

Series: Reboot

Sermon #6

Every Decision

Romans 12-15

Dr. Matt Cassidy – February 6, 2022

We're doing a series together called Reboot, and in that context, collectively as a church, and for us individually (I need to reboot!), and just start over. We need to become a thinking, living, biblical society that lives in the culture. We are not going to isolate ourselves from the culture and we're not going to imitate the culture. We will infiltrate that culture, and we'll do that courageously. That's what it means to reboot.

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. 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.

And we've been looking at two verses that we've been mining for gold. And because of the depth of them, they summarize the doctrine that precedes them and they invite us into the application of what we've been looking at today. Romans 12:1-2: **“For I urge you, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God”**—you've got to behave right—**“Present your bodies as a holy and living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual, logical service of worship.”** We should think right, too. **“And do not be conformed to this world. But you ought to 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.”**

Two simple sentences ... oh ... Pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones once preached ten sermons on just these two sentences and said he could have done another ten, absolutely.

Let me just review rather quickly where we've been. We're finishing up and letting Rebecca McLaughlin clean up. She'll do a great job next week. I can't wait.

Review

But this is how we started—the problem with Christianity has always been and is now that we somehow find ourselves being disciples of the media or the culture. And we have conformed to this world—that's what happens. And so, we need to acknowledge that and repent of that so we can move on the next part. And that is, if you remember, to give our lives as a living sacrifice. A living sacrifice means that we understand that God is infinitely wise and infinitely loving towards us. So, wouldn't it be the logical thing to turn our entire lives over to Him and let God himself and the Bible be the source of what we believe and what we do? Everything the Bible says, like it or not, we're going to try and understand that and obey that. The Bible has authority over us; not the other way around. It has authority over our passions, our beliefs, and our values.

Then we looked at how to transform our minds. To what? To the core creeds of what it means to have a biblical faith. And then we looked at how to change our lives. It says to be transformed. That word in Greek is *metamorphosis*. That means to be changed from the inside out. And if you remember, the graphic looked like this. We spent two weeks on this. It looks a little complicated, but honestly, it's rather simple in some respects. It starts with the understanding that we have an identity with Christ, and now our whole lives are lived around that identity. So, what we think is supposed to be supporting that, how we behave and what we do, is going to be energized by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, and then by purposeful friends that have influence in our lives to pick us up and encourage us in that new identity. That's what we've talked about so far.

Romans 12:2b

... so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

And now we're going to look at the last part of chapter 12, verse 2, when it tells us how we should then live. Chapter 12, verse 2, says this at the end. "**... so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**"

How Are We to Live Our Lives?

How do we live the rest of our lives in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God? There's a general will of God for all Christians at all times, and there's a specific will of God for you, for me individually. We don't have time to teach on the specific will of God—maybe sometime soon. But in the general will of God, chapters 12 through 15, starting in verse 12:3, are talking about how we should all live in all circumstances at all times. This is the will of God. It's His good and acceptable and perfect will.

I broke it up into four parts. There's a lot I'm not going to say, because we're just going to survey those four principles of living in the will of God.

1. Serve the Church, for God's Sake

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

The first one is this: serve the Church for God's sake. He's out of the blocks with this comment: "**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but with sober judgment, each according the measure of faith that God has assigned.**"

Sober judgment—that means accurately evaluating yourselves. And the Christian doctrine teaches us in a way that gives us the fullness of what that accuracy looks like. You can't think too highly of yourself in the Christian faith; it dogmatically declares that we're totally depraved. I mean, the only thing we bring to the altar of God is sin, our wretchedness—our nasty old rags. So, it's pretty hard to get haughty.

But on the other hand, the other part of the Gospel is that we've inherited. We are co-heirs with the identity of Jesus Christ. We are princes and princesses, but we've gone from rags to riches as a gift from God.

Romans 12:4-8

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

So, what are we supposed to do with these sober, reasonable, accurate thoughts of ourselves? Here's what it says: **“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”**

Let us use those gifts that the Spirit gave us. Here are some examples. **“If prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”**

What it's saying here is that every single believer in Christ is given as a gift, by the Spirit, a spiritual gift. The ability to do something, sometimes rather simple, but it happens with supernatural consequences. And we're given that gift to serve the body of Christ. And we're supposed to use that gift with zeal, with excitement, with cheerfulness. It says, **“Let us use**

them.” There are no unemployed Christians. There is no one that has a gift from the Spirit that is looking for a job. There are no passive members in a church. You’re not supposed to go to a church and say, *So, what are you going to do for me? How are you going to serve me?* That’s not in the Bible.

The application is that you go to the church and say, *How can I use the Spirit gift in me to serve this body?*

I hear people saying, *I’m not growing in this church.*

Tell me where you’re serving.

I’m not serving.

Well, maybe those two are connected—not serving, not growing. Sure, yeah. It happens all the time.

Look at it this way: you are the answer to someone else’s prayer. Because God has saved you, and then the Spirit gave you a gift, and then each of us is like a fingerprint or a snowflake. We have experiences and attributes and failures and loss that make you particularly important to the body of Christ. And people pray—you probably do this—you pray for your mother or sister or brother, or somebody that you love, and they’re living in another town, and we say, *Dear God, if we could bring them to a church, get them into a friendship, and have someone greet them, maybe have someone care for their child; they could care for them in a way that they could just go to lunch and talk about Christ.* You’re the answer to those prayers. **“Let us use them.”** If you come to church just to get, you’re resisting the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit has given you a gift. And it says right here, “Let us use that gift.”

2. Let Your Love Be True

That’s the first one. The second will of God that is good, acceptable, and perfect, that we can know, is let your love be true. Most of this whole section here from chapters 12 to 15 is in the context of a family relationship. And keep that in mind. This is like how families get along. Here’s how it works in the context of true love.

Romans 12:9-10a

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection.

“Let love be genuine.” Other translations say “sincere” or “Let your love be without hypocrisy.” “Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.”

There it is—brotherly affection, brotherly love. In C. S. Lewis’ book *The Four Loves*, he looks at four Greek words for love, and compares and contrasts those. And in this particular chapter on love, brotherly love is called *storge*. And *storge* is a family love that is not like the other loves. It’s like the love between a mother and her child. It’s automatic, it’s natural, it’s a deep and abiding love. You can’t explain it.

Now what Lewis says is that, to understand that definition of *storge* and project it, this is the glory of the church of Jesus Christ. Because *storge* love, in contrast to friendship love *phileo*, or lovers’ type of love—in those love gets to choose. You choose your friends, you choose who your husband or wife might be, and you say, *We were made for each other*.

Storge love is family love. You don’t choose. *Storge* love is inflicted on you by circumstances, and you have a bond that’s opposite of the choice of love. It just happens.

Look at it this way. Think of your brothers and sisters. If they weren’t your brothers or sisters, would you even like them? Would you even be friends? Sometimes, yes. But a lot of times, no. But there’s a bond, and blood is thicker than water. And you’ll lend them money or you’ll give a kidney to them, because we’re family, the bond. *Storge* is circumstantial by the sovereignty of God; it’s love that is inflicted upon you without your choice.

Here’s a long quote from Lewis explaining how this works: **“Growing fond of Old So-And-So simply because he or she happened to be there, because you’re thrown together in the same family or the same platoon or the same ship, there’s a wonder about that. For when you begin to say, ‘Though she is not my sort of person, yet she’s really very good in her own way,’ you’ve crossed a frontier. It means you’re getting beyond your own idiosyncrasies”** and loving someone completely different from you that you didn’t choose to like or love.

I love how he ends it here: **“You’re beginning to learn to appreciate goodness or intelligence in themselves, not merely goodness or intelligence that is flavored and served to suit your tastes and views and your own palate.”** Then he concludes, **“Dogs and cats should always be brought up together; it broadens their minds so.”**

Brotherly love—you couldn’t choose it. It’s the sovereign will of God that puts us in this auditorium together. And we have nothing in common; we have Christ in common. The family of God—the Gospel connects us. And that’s more than enough.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, the pastor I mentioned before, when preaching on this section, he said, **“When I entered the Christian family, I found myself in a group of people that were in a different class, a different race, a different temperament—people that I would never have liked. And now I find a bond to them; I find that I’m connected to them.”** Because we’re all related to God in this one way. And this one way is all that matters.

Brotherly love, family love—there’s no auditioning. There’s no selecting in or out.

You two guys are nothing alike.

I know. And I love him. He’s my brother.

That’s what it looks like.

Romans 12:10b-13

Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

And how do you show this genuine, authentic, non-hypocritical love? You just keep reading verses 10 through 13. It says this: Just try to **“Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in your prayer”** for one another. **“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”** You’re almost in a competition with your other brothers and sisters on how to share love with one another. That’s what it looks like. That’s what the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God is with our brothers and sisters.

3. Obey the Government

Romans 13:1-2

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

That's two. Here's the third way to practice the will of God. It says to obey your government. Obey the government. You're going to love this. I'll keep it short. Romans 13: 1-2 says, **“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”**

You don't like what the government is doing? Too bad. It tells you to do it anyway. This command to obey the government is given to us by God through the pen of Paul, who's writing it in prison because he's practicing his faith. He's going to die because he's practicing his faith. Obey the government up until the point where they tell you to sin. This government that he's talking about that he's supposed to submit to, that we're supposed to submit to, is the same government that had John the Baptist beheaded. It's the same government that had Jesus Christ crucified. And God says that it was all part of a sovereign plan. Just obey government up until the point of sin.

4. Quit Judging Each Other—Serve Each Other Instead

Heard enough already? Let's go on to the next point. Number four is to stop judging each other and serve each other instead. To be clear, before we even start, these are not moral issues. This is the like the gray between black and white. These are not hard convictions. As a matter of fact, Paul is going to list the do's and don'ts. He's going to list some from the Old Testament: thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet. And then he's going to go on and say, *Here's some other stuff. No illicit sex, no drunkenness, no sensuality, no quarreling, no*

jealousy. So, these are not morally evil things. He's talking about the gray in between that families get into squabbles about. This is what you're supposed to do in a family with your beliefs and your opinions. That's what he's talking about.

Romans 14:1-3

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains, pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

Look what he says in Romans 14:1: **“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God welcomes them both.”**

Quit judging. Quit criticizing each other. God is big enough to accept both of these. What is he talking about? Is he saying that vegetarians have terrible theology? He's not saying that. I'm saying that ... no, I'm kidding. No, what's happening here is that in the older Testament there's a whole section of commandments that have to do with ceremonial law. There are various expressions of cleanliness, and some of those have to do with clean and unclean animals. Also, part of the ceremonial laws are annual events that are prophesying towards Jesus Christ. And Jesus fulfills the ceremonial laws, the days and some of the clean and unclean animals.

And so, a person who has a deep grasp on the freedom that we have in Christ because he's fulfilled those is able to express that in eating whatever he wants and celebrating or not celebrating various holidays. But some are not yet there. They grew up their entire lives as Jewish and it's difficult for them to live with this transition. And so, the people that are stronger are kind of being inhibited.

Here's one way to respond to that. *You know what? I'm just going to flaunt my freedom in front of them. Watch this ... bacon ... wrapped around shrimp. Let's go.*

Or another way that's pretty common too is, *I'm just going to leave. Those people—their beliefs and their opinions—I'm going to go find a tribe of only strong believers so that I can eat and do whatever I choose.*

Romans 14:7-8, 10

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

And you could do that, except you wouldn't be a living sacrifice, would you? No, you wouldn't. Look at what the next verse says: **“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.”** That's a living sacrifice. We don't get to choose. God chooses for us. And in His infinite wisdom and His infinite love ... we keep reading. **“Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”** How about you delegate all that judging to the Lord Jesus Christ? And why don't we love?

Romans 14:19-20

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

Look what he says. Instead, we ought to be doing this, verses 19 and 20: **“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food”**—and you can insert any petty opinions or beliefs here. **“Do not, for the sake of”** whatever,

“destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.”

Can you imagine Paul writing the American church, watching the last two years, what we’ve chosen to squabble over, judging and condemning and arguing and dividing? I’m telling you, the ink on that parchment would be wet with tears. Really? You’re going to do this, that, or the other? Isn’t Christ enough that you have in common that you wouldn’t look at these other things as ancillary? Wow.

Romans 15:1-2

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

So, how are we supposed to serve one another? How are we supposed to live in the context of different beliefs and opinions on things that aren’t the Gospel? He says it in Romans 15:1-2: **“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”** It’s not about me and my rights and my freedom and my definition of how things ought to be run. We’re constantly looking—especially the strong—at how to serve those not as strong as us.

There’s a book that we read as an elder board and as pastors, and a lot of leaders read it regularly. It’s called *While Shepherds Watched Their Flock*. It’s a book for city slickers like all of us. And it’s about how to make sense of all the illustrations and applications of what it means to be a shepherd and sometimes a sheep, because what do we know? And so, there’s one section that we go to regularly when we make decisions around here for the whole flock. And it’s this section about how to care for the different types of sheep in our care. When a shepherd comes up on a new field to graze in, he will hold back the strong and the fast so that the weak and the slow get a head start. Because if the shepherd doesn’t give the weak and the slow a head start, the weak and the slow starve. They die. And for the sake of the weak and the slow, they hold the others back and say, *You get first shot, because you’ve got to live.*

As a parent you probably did this—we did. At Easter egg hunts (if you do that), you can’t just release everyone at once. The eleven-year-old will destroy the five- and the four-year-old, based on a true story. And those other ones don’t get any Easter eggs. So, we kind of know this.

But there are two types of fast and strong sheep. There are the fast and strong sheep that get it, and they're caring, and they say, *Look, I've been weak and slow, and I'm going to be weak and slow later. And I understand that this is best for them, so yeah, I'll stay back and go ahead and let them graze. There will be enough for me later.*

And then there's another type of strong and fast sheep. And that sheep says, *Why are you doing this? I have the right to be out there. I don't want to serve the weak. Here's what I'd like you to do. I'd like you to run the church around where I am in life. And I'm going to get there first, and I'm going to get all I can.*

Which sheep are you? How do you respond to not getting what you want and how it applies?

It's interesting—Paul teaches on this subject of this gray area and how to apply various biblical truths. Here in Romans, and again in 1 Corinthians, there are similar stories, but for different reasons. But it's interesting that in both cases, who he talks about and delivers his exhortations and criticisms to and says *You've got to get this right*—do you know who he's talking to? The strong. In each case, he's saying, *You guys that can afford this need to serve the others.*

Look what he says in Romans 14:1 and 15: 1. It's going to show up again in 15:7. I'll show you that in a minute. But look at the keywords here. Romans 14:1: **“Accept him whose faith is weak ...”** 15:1: **“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.”** “Accept”—key word.

Here's how various commentaries describe this word:

Open up your circle

Open up your arms to welcome someone in

Adjust your life and make changes in order to have a relationship with someone who is culturally, politically, or who maybe has a set of beliefs or opinions completely different from you..

He's saying, *Hey, look, strong ones, you adjust your life for the people that are barely getting in the door of a church. You make it easy for them to come. Because relationships are way more important than your preferences. Your family has way more value than these nonessential convictions. So, you say you're strong; so, use that strength for a purpose. Get out*

of the echo chamber you live in. Everyone is there with similar beliefs and how to apply them—similar opinions. Could you just show a little grace for your younger sister? Could you be patient for your kid brother? He'll grow up soon enough. But goodness, you're the strong one. Live with forgiveness. Give it away like you get points for it. (I think you do).

So, when Douglas Moo, a New Testament scholar who kind of specializes in the Book of Romans, talks about this passage, he doesn't just say, *Give it to the weaker*. He says, *No, sympathetically, deeply enter into the lives of the weak, not criticizing or judging them. Do what love requires*. In other words, get into their souls, into their stories. Why is it that you have these values, these beliefs? Oh no, wow. If you hear the whole story, you might pump your brakes a little bit and do less judging and more loving. He's saying this: Know them, enjoy them, open up your circle, expand your mind. Dogs and cats ought to be raised together. It will open their mind—help them broaden their minds together. Don't just associate with people of your same race or education or income or, whatever you call it, our newsfeed or your looping. Broaden your mind, serving and loving those people that are not like you.

I mean, I think it's funny that if you look at Jesus and His selection of His disciples, I don't think any two are alike. If you look at the selection of the disciples as if it were the NFL draft, you'd be absolutely startled. He spends all night praying to the Father that the Spirit would give Him insight so that He can pick all the right players. First out: *I'm going to call Simon the Zealot*.

Yeah, great pick. Way to go, Jesus! This guy is a nationalist. He's part of the militia. He wants to violently take over Rome. Good for you!

Second pick: *Matthew the tax collector*.

Do what??? Wait a minute, this guy's Jewish and he's serving as the boot on the throat of his fellow Jews to collect tax for the enemy, Rome.

Jesus says, *Yep. And I'm going to put them in a tent together and we're going to go camping for three years. Because cats and dogs need to be raised together so that they can broaden their mind.*

I want you to understand that Matthew and Simon both thought they were absolutely correct in all of their beliefs, in all of their opinions. You can ask any of their faction friends. They would support those views. And then they spend time with Jesus, and Jesus is more important than their Zealot leanings or their money. And I'll bet money that Simon lost a lot of

his faction friends and Matthew lost a lot of his tax-gathering friends, because they felt that Jesus was more important than anything else in their lives. They had nothing in common. They had one thing in common, and that was enough to wipe everything else away. And they became brothers—not the ones they picked, but the ones that were inflicted upon them, literally.

Romans 15:5-7

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

So, in conclusion, here's what Jesus is saying about how to live. It says in Romans 15:5-7—we're going to look for that "accept" word again, that "welcome" word again in verse 7—**"May the God of endurance and encouragement ..."** Having trouble with brothers and sisters in Christ? Maybe you should call upon the God of endurance and encouragement. I love that. It's like an acceptance of how hard this can be sometimes. **"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome"**—accept—open your mind—**"welcome one another as Christ as welcomed you, for the glory of God."**

How did Christ welcome me? How did He welcome you? Yeah—while we were yet sinners. While we were yet enemies. So, we could do something a little bit like that.

Application

This is the will of God, the perfect, acceptable, pleasing will of God. **"Therefore I urge you, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing. It's the rational, spiritual thing to do. Do not be conformed to this world."** Do not just sit passively and let it destroy the way you think and feel. **"Do not conform to this world. Rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind so**

that you will prove what the will of God is, the will that is good and acceptable and perfect.”

This whole section of Scripture, Romans 12 -15, can be encased in a single phrase or so that Jesus said. He said, “The world is going to know that you’re my followers by your love for one another.” That brotherly love, that *storge* that doesn’t make sense? You have nothing in common but this one thing in common? When you guys love each other this way, they’re going to want to know what’s going on. That’s what is going to cause people to want to come to Christ.

And in the history of the Church, from its very beginning, when you saw a church united and they enjoyed the differences in culture, the mild beliefs, the opinions, the food; when they hung onto the creeds of what the Gospel was; when that church was using their gifts to serve one another—use those spiritual gifts—when they were doing that in a robust way, caring for one another, giving to one another, and it didn’t matter the government. Let me just say it a better way—in spite of the government.

Need an example? Like the Gospel in China right now, in spite of the government.

They have this one thing: they’re brothers and sisters in Christ. When that happened, in all of history, the church thrived. And in the thriving of that church it gives glory to the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord. Every time whenever the church was independent and wanted to live for themselves and do whatever is particular to them, the Spirit left that church and took His power with Him. And then it just became a country club. It’s a shame.

Today we’re asking for this. Let’s be the church we were meant to be. Let’s reboot, here and here. Let’s love one another in this brotherly love that transcends understanding. Let’s use the power of the Spirit to serve and care and give, inside and outside the Church. Let’s glorify God by singing together. And in this chorus of different types of voices, we give glory to the Father of the Son, by the power of the Spirit.