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Be a “spiritual conformist”

It used to be a big issue whether or not one was considered a conformist or nonconformist. But what matters most is that our lives are in conformity with God.

Lynn A. Gray Jackson

ARE there times when it feels as if peer pressure or the “herd instinct” is dominating our lives? If so, perhaps it’s time to become what might be called a “spiritual conformist.”

What is a spiritual conformist? Wouldn’t it be one who conforms his thought and life to divine Spirit, God, not to materialistic patterns? A spiritual conformist seeks to listen to God; he prays and strives to be reliant on and obedient to divine Love.

A spiritual conformist strives to express God-given qualities such as love, patience, joy, peace, individuality, even when it would seem nearly impossible to do it.

How can we do this? How can we express more love, joy, and peace in our lives?

Christ Jesus shows us the way. To follow the Christ means to follow the example Jesus set—to see man as the son of God, whole and complete. Jesus loved, healed, raised the dead. He followed God’s voice. He prayed. He overcame hatred, resent-

at, fear. He courageously rebuked self-righteousness. Jesus did not worry about others getting ahead of him. He did not fret that he would be left out. He always conformed to God, obeyed His laws. Jesus did not let others lead him down wrong ways, nor did he conform to materialistic ways. He constantly and persistently obeyed his God. He followed God constantly and undoubtingly and was always heeding God's direction. His nature and life brought into view a new man—a spiritual son of God's eternal creation and its goodness and purpose. Even more, Jesus taught that we could partake of this perfect selfhood and divine grace.

Christian Science encourages us—enables us—to take a deeper look at man, at our true selfhood. Christian Science begins with Spirit, Mind, and Soul as God, and then reasons about the nature of man from the basis of his divine origin. Man made by Spirit is always the complete and perfect creation of God. The man that God made does not have to be himself one with God. Nor does he have to add something that God made in order to be complete. He already is at one with God; he already is complete. But that spiritual fact must be demonstrated; it has to become to us more than a nice theory or something to make us feel good about ourselves. The need is to conform our thoughts and acts—indeed, our very lives—to God, to be obedient to Him, to express our true nature as His likeness.

In a message to an Annual Meeting of the Church she addressed, Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer of Christian Science, said: "When a hungry heart petitions the divine Father-Mother for bread, it is not given a stone,—but more grace, obedience and love. If this heart, humble and trustful, faithfully asks: Love to feed it with the bread of heaven, health, holiness, and to be conformed to a fitness to receive the answer to its prayer" ¹

In this prayer, this humble petition for love, joy, confidence, and completeness expressed, is answered when we pray persist-

ently, sincerely, and are willing to conform our lives to that spiritual ideal. Let me share the experience of a college student who learned how to be a spiritual conformist. She found herself very upset with others because they all seemed to be getting ahead of her. Teachers seemed to offer help to other students while giving very little attention to my friend.

Though she had been a Christian Scientist for some time, my friend attempted to get ahead strictly through material ways; she began to ignore the others as well as imitate the instructor (this made her feel more important). She became a conformist to personality worship and jealousy, and she stopped relying on God to show her how to improve her work. But the worst part was that deep inside she began having feelings of hatred, jealousy, and envy toward everyone who accomplished more than she did. As a result she became aloof, uncaring, and a great feeling of lack of self-confidence set in. Those who had been her friends, ones she followed, imitated, as well as admired and loved, overnight became to her enemies, the direct object of her hate and scorn. As a Christian, she knew this wasn't right but didn't see how to break free of her feelings.

One morning, reading the Bible Lesson from the *Christian Science Quarterly*, she pondered the story of the risen Jesus with his disciples at the morning meal on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias (see John, chap. 21). You'll recall that Peter, after being told to feed Christ's sheep and to follow Christ, asked about a fellow disciple, "What shall this man do?" Jesus replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." ²

Reading these words, my friend suddenly realized that at school she had been expressing fear of being left out, fear of not getting what she deserved, fear of failure—but worst of all, fear of being unchosen. Jesus' response to Peter made her realize that she needed to stop following and imitating others and start following Christ. She had learned in Christian Science that because she was, in spiritual fact, the image and likeness of God,

she not only needed to, but could, express more love, peace, kindness, trust, and sincerity.

She began to love more, lean on God, and rely on Him to direct her ways. She realized that she did not need someone's favor, someone to imitate; she could express her true selfhood—

She got rid of thoughts of idolization and personality worship.

be the way God made her. She could conform to God, be His reflection. She threw out all thoughts and actions of idolization, imitation, and personality worship and replaced these faults with qualities of love for God and His man. With genuine love and sincere actions, with worship for the one true God, she learned obedient conformity to God, Spirit, Love, and she experienced healing.

My friend turned her "enemies" into friends again. She strove to see each one as God sees His man and to appreciate their individual talents. In short, she began really trying to follow the example of Jesus by expressing Christliness to the best of her ability. Jealousy, envy, and hatred dissolved, and she ceased seeing her friends as competitors. Fear of failure, of lack, and of loss of talent disappeared, and for the first time in a year she began to succeed in her field of study.

Like my friend, we too can learn to be spiritual conformists—nonconformists to false impulses, jealousy, peer pressure, hatred, failure. We can all grow spiritually in expressing the qualities that Jesus so naturally expressed, and we can begin today to pray and learn, step by step, how to express those Godlike qualities that are so important to life. Fear of failure, of loss, or lack, or of being unchosen will fall away as we earnestly watch our thinking, rid it of ungodlike thoughts, and pray to learn more of our relationship to God. Conforming to divine Love's ways and thoughts, relying on God to guide us and direct our paths, become natural when we prayerfully replace aggressive suggestions of evil, hatred, and disorder with good, peacefulness, and harmony.

Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures by Mrs. Eddy states, "Our heavenly Father, divine Love, demands that all men should follow the example of our Master and his apostles and not merely worship his personality."³ And we can certainly add, "Nor anyone else's personality!" We can all follow Jesus' example; we can all pray, heal, love, rebuke materiality, dissolve envy, listen to and obey our God—in short, *be* a spiritual conformist.

If we find ourselves in a situation of following and worshipping personality, let's wake up from this mesmerism and turn to God, praying for His image to be expressed in us more apparently. Learning to keep pace with God, we never need to fear that we will be forgotten or left out. Through prayer and attentive listening we can conform to Spirit and not to human personalities. Then we will express our true individuality, our true God-given qualities.

¹ *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 127. ² John 21:21, 22. ³ *Science and Health*, p. 40.

*As the truth is in Jesus:
that ye . . . be renewed in the spirit of your mind;
and that ye put on the new man,
which after God is created in righteousness
and true holiness. . . .
And be ye kind one to another.*

Ephesians 4:21-24, 32