

MONDAY MANNA

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TAKING A STANCE FOR 'SPIRITUAL CONFORMITY'

By Jim Langley

Our culture seems to be constantly changing these days. Personally, I have come to the conclusion that I can no longer keep up with, much less conform, to the many cultural shifts that are happening all around us. There was a time when I accepted those social changes as inevitable. However, as a follower of Jesus Christ, I now understand I cannot condone many of these changes and now am taking a stance for what I call "spiritual conformity." We are called by our Lord to follow His ways, not to conform to the ways of this world.

Romans 12:1-2 admonishes all believers, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer 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."*

As a young officer in the U.S. military, I was instructed to follow the orders and commands that came down from above. Orderly conduct governed by established rules produces positive results on the part of any group. Businesses must also establish best practices to ensure their employees follow guidelines that will honour their company and properly serve their clients.

As an avid golfer, I realise the purpose of rules for the game I dearly love. All organised sports have rules for a reason – without boundaries there would be chaos; players would take advantage of whatever they wanted to do. Without adequate and proper rules, the result would be competitive anarchy.

I believe this is the problem with all the cultural upheaval we have seen in recent years. Many people simply make up the rules as they go through life and do whatever they feel is right in their own eyes. In fact, this is what the Old Testament tells us. In Judges 2:10-11 we read *"After the whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals."*

Now, let me suggest we approach this from a different direction. Rather than assessing blame, I would prefer to offer what I feel is the antidote to this growing spiritual pandemic. Those of us having a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ are able to appropriate His life spiritually, through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We need to call on the Lord to fill us with His Spirit and give us the discernment needed for taking proper action to ensure that God's message of peace and hope is communicated effectively, permeating the hearts of those around us.

Within this context of seeking to live a counter-cultural life that honours God, I think of the words written by the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:15-17: *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

We need to hold tightly to what we know is true and correct, with wisdom standing strong in the grace bestowed on us by our Lord. Then we can pray for healing and restoration of the culture and our people, including the men and women we encounter each day in the marketplace.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

What are your thoughts about the cultural changes we have experienced in recent years? Do you find yourself conforming to those changes, even though they might be contrary to beliefs and practices you have followed in the past?

Why do you think it is so difficult to stand up for values that contradict the changing culture?

In the book of Romans, we find this statement by the apostle Paul: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes.... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith.... 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:16). How do you think we can apply that to how we deal with the ever-changing culture around us?

When you consider what you know about the life of Jesus Christ, how do you think He addressed challenges with the culture in which He lived on earth? What can that teach us?

NOTE: For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:

Psalm 139:23-24

Jeremiah 31:33-34

Romans 8:26-27

Ephesians 5:11-17

Colossians 1:27-29