

# Series: Reboot

## Sermon #1

### Where Are We?

James 3:2-6; 1:19-20

Dr. Matt Cassidy – January 2, 2022

Well, good morning, Grace! And ... Happy New Year! 2022 is here, and clearly, I'm not, because I'm wearing a short-sleeve shirt. And you? You're wearing a parka.

Well, it wasn't like we had planned, but this is what we're going to do. As we're starting the year over, today I want us to start everything over again. We'll call the whole series *Reboot*. Let's just take a breath ... a big, long, maybe two-year breath ... to recover maybe from some things that we have done or from influences in our life. And I want us to spend time in this series applying just two sentences from a doctrine-heavy book of the Bible called *Romans*.

#### **Romans 12:1-2**

**Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

This is what reboot means. Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, says this: "Therefore I urge you, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and a holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

And look—this is what we're going to look at today: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, which is good and acceptable and perfect."

“Do not be conformed to this world ...”—what is this world? That’s what we’re going to look at. How did we get here? That’s the outline of the whole series—how did we get here and how do we get out of here? How did we get into this world, how did we get conformed to this?

## **Where Are We Now?**

What is this world? In a word, it’s divided. It’s divided. We have a divided nation, we have divided families, we have splits and fracture lines in major churches around the country. You can’t even have free speech in some significant universities, particularly UC Berkeley. Some of you are alumni from UC Berkeley, and when some people go there to speak, they burn a lot of the buildings down. It’s like times I haven’t seen in a while, because ... well, it’s different. It’s the same, but it’s different.

Under it all—under all the division we have—is this seething anger and a destabilizing fear that is throughout the culture. That is this world: fear and anger.

Now, our country has been here before. Before the Civil War we were divided. It ended up with a war. But there was anger and there was fear. And then in the sixties and seventies, I was alive to watch it on TV. We had two brothers, the Kennedys, shot, assassinated, right in front of our very eyes. And then Dr. Martin Luther King, a pacifist pastor, just wanting to peacefully renegotiate the racial tension that’s in our culture and the way we treat one another because of the colors of our skin ... that man was killed. Again, cities were burning. And at least then, everyone agreed that rioting was bad. But even then, again, there’s that common denominator of a divided country filled with anger and fear.

## **How Did We Get Here?**

So, how did we get this divided? How did this much anger and fear come into our lives? Why did it happen? How did it happen?

It’s different this time. That’s what I want to spend our time this morning learning about. While it’s the same thing as some other times in history, it’s different this time. They’re using the same hopes and fear and hate, but they’re using different tactics.

It all started with the technology explosion, and particularly when technology was monetized—when it became a resource of income and money. For example, how do we get

people to go to particular websites? It's the addictive nature of clicking. The division today is built upon the platform of addiction. The division today that we have is built upon the platform that's for gambling and for gaming and for social media. What happened was that the rest of the gang got involved in that as well, particularly journalism. In other words, what keeps the light so bright in the middle of the night in the Nevada desert—Las Vegas; how come the house always wins? Because the addictive nature of gambling was used to motivate us to be in division: us against them, using hate or fear. That's what happened.

And so, one of the things I want us to do is to watch the movie *Social Dilemma* as part of our homework. You can watch that on Netflix. Find a friend that has that subscription. Watch that. That will explain how clicking becomes addictive. And *Social Dilemma* is an interesting documentary because the engineers, the men and women who invented the issue we're talking about today, are becoming like Dr. Frankenstein, confessing that they created a monster that's been turned loose on the culture. When one of the persons speaks, he says, "I invented the like button. And I'm sorry what it's done to the souls of people."

It's interesting, it's enlightening. But at the same time, it's scary.

It all changed in 2011. It all changed in 2011 when the business model of the news media saw what was going on in these other means of addiction and said, *Let's get in on that.*

What was addictive with vanity clicks in social media or winning a video game (I've never won anything in a video game, but there's a little buzz when you get that), that addictive nature that keeps people sitting in front of slot machines and pulling the arm down—that means of addiction—the newspapers and media said, *We're going to start doing that. I'm in.*

Like Natalie Merchant, a band member of 10,000 Maniacs, said "If fear and lust is your candy"—we're going to say "If fear and hate is your candy, if blood and anxiety taste so sweet, then give 'em what they want. Hey, just give 'em what they want." She goes on: "So their eyes are growing hazy, because they're just trying to turn it on. Their minds have grown lazy"—soft and lazy—"so now we just give them what they want."

And what do they want? They want anger and they want fear, and we keep clicking on these things.

Here's how it all happened. Prior to 2011 everyone involved in some kind of media realized they were losing a lot of money and their influence. They weren't able to keep up with the way things were changing. They were hemorrhaging money, losing all sorts of influence, and

they needed to change. And so, when 2011 rolls around, what happened was that the traditional means of media said, *We've got to learn from these other sources*. That was the year that *The New York Times* invented the paywall for their website, which made you pay for the subscription. And then it could watch to see what people were willing to pay for. They were watching to see what you were willing to spend money on and how they could increase their followers and influence and power and how they could increase their revenues.

And so, they would manipulate headlines and they would see which one got more money, which one got more followers. They were using slot machine ethics instead of journalistic practices. They watched it for a while, and it worked. It worked fabulously.

And one of the things that they found was that if they could use more divisive language and selective words, they would get more clicks, more followers, more traction, more money, more power.

An interesting study was done by a computer scientist watching all that happen. This is the name of the article—I'll wear you down with words here: "Prevalence of Prejudice-Denoting Words in News Media Discourse: A Chronological Analysis." The article is about as friendly as the title. But what this man does is he looks at headlines and news stories from 1970 to 2019. Listen to his sample size: 27 million different articles from forty-seven of the nation's top media sources. He looks at those over a period of time and he asks how has vocabulary changed in these four areas: ethnicity, gender, sexual, and religion. What words were being used and how are they being changed and what difference does it make? In other words, what sells?

In 2010 a headline would read "Man Kills Woman." That didn't get much traction—not much money. In 2014 it says, "White Man Kills Black Woman in What We Believe Was an Act of Racism or Sexism." Now it just says, "White Supremacist Murders Black Woman in Rampage," when the real story is that it was a mixed-race couple and it was classic domestic violence that got out of hand. But that story doesn't sell. That doesn't click.

And so, *The New York Times* made a decision that it was going to set up a paywall and choose clicks over truth. And this was five years before anyone knew Donald Trump was ever going to be president.

Let me just give you some statistics of word use and change. From 2010 to 2019, the word "racist" increased in usage 600 percent. All of the other news agencies jumped on board. They saw what was happening. *The Wall Street Journal* jumped in. "Islamophobic" jumped up

680 percent in that period of time. “White supremacy” usage went up 5, 931 percent in just those few years from 2010 to 2019.

Now it’s very important for you to understand that this is pre-Donald Trump—and he was a big log on this fire—I admit that. But it was independent of things that were taking place in fact of time, areas of race and gender and sexuality and religion. The increase didn’t represent what was really happening. It was made up for financial gain. They made a financial decision for divisive vocabulary. Clicks over accuracy—because it made more money and got more influence, more followers. It was slot machine ethics, and it ravaged journalism.

And that’s the world we’ve been living in for ten years.

Here’s the proof. This is from the movie *Social Dilemma*. One person says, “We found out that fake news traveled six times faster than true news.” So, what do you do? You start sending out fake news, because it travels six times faster.

Here’s another proof. Men and women in the media—the hosts, the journalists themselves, the expert witnesses that came on their shows, the politicians themselves—many of them heard testimony under oath of what was factually true. But once they went on their shows, they lied about what happened and what will happen in the future. “Oh, it’s going to come out soon ...” And so, what happens when you lie—once, twice, repeatedly over months, over years? These people weren’t fired; they were given awards. Some of them were significantly promoted. Why? Because it made them money. It got them more influence. They were rewarded. They already made the decision between and truth and click bait, and so they were rewarded according to the decision they made ahead of time.

One of our applications, by the way, is to fast. Fasting means to stop doing. Let’s do forty days as a church—forty days of fasting from news input—where we’re getting it from, that sort of thing. Let’s kind of put our heads down a little bit and take a break. In light of the fact that we now know they’re doing that and that they’ve made it work in a way that it’s addictive, why don’t we just change a little bit? Why don’t we change our lifestyles so that we’re not getting information using those methods?

### **How Do These Information Sources Divide Us?**

How does this new method divide us? I’m changing subjects mildly. It’s a new delivery system, but it’s an old model. How does division happen in our lives and how has it been so

effective? It's addictive. But I want to answer the question as to how it divides. How do you divide a country? How do you get so divided?

The point is that these are old methods. We've been doing this for millennia. This is the way you take over a country.

## 1. Violation of Words

One: violation of words. If you change words, you change a culture. You can go all the way back to—and the idea of “concept creep”—I'll explain that in just a moment. But whether it's *Brave New World* or “manifest destiny” in our country or “the ultimate solution” in Nazi Germany, we're going to change what words mean so that the culture will change and do what we want them to do.

In a very interesting article, it shows how what's called “concept creep” happened most recently. Here's the title of the article: “Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology.” It's by this doctor in Australia. And the misuse of language happened rather innocently at the beginning, because people in the mental health organizations started realizing that the terms they were using, like the word “trauma”, were too narrowly defined. And when people talked about PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), that was usually attached to someone who had been in combat or conflict, life-and-death situations. What they saw was that someone who was having panic attacks that had never seen combat—they just had to give a big speech one day and had a panic attack—and from that point on they were having panic attacks about that first panic attack. And they saw that there was a similarity and overlap between PTSD in combat—real combat—and the trauma of, for example, public speaking.

And they saw so much overlap that they said, *You know, maybe we should start using the word “trauma” and “PTSD” for more than just military combat applications.*

And there were other words like “abuse” and “addiction” and “toxic” that needed broadening of their definitions. The problem was that once they let that genie out of the bottle, they couldn't put it back in. And the expansion of these vocabulary words that were primarily emotion-centered or psychological in nature meant that they starting being applied where they probably shouldn't have been.

Someone would say, “That job review that I just had—that traumatized me. I don’t think I can go back into the boss’s office again. I think I’m suffering from PTSD every time I walk by that door.”

Really? If I remember right, he/she said that you got eight things that you did great this year, and two things that you need to work on. And you’re calling that PTSD?

We actually have to add a prefix now. We say “micro-“—*I was micro-offended, I was micro-traumatized*. That’s one example of violations of words.

But we’ve had this for over ten years, where words have changed their meaning. Ten years ago, the word “abuse” didn’t mean what it means now. We’re identifying a victim. It isn’t what it used to be. And we’re claiming a certain person is a hero. We didn’t call that person a hero five or ten years ago. When a person experiences violence, it used to mean that they had some kind of scar to show for it. Not so much now. And “phobic”—wow—that word is getting a lot of work these days.

But, you know what? We don’t have to think about it, because if fear and hate is our candy, if blood and anxiety taste so sweet, then give them what they want. Hey, just give them what they want. And that’s what they’ve been feeding us, and we’ve been buying into it.

## **2. Violation of Logic: Ignoring Logical Fallacies**

The second way you divide a country or a people or a household or a church is violation of logic. And this is the absence of or ignoring what is called logical fallacies. And I’d love for everybody to go ... there’s this great Chesterton quote about logical fallacies. Listen to this: “There’s a kind of thought that stops thought; that is the only kind of thought that should be stopped.”

That’s what logical fallacies do. They just stop thinking, and that needs to stop.

I want everyone to Google search the phrase “top ten logical fallacies.” Some of them have been renamed so that they’re easier to understand. And then as a family you can ... I don’t know ... reward someone when they see someone committing a logical fallacy ... a high five in my family background. And if you committed a logical fallacy you kind of got thumped on the head so that you wouldn’t do that in the future.

What I’d like to show you is that the way we’ve been divided over the last several years is this violation of logic. And I’d like to insert that it’s causing us to have fear and anger towards

one another. I want to go over five of them, not the top ten. I'm going to quickly do five and pull some stuff out from what you might have already heard.

The first one is called the straw man fallacy. That's when you misrepresent a particular person's view so that it's easily defeated. Sometimes at churches this happens, like at Grace sometimes someone will say, *You guys hate divorcees—you hate divorced people.*

Wait a minute—that's not even our value. You're going to tear down, but I don't hold that view. That's a straw man. I mean, look, we hate divorce. The Bible says that God hates divorce. Have you interviewed divorcees? A lot of them hate divorce. There's a lot of pain and suffering in divorce. Who wouldn't want to hate something that's full of pain and suffering? And then the fact of the matter pulls out that we actually care and help to restore people who suffer the sorrow of divorce in our ministry called Divorce Care—we're actually trying to help people. But yeah, we are significantly on the other side of this. We are significantly dedicated to keeping marriages together. We want to make sure we can do everything we can do and help the couple to live a life that God meant them to in the context of their marriage vows. It doesn't mean we hate divorcees.

See, it's a straw man. But why would someone say that in the first place? Because it causes a group of people to say, *Uh-oh, better be afraid of that type of church. You better hate that type of denomination that's going to hold to those sorts of things. We can make money off that click, off that little post on a website or Facebook.*

Ad hominem: I love this one because there's your get-out-of-jail-free card. It's name calling—that's all it means. It's a tool for the intellectually weak and the lazy when they can't counter logical arguments or factual data. When you know you're losing the fight on an intellectual basis, you just name call. Again, some politicians these days are experts at just name calling. And I've got to tell you, if you can get more adjectives involved in name calling, you get triple or double the points on that.

Maybe you've heard the phrase "angry black woman." There you go. How about "privileged white male"? Bing-bing-bing-bing. You hear the silence? After you call someone that, that's not the sound of you making a point that's going to change a mind; you just ended a conversation, probably, and maybe even ended a relationship. When you start name calling, you start dividing. And why would you call someone a name unless you wanted to show some kind of anger towards them or if you're afraid in some way.



Logical fallacies—the third one...and there's money to be made. In the context of politics and journalism, there's money to be made. False dichotomy: that's when you make it sound like it's either/or, yes or no; there's only two answers and you have to choose one of the two, and that's all there is to it. It's making difficult things simple, and you choose. And then it comes down to this—it's us or them. Just say the word on an elevator: ivermectin. Just say that word and you're going to see this polarization of people that say, "Oh, yeah, you mean like the farm animal/horse de-wormer that humans take for COVID?" Or you're going to hear people say, "You mean the Nobel prize-winning, FDA-approved drug that has been taken by billions of people and saved millions of lives because it's an anti-parasitic drug?" Well, yeah, there are those two views. But the real question is if it works with the COVID virus, right? But no one spends time talking about if it works the sickness. It's about choosing—is it us or them? What's it going to be? And that's where money is made. It makes money by putting a headline out there that makes it sound like that if you believe in one view or the other—I don't know—you're with them. You're to be feared; you're to be hated.

A fourth one is equivocation. This happens a lot. Equivocation is when you use a word or a phrase that's not the same, but you make it sound like it's the same word. You act like they're synonyms, but sometimes they're a little bit off, or they're not even related to each other. And by equivocating them, you're making it sound like they're equal.

In our experience in the last two years, we've seen this equivocation, that facts and science are the same thing. And people interchange the words—facts/science, facts/science—and they're not the same thing. I mean, "follow the science"? Following the science is like chasing a rooster. You can't catch it—it's changing all the time. The definition of science is following facts. It's constantly evolving. It's adapting to what new data we have. Following medicine, for goodness sake—you know, in the old days they used to use leeches to suck poisonous blood out of people. I think they're doing that again ... anyway, science is supposed to be questioned. It's supposed to have peer reviews. If you have science that can't be questioned, it's not science anymore. Now it's propaganda. Facts are stabilized. They are set; they don't change. They're either true or false. Facts and science—equivocation—they're not the same thing.

Here's another one that people are overlapping the meanings of. When someone says, "Oh, he's an anti-vax mandate person." And then they say, "He's an anti-vaxxer." They make it sound like they're one and the same thing. "Anybody that is anti-vax is anti-vax mandate.

Anybody who is anti-mandate is anti-vax as well.” Well, people that are against the mandate are against the power overreach of either the government or their employer to tell people what to do with their bodies. So, it’s not about the vaccination—it’s about the power. The people who are anti-vax are looking at statistical data where they’re seeing that this has the most benefits in their bodies with COVID at this time—in their life at this time.

Why would people of influence in the media make people that are against mandates seem like anti-vaxxers and make them the same? Because they’ve already tagged anti-vaxxers as a bunch of stupid hillbillies. And if they can jump and get you as an anti-mandate person in with them, they make it seem like you’re the same thing.

This kind of leads to our last one, hasty generalization fallacy. I just said one—a stupid hillbilly—anti-vaxxers are stupid hillbillies. Really? The phrase itself, “hasty generalization,” is just a phrase for what we would say is prejudice, when you say “*all* of those people.” And so, when I intentionally said “all anti-vaxxers are stupid hillbillies”, I get double points on that. One, I did an *ad hominem*—I called them a hillbilly and stupid. All of them are? Because I know some anti-vaxxers who are medical professionals and they’re brilliant in their field. It’s a complex issue and it’s an individual decision—what is most effective for that person at that time in their bloodstream.

But there’s no money in truth. There’s no power in truth. But there is power in division using anger and fear. This way we get people saying “us” and “them” and that we need to hate that group or fear that group over there.

Let me just review a little bit. How did we get here? And “here” is a divided nation. How did we get here in a divided family or a divided church? The violation of words and the violation of logic.

But wait ... there’s more. There’s much more.

When in 2011 *The New York Times* switched over and put up that paywall and saw the power of the slot machine and watched exactly what people clicked on and there were hyperactive uses of words that were divisive, it wasn’t just journalists that got on board with that, but so did politicians and various parts of the academies and the media. Everybody got on board, because they all made a decision about whether they were going to make money and increase their influence, or hold onto truth. And what you started seeing just ten years ago in politics—there are always two sides to politics—at least two sides--there were Democrats and

Republicans. There were two sides to the academy, liberal arts. There were two sides to the hard sciences and the medical fields. They had peer reviews going back and forth. There were two sides to the media: there were liberals and conservatives in the media, and you knew their agenda. There were two sides of comedy, for goodness' sake.

But what's happened is that the choice isn't any longer about your bias of liberal, conservative, Democrat, Republican, whatever it might be; the choice now is are you going to choose to monetize and get people addicted to anger and hate so that you can keep having more influence and more power? Or are you just going to do it the same old way and maybe hold onto your core values?

And so, what's interesting now is that choice was Democrat/Republican, liberal/conservative, and now it's whether or not you're going to sell your soul to Vegas-style addiction or what ought to be right for people—whatever the topic is.

And so, now you're seeing co-authored, divergent views, philosophies, and they're co-authoring articles saying stuff like “Death of science in the modern day” and “the end of journalism.” And they're written by both sides. You play along with the addictive methods or you kind of get kicked out and forgotten. That's how things work now. That's how we got to where we are today.

This is a summary of what it means to be conformed to this world—this world. It's division through the addictive nature of the emotions of hate and fear by the misuse of words and the violation of logic. That's where we are. In many respects, there's nothing new to this. What is new is the addictive nature to it. And it's brought to us on our phones. We can't get away from it. It's an addiction, and it comes on the phone.

Let me show you how far back this goes. When C. S. Lewis wrote his book *That Hideous Strength* in 1946, one character in the novel is tutoring his person in charge of the press, and he's going to be in charge of propaganda. And he says this: “Look, it's really important about the words that you choose to use so as not to be alarming. For example, don't say ‘experiment,’ say ‘experimental.’ Don't write in the newspaper that you're going to experiment on prisoners; say that you're going to be running an experimental program of rehabilitation, and the people will love it.”

And if you know that's true, watch what we do with education. He says, "You can't experiment on people's little children; but offer those dear little kiddies a free education with an experimental school attached to our institute and it's all correct!"

And so, the person being mentored here says, "Yeah, but what about the high intellectual people? They're never going to be gullible."

Here's a quote—it's a long quote—forgive me. He says this about intellectuals: "Why you fool, it's the educated reader who is the gullible one. All our difficulty comes with all the others. When did you ever meet a workman who believes the papers? He takes for granted that they're all propaganda and skips the major articles. This person buys the paper to find out the football results and the couple of paragraphs about girls falling out of windows. That's all. He is our problem. That's the person we need to recondition. But the educated public, the Ph.D people who read high-brow weeklies, don't need reconditioning. They're all right already. They'll believe anything."

Does that sound familiar—from 1946? Conform to this world, divided through anger and fear. That's what it means. It means "us" and "them."

Here's how *That Hideous Strength* ends in some respects in this section: "It is absolutely essential to keep a fierce Left and fierce Right, both on their toes"—that's hating each other—"and each terrified"—fearing each other—"of the other! That's how we get things done." Keep them divided.

It is the nature of a man, it is the nature of a woman, to need more followers, whether it's for power or just to be liked. Look at this—it goes back to days gone by with kings. Look at this cartoon where the entire village has come to take over the kingdom.



They're tired of this guy. If you look closely, you'll see that about half of the people out there have pitchforks and the other half have torches. They have one thing in common: they want to end this king's reign. And his advisor says, "Oh, you don't need to fight them ... you just need to convince the pitchfork people that the torch people want to take away their pitchforks."

Sound familiar? It hurts though, too. You laugh and then you realize you're being laughed at, because our minds are soft and faded. And we're just lazy now. And hate and fear are our candy and anger and anxiety taste so sweet. So, give them what they want. Just keep giving them what they want.

Let's take a pause for a minute. Let's pivot this whole thing around and talk about how you're feeling. What are you thinking? What have you been doing the last two to three years that would reflect any kind of symptoms of seething anger or destabilizing fear? Because for at least

ten years it's the water we drink; it's in the air that we breathe. It's anger and fear, the same old thing. But now it's an addiction with the means of communicating to us on our very phones.

Let me put it this way. We have all been fighting an unfair war on five fronts for ten years, at least. How's that for battle fatigue? And so, you've got to ask ... have you started any fires in the last two years because of anger, because of fear? Are you calmer now than you were five years ago? Or are you more anxious? When you go to bed at night, what's the primary emotion that you go to sleep to? Because, in other words, if this was a biological thing like COVID, I would say, *Do you have the symptoms of being part of this world?* "Do not be conformed to this world." Do you have these symptoms of anger and fear? I bet we do. And that's why I just want to reboot. I want to start over. Let's get this right. It's been a frog in boiling water and no more. Now we know different.

### How Do We Get Out of This?

What do we do? How do we get out of here? That's where we are—how do we get out of here? That's what the rest of time is about.

### Application: Restoration of Words

I'll try to hurry, but the first thing is restoration of words in this part of our homework—restoration of words. When Confucius saw that his country had fallen apart and he wanted to revive it, the first thing he did was this restoration of words. That was his phrase. That's how he changed the culture.

And James talks about the power of words, the power of tweets, the power of posts, the power of the tongue. Listen to what he says: **"Indeed, we all make mistakes, but any person who can control their tongue would be perfect, because if you can control your tongue, you can control everything else."** He says, **"Look at the size of this large horse. And yet a small bit in its mouth can direct it."** He says that the tongue is like that. He says, **"Look at a huge ship. It's got this tiny little rudder with Gothic scales, and yet, the ship obeys even in strong winds and storms. A tongue is like the power of that rudder."**

And he says this: **"In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set an entire forest on fire."**

Verse 6 of chapter 3 in James says, “**And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire.**” So is a text. So is a post. “**It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting the entire body. It can set a whole life on fire. And it set on fire by hell itself.**” Can I tell you that a lot of this is from hell itself?

### **Application: Take Responsibility**

It’s a restoration of words. Another thing that we need to do is to take responsibility. I don’t know what that means to you—whatever it means to be at peace with all men, you do whatever it takes.

#### **James 1:19-20**

**My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.**

In James chapter 1, he says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” It never does.

And so, taking responsibility could be something as simple as, *Oops, two years ago in this one conversation—you might have forgotten it—but I went straight to calling you a name. And I need you to forgive me.*

If it’s something on the internet that you posted thinking it would get you followers, maybe you need to repost it, saying, “Hey, here’s where I was wrong, and here’s what would make it right.” And just say, “Hey, I was sinful.” That will get you a lot of clicks. That word is not used much. As much as it is up to you ...

How do we get out of this culture? How do we not conform to this world? We’re not going to hide, we’re not going to imitate the culture; we’re going to engage the culture and we’re going to do it using words appropriately and using logic appropriately and being kind.

## Romans 12:2

**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

But look what the passage says: “Be not conformed to this world.” The rest of our time together in this series is about this: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Here are the last couple of things that I want us to do to make this happen, to get back to where we ought to be. Besides these four parts of the homework, I want us to look at a book called *Confronting Christianity*. There’s a book on sale starting January 2 in the lobby. We rush ordered. Buy the book *Confronting Christianity*. It’s a beautiful book written by a wonderful woman. And we’re actually going to have her come visit church at the end of the series. She’s going to finish this up.

And the last application here: come and see. Come and listen. I would suggest you join a small group and cover the material that we’re going to be going over in our learning about how to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Get in a small group covering the material. Let’s see what happens over the next couple of months or so.

Just like I started, I think we all just need to inhale and exhale and just reboot. The difference between last year and this year maybe is today’s time together. Now you know what happened. And it says in the Greek, “Do not be conformed to this world.” The phrase “be conformed” is a passive verb. In other words, it just kind of happens to you. Now we know, this is what happened to us. This is how we got divided: the violation of words, the violation of logic, in a medium that was addictive. And we became soft and lazy in our minds and we just kept fueling a fire that somebody else started, so that they could make money off the division of our homes and our churches. Phew! Let’s start over. We know better now. And we know our way out. We know where we are and we know our way out.

Would you join me in prayer?

*Wow, it’s been an unsettling year—two years. Well, it’s been a bad decade. Without even knowing it, it seems, something has changed in the hearts and the minds of those who are Christ-*



*followers. Somehow, they got more addicted to their agenda or their belief system or, I don't know, their "us" and "them," instead of following You first and foremost, the application of an ethic instead of the ethic that You bring us.*

*Lord, I repent of that. Lord, I'd ask that Your Spirit would speak to ours about what exactly we need to do to take responsibility for the division that we've caused. What words need to be spoken, what notes need to be written, or maybe some post needs not to be taken down, but straightened out.*

*And Lord, I'd ask that You would help us be a church that's like a lighthouse on a hill that communicates that we have not sold our soul to the addictions that are around us; that we are coming out of this addiction and are living one day at a time, and we're going to respect words, and we're going to respect truth and logic, and we're going to be that lighthouse where people come from different points of view and know the truth will be spoken and taught and applied in a way that's life-transforming. Even that transformed life is a means, and the means is to glorify You, the Father.*

*Lord, thank You for sending Your Son, to allow Your Spirit to indwell our souls, to give us the power over these addictions of anger and fear. I'd ask that You would help us live one day at a time. Let 2022 be that year of freedom and unity. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*