

Conformity

Dear Lord, Society imposes its shape on us - it tries to mold us. May we find peace in conforming to Your ways even when that goes against what's popular. Amen.

Romans 12:2 NRSV Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms, politics or being like-minded. Conformity doesn't care about what we *actually* believe. Conformity is concerned with our outward appearance. We conform by fitting into the mold - the mold that tries to get us into a certain way of looking, thinking, and behaving.

Unfortunately, culture rarely values our standards. Our conformity to God's ways reveals our freedom from cultural influence. Many people say, "I'm going to do what I want. I don't care what people say." Our task as a Christian is to conform to God's way of thinking and acting, even when it goes against what's popular.

Obedying God is sometimes not as black and white as it first appears. Life today is tough. Conformity is a real temptation. But so is taking an angry stand, burning bridges and opportunities for showing our beliefs, just because we don't like the uncomfortable nature of living in our culture. We must learn that even though we don't choose to conform to society, we should not show our beliefs in unacceptable ways.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul says, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." In Paul's letter to the Galatians, there are pressures to conform to a certain standard; early Christians debated whether one had to follow Jewish law and custom. Paul writes that we are "free" of such things but also argues that the gift of freedom is not only for ourselves but for our neighbors as well.

J.B. Phillips captures Romans 12:2 well in his paraphrase: "Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within." The world will certainly squeeze us into its mold if we allow it. Be aware!

1. In what ways does our world try to conform us?
2. So, is conformity bad or good?
3. Are we given freedom from Christ not to conform? How so?
4. What would the world look like if people tried to affirm others in their own freedom of choice or expression instead of trying to get them to conform? But what about God's will?

"Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth." ~ John F. Kennedy

"The opposite of courage is not cowardice, it is conformity. Even a dead fish can go with the flow." ~ Jim Hightower

"Conformity—the natural instinct to passively yield to that vague something recognized as authority." ~ Mark Twain