

Topic	The Gospel and Emotionally Healthy Spirituality
Reference	Romans 12:1-2
Date	15 April 2018
Speaker	Arnold Lim

Romans 12:1-2 *Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is— his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

This thing has a lot of confusion because sometime you hear people saying that, they say it is God's will for me to do this or that, the question is how do you know that it is God who is telling you. You want to lose an argument with someone, just say the Holy Spirit told me so.

The central theme is about worship and the renewal of the mind drives worship.

What is worship?

It is not just singing, everything you do is worship. Renewal of the mind is something from the inside, the Greek word is metamorpheus which means transfigured from inside and is a spirit led activity.

- **How do we make decisions?**
- **Are our decisions within God's will?**

The first question is not as straightforward as you think. The management people will tell you that they rationalized it, thought about it, I did an analysis, did risk management and made a decision, simple like that. Here is what I would like to propose what Romans 12:2 is telling us, we make decisions often subconsciously, now to me this is very foundational, you just don't realize it. John Piper says this, he says,

"I venture to say that a good 95 percent of your behavior you do not premeditate. That is, most of your thoughts, attitudes, actions are spontaneous. They are just a spillover from what's inside."

Scripture tells us that on the last day man will give an account of every careless word they say. Notice that, it comes from inside, it is not premeditated. We act very often out of impulse or we make decisions which we think we are doing it rationally and what I think the text is telling us that decision is being driven by many things you don't see.

In decision making all of us go through hard decision making and when there is hard decision making, this is where your real character comes out and all the four gospels pick up this turmoil that Pontius Pilate goes through. When he is privately with Jesus Christ, he is very clear, Jesus is innocent. When he is with the crowd, the crowd pushes him in a sudden way. So the story unfolds, he tries many ways to get Jesus free, or to be more accurate he tries to absorb

responsibility over it. He first says, this man is your guy you go and judge him yourself and one of the gospel says, his blood is on your hand, it is not my responsibility. The last trick he pulls out; he says why don't I free him on this day. So we see two things happening, which is what Romans 12 is telling us. It says, do not conform anymore to the pattern of this world.

What is the pattern of the world affecting the decision making process of Pontius Pilate, the mob. It is something very common, pressure. The office environment pressures you a certain way, you come from a certain family background, that family background pressures you a certain way. You go to church; you make certain decision because the church pressures you a certain way.

The other thing is coming from within that's why it is about renewal of the mind and basically Pontius Pilate is a coward. He is scared of offending people, so he tries to like a politician move left, move right, turn here, turn there and in the end the crowd use something on him, "we have no king but Caesar", that's it and that melted him and then he led an innocent man be crucified, which also lead to another interesting point about decision making. Godly decision making involves making sacrifices and that is really what is gospel is about.

How the world influences your decision making, how your inside character influences your decision making and they are subconscious, you don't pick it up. One of the most famous tragedies of the world is the Challenger Explosion. In 1987 NASA space shuttle goes out there, hasn't gone up to orbit and explodes, seven people died.

How did this happened?

How did this happen to NASA, the world's leading space agency with all its protocols, SOPs and all the systems. A series of incidences occurred, probability of all of this happening were very-very small but when they all happened the thing exploded but the chances of it happening were very slim and Diane Vaughan wrote a really interesting book about it, The Challenger Launch Decision and he coined a term which is quite interesting. She called it the 'Deviation Spiral'. Now the Deviation Spiral simply means this, in your SOPs, in your company you have certain protocols for safety and you have been practicing it. That of course takes time, takes cost. Then one smart elite guy from finance says, company need to cut corners. The company does it, things go well, no incidences. So what happens is that you just compromised a little bit and you make money. The behavior here is centered on self. So from 90% it drops to 80, 70, 60.

So what happens is the spiral that drops, drops and drops until NASA comes to a point where they don't realize what they are doing actually is dangerous and the book tells you how some engineers told them, you shouldn't be doing this and standard answer is, we have been doing this for the last 20 years, no problem, we are NASA you know. When has NASA had this problem and it happens.

This is very common throughout the world. It is so in the air that we breathe. We live in a world where there is a deviation spiral because the world tries to conform you.

What driving our decisions is the thing that we cannot see and the more you keep reinforcing that in your mind. Man in particular, a lot of the decisions are driven by pride and if you keep doing that they say, the deepest danger of fakery is coming to believe your own lies. Because you reinforce it, you keep saying it, you believe it. So here is the simple truth. Decision making is never pure, it is always driven by pride, insecurity, and the need to win an argument. A lot of things drive us. They drive our decision making but we will not admit it and we want to stand up and tell everyone, I have a clear conscious, I didn't do it, this is what I really meant, but if you keep saying that publically you will believe your own lie. So here is the first observation, ***decision making is subconscious. It is very important to pick this up, very life changing.***

Are our decisions within God's will?

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

The NIV translates it as, you will be able to test and approve. The word is discern and then that is the word God's will. What do you mean by God's will? So the question I am going to ask is this, decision making and the will of God. So here is what most people believe. If they are offered a new job, which is better than the current one, but they are confused. So they go to the church and the pastor there is giving a message on changing territories. People feel that God is talking to them and telling them to change now. Then in the café they meet another fellow who tell them that we should be bold and step out. You got new directions and you will God talk to me again. You go home you pray and then you have this peace of mind.

So they call this the Bull's Eye Theory. You line up all of these circumstances and you say, God is telling me I should shift my job. Now you can apply that to 101 issues and this is really complex.

The human mind is this, when there are decisions which we think are within our control we want to decide ourselves, when the decisions in which we are stuck we want God to show us clearly what it is. That's the human default mode.

What we mean when we say the will of God?

The first you can call it God's moral will or Gods will or command or obedience.

- Doesn't include evil
- Made clearly known in the bible. The Bible tells you about certain things, like you conversation be so and so. Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to anger. Keep your life holy. This is God's moral will.
- You can chose to break it or don't break it, you have choice.

The other one is God's sovereign will. Now the first very important thing to pick up,

- **Includes evil**, because we know God allowed Pontius Pilate to send Jesus to the cross. On one hand Pontius Pilate decided on its own free will, on the other hand his free will to decide to do it is within God's sovereign will. Now that's quite complex. So you choose on your own, but your independent choice will always fall within God's sovereign will because he is supremely in control of everything and we have to remember it includes evil and the most evil deed in the world was when Jesus was crucified on the cross, yet that came to pass as part of God's will to save us from sin.
- **Hidden and not known**. If you know it is much later, look at Joseph. He never knew what happened until much later. Then he realized why God sent him into captivity to Egypt. Job never knew why calamity fell on me. It is about God's sovereign will.

Sometimes people will say, why is my life so bad and then they will blame themselves, because I must have sinned. I must have done something wrong. Was it God's will, I had a bad childhood. So here is one way of trying to explain it, which doesn't fully satisfy it but it is one way. On one hand, it wasn't God's will and if you are hurting now I pray you take that home, why, because God's moral will doesn't include evil. God is a God of grace, of love, of forgiveness, he doesn't condone evil happening to you. So on one hand, it isn't God's will, on the other hand it is God's will because God allows evil to happen for his own purpose and we don't understand why.

The key issue now, we have to ask ourselves in Romans 12 is Paul referring to God's moral will or will to command or is God referring to God's sovereign will. What is the will here in the text? One way of looking at it, is to look at the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus says, not my will but your will be done. Jesus is going in obedience, God's moral will and out of his obedience God's sovereign will is carried out. So when you look at the text, the text is split into two parts because of the word 'then'. Meaning, you really want to walk in God's will, obey. How do you know it is obeying? Because offer your bodies as living sacrifice that's the spiritual act of worship, do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world.

We all need to navigate life with all its pitfalls and we all struggle with this, discernment. So here is what the text is saying, you do not need the renewed mind to find God's hidden will, you need a crystal ball. So when you say, God I don't know what to do, show me a sign, you are actually revealing your character, you are wanting God to drop a sign from heaven for you. Now what the text is saying is this, that doesn't require a renewed mind. Now I am not saying that it is wrong, not saying that it doesn't happen, but you need the renewed mind first. So let's go back to this, all these decisions, big and small we need a renewed mind.

The un-renewed mind says, I can make money, I don't care, I wake up at 3 o'clock, don't care what happens to my family, my job, I am just going to do that. The renewed mind before he does this says, if I wake up at 3 in the morning, does it affect the rest of my day, when I come back am I too tired to spend time with my family, that's coming from a renewed mind, because

it sees the matrix of decision making, why because the rest of my day I cannot glorify God and give to him my life as a living sacrifice as a father, as a husband, in my job that's not worship, that's how you make decisions. You make decisions by having renewed mind. You don't pray, God show me a sign, which counter to invest in. A renewed mind filter everything through this. So here is one way of looking at it:

1. You prayerfully decide within God's moral will or what scripture says as revealed in the Bible and you make a decision then God can open doors but you are still responsible to discern and after you decide, whatever you decide God's will, his sovereign will, will never be affected.

So if God open a door, you have to go through the door, but Paul writes even though God open the door, the verse says, I still had no peace of mind because I didn't find my brother Titus there, so I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia. So behold open door but he didn't go through, why, because he discerned to go to Troas, he needed Titus with him. So with discernment, although God open the door for him, he choose not to go through, that's very important, so wisdom and decision making.

Let me give some practical examples to it

1. REBOOT YOUR MIND.

It always starts with the mind, reboot your mind. A bad attitude to a bad day is worse than having a bad day. The story of Joseph is tied to it, he got thrown in prison and was innocent. He never sat in prison and mourn over the fakeness of the news, got upset, never complained, he was depressed but yet he organized the prison. He doesn't need to organize the prison, but he did it so well that the prison warden was very impressed and commended him for organizing the prison and then after that he was left to rot.

Joseph was in prison and he followed God's moral will, God trained him and later in God's sovereign will when he went to Egypt, he learned to organize a country and he learned that from organizing a prison. From a spot brag to organizing a prison and then organizing a country, see God takes you on an adventure. So attitude is everything. So again, how do I decide all of this, simple principle, you ask yourself, how am I glorifying God in every area.

Simple truths in life carry a long way. Biblical truths are simple and applicable, you don't want to mess up your life, you start off with a mind and you start off with the attitude of mind. Why is the attitude important?

Romans 8, at the end of so much theology Paul says, in all of this we are more than conquerors. You are not conquering all of this, the gospel is as much about the cross as the empty tomb, you need to appropriate this.

Paul was a tent maker as a secondary job, his main job is a missionary. Paul said,

*“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. **In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak...**” Acts 20:33-35*

Meaning for Paul tent making was to help the weak, why, because Paul had the mind that everything he did, whether it was him as a missionary or whether him as a tent maker he will glorify God. So when Paul was thrown into prison, he wrote half of the New Testament. The mind is the key to everything and what often we find disturbing is to find Christians who are defeated. You are defeating yourself because your mind is un-renewed. So you start up by rebooting your mind.

How do we reboot our mind?

Two attitudes were given at the beginning of Genesis, the first is the worshipping mind. Now this is where you must understand it comes with a cost. Abel sacrificed the best, it cost him his life. So here is the thing, you give the Lord the best but sometimes God will take you through the fire but Abel is honoured. Cain represents a lot of us, he has got the survivor mind, he just took some fruits and just gave leftovers to God. A lot of us we just give leftovers to God and he gets jealous of his brother and God tells him sin is crouching on your door, you must wrestle it, but like Pontius Pilate he does the simpler thing, he eliminates the competition then he hides it out, am I my brother’s keeper.

So this morning God is challenging you, do you have the worshipping mind or do you have the survivor mind. The worshipping mind will cost you, because of the sacrifice but that honours God. Trust God, seek first the kingdom of God, all these things will be added to you whether here or in the afterlife but that’s God’s command to us. Now how do we do that?

1. OBSERVE THE PATTERNS OF YOUR DECISION MAKING

Here is the second step which I am really being trying to practice this my life, very helpful for me personally, you observe the patterns of your decision making. the New Testament is about living in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God is both here and not yet, meaning there is you in the present with all its force and is you that you should aspire to be in God’s kingdom. That’s really a lot what a sermon on the mount is saying. Now how do I get from A to B and I say, here is one simple example, I am going to be a very good accountant because my accountancy work is my act of worship to God. The sinful mind says, I want to make a lot of money with that, the renewed mind says, because by doing this I help the country in transparency, help the country in things of equitable justice and I give that to you, God. Now how do I get my A to B. The first thing we do is we track the decisions to make because they are all in patterns.

In his book Peter Scazzero talks about some important person from another church, you want to visit him at home and he says, well I am doing God's work, who am I to turn him away, so this guy come, but here is the problem, he is not spending time with his family, but he justifies his decision, again this is subconscious by saying its ministry. What happens if you read the book, the daughter on that night when they having dinner goes to the pool and nearly drowns because he is so preoccupied trying to be nice to this guy and after this the wife leaves him. So the conscious decision is, I am doing God's work and it justifies me, neglecting my family because it is God's work.

Paul has a different attitude, I am going to glorify God as a missionary, I am going to glorify you as a tent maker. This is a very common mistake people in church do and the real subconscious, the word is habit has got the deep insecurity. He lives of people telling him, you are a good preacher, you are a good pastor, I like what you are teaching me, he hears that and that things drives him but he cannot see it. So here is the thing, you look at the habits of your decision making.

Let me give you another biblical example, one way to look at the pattern of your decision making and if certain things happen again and again and again that's a pattern then you ask yourself, is that pattern biblical. Here is one; woman at the well was married to five males, she was looking for something, but God is going to give her waters that she will not quench but let put at a side, that's a habit. After five times being burnt, you will imagine you won't get into it, but she is addicted to that kind of water because she needs companionship, so she goes to another one, this time her safety net says, I am not going to marry him, you see where we are going, things I do not do I do, things I do I don't, what is interesting is Jesus reveals her habits and she changes topic. God just exposed her, you got married five times, wow that is very good, let's talk about something more important, should we worship in Jerusalem or should we worship in that mountain. She shifts the topic, because we all don't like to be confronted with our decision making habits that damage us. Why is that so?

For me, I am impulsive, so I tend to react but it takes a lot for me to realize that, why because there is another part of our human nature which comes out and you find that in the garden of Eden. At the Garden of Eden, you look at the preceding chapter to the fall, Adam and Eve are in the garden and God says them to take care of the garden. Now do you think Adam says, God what is your will for me today, what is interesting at the end of the chapter is this, they are naked and they felt no shame. The text is telling you, when you have open relationship with God, you don't hide anything, because shame and hiding doesn't occur. The moment you start to hide and you are shameful that's when things go wrong and you make massive decisions because what happens after that, they sin and they try to hide and in case we didn't get the text, the text says, when God says why do you hide because we were naked, just in case we didn't get it. They were shameful but what was interesting is God approaches Adam and says, why do you eat. Adam put the blame on woman, it is the first sin that comes out. Basically he is telling God, it is not my fault, it is the woman's fault. Never mind, the woman not enough, the woman that you gave. So God it is not only her problem, it is your problem, don't blame me. Now this is important because this is the first sin that comes out post fall.

So you ask yourself whenever you had a problem in your life or confrontation, what's the most obvious thing to do, not me it is someone else. If you and I cannot learn to take responsibility for our decision making mistakes and you cannot identify all these things you repeatedly do, you will continue to do them and you continue to blame others and you continue to have a bad day and you will never have discernment.

3. PRACTICE GODLY INSTINCTS

Some people have got killer instincts. It comes from two things, when something is embedded into your and a situation comes up, it comes up naturally. Sometime God puts you through situations to develop your instincts, so when the time comes you make go to your instincts. Spiritually, we are confronted with decisions big and small and you have no time to pause and think. If engrained in you the word of forgiveness and grace, they will frame what you say next and what you decide, it is instinctive. If you make the habit of always saying the truth, speaking the truth and just being truthful in big and small things, until the fruit of spirit is instinctively embedded in you, you cannot make the decisions.

HOW DO WE BE GODLIER FATHER?

- What are my faults and strengths as a father? (Look at the patterns of your parenting)

Some people might say, daughter is close to me but not my son and then you pause, I wonder if I may be showing favoritism to my son. That takes courage. You say that by looking at the patterns of your decision making. The time you spend with your kids, have you done certain things that makes your son perceive that and you don't get reactive, you say, you know what, I don't shift responsibility like Adam did. This could be true.

- What are the issues my children are going through? That is just common sense.

Seriously most of us don't know.

- What are my past issues affecting me? (symptoms and causes)

It is again about the heart, coming from inside. Maybe you got this in the past and you push it so far in and you then got married as an escape way and this thing just come out, but you consider it then you ask.

- What are the external issues hindering me? That's conforming to the world.

No time for church, no time for family. Man might say, I am putting bread on the table, what more you want. I only got time for work.

- What are the biblical verses on being a godly father? That's God's will of command.

Most of us don't read the Bible, we Google it.

- What are the simple everyday steps I can take? Those are small decisions.

Learn to LISTEN more, especially to my son. Learn not to exasperate my children. Be very conscious of being fair to both of them. Learn to show grace and forgiveness with my wife when we quarrel as the kids see our actions. Our kids see us as a hero. When you cease to be a hero in the eyes of your kids, in many ways they die inside and everything you do after that is very hard to pull out. They look up to you as you lead them to God the Father. Why is it important when you have a quarrel? They see grace and forgiveness, because you can then explain to your kids, 'mom and dad fight but we love each other, we forgave as God forgave us'. That's Gospel living.

- What are some long term goals I can take? Those are big decisions.

Do more family devotion. More intentional one to one time with the kids. Really look at time management at office. Learn to forgive my father. Take wife for more dates. Learn to have more of a Gospel lifestyle.

To make great decisions you have to be ready to be changed and willingly slaughter selfish illusions. Only then can you begin to see what is real and what is illusionary. We all need help here. Viv Thomas- Associate Director of OM International.