

Billy Graham: 4 Ways Christians Should Respond to the Spirit of the World

When Rome was at the height of her glory and power, there appeared a disturbing sect called Christians. Because of a fire that burned within them, these people dared to be different.

In an era when immorality, lavishness and luxury were stylish, Christians refused to be defiled by the sensual practices of a disintegrating civilization. In a period when human life was cheap, they put a high value upon human beings, their souls and their destinies.

These Christians refused to be absorbed into the godless society of Rome. They had not heard of the rule that we hear today: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." The Roman high tribunal initiated a drive to stamp out Christianity as a disturber of pagan unity.

The Romans had a false notion that a person's conscience could be controlled by law, so they made it illegal to be different. All had to bow to Caesar. All had to conform to pagan custom. All had to behave like true Romans.

Nonconformists were threatened with death, and many chose death rather than to conform to Rome and to compromise their consciences.

A Roman Christian named Paul took up his pen and wrote a word for all Christians of all times: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Times have changed, but human nature hasn't. The pagan world is still trying to put its stamp of conformity on every follower of Jesus Christ. Every possible pressure is being brought to bear upon Christians to make them conform to the standards of the world.

The Apostle Paul urges Christians everywhere in all ages to be nonconformists as far as the world system is concerned. A true Christian, living an obedient life, is a constant rebuke to those who accept the moral standards of this world.

In our desire to make Christ known and to increase the influence of the church, we are prone to think that Christians and the church can be made popular with the unbelieving world. This is a grave mistake. Christ crucified is anathema to Satan, and the message of the Gospel is still a stumbling block and foolishness to the world. Our Lord warned His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The Apostle John writes, "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13).

Christians may be shown a grudging respect at times, but if we are faithful to Christ, we will surely incur the wrath of the world. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution," says the Scripture (2 Timothy 3:12).

The Scripture teaches that popularity with the world means death. Satan's most effective tools are conformity and compromise. He is aware that one man standing in the midst of a pagan people declaring, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16), can move more people in the direction of God than thousands of insipid professors of religion.

We often ask ourselves, "How could the early disciples turn the world upside down when millions of Christians can't even

keep it right side up today?" The answer is simple. They didn't conform their faith to the world. They had the truth, and they refused to water it down. They held a faith that would not compromise.

Because they dared to buck the tide of public opinion and be different, because they dared to believe when other people doubted, because they were willing to risk their lives for what they stood for, because they chose death rather than to live an empty life, the world took notice of what motivated these men and women. In due time, they turned the philosophical and religious world upside down.

The words of Paul, "Do not be conformed to this world," have tremendous significance and meaning for us today. These words cut like a sharp sword across our way of life. They are not comfortable words. They have the tone of the battle call in them. They separate the weak from the strong. But they are words of inspiration, and we need to hear them today.

First, we must not be conformed to this world mentally. The world—by its advertisements, its conversation and its philosophy—is engaged in a gigantic brainwashing task. Much entertainment is slanted to those who feed on violence, sex and lawlessness. It seems that some diabolic mastermind is running the affairs of this world and that his chief objective is to brainwash Christians and to get them to conform to this world. The world's sewage system threatens to contaminate the Christian's thought. Satan will contest every hour you spend in Bible reading or prayer.

However, above the din we can hear the voice of Scripture: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). And: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Second, we must not conform to the world physically. These

bodies of ours are intended to be temples of the Spirit of God. We are not to prostrate them before the temples of Baal. We are to present them wholly to God as a "living sacrifice." Our dress, our posture and our actions should all be for the honor and glory of Christ.

Third, we must not conform to the world socially. The world attempts to absorb us into its secular society and to conform us to its earthly image, but Christ urges us not to conform. Clearly He says of those who believe in Him, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16).

Jesus dined with publicans and sinners, but He did not allow the social group to conform Him to its ways. He seized every opportunity to present a spiritual truth and to lead souls from death to life. Our social contacts should not only be pleasant, they should be opportunities to share our faith with those who do not yet know Christ.

Fourth, we must not conform to the world spiritually. We are not to be conformed to the world's definition of what it means to be religious, but we are to make sure we have met God's requirements for discipleship.

No nation was ever more religious than Israel in the Prophet Isaiah's day. The Temple was filled. The altar ran red with the blood of sacrifice. The religious festivals were strictly observed, and the voice of prayer was heard in the house of God. But there was a lack of true devotion in Israel's worship. The nation was deteriorating morally. Speaking as God commanded, Isaiah said, "Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting" (Isaiah 1:13).

Then Isaiah told them how they could be cleansed from their sin. He said: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do

evil. ... 'Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool'" (Isaiah 1:16, 18).

There are thousands of people who do not give themselves to Jesus Christ, because they have conformed to the world. They are afraid of being called fanatic, pious, puritanical or religious. A true Christian is a nonconformist.

I'm asking Christians everywhere to become committed followers of Jesus Christ—not conformed to the world, but conformed daily to the image of Jesus Christ. Why don't you, right now, give your life over completely to Jesus Christ?

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