

Hearts and Minds

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For the sermon today I have to confess that I have used this topic at the Feast years ago. That either speaks to my laziness or the depth of God's Word. Even in our personal study we can revisit a subject time and time again, and still get something out of it. We can get an entirely fresh look at it and that's what we do sometimes. For example, in the Pacific Church of God, if you look at the God of the Old Testament understanding, how many times did we read over those scriptures? Time and again—we just didn't see it on the first go around. For some of us that took years—forty plus for us personally. But then all of a sudden, all those scriptures just jumped out at us and we had it. It finally stuck in our minds. It literally changed our "hearts and minds"; it was an exciting time for us.

Just thinking about the phrase "hearts and minds" it may ring a bell in our memories if you go back in history. A Google search on that term, loosely attributes it to the then President Lyndon Johnson. He actually visited Vietnam at the beginning of that conflict—that ten-year conflict—although some people say that Johnson may have used a more colorful term than "hearts and minds".

Another idea is that originated earlier with a British general in history, sometime during one of Britain's colonizing excursions. The theory then and the idea behind "hearts and minds" was, you could defeat a guerilla army, but in order to obtain complete victory you had to use the indigenous population. You had to use their army, you had to use their military. In other words, you turn the burden of whatever you were doing over to the other country. The point being, you had to win the "hearts and the minds" of the people. We know that in Vietnam as well. That strategy was also employed in Iraq and Afghanistan. We know how that worked out everywhere it was adopted. Scripturally, in Philippians 4, Paul used that expression—*hearts and minds* in a different context—it was in a spiritual context. In Philippians 4, beginning in verse 2 to verse 7.

Philippians 4:2 *I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.*

3) *And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*

4) *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*

5) *Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*

6) *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;*

7) *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJV)*

Yesterday, Gail mentioned a previous Feast site they went to where we also had an experience of peace and harmony one time. It was when, in 1987 we were able to go to the Feast in Fiji. In a sense God was guarding our minds then—He was taking

care of us then. That word *guard* means “to protect and to watch over”. Just like a parent would watch over and protect a child. Through God’s Holy Spirit and at that Feast site He was giving us a break from a troubled world. If you remember, in 1987 was the year of the coup in Fiji. The Fijian military actually took over the government from the Indian people who had been imported earlier in Fiji’s history. They eventually took over the government and a Fijian army general overthrew that government. There’s a long back story but we won’t get into that. It was an interesting country to visit.

Getting to the point of that story—during that period of time when that coup was taking place, there was a complete news blackout in Fiji. There was nothing—there was no news going out, there was no news coming in. We were staying at a resort hotel and there was nothing. Of course, we didn’t have TV, we didn’t have anything. So here we were in this setting in Fiji, beautiful weather, balmy, 80 degrees day and night—just perfect. A wonderful beach from where they had manmade jetty going out into the lagoon and that made this crystal-clear lagoon just a beautiful setting. The night sky was incredible. In that hemisphere you get the southern cross—it was gorgeous. It was really something to see. Two weeks without any outside influence whatsoever we had that kind of peace and understanding that “God was watching out for us”. It was like we were insulated from the rest of the world and that was quite an experience. But of course, we eventually had to leave. The international airport in Fiji is in Nandi and when we walked in we got a taste of a worldly environment right away. They had TV monitors everywhere and there were some news clips on there about what was going on in the world. It was so traumatic that our nerves were just jangled. We didn’t know how to react to that. We had had two weeks of absolute peace and it was a wonderful feeling.

Even here God gives us a glimpse into the future in many respects. At least into the millennium, which was the whole point of Rick’s opening sermon. It gave us a glimpse into what the millennium will be like. I knew as he was going through all that, I had all those scriptures marked in my Bible, so we have heard them many times before. We can speculate on what the future holds and I think we do that a lot. We have always done that in our time in God’s church. We can speculate on what it will look like, what it will be like in the millennium. But you know we are going to get a lot of surprises. We can only guess at some of these things. There will be changes, there’s no doubt about that. There’s a question. “What will be changed?” Most of us, looking at everybody here, have been around for quite a while—we don’t have too many younger people here, just a few. We’ve heard different versions that the millennium will be a semi-chaotic rebuilding or it will be a utopia from right off the bat—we don’t know, we’ve heard various versions of that. The point I’m trying to get at—are there any specifics that we can nail down? I think there are.

It seems like every time there is a political cycle in this country, we endure that. Usually the mantra is, “This is an administration of change.” That’s typical, but the only change that I can determine, is that it refreshes our disgust with politics in general. I read something recently that the only visible growth industry in the United States is the “entitlement” industry. Talk about “tax and spend” politics—there you go. Entitlement should be a euphemism for bribed votes. What definite change will have to occur? One major change that I think will occur—in fact it’s going to have to

change for other change to take place—that change is a “change of heart”. That is going to have to happen. If you want a title for this message, it’s the obvious one:

Hearts and Minds

When you think about that, when you think about everything that God is going to do, He has a “Heart and Mind” on a scale unlike anything that human beings could come up with. It won’t be anything like man’s. We’re all very much aware of what is going on around us in our country and I don’t think anyone would disagree that mankind has created a monumental mess in everything it does. Even saying that it’s a big mess, is being charitable, when you look at everything that we’re doing. Everything is a mess—our cities, our environment, our human society and on and on it goes. We seem to be bent on a pattern of self destruction. I don’t know about you, but that’s what I say, and it’s all manmade, every bit of it. It’s all the result of human nature, with Satan spurring it on. It comes down to man’s heart and that is the source of the problems. Ezekiel 11—I know Rick was in Ezekiel 11—and I’ll actually be quoting one scripture that he used. I think we’re all familiar enough with the book of Ezekiel to understand that there’s a lot of imagery in it. If we look back to the context in chapter 10, God is basically saying that out of disgust. He is going to leave the nation of Israel. He is going to literally divorce them. He is going to lead them into captivity. That was the diaspora at that time. It was primarily a judgment on Israel’s leadership, as we will see in the context. By extrapolation, those principles can apply to all leaders if we remember that Ezekiel’s visions reached are far into the future. It said earlier that Ezekiel was in the spirit—he was in a deep visionary state.

Ezekiel 11:14 *Then this message came to me from the Lord:*

15) *“Son of man, the people still left in Jerusalem are talking about you and your relatives and all the people of Israel who are in exile. They are saying, ‘Those people are far away from the Lord, so now he has given their land to us!’ (NLT)*

If you study the context of the people, who are they talking about? Who were left in Jerusalem—Israel’s capital at the time? They were the leadership who had not been taken into captivity and that’s what was going on here. Those people who are far away are primarily the leadership and some of the people who had been taken away. The plot here is that those who were left are now saying that God had taken those bad leaders away, so we’re okay and now it’s all ours—we can have it all, we can take over. Partisan politics at its best there. Continuing in Ezekiel 11:16.

16) *Therefore, tell the exiles, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Although I have scattered you in the countries of the world, I will be a sanctuary to you during your time in exile.*

17) *I, the Sovereign Lord, will gather you back from the nations where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel once again.’*

18) *“When the people return to their homeland, they will remove every trace of their vile images and detestable idols.*

19) *And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit [Rick quoted this one yesterday] within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart. (NLT)*

That's what God wants, that's what He is most interested in. He's not handing out punishment for the sake of punishing people.

20) so they will obey my decrees and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God. (NLT)

That is, then there will be harmony and compatibility existing between God and His people.

21) But as for those who long for vile images and detestable idols, I will repay them fully for their sins. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!" (NLT)

I know we all know that the usage of the word *heart* in scripture is referring to “the intellect—the will, the very core of our being”. I think it's been proven scientifically that everything is hardwired there between our emotions and our minds and our thinking. Man's heart, under Satan's influence, just wants to do evil continually. That's why we find ourselves in the mess we are in today. Is anything running smoothly on any level of our lives? I can't think of anything. God was taking these people to task because of the idolatry—the Sabbath breaking—all the things they were doing wrong. It's all been done apart from God and under Satan's influence and the way he's affected their hearts and minds. He is doing that. In the future, in the millennium, God is going to affect the hearts and minds as we're going to see.

Even when Satan is put away, how much of that influence is going to spill over into the millennium? We don't know. It's abundantly clear, if you look at scripture, that God is going to have to change man's heart—the very nature. He's going to have to change it from the inside out so to speak and we know that is a process. It's a process symbolized by a physical act—a picture, if you will—about how that is going to take place in the future. Now it's taking place in our lives spiritually today but that same process is going to be employed and used by God in the future. We might think it's strange but it's pictured by the ritual of circumcision. I know that many times we've heard references to circumcision, but there are a lot of lessons imbedded there. Let's go back to the introduction of circumcision. We can pick up some of these things along the way in Genesis 17. When I was talking about “in the beginning”, I meant I have an entire sermon on circumcision I gave, if you can imagine, one time, years ago at the Feast. But it all ties to the heart, we'll see that as we go along. I am going to use the Young's Literal Translation. It's going to be very close to your King James.

Genesis 17:1 *And Abram is a son of ninety and nine years, and Jehovah appeareth unto Abram, and saith unto him, 'I [am] God Almighty, walk habitually before Me, and be thou perfect;
2) and I give My covenant between Me and thee, and multiply thee very exceedingly.'* (YLT)

Key term here is *covenant* and an implied *special relationship* that God is establishing with Abraham.

3) And Abram falleth upon his face, and God speaketh with him, saying,

- 4) *`I -- lo, My covenant [is] with thee, and thou hast become father of a multitude of nations;*
 5) *and thy name is no more called Abram, but thy name hath been Abraham, for father of a multitude of nations have I made thee; (YLT)*

It's interesting that whenever God makes these name changes, the name describes what people actually are to Him. Abraham is called the "*father of the faithful*" later on. But every time a term like that is used, it always points to the future. *Abraham* also means "father of a multitude of nations or a powerful multitude". Let's continue in Genesis 17.

- 6) *and I have made thee exceeding fruitful, and made thee become nations, and kings go out from thee.*
 7) *And I have established My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, to their generations, for a covenant age-during, to become God to thee, and to thy seed after thee;*
 8) *and I have given to thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, the whole land of Canaan, for a possession age-during, and I have become their God.'*
 9) *And God saith unto Abraham, `And thou dost keep My covenant, thou and thy seed after thee, to their generations;*
 10) *this [is] My covenant which ye keep between Me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every male of you [is] to be circumcised;*
 11) *and ye have circumcised the flesh of your foreskin, and it hath become a token [that just means a sign or evidence] of a covenant between Me and you.*
 12) *And a son of eight days is circumcised by you; every male to your generations, born in the house, or bought with money from any son of a stranger, who is not of thy seed;*
 13) *he is certainly circumcised who [is] born in thine house, or bought with thy money; and My covenant hath become in your flesh a covenant age-during;*
 14) *and an uncircumcised one, a male, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised, even that person hath been cut off from his people; My covenant he hath broken.'* (YLT)

We see several things. We see that all the males were circumcised, but it was a sign, a symbol of the covenant between God and His people. We also see that it was an everlasting, perpetual, ongoing covenant again that pointed to the future. There's another reference in Exodus 12—I'm only touching on a few verses on this entire topic. Exodus 12, we know is where it mentions the first Passover. I'm still using the Literal Translation.

- Exodus 12:43** *And Jehovah saith unto Moses and Aaron, `This [is] a statute of the passover; Any son of a stranger doth not eat of it;*
 44) *and any man's servant, the purchase of money, when thou hast circumcised him -- then he doth eat of it;*
 45) *a settler or hired servant doth not eat of it; (YLT)*

We know from the Passover which we keep, that the eating the Passover symbolizes eating and drinking the blood of Christ. There's a covenant and there's blood involved and it's an everlasting covenant that points to the future. We'll see later in

the sermon that there is a “circumcision of the heart” and there are parallels in that symbolism. We know this is a process, that God has designed to work. That’s the only way it works; God is not going to change the process; it’s going to stay the same. We’re going to see that same process in the millennium being worked out. In fact, we’re going to have a part in using that process. If you think about that spiritually, if you wrap all this up and put it into the context, there is going to be a monumental change in people’s “hearts and minds”. At first, it’s going to be hundreds and then thousands and then millions and later on billions. God is going to work with them with the same process, from the inside out with the heart.

If we dig further into the Old Testament, we can see that this act—the cutting off of the flesh—also pictures “circumcision of the heart”. It’s changed in the thinking and the mind. It begins to tell us that very clearly in Deuteronomy 10. Again, from Young’s Literal Translation, I just happen to have that in my software program. I like it because it translates LORD into Yehovah and I don’t have to make those editorial changes if I’m using other scriptures.

Deuteronomy 10:12 `And now, Israel, what is Jehovah thy God asking from thee, except to fear Jehovah thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul ... (YLT)

Notice the concept there; loving God *with all of our heart, all of our minds*, the way we think and the way we even conduct our lives—that’s the way we express that to God. It’s not a reach at all to see the connection between the ritual act of circumcision and the conversion process. In other words, when we are called, God begins working with us to show us how our hearts and minds, how our carnal nature operates apart from God—it’s mostly carnal, it’s fleshly. There’s no spiritual element there. We operate on a purely carnal level. Then what happens? God gradually brings us to *repentance* and that just means “to turn around or change our thinking”. Change the carnal thinking. In other words, we are cutting out or excising sin from our lives, so there’s some parallels there. We are doing that with God’s help. That’s the way the process works now, that’s the way the process is going to work in the future. When that takes place, God becomes central in everything we think, say and do. It’s expressed in our behavior and thoughts—everything. We’ll see a little later on that God looks at that—that’s what He looks at. Mostly that is all we see, but God looks much deeper than that. He actually measures our thinking from the inside. That’s an ongoing process. Man’s going to follow that same process. The last part of verse 12 said *to serve Yehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul*.

13) to keep the commands of Jehovah, and His statutes which I am commanding thee to-day, for good to thee?

14) Lo, to Jehovah thy God [are] the heavens and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that [is] in it;

15) only in thy fathers hath Jehovah delighted -- to love them, and He doth fix on their seed after them -- on you, out of all the peoples as [at] this day; (YLT)

When you think about that and the history of Israel, all the miracles that they saw, everything that He worked for them and how many times they rebelled and left God. They slipped into idolatry and did all the things that showed they didn’t love God. What did Christ say? “*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*” They loved the

things of the people around them; they wanted to be part of that. It goes on to point out the root of the problem, and again it's on the inside. Here in Deuteronomy 10:16, this is from the Amplified Version, it brings it out a little bit better.

16) So circumcise [that is, remove sin from] your heart, and be stiff-necked (stubborn, obstinate) no longer. (AV)

In other words, cut away what's causing God to separate Himself from you. Being a physical nation, they didn't have God's Spirit to help make those changes. I was talking to someone about this recently. Sometimes we fall into this little trap and say they didn't have God's Spirit back then; they couldn't really help themselves. That's not true. It's not the way God works. No matter where they are and at what time, He always give people the knowledge to make informed choices. He just does that; that's the way God operates. In reality, even though God's promises and everything then was physical, they could still have done those things that He told them to do, but they chose not to. It's as simple as that. They were a stubborn, rebellious people as God repeatedly called them. Remember in Ezekiel 11:21 that we read earlier—as *for those who long for the vile images and detestable idols, all the evil images and detestable things*—we still see humanity doing that today. There's nothing new under the sun when it comes to human nature. God goes on to say in verse 21 of that chapter,

"I will repay them fully for their sins. I the sovereign Yehovah have spoken."

That should sound familiar to us today. Man thinks he is getting away with everything that he is doing, but he's not. When I think about that term where God says "*Vengeance is Mine*", it tells us God is going to settle all scores—all of them.

There's an interesting prophecy in Jeremiah, another account where Israel had fallen into rank idolatry. Jeremiah 9, I'll be using the New Living Translation. It is an interesting prophecy, because it is pointing down into the future.

Jeremiah 9:25 *"A time is coming," says the Lord, "when I will punish all those who are circumcised in body but not in spirit—
26) the Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, the people who live in the desert in remote places, * and yes, even the people of Judah. And like all these pagan nations, the people of Israel also have uncircumcised hearts."*
(NLT)

That was evident in the way they were living and the things they were doing. He's lumping Israel, primarily Judah in this context, with the Gentile nations—there's no difference. He was telling them they are no better than the nations around them. They were no better in God's eyes at all. Remember later on, how the Jews very scornfully in their self-righteous attitude referred to everyone who wasn't circumcised as heathens? They took that one physical sign and made a religion out of it. They didn't have God's Spirit; they didn't differentiate between physical and spiritual—they just didn't see that. The whole record of Israel just kept proving that they were "uncircumcised in heart"; that's where the problem lay. They didn't love God and they didn't obey Him as they should have. When you think about that, they were rejecting God with their disobedience.

God gives us many lessons through circumcision, that cutting off of the flesh. It pictures “*circumcision of the heart and mind*”. We understand that that’s far more important to God than the physical act of circumcision. That same process is going to carry over into the millennium, it does not change, it stays the same. We know the account in Acts 15 and the Jerusalem conference. The major issue with the Jews then was a question of circumcision. We know from the record there, that James had to make the determination that they wouldn’t lay that ritual—because things were now spiritual—on the early fledgling church. The physical act served a purpose back then, but it only symbolized a covenant between God and His people. Now it is a *spiritual circumcision* of the “heart and mind”. When you think about that, a physical ritual has no application spiritually, it just doesn’t work that way. The result of that conference was that the people coming into the church at that time didn’t need to do that. Paul read all those Old Testament scriptures; in fact, he was very well versed in those—he was a scholar. He constantly had to deal with that legalistic attitude that a physical act was necessary for salvation, because that’s what the Jews were doing. When you think about that, it’s one thing to love God’s laws but it’s another thing to make the laws themselves with “do’s and the don’ts”. This became especially necessary to the Pharisees and spilled over to the people at that time. That was the law you had to obey, there was no spiritual component to it.

In Romans 1 and we see an example—an outstanding example when you think about it, in the church in Rome where Paul dealt with this. It’s not hard to see what he was up against in Rome. What did he have in Rome? A mix of Jewish people and other people. Of course, most of the Jews at that time were pretty well to do. There were also slaves there—there was a mixture of people. Kind of like today. After his salutation, Paul is just telling them to take a good hard look at the so-called enlightened society that they found themselves in at the time. They had all the pagan mythology, philosophy and a lot of intellectual vanity; it sounds familiar. The context also shows that there were a whole lot of attitudes flying back and forth among the church. That sounds familiar too. The main focus I’m going to go to is in Romans 2. We could go through the whole of Romans 1 and make a list of things that would be a remarkable parallel between what Paul was describing at that time and the works of the flesh we find in Galatians 5. Their carnality is brought out in the last part of Romans 1:28. I’m still using the New Living Translation; it brings it out more clearly for us today.

Romans 1:28 *Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. (NLT)*

The *carnal* “hearts and minds”, the things that should never be done. Do we see that today? Of course, we do. People just think they can ignore our Creator and there’s no consequences but there are consequences.

29) Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip.

30) They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents.

31) *They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy.*

32) *They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. (NLT)*

Down in chapter 2:1.

Romans 2:1 *You may think you [he's primarily addressing these judgmental Jews] can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. (NLT)*

Evidently these self-righteous, hypocritical, judgmental attitudes that were cropping up between the Jews and Greeks were tearing the church apart. They were just battling these things back and forth. I'm sure the Jews had all their favorite scriptures that they would lay on everyone and make comparisons between themselves and others. They were just creating all kinds of problems. To me that is very similar to the kind of factions that Paul was addressing in Corinthians, the church at Corinth. Sometimes people do that. They get on their proverbial "high horse" and they will pick out some doctrinal things that become very important to them; in fact they become an entire religion. When people do that, they forget the rest of God's Word; it's all in context, every bit of it. You can't just take the pieces you want and use them and throw them at other people. Or use them as a yard stick, especially when you're looking at other people. Paul shows that is what is happening here. We can even see that today; once that starts in a church it just seems to escalate. It's like storm clouds coming through a church. We're scattered all over the place; God's people are scattered everywhere. It's like you have this black cloud hanging over the church and it seems to last for a time and then it will go away and you'll get a little sunshine. Then something else will come along. I think James said one time it seems about every ten years it runs a cycle. Being that the church is fragmented like it is now. That happens on a smaller scale in different groups.

Romans 2:2 *And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things.*

3) *Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? (NLT)*

That's usually the case. When you have one segment of a group being judgmental and critical of another, they're usually doing the same thing in another sense. That's what Paul is telling us. It seems like a psychological function that we all seem to fall into. Put someone else down to inflate your own ego and on and on it goes; that has consequences.

4) *Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient [remember these were supposedly converted people] God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (NLT)*

I don't know about you but when God called us, He was really patient with us. He changed our hearts and minds and when you think about that, through His kindness and patience, he brought us along in baby steps. I know everyone here has their story—we all do. We used to talk about that a lot. Here we have a record of these individuals. They are showing us a pattern if we get embroiled in this mode of engaging in judgmental, hypocritical arguments. In this case it was like, *I'm a Jew, you're not, I was circumcised according to the law and you're not or you won't*. It's just another way of saying who's who in the church.

5) But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (NLT)

That's in the millennium.

6) He will judge everyone according to what they have done. (NLT)

If you have a marginal reference in your King James Translation like I do, you are going to find a couple of Old Testament scriptures in there. Paul is actually quoting from these. This is just a reference one in Psalms 62 from the New Living.

Psalms 62:11 *God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you; 12) unfailing love, O Lord, is yours. Surely you repay all people according to what they have done. (NLT)*

Another one—I had a couple in my margin—was Proverbs 24. This is from the Young's Literal Translation

Proverbs 24:12 *When thou sayest, [this is what human nature typically does] 'Lo, we knew not this.' Is not the Ponderer of hearts He who understandeth? And the Keeper of thy soul He who knoweth? And He hath rendered to man according to his work. (YLT)*

Paul was quoting those scriptures. He said God will render to each person according to his deeds. That principle is prefaced by that statement, "I didn't know". Courts hear that all the time; I didn't know it was against the law to do 150 mph in my Corvette. The point I'm getting at is he's talking about "*weighing the heart*"; that doesn't mean a physical weight. When God says He weighs something that means He looks at it—the motives and thoughts that we have, what drives us to do the things we do in our lives—that's what He's weighing. If you look at it physically, when you weigh something, you're looking at data. You can do something with that. For example, if I went down to the local landscaping nursery and bought five yards of rock and it weighed 5000lbs, I wouldn't put that in my 1/2-ton pickup—you do the math. By analogy, God does the same thing; He wants the data coming from our hearts. That's what He is looking at. He measures that, He weighs that, He tests that and it's a process. It's the same process that's going to go on in the millennium.

Going back to Romans 2:7, there were some people at this church in Rome who weren't doing this and that's interesting. We read verse 6 earlier, He will judge everyone according to what they have done.

Romans 2:7 *He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. (NLT)*

When is that going to take place? In the future. Sometimes that's all we can do is to hang on, to persevere, honor God and glorify God in everything that we do. Going down to verse 25, which is a long discourse, but if you want to study the whole context, it is kind of interesting. Paul is pointing out something to them.

25) *The Jewish ceremony [actually it was God's] of circumcision has value only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile.*

26) *And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God declare them to be his own people?*

27) *In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God's law but don't obey it.*

28) *For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision.*

29) *No, [here's the point Paul was making] a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law [which is what they were doing and trying to put onto other people, thinking the letter of the law was essential for salvation]; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people. (NLT)*

Nothing new under the sun; the nations back then wanted to be part of the people around them. Paul pointed that same thing out in Rome, same thing today. When you think about this, Paul wasn't condemning the Jewish segment of the church, he was rebutting their hypocrisy in what they were doing. In essence they were acting like they were uncircumcised spiritually. Over in Romans 4, he's still talking to the same people. He cites the example of Abraham in the same context of what we're talking about. You remember the Jews made a big show of claiming their lineage to Abraham but in Romans 4:11 and 12, again from the New Living Translation, Paul was pointing back in history and to now—and actually on into the future.

Romans 4:11 *Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith.*

12) *And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.(NLT)*

In other words, the physical act of circumcision is not the point. Abraham still had that uncircumcised state before he was circumcised. He just went through the symbolism later because that's what God wanted him to do. It signified that perpetual

covenant; that's why he did that. It's like when Paul used another metaphor when he talked about the covering, the layers of the heart and pictures the surgical procedure, spiritually, that God does. In a spiritual sense that's what happened to us. Those layers and that process of conversion—those carnal layers of the hardness of our heart. Under Satan's influence we develop that hardness, we develop that callousness towards God and one another. When God helps us—brings us to repentance, brings us to conversion—He cuts that away spiritually speaking. Not with a surgeon's scalpel but with His Holy Spirit acting in our hearts and minds. That's another metaphor that we don't have time to go into. What I'm trying to say is, essentially, we have already had that circumcision of heart.

I was talking to a good friend once—it's been years ago and I don't even know if he's still around—and he was saying that being called and converted is like being in a live classroom. That's kind of what it is like, this process of conversion. We are given lessons every day. I worked—I'm retired now—as an instructor at a nuclear power plant. I would get an assignment to develop a class. That was my thing at the time. I would develop the classroom portion and then I would develop the labs. We would do a lot of hands on. I would get an assignment to do a class on some piece of equipment used in a nuclear plant. In a nuclear powerplant, you don't touch anything unless you've been trained. If you do, you're going to lose your job and you may wind up in court. My favorite part was the "hands on" part and that's what we're going to be doing in the millennium. We're going to be doing the "hands on". We're going to see a lot of miraculous changes.

Rick talked about this yesterday, in fact that was point number two and we should all remember that one—"the Father is going to renew the earth". When you think about that, health is going to be restored to the earth, restored to the soil, the water, the air—everything. We're going to see those things. Is that going to be our primary function? I don't think so, we're just going to restore the physical things so the earth can sustain life through the millennium—that's what we're going to be doing. I would like to turn to a final scripture in Romans 8. This is the promise from God to us who have been converted, those who have this circumcised heart now and are living the way we're supposed to be living.

Romans 8:12 *Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. (NLT)*

We do have choices, just like the Israelites could have chosen to obey God—they chose not to. We can do the same thing; we are free 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)

In the Old Testament you were God's people if you obeyed God. You expressed your love towards God by obeying Him.

15) So, you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. 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 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)*

That suffering is just living our human life out; that's the way I see that.

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

I have talked quite a bit about the process, I hope you realize it's not just the process God is interested in, it's the end product. What He is constantly testing—those things we talked about that God weighs, He's looking at that. We had a saying in the nuclear industry:

“Don't get overly focused on the process”.

In other words, don't get so tied up in the process that you lose sight of the goal you're trying to achieve through that process you're employing. It's kind of similar to a military saying—there's a saying among military operators of:

“Don't fall in love with plan A, because you might have to go to plan B, or plan C, or no plan at all—in a hurry”.

It's the same with the conversion process. God's ultimate interest is that the result—the product achieved through the process—is a converted mind resulting in Godly character, a change in “*heart and mind*”. That's the only way we're going to achieve Godly character. It is through that change.

Solomon's wisdom teaches us something; this is just a reference scripture and should be familiar to us.

Ecclesiastes 3:13 *And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. (NLT)*

God gives us our physical life. Humanly we tend to self identify with the substance of our lives—our family, our career, the things we most readily relate to. We used to naively think that somehow God was going to use those talents we developed in this physical life in the millennium. Should we forget that God's going to give us a new identity? Rick quoted that scripture yesterday—Revelation 2:17. This is just a reference. I like the New Living Translation.

Revelation 2:17 *Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it. (NLT)*

That's the end result, the ultimate goal God has for us. That's an entirely new identity from the one we have now, from the one we can relate to now. When you think about

all the character God develops in us now, He is going to perfect that when we are changed into spirit beings. That's what God wants to bring through to the millennium. Finally, Romans 8:19 from the New Living Translation. This short scripture should be an anchoring scripture, more than a memory scripture. Something we hang onto as it points to our future.

Romans 8:19 *For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.* (NLT)

We should be looking forward to that time when we have the opportunity in the millennium to actually change "*hearts and minds*".