

Freedom to Choose

Feast of Tabernacles

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October 13, 2014

It's good to be here at the feast.

I'd like to take a little trip down memory lane for a minute. Try to think back to a memorable gift you've received in your lifetime. The one thing that sticks in my mind is when I was nine or ten years old, I received a present from my dad. He gave me a little hatchet and knife set. They had white plastic handles, imitation ivory. I was thrilled about that present because I had received toys up to then. My dad was probably worried about me chopping down a support post inside the house. In my little mind I was Daniel Boone, Davey Crockett and Jim Bridger all rolled into one with the hatchet and knife. I found an old belt and could strap that on with my cap gun on one side. That was a special gift to me.

There are many kinds of gifts that we've received through the years. Maybe for the ladies it's a diamond ring. Maybe a gift to you is a spouse. Those of us fortunate enough to be married and still have our spouse, that is a gift. Perhaps it's a gift of a child or grandchild, a job promotion or something like that. We have many gifts to be thankful for.

Then we think about the spiritual gifts we have. We have God's calling, God led us to repentance, He gave us His holy spirit, God's grace and ultimately, we have the gift of eternal life that God is holding out for us. There is a gift we don't always mention and that's the freedom to choose. We have the freedom to make choices.

That's the title of this sermon.

The Freedom to Choose

In years past, what did we call that in the church? Free moral agency. Well, that's an okay term. It was maybe meant to be a little intellectual, but I like the freedom we have to choose, the responses we make and the way we live. The Bible is actually full of that. Just look back in your studies. I have books on the men and women and children of the Bible. We can see in those stories that they made good and bad choices. For example, Adam and Eve certainly made bad choices. Moses made bad choices. Many of the spiritual heroes made bad choices. David certainly made bad choices. Esau made a bad choice when he sold his inheritance for a bowl of soup.

In thinking about this, if we couple God's holy spirit with that freedom of choice, we have power there. We have a power of choice.

Turn to James and I will try to elaborate on that as we go along. The freedom we have to choose coupled with God's spirit.

**James 1:1. James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. (NKJV)**

If we think about ourselves, and it has already been mentioned at the feast, we are a scattered people and they were then.

I like the book of James because it's kind of a "how to" epistle. James' direction to the church, the scattered people, was how we are to function in that mode. That has been brought up already in sermons. James tells us how to practice that true religion and it's really a matter of choices that we make.

- 2) *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*
- 3) *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*
- 4) *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)*

It talks about learning patience in trials. Generally speaking, I don't know about you, but the trials that we've had, one of the primary elements in that trial is to learn patience. We usually learn that patience. Sometimes we get trials because we deserve them through the bad choices we make. You might sustain an injury if you turn in front of a bus. You might wish you could retract that and make a different choice. In bad health perhaps we make poor choices. We need to take good care of ourselves.

- 5) *If any of you lacks wisdom ... (NKJV)*

We have to ask ourselves, wisdom for what? It's not for going to college or studying to be an engineer or something. It's not wisdom in math. It's not wisdom for anything like that. It's not wisdom about what kind of car or house to buy or where to live, or what kind of dog to buy. It's not that kind of wisdom. It's the wisdom for how to make right choices for God's will. That's what it is talking about.

- 5b) *... let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)*

God doesn't give gifts and then take them back. He doesn't give us the gift of choice and then say, "Well, I'm going to take that back." We'll look at a scripture later on if we have time and I'll point that out.

- 6) *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.*
- 7) *For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;*
- 8) *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (NKJV)*

That happens whenever we think that maybe God isn't right in this or that. We get a bit wishy-washy and we could make bad choices by doing that. We're always safe if we do what God tells us to do. That's been pointed out in one of the sermons.

9) *Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, (NKJV)*

In other words, it doesn't matter who we are in God's eyes.

10) *but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.*

11) *For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. (NKJV)*

What that means is all of us come to the same end.

Then James is getting to the important things of life.

12) *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

That's talking about eternal life.

13) *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (NKJV)*

Evil is not in God's nature or His character.

14) *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (NKJV)*

We're drawn away by our own lusts, things in our nature and enticed.

15) *Then, when desire has conceived [from lust], it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV)*

Go back sometime and reread Proverbs 7. It talks about lust being personified as a harlot that leads us into bad choices.

16) *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. [deceived by Satan] (NKJV)*

He convinced Eve to lust after the tree. He led her into making a very bad choice. Adam went along with her. He made a bad choice, didn't he?

17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above ... (NKJV)

Unlike Satan's nature, God's nature and character is to give His gifts, one of which is the freedom to make choices. He could deny that and we know that. We're going to point out something later that shows that God can use an external force to do something. But He doesn't choose to do that. How are we going to build the character we need if God does that?

17b) ... and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (NKJV)

God never ever changes.

18) Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth ... (NKJV)

We know that's over in John 8. That's where Christ was in a debate with the Pharisees. They were arguing with Him. In John 8:31, it says:

John 8:31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. (NKJV)

Then we have that other scripture saying that you can't serve two masters. If we're going to be Christ's disciples, we need to serve Him. We need to choose to do God's will, not Satan's will. If not, are we serving the devil when we make those bad choices?

32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (NKJV)

We're kind of picturing that here, a time in the future when we will be teaching that freedom to the whole world.

Continue now with the last verse of James 1:18.

18b) that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (NKJV)

19) Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. (NLT)

It's talking about an attitude. It's talking about a carnal reaction that some people have.

20) Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. (NLT)

Controlling our emotions, our anger is a very powerful action. We know that. Usually what happens in the heat of a moment when we're really angry, like road rage, we make bad choices if we cannot control that anger. That's why it is such an important principle that God gives us.

21) *So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. (NLT)*

For us that is our eternal lives.

22) *But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.*

23) *For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror.*

24) *You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. (NLT)*

The point there is that we don't see ourselves as God sees us. We think sometimes that we know what we need to do to change, but God really knows what we need to change. Sometimes we have to make some serious choices in order to do that.

25) *But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says [make right choices] and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

26) *If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. (NLT)*

You fool yourself by thinking that the person looking back at you in the mirror tells you you're okay. In other words, I read God's word every day. Isn't that enough?

James is a "how to" book. It tells us that we need to apply what we know.

27) *Pure and genuine religion ... (NLT)*

That's the only kind that counts.

27b) *... in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress ... (NLT)*

That's an example of doing something for someone that has a need. I can remember years ago in the local congregation we had folks that had some hard times. The man was out of work and they were short of everything. One of the ladies in the congregation went to the grocery store and bought a couple of bags of food and took it to them. She got into trouble from the minister for doing that. This person was actually applying these principles. She saw a need and she was doing something to help.

Another situation I remember at a feast. They had a tent set up for those who had excess second tithes. You could donate these funds and then people could come and get financial assistance if they needed it. There were four or five of us men standing there and a young woman came in. I think she had one or two children. She had a flat tire. I don't want to accuse anyone of anything that isn't true, but I think she was turned down for assistance. Of course, we could overhear the conversation, and she walked

out of there with enough money for a set of tires. We saw a need and we took care of it. We were at some risk there for bucking the system.

27 continued) ... and refusing to let the world corrupt you. (NLT)

Many times, we must make that choice. Sometimes we are faced with that daily. The King James Version says *to keep yourself unspotted*. James is encouraging us to do this by applying these principles in our lives and making good choices. Then we are exhibiting God's nature more than our own carnal nature.

In the Millennium, Satan the great deceiver will not be there to influence people. Look at the world around us. It is totally influenced by evil. If you want to promote evil in the world, what do you do these days especially in the United States? You just have to put it on the ballot and come up with enough money to influence people to vote for it. Look at what we have. There's same-sex marriage in the wonderful state of Washington and we now have legalized marijuana. We are supposed to be the light of the world. We shouldn't do those things.

Again, God has given us many gifts. He gives us the breath that we breathe, the very life that we have. Everything around us was created by God, this beautiful place here even though it has been beaten up pretty much in the past from the mining. It's still a beautiful place. That is a gift of God, this beautiful environment.

The Father gave us the gift of His Son. That Son, in turn, gave His life for us. We have all these wonderful gifts. We have the understanding of the feast. We all chose to be here because of the understanding that God has given us about the holy days. We're here observing these things. He has also given us the understanding that we have a part to play in His plan. We are also picturing that here at the feast. All this is a tremendous gift.

I'd like to focus on this one important gift. Sometimes we just don't think about it. We don't consider that actually this freedom of choice could be more important to us as individuals than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That may be a startling statement, but I will try to elaborate on that. Why would this be so important to focus on at the feast? It's because it actually affects yours and my eternal life. Isn't that what we are here to partly observe and celebrate? We have a future ahead of us. We have a life ahead of us that God is holding out for us. We have this freedom of choice. If you think about that, we can actually nullify the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us by making bad choices. Paul teaches us that.

Romans 8:9. *But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)*
(NLT)

You can't serve two masters.

10) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.

11) The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. (NLT)

Again we know that is going to happen at the resurrection or if we are changed.

12) Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. (NLT)

Again, it's that person looking back at you in the mirror, the analogy that James used. You have no obligation to do that.

13) For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. (NLT)

Do you catch what Paul told these folks? When we are called to repentance and baptized and given God's holy spirit, we enter into partnership with God to help us make the right choices. Instead of your choices being led by your carnal nature, we now have God's holy spirit to help us make those choices.

Christ used the term back in John 14 and 15 that He would send a comforter or helper to assist us in following God's will and make the right choices and do the things we should be doing in our life.

15) So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves ... (NLT)

It doesn't force you. It doesn't shove you or drag you.

15b) ... Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."

16) For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm [there's that partnership] that we are God's children.

17) And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (NLT)

We have to choose to follow God and Christ.

I gave a sermon one time where I mentioned the citations in the New Testament about following Christ. I came up with approximately seventy. A week or so later on the Sabbath someone gave me about a two page list of them, where it directly says to follow Christ or it implied that we are to follow Christ.

18) Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.

19) For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day [the Millennium] when God will reveal who his children really are. (NLT)

It says that all of us that are led by God's holy spirit are the sons of God now and also in a future sense as far as God is concerned. However, we can lose that. We can choose not to follow the lead of God's holy spirit. Then you can actually nullify that gift that God has given us along with everything else He has done for us personally. We have this gift that we don't think about often. We have the freedom to choose. This is a very important topic for us.

It's interesting when you listen to the sermons, and I appreciate those, but there always is a thread that runs through the sermons. A little bit has been brought up about our history. I'm going to mention something about history too. I don't want to diminish Herbert Armstrong or anything that went on in the past. It's not my intent to do that at all. There was a teaching in the church that God would not allow anyone into His family that He cannot govern. I heard someone say once in a sermon that they thought that statement was dead wrong. Looking back at the history and where we are today, I have to say that I agree with that.

Of course, we have to submit to the authority of God in our life, to obey His laws in every way. I was ex-military, so when I came into the church, I liked the command-and-control structure. I was used to that and I didn't have a problem with it. When you look back, the more you bought into that, the more you became dependent on that whole idea. We know that's what that really meant. It really meant the church was His government on earth. But the more you bought into that and became dependent on that, the harder you fell. I know that worked the same way for us. I think Marie handled it better than I did, because I bought into all that. I was willing to relegate my decision, my choices and everything to the structure in the church.

There were a couple of years of dark depression. I would sit in the dark and drink coffee and stew over everything that was happening. Where did everything go? Why is this happening? You know we all went through that, but at some point, I had to realize I couldn't continue doing that. That is a slow spiritual death.

Getting back to the point, I don't believe that God will allow anyone into His family that won't choose to learn to govern themselves. Many scriptures tell us that. If God wouldn't give us the freedom to make our own choices, led by His spirit, would He then control us like automations? Why would we need this guide book with instructions to lead our lives?

Turn to Zechariah 14. This is a process that's going to work in the Millennium. We have an example right here. The setting here is the Day of the Lord, the beginning of the Millennium and the rule of Jesus Christ.

Zechariah 14:16. *And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

17) *And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.*

18) *If the family of Egypt ... (NKJV)*

That's probably a reference to the Arab nations. They just won't let go of that prophet or that Sharia law.

18b) *... will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

19) *This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. (NKJV)*

So what is God doing here early on as the Millennium starts? Because of that obstinate, stubborn human nature, He will have to force some people to keep the holy days. He's going to have to control them externally by withholding rain and sending a plague. Think about that. At some point doesn't that have to become internalized to where these folks want to keep the feast, and understand and they love God and want to keep the holy days and the feast because they know it's the right thing to do? They know that's the right choice. God doesn't want to have to do this, but He will need to do it in some cases.

We have this example and I don't believe anyone will be in God's family that will not eventually learn how to govern themselves.

Let's take a look at a famous example of someone who didn't govern himself properly.

Isaiah 14:12. *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!"*

13) *For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north;*

14) *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'* (NKJV)

Notice the tone there, the rebellion, the attitude, the anger and the rage. There is a thought process going on here in Satan's mind. He is making choices that are contrary to God's way. He influences the whole world to do that still today. The whole world is deceived by the same being. He doesn't change.

I believe that this selfishness we are reading about could have the same result with us. Frankly we will end up at the same place as Satan if we do not choose to humble

ourselves before God, learn to govern ourselves and submit to God's authority because God has very graciously given us all these wonderful gifts including the freedom to choose. It's clear that someone who has not chosen to humble himself or herself before Almighty God simply won't be in God's family. God cannot use that person. There is scripture to support that.

Also I believe we can be guilty of this if we don't heed the warnings given in 1 Peter.

1 Peter 2:11. *Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. (NLT)*

That war rages so many times in our lives to make wrong choices under Satan's influence. I think we are desensitized to it. We are bombarded by it constantly.

12) Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior ... (NLT)

They will see your good choices hopefully.

12b) ... and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. (NLT)

That's very futuristic. I knew someone once and I didn't understand why he or she did what they did, but now I see it, and we're going to have a role to play in that.

In 1 Peter 4:17 it states that judgment is on the house of God now.

In 1 Peter 5 we have to remember that Peter ended his letter like this.

1 Peter 5: 8. *Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. (NLT)*

How does he devour us? We get swallowed up in making the choices he entices us into. We have a whole world of that. It's playing out in front of us right now. It's been said many times in our history that the whole world is operating on Satan's wavelength.

9) Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith... (NLT)

Of course, one way we do that is by making right choices.

9b) ... Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are. (NLT)

In Matthew 19 let's look at a couple other examples about choices. It's a bit scary to me when we look back on all of this. One time we were told that only God could get us into His kingdom, and that's mostly true. That might give us a little difficulty because we still have this partnership with God. He gives us His holy spirit, expects us to operate in a

certain way to make right choices. He gives us the power and freedom to do that. He doesn't force us into His kingdom. He refuses to do that. In fact, He loves us so much that if we don't do the things we need to do, He will throw us in the lake of fire. He won't let us be like that being that we just read about in Isaiah 14. He won't let us do that. He loves us too much. We have to make that choice.

Matthew 19:16. *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (NKJV)*

He asked about eternal life. Christ told him to keep the commandments. He asked which ones and Christ went through a list.

20) *The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"*

21) *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

22) *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (NKJV)*

Did he make a choice there? Yes, he did. Christ didn't grab him by the neck and say, "No, you can't do that." He let him make that choice.

There are only two choices we can make when you really think about it.

One: We can make proactive choices.

Two: We can make no choice at all.

Either way, we've made a choice.

I have a quote: "We can try to avoid making choices by doing nothing, but even that is a decision." That's from Gary Collin, the cartoonist. There's a bit of wisdom there.

Then we have the parable of the talents. There we have the proactive guys. The one had five talents and he turned them into ten. One had two talents and turned them into four. Then there's the guy who had one talent and he turned it into zero. In other words, the ones that did something made proactive choices. They went out and did something. There was the guy that made no choice at all, but he really did make a choice. He chose to do nothing. He chose to passively sit there and do nothing. God condemned him because he made no choice.

Does this affect our eternal lives? I think so. Many scriptures bear that out.

Matthew 16:20. *Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.*

- 21) *From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*
- 22) *Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"*
- 23) *But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*
- 24) *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (NKJV)"*

This is a choice Christ said we have to make on a daily basis, to follow Him, to do those things that are pleasing in His sight. It's not something we do once and that's all we have to do. We know that.

- 25) *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*
- 26) *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul [or eternal life for us]? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*
- 27) *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. (NKJV)"*

What he or she has done with their lives, and that all involves choices. It really does, all the time.

Here Paul is speaking and he is telling something about himself.

- 1 Corinthians 9:24.** *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*
- 25) *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they [the world] do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. (NKJV)"*

Here's a reference to eternal life again.

- 26) *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. (NKJV)"*

There's an internal battle going on there. We can see that in Romans 7. It makes it very clear.

- 27) *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ... (NKJV)"*

That sounds like choices to me. He is choosing to deny himself certain things, to keep his mind under control. He's talking about the things he can do physically. He knows he can depend on God for the spiritual things, to make up for the things he cannot do. He's trying to get himself in a spiritual frame of mind.

I have a book in my library entitled Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl. He was an Austrian born German. He wound up in a concentration camp from 1942 to 1944 due to one of his Austrian brethren by the name of Adolf Hitler. He survived the concentration camp. His wife and parents perished. He could have gotten out of Austria before the Nazis came in and threw the Jews into concentration camps. He chose not to do that. He chose to stay and take care of his parents. Anyhow the point is that he came up with an idea or philosophy in the concentration camp that once something happened to him, he could decide in his mind how he would react to it.

It's kind of the same way with us. James talked about suffering. We don't know what is coming, but we can decide ahead of time. The more choices we make that are right the easier it's going to be to do that. Certainly, we need to be close to God to make those right choices. That's how we achieve that.

27b) ... lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified [King James says cast away]. (NKJV)

He's talking about not having eternal life.

It is clear to us that we have choices and that freedom of choice has everything to do with our eternity. I personally want to be a member of God's family. That means I have to make certain choices. Like Paul, we have to discipline ourselves and make the right choices against our own carnal nature.

A good example of that is addiction. Unfortunately, we have folks in the church that are suffering or have suffered from addiction. If someone suffers from addiction, how do they get over that? They have to learn to say no to themselves. They have to make that choice. Scripture is clear about that. Consider alcoholism. Scripture says in Galatians 5:21 that no drunkard will be in God's Kingdom. A drunkard isn't someone that slips once in a while. This is talking about an alcoholic. What happens when you do that? It can be drugs, alcohol or whatever, you lose control of your mind. You don't have control and you don't make the right choices. The only thing you want is the next fix or the next drink. Again, it's not talking about us at the feast and maybe having a little too much.

We had some folks in our congregation in Worldwide that came out of Church of God Seventh Day. They would poke fun at Herbert Armstrong and said that he had the Feast of Booze.

It's talking about alcoholism and if you look at the scriptures closely, for the word "drunkard" the Greek will lead back to that. Some of us can relate to those kinds of addictions.

Again, that means that we must make choices every day to say no to ourselves in order to choose for God.

If we have an addiction or had one and overcame it, we are vulnerable all the time. We can't be passive about that. We must take control of our lives and overcome. If we don't have that control, we won't be in God's Kingdom and we won't be a member of God's family. We want to be there together.

Sometimes people have to come to the point to understand this concept that they have a free choice before they can actually make progress in overcoming an addiction. Sometimes it may take a twelve-step program or something like that. Sometimes we need counseling. Sometimes the ministry can help, or sometimes they don't have the ability. The point is to overcome and learn to say no to yourself.

When God gives us that gift of choice, and I believe it is a gift, He places the responsibility to use that right back on our shoulders. If we want eternal life, we must take the responsibility and do that.

I'm not talking about gaining eternal life through works. That isn't possible. We know that eternal life has been opened to us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He gave us that gift, but we must do certain things to prove to Him that we want that. We have to make the choice for eternal life. In a nut shell, our choices can lead us closer in our relationship with God or bad choices can lead us away from God.

Again, what does all this have to do with Jesus Christ and the Millennium? Daniel 7:18.

Daniel 7:18. *But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.' (NKJV)*

What are those kings and priests going to be doing? We're going to be doing something and it has everything to do with choices.

Isaiah 2:1. *The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

2) Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. (NKJV)

We read this just about every Feast of Tabernacles.

3) Many people shall come and say, come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach ... (NKJV)

As kings and priests, we will have that role too. If you look up that word, it means to *inform, educate, direct and instruct*. It doesn't mean to drive or beat into submission.

3b) ... us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4) *He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people ... (NKJV)*

The following is on a statue at the United Nations.

4b) *... They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (NKJV)*

Just think about that one phrase. *"They won't learn war anymore."*

I am a reader and I like historical novels ... Civil War, WWI, WWII and all that. In the novels they use accurate history, but they inject characters to give drama and life to the story. I believe Jeff Shaara wrote The Steel Wave about the invasion of Normandy in June of 1944. There were five beaches. There was Omaha, Utah, Gold, Juno and Sword Beach. Utah and Omaha belonged to the Americans and they were slaughtered because of the cliffs. They got blown off course and landed a little off the beach where they were supposed to be and they got slaughtered. There were approximately ten thousand casualties the first day on that landing. The Germans lost a thousand, so the allies lost ten times that amount.

There will be a reeducation process that is going to take, because going to war is a choice. We're going to be able to teach people that we don't have to kill each other. There is another choice. We can teach about peace and loving each other. God's knowledge is going to be like the oceans. It will cover the whole earth and God's spirit will be made available to people. All those conventional wars are at the level of governments and that's always a choice. It's usually somebody else, of course, than the people that make the choice to go to war.

Think about all the wars that humans cannot solve ... the war on drugs. We lost that war.

How about the war on crime? It's obvious we have lost that. It seems the gangs have more protection than the citizens do.

The war on terrorism; I think we're going to lose that one too. It's not a safer place, as the president promised.

The military is integrated with homosexuals now. Of course, they have rights. They can marry and their commanders are afraid to tell them anything. What kind of military is that? Look at the rules of engagement we have. This is not going to work.

Think about Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty. That's turned into a massively abused welfare system.

With all these bad behaviors and choices that people make in the world around us, we're going to be involved in a reeducation process that will teach them the real

solutions and real choices that will produce genuine fruit. It will lead to their eternal life. We will have a hand in that process.

Isaiah 30:20. *And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers ... (NKJV)*

It's the same word: *educate, form, direct, instruct.* It doesn't mean to beat or be tyrants.

20b) ... will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. (NKJV)

There will not be many people left at the beginning of the Millennium. I think it's going to be very much one-on-one. As an instructor I would have classes of thirty or forty people. There was very little one-on-one. The classes I gave were for construction guys, iron workers, boiler makers, and carpenters.

21) Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way ... (NKJV)

What way? It's the way of life, how you conduct your life, the way to make right Godly choices. That's what we're going to teach.

21b) ... walk in it," Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left. (NKJV)

There are two choices there. You can turn left or right. Yogi Berra would say, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." We will be able to help and inspire people with those right choices.

22) You will also defile the covering of your images of silver, and the ornament of your molded images of gold ... (NKJV)

It sounds like false religious images to me.

22b) ... You will throw them away as an unclean thing; you will say to them, "Get away!" (NKJV)

They will choose. It's going to be a free choice due to that educational process, due to spirit beings that are caring for them and helping them. With all of the idolatry we see around us today, people will come to understand what it has done to them and they will throw it away. They will choose to get it out of their lives.

Here is a famous last scripture. The Israelites are on the threshold of going into the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 30:15. *See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,*

16) in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments ... (NKJV)

This is all about choices.

16b) ... that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. (NKJV)

They weren't there yet. That's a very futuristic tense there.

17) But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, [bad choices]

18) I announce to you today that you shall surely perish ... (NKJV)

God never changes and never compromises. If we make wrong choices, we will perish just as these people historically.

18b) ... you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

19) I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life ... (NKJV)

It's the same for us brethren. Do we want eternal life? The choice is ours. It really is when you think about it. When we leave here and in the coming year, think about the choices that we make every day. Repent of the bad choices.

We have a saying in golf that if we make a bad shot, just go on and forget about it. It's kind of the same with us. When we make a bad choice, repent of it and just go on because like the most important shot is the next one in golf, the most important choice you make is the next one. Just let it go.

19b) ... that both you and your descendants may live; (NKJV)

Little kids, I always think that they are our future. They are our legacy. They need to be taught about right choices. We always helped our kids do that. Sometimes they choose not to stay in the church and that's okay with us as long as they are making good choices in their lives.

Brethren, we don't know what the future holds for us. We have many choices facing us in the future. Let's appreciate this gift we have, this freedom of choice that God has given us. Let's take the opportunity in every way we have, not only here but as we leave and until we come together again. Let's choose to live God's way and let's choose to look forward to the Millennium and choose to look forward like it says in Deuteronomy 30:19: *choose life*. Let's choose to be there for all eternity.