

**GRACE BIBLE CHURCH**  
*Robert McLaughlin Bible Ministries*

**The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.**  
**The Tree of Life for week ending 04/08/01.**

**Guidelines for choosing the right Pastor-Teacher and the right local assembly.**

We have completed the first half of **Phi 4:1** which says *“Therefore, my beloved brethren [members of the Royal family of God] whom I desire to see or be with,”* We are now ready for the next phrase in which Paul says *“my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”*

The phrase *“my joy and crown”* is another unusual phrase to use, since we are to derive our joy from God. However, there is a legitimate application of joy that comes from other believers. Here in the Greek is the personal pronoun **“mou”** (my) followed by noun **“chara”** and is translated correctly as “my source of happiness.”

The word **“chara”** is used represent everything we want that is legitimate, that we are entitled to and everything that growing in grace provides; that is happiness! The word actually represents some wonderful things in the Greek.

**Phi 4:1** *“Therefore, my beloved brethren [members of the Royal family of God] whom I desire to see or be with, my source of happiness”*

It's an inspiring thought to realize that fellow-believers could be a source, not **“the source”** but a source of someone's happiness. When brethren or, in the Church-age, members of the Royal family of God dwell together in unity, it is at that place of unity that the Lord commands happiness' forever. Because when we gather together, we are gathering together not for fellowship but to hear the word of God, **Heb 10:25**.

The word of God is the basis for our unity and where real oneness comes from, not from fellowship. When a local assembly has one mind, one goal, and one purpose, then true oneness can exist and true fellowship results.

What should our goals and purposes be?

- Evangelize and teach the Gospel correctly to the unbeliever and to prepare the believer to communicate the Gospel correctly.
- Communicate the Pre-designed Plan of God and Bible doctrine to the believer.
- Raise up evangelists and pastors and missionaries and send them out throughout the world.

The point is that you never have fellowship as the basis of unity, you have fellowship as a result of what true biblical unity produces. It is difficult to explain how people make you truly happy. Consider the context of our main passage in Phi 4:1 here, to the apostle Paul, a communicator of Bible doctrine, those who are positive toward doctrine are a **source** of happiness. It is not the attendance or number in the pew. Nor is it having more people in a congregation than someone else has, but rather, it is having serious students of the Word of God. Anyone who is positive toward Bible doctrine becomes a source of happiness and encouragement to the one who communicates Bible doctrine. These are the ones who stick with it and gut it out and don't quit and don't let distractions get in the way.

In Phi 4:1 the apostle Paul is in no man's land between supergrace and ultra supergrace, and the thing that makes him happy is positive volition, especially the positive volition of the Philippians. When a right pastor has gone to supergrace and then on to ultra supergrace, nothing makes him happier than to have his congregation follow. This is done by consistent and persistent intake of Bible doctrine. Our Lord began His ministry with this principle when He said to Peter and Andrew, **Mat 4:19-20**; *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.”* The pastor-teacher, like the apostle Paul, has a different source of happiness than anyone else. His happiness must be related to believers who respond to his doctrinal teaching. All other forms of happiness must be secondary to this particular category. While the Philippian believers are the source of Paul's happiness in time they are also the source of Paul's decorations and rewards for eternity, so he adds the words **“my crown.”** In the Greek it is the conjunction **“kai”** and the noun **“stephanos.”** The word **“stephanos”** is not a crown; rather a wreath given as the highest decoration in the Roman army. The apostle Paul is going to receive a special wreath of glory at the Judgement Seat of Christ because he has led so many of them to supergrace and onto ultra supergrace. In Phi 4:1 **“my source of happiness”** refers to blessings in time, my **“crown”** refers to blessings in the eternal state. This was a great relationship between Paul and the believers in Philippi.

A question that is often asked by believers today is “What are some of the factors to consider when choosing a local assembly?” This decision really begins with choosing a pastor-teacher. A decision that is just as important as choosing a person to marry. One has to do with your domestic relationship, the other with your eternal welfare. Unfortunately, the method that many people follow in choosing a local assembly often has little to do with what the Word of God has to say about the subject. How does a person choose a local assembly?

**First of all, the Word of God has always been and must always be our norm and standard for decision making.**

Our decisions must be made upon the basis of the word of God not the basis of convenience. In **Mat 12:42** *“The Queen of the South [the Queen of Sheba] shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom [the doctrine] from Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”*

In **Mat 12:42**, we read *“The Queen of the south [the Queen of Sheba] shall rise up with this generation at the judgment [she will be mentioned at that great white throne judgment to the Jews who had negative volition] and shall condemn it,”*

Her life and her actions are used to illustrate what positive volition will do to know God. Notice that He said **“something”** greater not someone greater, although He is! He was referring to something in reference to the teaching of grace and truth replacing the Law or reality superseding the ritual. The same thing is true about pastors in this generation, because the demand for Bible teaching pastors diminishes in time of apostasy.

So, this passage teaches two very important principles;

1. The importance of Bible doctrine and the price to pay for it, Mat 12:42.
2. The worthlessness of self-reformation in Mat 12:43-45.
- 3.

**Never choose a local church because of what it can give.**

The Laodicean church could give many things, including luxuries and comforts. In **Rev 3:17**, the Laodicean church was rich and wealthy and had need of nothing. This type of church may communicate ear-tickling messages or capture you by its atmospheric environment.

But that is the wrong basis.

**Never choose a church because your friends go there.**

Personality appreciation should not be the reason for choosing a local church.

**Never choose a church because family has been attending for years.**

Tradition should never be a motivating factor, nor should sentimentality affect the choice. There's usually one leader in the family that others follow and choose family over dedication and devotion to the word of God.

**Never choose a church because it offers a good youth program for the children.**

It is vitally important to test everything we believe by the Word of God. The Bible says in **Mat 4:4** *“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”*

The Word of God reveals the mind of Christ and it teaches us how to choose a local assembly and there are crucial questions that must be answered:

- 1. Does the local church stay true to all the central doctrines of the Christian faith?**
- 2. Does the church believe in the historical faith passed down by the apostles given to us through our forefathers?**
- 3. Do they accept the inherent, infallible teaching of the Word of God?**
- 4. Do they believe that all Scripture is God-breathed?**

**5. Does the church believe 2Ti 3:16-17?** *“All Scripture is [theopneustos] God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

Our Lord said **Joh 6:63** *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”*

**Does the church believe that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation?**

**2Pe 1:20-21** *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

God warns that we must examine prophets carefully, and *“if they speak not according to the word, it is because there is no light in them,”* **Isa 8:20**. There are many movements in Christianity today that are adding to the word of God. Ignoring **Pro 30:5-6**, *“Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.”*

**It is very important to find out exactly where the church stands in its presentation of the character and nature of God.**

Beware that they do not over-emphasize certain attributes of God and ignore the balance. Some over-emphasize the Love of God and do away with His Justice. Some

over-emphasize the Justice and Righteousness of God and do away with His Forgiveness and Love. Some over-emphasize the Sovereignty of God and do away with His Justice and the free will of man. It should always be Christ and the objective Word of God as the emphasis. The Word of God has always been and must always be our norm and standard for decision making.

**It is an important consideration to observe whether the Pastor equips himself with preparation before God in study; 2Ti 2:15, Col 1:10, Phi 1:9-10,20-21, Eph 3:16-19.**

In 2Ti 2:15, he is told to study to present himself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. In Col 1:10, he is commanded to increase in the knowledge of God.

In **Phi 1:9-10**, he is told to learn how to operate in *“virtue-love and to excel to the maximum more and more by means of metabolized doctrine resulting in all spiritual discernment,”*

Christ should be at home in his heart or right lobe by means of doctrine. He may be a nice individual, educated in seminary, having a doctor's degree, but not prepared to communicate doctrine.

**Does the Pastor Teacher preach the whole counsel of God?**

Paul said Act 20:27 *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”*

**Does he preach the Word in season and out of season, 2Ti 4:2?**

**Does he reprove, rebuke, exhort with divine, delegated, legitimate authority, 2Ti 4:2?**

**Does he communicate doctrine with authority?**

Does he let his statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; Mat 5:37. He should not be wavering in his communication of doctrine nor fearful of the congregation's reaction?

**Does his message lose its sting because he's a coward in the sense that he is not willing to declare the whole counsel of God?**

It is important to understand that your capacity for the details of life will not go beyond the measure of doctrine that is imparted to you categorically. A believer cannot reach maturity if they are not given mature instructions. The Pastor cannot live beyond the content of what he thinks and cannot think beyond the content of what he has received. He cannot receive if he is never in a position to hear the Word of God **Rom 10:17** *“For faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”*

The same is true for each believer. A church member that doesn't go to the right church may hear false teaching but they are responsible for all that God has appointed them to hear. God will require accountability for what you are suppose to hear, ignorance is of no excuse. If they don't make a choice toward categorical doctrine, although the church is prepared to present the right premise to them, they will never escape the responsibility by claiming that they are ignorant, **1Co 10:1** *“For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren,”*

Many will lose their reward at the Bema Seat, because they haven't chosen the right pastor-teacher and the right local assembly, simply because they did not care.

**The music ministry is an important aspect to consider.**

Many singers and singing groups should *not* be singing in church services because they are not even taught properly. Many are more involved with entertaining than imparting the word of life to the congregation. Christians should love the Finished Work, and the Word of God. A worship service should center on teaching the Word. The songs and the song service should be songs that minister and glorify The Lord Jesus Christ and the plan of God the Father and not have what Mat 6:7 calls meaningless repetition.

**Another aspect to consider in choosing a pastor-teacher and a local assembly is what is the structure of the local church government?**

Delegated authority is obviously needed; portions of the body need to be utilized, mobilized and organized. Deacons should be given delegated authority. This is wise leadership, but this authority is delegated from one pastor-teacher. There is one pastor-teacher who is responsible to Jesus Christ and for any particular assembly; **Eph 4:11-16, Tit 1:5,7**. The Pastor-teacher is to be the chief administrator as well as the communicator of Bible doctrine, the head of the table of organization. In addition to the pastor-teacher, the right church government is made up of deacons who function according to 1Ti 3:8-13, Act 6:1-6, Phi 1:1.

**The local church should have categorical doctrine, but it should also dogmatically believe that Christ has finished the work of redemption forever, Joh 19:30.**

A ministry that doesn't understand the nature of God and His workings of grace cannot express impersonal unconditional love to its members. The work of salvation is by grace alone, grace plus nothing, **Rom 11:6**, we receive grace for salvation, **Eph 2:8-9**, and we receive grace for growing in **2Pe 3:18**. When a church adds works to grace its people inevitably become involved in other systems that are not from God such as legalism, status symbols, and religious works, all of which will characterize the ministry.

**Another principle that is relevant in choosing a local assembly involves the practical application of the whole counsel of God.**

**When choosing a local assembly, be on the alert!**

Learn to detect false teaching by applying the Word of God to every aspect of life within the Church. The most fundamental belief in Christianity is the unlimited atonement and eternal security. We are eternally secure as believers in Christ's Finished Work on the cross. Yet many churches deny the principle of the unlimited atonement and eternal security, and by doing so directly attack the nature of God. Make it a point to find out if the church believes in eternal security. If it does not, it cannot reveal God's character, and it a result, it will destroy your capacity to think and live with God. Eternal security must be understood from the standpoint of practical application and daily operation of truth. Anyone who does not believe in eternal security will inevitably put other people under bondage.

**Does the church produce an atmosphere where people know that God loves them in adversity, tribulation, persecution, as well as when they sin?**

**Does the church teach the Word of God in a loving atmosphere so that everyone experiences that God loves each individual with the same kind of love?**

God loves every individual with an unlimited divine capacity. His love never changes, for God is love, 1Jo 4:8.

**Do the church members love each other with unconditional love?**

**Do the members who belong to God's royal family love one another with God's unconditional love or are they petty, indifferent, judgmental, resentful and reactionary?**

While they practice this beautiful love of God, does the ministry also take a stand against sin, and unrighteousness? Do they live by the conviction that Christians are ministers of grace and love?

**Does the ministry teach that faith is the only way to please God?**

All these questions are vital to understand and need to be answered.

**Another important question relevant to choosing a local church is does the local church practice the importance of being members of the body of Christ, 1Co 12:12-14.**

Believers must understand the positional truth of the Body so that they will be in union with our head, Jesus Christ.

**Do the believers in the church lay down their lives to bare one another's burden fulfilling the law of love, Gal 6:2, 1Jo 3:14.**

**Do they practice divine order in church discipline?**

**Do they practice accepting an accusation only when there are two or three witnesses, Deu 19:15.**

**Do they totally forgive and forget? What happens if the person repents?**

Divine forgiveness always forgives and forgets, Mat 6:12, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13.

**Do they love one another?**

**Do they make a practice of repeating a matter to others, Pro 17:9?**

**Consider the principle of the vision and the goals of the local assembly.**

Do they have a vision in word only or in power of application?

**Does that local ministry seek God's kingdom first, Mat 6:33, or do they seek to build luxurious edifices with diverse programs?**

Are they after *people* for themselves or are they after people for God? Do they use people or do they love people?

These points on how to choose a local church are provided in order to make a mature choice before God. Just as the wrong choice for a partner produces an unhappy marriage, the wrong choice for a church may produce a limited, ignorant or an unhappy Christian life.

There will never be a "perfect church" because we are all sinners, but we must learn to repent and recover when we fail. All churches have defects, all have flaws in some areas. But the local church, which is growing in these areas, striving to return to the right point of reference, the infallible Word of God, is a local church on the right path.

The local church must point to a daily cross, it is doesn't, it is the wrong church. A local church isn't perfect, but it better start out with the Finished Work message and keep on that road. The congregation should never idolize the pastor-teacher, nor put him before the Lord. At the same time, they should realize that he has been gifted by the Lord to help further that church in its spiritual growth. The Word of God that he preaches needs to be received as the Word of God.

Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will lead those seeking the right local church into "**all truth**" and that He will **guide them** to the right decision.