

As a Christian, I Refuse to Be a Conformist—and So Should You

Note: Jamie Buckingham's wit and wisdom from a 1979 column in Charisma still makes you think. We honor his memory today 25 years after his death.

It seems I am to spend my life paddling upstream. While many of my Christian brothers are happily floating with the current, here I am, doggedly battling in the opposite direction.

Some of my friends say I am rebellious. Independent. Unsubmissive. Not so. I am, however, determined to regain my uniqueness, my individuality, those things which peer pressure seems dedicated to sweep away.

For instance, I am weary of being pushed around by fashion and advertising moguls who not only tell me what to wear, but want to turn me into a walking billboard for their products.

Therefore, I refuse to wear T-shirts which have "Adidas" emblazoned on the chest.

Last week, my wife gave me a dress shirt that said "Pierre Cardin" on the pocket. She obviously had me confused with an old boyfriend. Since my name is Jamie, not Pierre, I gave it back. Neither, by the way, is my name Levi or Hang Ten.

I'm me!

The tough scene came at the auto dealer when our new car arrived. It's bad enough wearing a "Rabbit" sign without being forced to be a rolling advertisement for Honest John's Auto Hutch.

Therefore, I asked Honest John to remove his little sign from the tailgate. When he showed dismay, I suggested a compromise. I would drive around with his little sign on my car if he would pay me a royalty of two cents per mile on the highway. That's the way songwriters do it, you know.

He didn't think that was funny—and removed the sign.

I'm not, as a friend accused, a cynic. But I am more than a piece of flotsam being washed along in the current.

All my experiences are unique—even those shared with others. I'm not a sheep to be herded; I'm a saint for whom Christ died. I choose to submit as an act of my will.

But God has not called me to unscrew my head and store my intellect in a jar; nor am I to simply put my brain in neutral and buzz with the swarm.

His Spirit has sanctified my intellect as well as my emotions. Not only am I free in the Spirit, but I am free to think as well.

I detest crowds. I stay home on July 4 and go to the beach when I can walk alone on the sand. The idea of being part of a crowd of a million people at a religious rally horrifies me. I'd much rather be alone in the woods with God—or sitting in a quiet restaurant with friends.

I value and protect my individuality—my uniqueness. It is the essence of being, the mark of creation, the reason for redemption. Christ did not die to make us robots, but to restore us to personhood.

However, in my free thinking, there are lines I choose not to cross—boundaries defined for me in God's Word. Yet I refuse to be labeled a "fundamentalist" or put in a "liberal" box. I'm not them—or a they. I'm a me.

The system tried to label Jesus—to give Him a title. That's

the way the system controls you. Then you can be classified as a “they” or a “those.” Jesus just smiled and said, “If you need a title, call Me ‘Son of Man.’”

He too was a me. Not a they.

For years, I refused to wear a necktie—simply because everyone else did. Then I began to hear things like “Jamie’s one of those who never wears a tie.”

So, I have started wearing (on occasion) three-piece suits.

But that’s part of the price of swimming upstream. I eat at Fred and Ethyl’s restaurant rather than at Wendy’s. If time allows, I choose the back roads rather than the interstates. I stay in small motels, wear old clothes, cut my own hair, read gutsy books and go to movies of my own choosing. And sometimes I grow a mustache just because I want to.

I’m me.

Last year, when the tuxedo-wearing evangelist at the convention announced that everyone in the room was going to be slain in the Spirit as he walked down the aisle, I was the only one who remained standing. My wife accused me (from her prone position under the chairs) of being stubborn, independent and rebellious.

I’m none of these. I’m just me. A unique creature for whom Christ died.

To lay down your individuality is the worst of all blasphemies—for it negates the death of Christ. Your uniqueness is your most precious possession. Don’t waste it floating downstream. {eoa}