

BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD – Part 2

This essay, written by Benjamin L. Sommer was originally published in 1929 along with a collection of essays in a booklet entitled "The Fascination of the Race", which is available from Apostolic Christian Publications.

Last Month's article ended with: Having concluded not only that there is no virtue in mere non-conformity, in mere peculiarity, or in mere separateness from the world, but that there is great danger in these, it will be worth our while to consider what kind of non-conformity to the world is of value in God's sight.

The answer is very simple. That non-conformity to the world, which is conformity to Christ, and that alone, is of value; and that is of eternal value. That is the peculiarity which is peculiar to Christ and which is brought about by the "renewing" of the mind by the new birth.

But let us be more specific and analyze wherein the "renewing of the mind" makes one to differ from the world. Let us draw a parallel picture of the carnally minded person on the one hand and the spiritually minded on the other, in respect to a number of the phases of life.

1st: The natural man has his heart set only upon this life and its gain and pleasures. On the other hand the "renewed mind" or the spiritual mind of a converted and regenerated person sees farther. The Christian receives and enjoys thankfully in moderation all of God's good gifts for this life, but they are not his highest interest. His heart is set upon the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness and its rewards. In adversity he does not despair "as those who have no hope," for his eye is set upon "the better land."

2nd: The natural man loves the world to indulge himself in its lusts and vain pleasures. The spiritually minded man loves the world also, but in an entirely different sense. The lusts and sinful pleasures of the world he loathes because of their uncleanness and destructive nature. The vanities of life he neglects because they are too mean and common for one who has had a foretaste of heavenly things. But he loves the world, the people thereof, in the sense that God loves the world; namely, to help them. The spiritually minded man finds joys and pleasures in the peace of God and in the communion of the saints far greater than the pleasures which the world knows.

3rd: The natural man is apt to have a high opinion of himself which is not justified. He is inclined to proud and arrogant and to look down upon others. The spiritually minded man thinks moderately and soberly of himself and, being humble in his own heart, he treats others with consideration and respect.

4th: The natural man is apt to be selfish and to lack consideration for others. The spiritually minded man in whom the love of God has been poured out, has learned the great lesson of unselfishness. He finds joy in the joy of others. He finds happiness in the prosperity of others.

5th: The natural man likes to be served, but the spiritually minded man delights to serve others, for the love of his fellowmen is in him.

6th: When the natural man feels himself injured he thirsts for revenge, but the spiritually minded man is ready to forgive and to make peace and even to return good for evil.

We might go on indefinitely in drawing contrasts between the natural or unregenerate man and the man who has experienced the "renewing of the mind" in our effort to show how and wherein a Christian should be "not conformed to this world."

But now we shall let the apostle Paul speak for a moment. To the Galatians he writes: "Walk in the spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. . . . Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party-spirit, envying, carousing, and the like. But what the Spirit produces is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Gal 5.16-23)

In short our non-conformity with the world shall be in that, being converted and regenerated, we no longer shall bring forth the fruits of the flesh. But that alone will not be sufficient. We must also be diligent to bring forth in rich measure the fruits of the Spirit. Therein is the true non-conformity of the Christian, not in the keeping of customs in external matters which are different from those of the people surrounding us.

It has happened that when someone undertook or did something which was not according to previous custom that a critic would say, "That should not be; it is worldly," or, "That is the way the world does." The

unconverted people of the world do many things which are entirely right and proper and the apostle Paul does not mean that in such matters we should try to be different. In fact Christ goes so far as to say, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." (Luke 16.8) So it is sometimes possible to learn a good lesson from the world.

But someone will ask: "Does not the 'renewing of the mind, also shows itself outwardly?" Yes, it does. Not in that it puts us into subjection to man-made ordinances and traditions or to self-righteous customs, but it works an inward modesty which expresses itself in outward moderation and in obedience to the doctrine of Christ.

The fruits of the "renewing of the mind," which are visible to the eye, however, are of minor importance when compared with the invisible qualities of the heart, such as faith, hope, love, patience, moderation, purity, humility, peaceableness, modesty, kindness, forbearance, gentleness, cheerfulness, unselfishness, loyalty, constancy and self control. These are the true marks of unworldliness which adorn the Christian character and make him to differ from the world. These things are what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of the mind."

One more important thought we must add: Let no one think he can accomplish this non-conformity to the world and "the renewing of the mind" through his own will and through his own strength. That is the work of the grace of God. It is possible for all to attain who seek it through the grace of God in Christ, who are willing that Christ shall rule in them and over them.