

**The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.  
The Tree of Life from the week ending 12/19/04  
The Doctrine of Contentment  
Philippians 4:11**

In Phi 4:11-12, we have been noting the result of living in a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, or what TLJC called the way, the truth and having the life that God has designed for you to have, Phi 4:11-12; *Not that I speak from want; for **I have learned** to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.*

Before a believer can attain that which Paul will teach us in Phi 4, the manifestations of experiencing this zoe-life in time, a very important revelation occurs; infusion of divine justice. This is where the mature believer realizes that whatever the Lord does, it is just. He truly believes Deu 32:4, *"The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He."* He understands that he is being prepared for something and he has the ability to *be content in whatever circumstances he finds himself in.*

It is living in this ability, this zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, is what truly brings glory to God in the midst of the angelic conflict because we still have a free will and must make a choice as to how we will **respond** to these principles.

The apostle Paul said this regarding the zoe-life in 1Ti 6:12, *Fight the good fight of faith; **take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*** The key here is the Greek verb *epilabou*, translated **take hold**. This is not telling believers to get eternal life since they already have it but rather this verb means to take hold, seize, grasp, obtain, be concerned with, take interest in what eternal life has to offer and all these meanings are applicable. Therefore seize; take hold of the eternal life, the zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, to which you were called.

Believers are to seize these things now because the **only time** we can seize these things is **in time**. In the eternal state God does all the work. 1Co 13:12, *For **now** we see in a mirror dimly, but **then** face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.* Right now we know the truth in part, imperfectly, but we shall know and understand fully and clearly, even in the same manner as we have been fully and clearly known and understood by God.

The zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, means that you are very much alive and that you cherish every moment of life, whether in adversity or prosperity. In the zoe life, you have zest for life and an enjoyment of every moment of life, regardless of what it brings, and this zest for life excludes being depressed or upset by the ups and downs of life. Paul is telling us to seize these things and do it now because the **only time** you can seize these things is **in time**. This is why Paul said on his dying bed in 2Ti 4:6-8, *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering [he knew he was facing death and his life was being poured out], and the time of my departure has come. I have **fought** the good fight, I have **finished** the course, I have **kept** the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.* Remember Co 9:24, *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.* You must run now!

As long as you're on this earth as a believer, you have the **opportunity** of getting all that God has offered to you as a part of your eternal life and remember this cannot happen when you reject doctrine or neglect doctrine. The fantastic decorations and blessings that the believer will receive for becoming a winner believer in time are beyond human description and comprehension. Becoming a winner in time and running the race set before you is the road to being a winner in eternity and in between we have dying grace, the golden bridge to eternity. For everyone who receives blessings in time, there's going to be hundreds of thousands of people who do not because **they rejected or ignored doctrine.**

Let's notice some principles concerning the zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment.

1. These are times that the zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, is being cultivated within us as we are identified with our Lord's sufferings.
2. Many times what is hard to suffer is sweet to remember. You don't develop courage and fortitude by being happy in your relationships everyday, you develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity and being content in whatever state you're in.
3. In this dispensation, it is not *deliverance from* trials, adversities and problems that are the issue, but the superior power that God gives to us to *endure* these things. One often learns more from ten days of agony than from ten years of contentment.
4. The path of least resistance is the path of the loser, have the attitude of Est 4:16c "*and if I perish, I perish.*"
5. It is not the power *for* you that counts, but it is the power *within you* that counts, Eph 3:20, 2Co 4:7.
6. You will never know your own strength until you are faced with adversity. Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to live in the zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment.
7. We can grow spiritually in all of our difficulties, Rom 5:3-4, 1Pe 1:6.
8. When trials, difficulties, sorrows, or weaknesses come our way, the thing to consider is the grace and the power to be *above them all* through the experience of the zoe life. It is in those dark times, that the eyes begin to see. Adversity is the perfect glass where we can truly see our own reflection and really know ourselves.
9. We shall never be victorious in this life as believers if we think that the zoe life, our life with God and hidden in Christ, means freedom from suffering, sorrow, and trial. In reality, we develop greater inner strength by participating in His sufferings; therefore we are to be anxious for nothing, not even our spiritual growth.
10. Every believer is commanded to take up his own cross and we must accept the fact that the cross has only suffering and death as its ministry.

People do not normally admire people when they go through adversity but in prosperity. Pro 19:6, *Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.* The believer who lives in the zoe-life realizes that even during times of adversity they are not retreating, they are simply advancing in another direction. So, when some affliction happens to you, you either let it defeat you, or you defeat it. Problems indicate that progress is being made, wheels are turning, and you're moving closer to your goals. If we are going to receive the benefit of the cross, we must go through the suffering of the cross. When it comes to TLJC and your relationship with God, the ultimate question that needs to be answered is *what is our motivation?*

For us to experience zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, our ultimate motivation must be Him and Him alone and if we have this attitude then we will not be in bondage to the things of this world. The zoe-life means we will experience deliverance from bondage to the world and the stronghold of the cosmic system.

As a reward for making positive decisions toward doctrine and the experience of a fantastic inner spiritual life, the zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, there is freedom from being in bondage to the cosmic system. This is why it is so important that when the believer begins to encounter sufferings in his life, that he does not run from those sufferings, but accepts them. The believer must come to a point where he is no longer blown away or about by the winds of false solutions to suffering, Eph 4:14. There is a place which can be reached by the mentality of the soul that enjoys this fantastic zoe-life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment. The soul of the believer becomes so confirmed in God that it can find nothing more satisfying in all creation.

So again Phi 4:11 gives us the principle of this eternal life, a life filled with inner happiness and contentment, *Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.* "Not" is the strongest Greek negative particle *ouk* translated not, with the causal conjunction *hoti* the correct translation is "not because." The present active indicative of the verb *lego* describes what is now going on in the life of the apostle Paul, in the active voice, Paul produces the action of the verb and the indicative mood is declarative for the reality of doctrinal communication under the principle of verbal inspiration in the original language of Scripture. Next comes the preposition *kath'* (from) plus the accusative noun *husteresin* (poverty or to lack). So we translate it, "not because I am speaking with reference to poverty or lack,".

Sooner or later you will have some people in your life who will appear to be very humble, very sweet, and will even appeal to your ego but you're going to find out that these people know how to manipulate others. They have a thousand ways in which they have their hand out. The true attitude of a mature believer is that he finds his

contentment and fulfillment in Christ and does not go around like a beggar asking for things. Paul is complimenting the Philippian church because of their faithfulness and the manifestation of that faithfulness in time by supplying his need, but he wants to make it crystal clear that he is not doing so because he needed them or their gift. Paul has learned the very valuable lesson that God doesn't need anyone, so don't ever get involved with the Elijah syndrome. Remember, Elijah thought that the Lord really needed him to serve and that he was the only one who could minister to the people of God.

Rom 11:2-5, *God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.* God doesn't need any of us!

Phi 4:11, *Not because I am speaking with reference to poverty or lack; for -* The explanatory use of the conjunctive particle *gar* (for) gives the reason why Paul does not have to beg and next he gives us the reason why, *"I have learned."* Here we have the personal pronoun *ego* (I) then the aorist active indicative from the verb, *manthano* which means to learn through instruction, to come to know, to receive instruction under discipline, or to appropriate knowledge. Everything it took to get Paul to supergrace taught him to think objectively and to have capacity for true love. When you reach this stage you have an awareness of logistical grace and the fact that God *has* and will *provide* everything for you.

The next phrase in our verse is translated *in whatsoever circumstances*, the preposition *en* plus the relative pronoun *hois* correctly translated *in whatever*, and we add for clarity, *circumstances or situations*. You are not born with this instinct or understanding, it is something that has to be taught. No matter what the circumstances of life, you perpetuate happiness, contentment, and blessing no matter what the situation may be.

So far we have Phi 4:11, *Not because I am speaking with reference to poverty or lack; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.* If you are a mature believer, circumstances do not change you, you change circumstances. Everyone will have an experience in life that's dull; school, job, assignment, anything that is just plain boring! A dull circumstance can break a boring person and when it does these people quit. They are a slave to their circumstances and these people will never be happy for very long in this life. One of the great blessings that come to the supergrace believer is not to be broken by circumstances, but to make circumstances. You can turn a dull job or a dull course in school into something very pleasant and very happy. You can do the same thing with disaster; however you have to have doctrine to do it. You can't handle disaster without doctrine! This unique ability belongs only to the supergrace believer. Arrogant people get bored with routine and discipline plus they think more highly of themselves than they ought to.

Phi 4:11, *Not because I am speaking with reference to poverty or lack; for I have learned in whatever circumstances I am to be content.* The Greek adjective, *autarkes*, means self-sufficient contentment. This is adaptability to any difficult circumstance in life. If it's something dull, then you just weave a little web around it, and you encompass it with happiness, with challenge, with blessing, with stimulation. A mature believer, a supergrace or ultra supergrace believer becomes content and self sufficient all in one package. He takes the contentment in his soul wherever he goes and when he walks into a dull situation, he just takes his contentment out of his soul and sprays the place. The circumstances are still there, but there's a difference, contentment is with him, and with it he handles every circumstance of life.

This word, *autarkes*, or contentment has led us to the Doctrine of Contentment. We start with a definition:

- The word *autarkes*, contentment, originates from Aeschylus and it means sufficient for oneself, strong enough or possessing enough to need no aid or support; to be independent of external circumstances. As the apostle Paul stated in 1Th 4:9-12, you are *"to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.* *Autarkes* also means to be contented with one's niche, with one's means, even though little. It means to be strong enough or possessing enough to need no aid or support. In the spiritual realm, *autarkes* means to be spiritually self-sustained and to become sufficient enough to be in need of no one else. In the New Testament the word is given a new dimension as part of living the spiritual life as in 1Ti 6:6.

## **Point 2. Godliness or Living the Spiritual Life that God has provided is a means of great profit when accompanied by contentment.**

Godliness means that you're in the place where God can train you, that is, residence, function, and momentum inside the spiritual life that God has provided. This is a means of great profit because it is the beginning of the development of true contentment and the resultant inner happiness, becoming occupied with Christ, and having personal love for God. So *contentment* refers to the perfect happiness that began in spiritual self-esteem, continued in spiritual autonomy, and is completed in spiritual maturity. We then looked at providential preventative suffering as it relates to contentment.

Providential preventative suffering is the first category of suffering for blessing to rid us of arrogance and to produce more contentment in our lives. In the context of 2Co 12:7-10, it can be called thorn testing, *And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content [that's the beginning of perfect happiness] with weaknesses [providential preventative suffering]: in insults or slanders [people testing], with distresses or pressures [thought testing] with persecutions [system testing], with difficulties or stresses [disaster testing] on behalf of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* The four types of testing mentioned in verse 10, are warm-ups for spiritual self-esteem designed to advance us to the momentum tests of spiritual autonomy; People

testing, Thought testing, System testing and Disaster testing. As believers we must go through some form of testing that reveals our weakness so that we will realize where our strength truly resides. In order for our contentment to remain within and to increase, God must deal with any of the cob-webs of arrogance in our lives. Arrogance is an enemy to contentment (1Co 3:18, Isa 5:21, Rom 12:3) and remember that Satan is the first creature guilty of arrogance (Isa 14:14). His original sin of arrogance is amplified in Eze 28:17, he was corrupted by his wisdom, he thought he knew more than God. Arrogance is synonymous with vanity, which is empty pride in regard to one's person, attainments, or possessions coupled with an excessive desire to be noticed, a lust for attention, lust for approval or praise from others. Providential preventative suffering is designed to rid you of this arrogance and it is the first category of suffering for blessing. Spiritual self-esteem is most vulnerable to arrogance without providential preventative suffering, which God graciously provides.

So again, the four types of testing mentioned in verse 10 are warm-ups for spiritual self-esteem in order to advance us to spiritual autonomy and you pass these tests by having contentment, the beginning of perfect happiness. There is enough happiness in your soul from spiritual self-esteem so that you can be happy in all categories of providential preventative suffering. Only in this Church-age has God provided a well-organized system for us to have fantastic blessing in the midst of suffering and this suffering can be just as great a blessing as any prosperous circumstances. Providential preventative suffering brings you to the point where you realize life and the devil are bigger than you, and that you won't be able to solve your problems on your own. You realize that strength comes from the use of the problem solving devices. It often takes a lot to make someone realize they are weak, especially if when one is high-spirited and strong-willed, however, until you know you're weak, you will never be strong. To the extent that you have illusions about your so-called strong points, you are depriving yourself of the blessings of grace. True strength comes from using divine power to match your weakness, rather than using human power to hold at bay God's grace provision for you.

So there will be different forms of testing in your life to strengthen your contentment. People testing comes in two categories. 1) In personal love or admiration, the object of your love often controls your life or provides for you unhappiness, unless you have attained spiritual self-esteem, spiritual independence, or spiritual maturity. In wanting to please the object of your personal love, you find yourself being a different person and not following your normal function. 2) In personal hatred or animosity, the object of your antagonism or irritation often has control of your life or happiness, unless you have advanced to spiritual adulthood. Under the PPOG, God designed His plan so that your happiness and contentment will always reside in you, so that you do not depend on people or things for your happiness. As a function of your royal priesthood it all comes from within.

You are to have personal control of your life, a personal sense of destiny, self-confidence from metabolized doctrine, contentment, and therefore, poise and command of self. This means your not easily swayed and moved by others and their doctrinal opinions because that is how you become unstable, Eph 4:14. You are to bring happiness and contentment to others but not to lean on others or circumstances for your happiness or contentment. People are easily led away from the PPOG and doctrine by

their friendships, love life, and even hatred, (Pro 13:20, Psa 119:63, Mal 3:16). The solution to people testing is found in the combination of personal love for God and impersonal love for all mankind.

Another form of suffering for blessing to strengthen your contentment is thought testing, and Rom 12:3 addresses the problem, *For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think* [in other words, stop thinking in terms of arrogance]; *but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.* Once you reach spiritual self-esteem, you begin to recognize your abilities, your capabilities, what you can handle and what you cannot. Gal 6:3 says, *For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.* 1Co 10:12 warns us not to think more highly of ourselves, like thinking that we are beyond reproach and not as bad as other believers, and since thinking is such a crucial issue, there are mandates throughout the Bible with regard to thought testing.

Then there is system testing. By now you're aware of the fact that the world is filled with organizations. Everywhere that you turn in life it is inevitable that you become a part of a system or an organization. A system is an organization composed of people under the command of other people functioning under a policy which is designed to fulfill a specific objective. When you become a part of any organization, one of the first things that you discover is that every organization has a command structure, a chain of command. Some systems are good and some are bad, however, the issue is this, do you enter into the system or organization with the perfect happiness and contentment from God. If you enter in with the power of God, you will not only do well in that organization and you will do well in representing the Lord as an ambassador. You may be the low person on the totem pole but with the power of God you will go far (1Co 10:31)! The characteristics of a system are three-fold; Authority, Policy and Objective. The personnel under authority as well as the authority itself can face system testing. The policy of management and the objective of the organization can also cause system testing. There are good and bad organizations, systems, leadership, policies and objectives. Generally, there are three areas of system testing. 1) The authority may give unfair and unjust treatment, as from management, the boss, supervisor, senior officer, coach, professor, government bureaucrat, husband, parents, etc. Favoritism on the part of management can inevitably lead to personality conflict in an office. 2) The policy may be unreasonable, or may conflict with normal living or with your own personal norms and standards, or it may be a stupid though still enforceable policy. 3) The objectives may be unreasonable or even impossible because of lack of ability in the personnel trying to fulfill them. The greatest enemy to any organization is arrogance in its personnel. Arrogance is the great enemy wherever there are people. Incapability, laziness, distraction from wrong priorities and ignorance are other enemies.

Then there is disaster testing. Before the believer reaches spiritual maturity and has +H and real contentment, there will be some major disasters in their life. How the believer handles these circumstances determines whether he accelerates his spiritual growth or retreats and goes backward. In Psa 57:1 David tells us how to handle disaster, *"Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul takes refuge in Thee; And in the shadow of Thy wings I will take refuge, until destruction passes by."* There are two categories of disaster testing. The first is personal disaster testing is designed as suffering for blessing resulting in acceleration of momentum, or warning of cosmic involvement, in

which case divine discipline becomes involved. There are at least six characteristics of personal disaster testing. A) Pain, e.g., physical or mental pain and anguish. B) Crime, where you are the victim. C) Persecution (not paranoia). D) Privation, meaning hunger, thirst, exposure, fatigue. E) Loss of loved ones, property, success, money, etc. F) Disease and handicaps. The second category is historical disaster, collective disaster, or national disaster testing as related to the bad decisions of others in which you are involved by association. There are at least six characteristics of historical disaster testing. A) Pain, e.g., physical or mental pain and anguish. B) Crime, where you are the victim. C) Persecution (not paranoia). D) Privation, meaning hunger, thirst, exposure, fatigue. E) Loss of loved ones, property, success, money, etc. F) Disease and handicaps. Specific to national disaster testing there are four categories. A) Violence, crime, terrorism, dope, murder. B) Warfare. C) Weather disaster includes heat, cold, storm, blizzards, hurricanes, tornadoes. D) Cycles of discipline. Disaster testing always tests our emotions and there is always the temptation to take the easy route of money, security, fame, and lose forever the conveyance of escrow blessing. There is always the disaster that will make you prosperous if you rely on the power of God to pull you through, and that is contentment!

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