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By Jim Langley

Conforming - Or Being Transformed?

Have you noticed how easily we get caught up in doing things the way our culture dictates, becoming squeezed into the world's mold? We find almost everyone conforming to the current trends, adopting the behaviors, values and beliefs endorsed by the entertainment media, popular books, the Internet and social media.

In 1977, a popular song rose to the top of the music charts. Soon people in many parts of the world were singing or humming, "You Light Up My Life." For years we heard it performed at weddings. A sweet sentiment, right? The closing line, "it can't be wrong when it feels so right," sounded innocent enough, and many people adopted it as a personal creed. Over time it morphed into, "if it feels good, do it!" More than 40 years later, this attitude still holds sway in people's minds and hearts.

We often see this in the business world. We become enticed by the quick successes of others and follow their lead, hoping to experience similar results. Over my insurance career, I have seen some of my colleagues fall into practices that led to short-term success, but ultimate failure. Sometimes their schemes caused them to lose their ability to conduct future business, even huge financial penalties and prison time. Feelings can deceive.

On a larger scale, we have seen companies fall out of favor due to unethical business practices. Business institutions spend millions on strategic marketing campaigns to improve severely damaged corporate images. It only takes a few top level executives to hatch devious plans, but in the "if it feels good, do it"

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culture, we also see lower-level executives buying into deceptive strategies in the quest for personal gain and prestige.

Addressing members of the church in Rome, the apostle Paul warned against conforming to thinking and practices we see in the world around us. He wrote, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will"* (Romans 12:1-2).

Paul was saying this is how we, as Christ's followers, are to live, seeking to please our Master. One translation of *Romans 12:2 warns, "don't let the world squeeze you into its mold."* Rather than conforming to the pattern of this world, we are to be transformed into the image of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, by His power at work in us.

We might succeed in deluding ourselves that there is no harm in conforming to the ways of this world, that there are no consequences. But there are always repercussions for our actions, good or bad. Paul addressed this problem nearly 2,000 years ago, but today not much has changed. The only difference is the magnitude of the impact our bad decisions can have in this fast-paced world, when a misguided decision made in one city can affect thousands, even millions of people in many other parts of the world.

So how can we avoid being "conformed" so that we can be transformed by God? Here are two suggestions:

Put God first. We are promised that the Lord will meet our needs if we trust in Him, not our own devices. *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matthew 6:33).

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Put others second. When we take time to consider the best interests of others before ourselves, the likelihood of avoiding compromising, unethical decisions rises exponentially. And we save ourselves a lot of trouble. *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).*

© 2018, all rights reserved. Jim Langley has been writing for more than 30 years while working as a life and health insurance agent. In recent years, his passion has turned to writing about his personal relationship with God. His goal is to encourage others to draw near to Him as well. A long-time member of CBMC, he started writing "Fourth Quarter Strategies" in 2014.

Reflection/Discussion Question

1. What are some of the ways that you have observed business - even at the organization where you work - being influenced by the culture that surrounds us?
2. Can you think of a time when you consciously strived to avoid actions commonly practiced by your peers because you felt they were wrong? What was the impact of this decision to not be "conformed to the pattern of this world"?
3. Why is trusting in our feelings, going according to what some people call "gut instinct," often so problematic? Have you ever espoused the philosophy, "How can it be wrong when it feels so right?" What did you learn from that?
4. In your view, what does it mean to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind"? How should we strive to do that?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 10:9, 11:1,3, 21, 12:15, 14:12, 20:23, 22:3, 28:2; Matthew 5:19-24,43-48

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