

CONFORMITY

By Bill Irby

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“And 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” (Romans 12:2). Have you thought lately about Paul’s choice of words here? He said, “Do not be conformed to this world.”

Conformity is not always a bad thing. We are to conform our lives to the pattern revealed by God in His Word (Colossians 3:17, Philippians 2:5-11). Conforming one’s life so as to reflect the principles of Jesus Christ is a good thing. But here Paul is concerned about conformity to the world.

It is easier to see the world at work in a culture like that of China. We have seen their ability to organize and present a favorable view of themselves to the world at large. This they are able to do because their culture is authoritarian. The Chinese are used to conforming to instructions from their government. Any diversion from the dictated agenda is handled harshly.

You and I live in a different kind of social environment. Our culture stresses individual freedom and I for one, am glad of it. I pray that we will continue to protect the rights and interests of the individual. But we should not believe that such a culture as ours is immune from forces that would create conformity to the world.

Indeed, there is at work an old paradigm that has within it the architecture of conformity. We might well call it the paradigm of progress. It has been so successfully ingrained into our culture that most people see the word “progress” as an automatically good thing.

In many areas of life progress is good. Advances in medicine, transportation, agriculture and hundreds of other areas are good things. We must know, however, that progress in the material world is not the same thing at all as progress in the spiritual world.

The difference between the two is simple: the material world is designed by God to be explored and manipulated by us. The only boundaries are the boundaries of reality designed by the Creator. We will spend our existence here discovering those boundaries. The spiritual or non-material world is bound more immediately by truth.

Many of our world's problems have come because we have tried to manipulate truth in the same fashion as we manipulate the material world. True ideas are permanent and therefore not open to modification or manipulation. These are ideas such as the existence of God, the truth of the Bible and thus, the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other inviolable truths flow out of these, including practical principles by which human beings ought to live their daily lives.

The world, including our "free" part of it, is hostile to these permanent ideas, sometimes in the name of progress. We think that because we invented GPS machines to help us when get lost physically that we get to invent a set of ideas to help us when we are lost spiritually. It will not work (John 8:32).

Remember the world's hostility to God's truth. The world, by which I mean the people of it and in it, uses words and deeds and the communication thereof to create conformity to itself. We must resist this particular conformity because such resistance is the will of God.