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New Life in Messiah

2: 14-18

New life in Messiah DIG: Why did Paul want the Philippians to do everything without complaining? Why did Paul want the Philippians to be blameless and innocent? In what sense should believers be like shining stars? What characteristics make God's people shine like stars? Why was Paul worried that he would run the race in vain? How did he want to present his body? Why?

REFLECT: If we find ourselves complaining, what should we do? How do you shine like a star in the crooked and depraved generation of today? As a star, is your witness a “twinkle-twinkle?” A nova? Burned out? Why? How can you help it burn more brightly? How can you be the salt of the earth and the light of the world this week? How can you present your body as a living sacrifice?

Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God, above reproach in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

Do everything without complaining (Greek: *gongusmos*, meaning *murmuring* or *grumbling*) **and arguing (2:14 NIV)**. One of the ways in which the lack of harmony among **the Philippians** manifested itself was in **their complaining**. Paul urged **them** to stop **their** divisive *murmuring*. It is an onomatopoeic word, that is, a word whose sound (gong-goos-MOS) resembles its meaning. It doesn't refer to a loud outspoken **complaint**, but quiet, deadly gossip. The use of this word shows that the division among **the Philippians** had not yet risen to the point of loud dissension, but of those who *murmur* softly, secretly.⁹² This **complaining** led to some **arguing** (Greek: *dialogismos*), describing the futile thinking of fallen humanity (**Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; Romans 1:21; First Corinthians 3:20**). It is a word that speaks not just of spoken resistance, but the internal thoughts of the mind and heart (**Luke 5:22, 6:8, and 24:38**).

Dialogismos refers to an utterance made in a low tone of voice, or perhaps even more vividly “behind the scenes,” and is especially prominent in three passages in the TaNaKh. In **Exodus 16:1 to 17:7** *Isra’el grumbled* about their lack of food and water **in the wilderness** on their way to Mount Sinai. When **God** judged **them** for not entering the Promised Land, **they murmured** against **Moses and Aaron (Numbers 14:38)**. **Complaining** was also prominent in **Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16:1 to 17:13)**. Thus, **Paul** is alluding to **Deuteronomy 32:5**, which recalls **Isra’el’s rebellion in the wilderness**. Believers must not be like **Isra’el**, whose *grumbling* led to **God’s** discipline and the disruption of the covenant people of **YHVH**. **Verse 14** begins a sentence in Greek that runs through the end of **verse 16**. It consists of a command (**2:14**) with an extended purpose clause (**2:15-16a**), and a concluding result (**2:16b**). This command is a specific way in which it is necessary for believers to **work out their salvation (2:12)**. **The Philippians** were to do all things **without complaining**.

This command surely ranks as one of the hardest in **Philippians**. **Paul** leaves no wiggle room, suggesting that it is not permissible to do some things while **complaining** and *grumbling*. **Paul** is ruling out the sort of formal obedience that is not consistent with that of **Yeshua Himself**, who delighted in doing **God’s** will (**Psalms 40:8; John 4:34; Hebrews 10:5-10**). **ADONAI** is not merely interested in outward behavioral conformity, but heart transformation. We must not think that **God** is satisfied if we simply go through the outward motions of obedience while our hearts are *grumbling* or **arguing** with **Him** or others. If we find ourselves in that situation, we must press forward in obedience, asking **the Lord** to empower our obedience to **His Spirit** and change our heart/mind in the process.⁹³ A difficult, but necessary process.

So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God, above reproach in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe (2:15 Greek). **Paul** now states the purpose behind **doing everything** without complaining, to be a certain kind of **people**, which falls into two parts. The first part of the description is a combination of two adjectives: **blameless and innocent**. By **blameless**, **Paul** does not mean sinless, but rather being without fault. We are to seek to be without moral or spiritual blemish. This is the life-long process of **sanctification (to see link click Ax - Sanctification)** **Zacharias and Elizabeth**, the parents of **John the Baptist**, **were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the LORD (Luke 1:6)**. In describing **his**

life before **he** came to know **Messiah**, **Paul** says that **in regard to the righteousness demanded by legalism, blameless (3:6b CJB)**. **Innocent** has the basic meaning of being unmixed or unadulterated. The term was used to describe pure wine that was unmixed with water and pure metal that was not alloyed. Figuratively, it is sometimes used for what was harmless or **innocent**. **Yeshua** commanded **His apostles** to **be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16)**. Similarly, **Paul** encouraged the believers in Rome **to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil (Romans 16:19)**. The believer's life is to be absolutely pure, unmixed with sin and **evil**.⁹⁴

The second part of the description is to demonstrate that believers are **children of God without blemish**, meaning morally blameless. Because **Messiah** was **a lamb without blemish or defect (First Peter 1:19)** He was able to offer **Himself without blemish to God (Hebrews 9:14)**. This term frequently refers to sacrificial animals needing to be without **blemish or defect** (see **Leviticus A1 - The Purification Offering: Purified by the Blood**), as well as a person's behavior being **blameless** or **without** fault before **the Lord (Psalms 15:2, 18:23 and 32, 19:13, 37:18, 64:4, 101:2 and 6, 119:1)**. **Paul** is asserting that we are set apart from the world as **God's children**; and as such, our behavior should be **without blemish** as a suitable **living sacrifice to ADONAI**.

The call to be **without blemish or defect** must be carried out **in a crooked and depraved generation**. Although the word translated **crooked** (Greek: *skolios*) can refer to an object that is bent or curved (**Luke 3:5**), it is more often used in a moral sense, as it is here. Thus, **Peter** can urge the crowd at Shavu'ot: **Save yourselves from this crooked generation (Acts 2:40)** of the unpardonable **sin** (see **The Life of Christ Ek - Jesus Heals a Blind Mute**). The word **depraved** comes from a verb (Greek: *diastrepho*) that means *to cause to depart from an accepted standard of moral values*. In **Proverbs** it often describes a life outside **the wise path** that **ADONAI** has established for **His** people (see **Proverbs Br - Lady Wisdom and Madam Folly**).⁹⁵

In the first part of the verse (**2:15a**), **Paul** speaks of the character that believers are to *be*. Here, **he** speaks about what believers are to say, the content of what we preach and teach. But just as right doctrine without right character is hypocritical and ineffective, so also is right living ineffective if believers are not proclaiming **Gospel** truth. To effectively carry out the Great Commission of **Genesis 12:3** and **Matthew 28:19-20**, believers must **shine like stars** (Greek: *phoster*, meaning *lights*) **in the universe (2:15b)**. In **his Spirit**-inspired prophecy **Zacharias** spoke

of **Yeshua** as the coming **Sunrise from on high**, who would **shine upon those who sit in darkness (Luke 1:78-70)**. In Him was life, and the life was the **Light of men**, John declared: **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:4-5)**.⁹⁶ As a result, we are to be **salt and light in the world** (see **The Life of Christ Df - You are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World**).

The conclusion of the sentence that began in **verse 14** begins with a further description of what it means to **shine like stars in the universe in a crooked and fallen world**. **The Philippians** were to **shine like stars** by **holding firmly to the Word of life (2:16a NLT)**. The **Word of life** refers to **Scripture** and, more specifically, to **the Gospel**. **Yeshua** said: **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and are life (John 6:63)**. When many professing followers then turned away, **the Master** asked **the twelve**: **Are you also going to leave?** **Peter** responded: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:66-68)**.



For **Paul**, the ultimate result of **the Philippians** being **blameless and innocent, children of God (2:15)** is that on the day of **Messiah's return**, [he] will be proud that [he] did not run the race in vain and that [his] work was not useless (2:16b NLT). Several times in **his** letters, **Paul** mentions this fear that he will **run or labor in vain**. Not wanting **God's** grace shown to **him** to be **in vain**, **Paul** labored harder than others in ministry (**First Corinthians 15:10**). Although he knew that **the labor of the Lord** in ministry was **not in vain (First Corinthians 15:58; First Thessalonians 2:1)**, at various points in **his** life he worried that **his** efforts to see **the Jews** and **Gentiles** united in **one body of Messiah** on equal terms would be **in vain (Galatians 2:2, 4:11; First**

Thessalonians 3:5). Such concern was likely rooted in **Isaiah 49:4**, which **Paul** echoes here in **Philippians 2:16**.

Isaiah 49:1-6 describes the mission of **the Servant of the LORD** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Im – The Mission of the Servant of the LORD**). This Messianic **Servant** will be identified with **Isra'el (Isaiah 49:3)** so that **He** can restore the righteous of the TaNaKh and be **a light for the nations that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:5-6)**. However, along the way, **the Suffering Servant** worried that: **I have labored in vain; I have spent My strength for nothing and no purpose (Isaiah 49:4a)** before ultimately affirming: **Yet, surely the justice due to Me is with ADONAI, My reward with My God (49:4b)**. **Paul** understood **his** life and ministry as the fulfillment of **the Servant's** mission to be **a light to the nations** because **Yeshua Messiah, the Suffering Servant**, lived through **him (Galatians 1:15-16 and 2:20)**. When **the Philippians** stand before **the bema seat of Messiah** (see **Revelation Cc – We Must All Appear Before the Bema Seat of Christ**), **blameless and innocent**, it will be evident to all that **Paul** didn't **labor in vain**.

Is that your motivation in ministry? Do you look forward to **the bema seat of Messiah** as an opportunity to see the work **ADONAI** displayed in the perseverance of **His** people? Do you consider the very real possibility of **laboring in vain**? Seeing **the Gospel** take root in the lives of believers demonstrates that the sacrifices made in serving **Messiah** are worth it. Even when that fruit is not always visible to us, it will be made visible to all.⁹⁷

The prospect of **laboring in vain** led **Paul** once again to reflect on the possibility that **his** ministry efforts would lead to **his** martyrdom. **He** now seeks to emphasize that the verdict of whether **he** has **labored in vain** does not ultimately rest on **his** release from prison; but rather, on **his** faithfulness to **Messiah** and **His Gospel**. **But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith (2:17a NIV)**. **Jacob poured out a drink offering of wine over a stone pillar (see Genesis li – Jacob Returned from Paddan Aram and God Appeared to Him at Bethel)**. In **Isra'el's** sacrificial system the material of **a drink offering** was **wine (Ex 29:40; Lev 23:13; Num 15:5, 7-10, 28:7, 29:40)**. In **Yeshua's** time **wine** was a metaphor for **blood (Mt 26:27-29)**.⁹⁸ In the interest of advancing **the Gospel**, **ADONAI** may choose to **pour Paul out like a drink offering**. And should that happen, **Paul** will not **complain** or *grumble*. Instead, when **he** considers such a possibility, **he** says: **I am glad and rejoice with all of you (2:17b NIV)**. Once again, **Paul** sounds the

central theme of the letter – **joy** that is rooted in **the Gospel**. It does not matter to **him** that **his** commitment may cost **him his** life. Even that prospect produces **joy** because **he** knows **his** death **will not be in vain**.

It shouldn't be surprising that this imagery was taken up by later believers facing the prospect of Martyrdom. Less than 75 years after **Paul**, Ignatius (bishop of Antioch in Syria) was on his way to Rome to be executed for his faith. Along the way he wrote to the church at Rome, "Grant me nothing more than to be poured out as **a drink offering to God** while there is still an altar ready, so that in love you may form a chorus and sing to **the Father in Jesus Christ**" (Ignatius, Rome 2:2).

Is that how you think of your own life as a believer? Is your life a sacrificial **offering to God** that grows out of a deepening faith and trust in **the Person of Yeshua Messiah**? Such is the sacrifice that **ADONAI** calls for from **His** faithful. **Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)**. Nothing is to be held back in **His** service. But such sacrificial service does not come from simply trying harder; instead, it comes from a growing faith in who **Yeshua Messiah** is and what **He** has done for us. When we see **Him** as **the Suffering Servant of ADONAI**, who made **Himself** nothing so that **He** might rescue us from our sin and be given **a Name above every name**, our hearts are moved by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** to live a life of humble service to others.

Paul repeats **himself** to close this section with an emphasis on **joy**: **Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me (2:18 ESV)**. The apostle seems to acknowledge that while **the Philippians** already share **his joy** of seeing **ADONAI** work for the advancement of **the Gospel** both in **Rome** and among **the Philippians**, there is more **joy** for **them** to experience. **Paul** recognized that the morbid thought of **his** death would naturally provoke sadness and concern among **the Philippians**; but instead, **Paul** urged **them** to share **his joy** at the prospect of **his** life **being poured out** over the sacrificial **offering** of **the Philippians'** lives.⁹⁹

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for being so wise, wonderful, caring and almighty! Thank **You** for **Your** role in my sanctification (2:13). Though loving **You** now may result in hard trials, **You** call on me to be **a living sacrifice** for **You**. My **sacrifice**, even to the point of death, is as nothing compared to **Your** leaving glory to come to earth to be ridiculed and to die. **Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,***

holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship (Romans 12:1-2). I understand that I don't need to **complain** when life gets hard. **You** always keep **Your** promises. **You** call me to be **a living sacrifice** for **You**; therefore, I need to keep my eyes focused on eternity and on **Your** wonderful promise of life forever with **You** in heaven! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen