

# Conformity to the World

by Charles Finney

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*Christians are required to not conform to the world in business, fashion, and politics, as it is contrary to the love of God and man and leads to hypocrisy and a lack of love for the souls of men.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:14-16, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 6:17, Galatians 1:10, Ephesians 5:11, Philippians 2:15, Colossians 3:2, James 4:4, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 2:15-17

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Non-Conformity"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the imperative for Christians to resist conformity to the world, explaining that this command encompasses business, fashion, and politics. He argues that worldly principles, driven by selfishness and dishonesty, are incompatible with the Christian faith, which calls for self-denial and love for others. Finney highlights that true Christians should not only reject worldly practices but also actively demonstrate their faith through their actions, thereby influencing the world positively. He challenges believers to live distinctly and authentically, as their conduct can either draw others to Christ or serve as a stumbling block. Ultimately, Finney calls for a radical commitment to God's principles over societal norms.

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## Transcript

TEXT.-- Be not conformed to this world.--Romans xii. 2

IT will be recollected by some who are present, that some time since I made use of this text in preaching in this place, but the object of this evening's discourse is so far different that it is not improper to employ the same text again. The following is the order in which I design to discuss the subject of

CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

- I. To show what is not meant by the command in the text.
- II. Show what is meant by the command, "Be not conformed to this world."
- III. To mention some of the reasons why this requirement is made upon all who will live a godly life.
- IV. To answer some objections that are made to the principles laid down.
- I. I am to show what is not meant by the requirement, "Be not conformed to this world."

I suppose it is not meant, that Christians should refuse to benefit by the useful arts, improvements and discoveries of the world. It is not only the privilege but the duty of the friends of God to avail themselves of these, and to use for God all the really useful arts and improvements that arise among mankind.

II. I am to show what is meant by the requirement.

It is meant that Christians are bound not to conform to the world in the three following things. I mention only these three, not because there are not many other things in which conformity to the world is forbidden, but because these three classes are all that I have time to examine to-night, and further, because these three are peculiarly necessary to be discussed at the present time. The three things are three departments of life, in which it is required that you be not conformed to this world. They are

**BUSINESS--FASHION--POLITICS.**

In all these departments it is required that Christians should not do as the world do, they should neither receive the maxims, nor adopt the principles, nor follow the practices of the world.

III. I am to mention some reasons for the command, "Be not conformed to this world."

You are by no means to act on the same principles, nor from the same motives, nor pursue your object in the same manner that the world do, either in the pursuits of business, or of fashion, or of politics. I shall examine these several departments separate.

First.--Of business.

1. The first reason why you are not to be conformed to this world in business, is that the principle of the world is that of supreme selfishness. This is true universally, in the pursuit of business. The whole course of business in the world is governed and regulated by the maxims of supreme and unmixed selfishness. It is regulated without the least regard to the commands of God, or the glory of God, or the welfare of their fellow men. The maxims of business generally current among business men, and the habits and usages of business men, are all based upon supreme selfishness. Who does not know, that in making bargains, the business-men of the world consult their own interest, and seek their own benefit, and not the benefit of those they deal with? Who has ever heard of a worldly man of business making bargains, and doing business for the benefit of those he dealt with? No, it is always for their own benefit. And are Christians to do so? They are required to act on the very opposite principle to this; "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." They are required to copy the example of Jesus Christ. Did he ever make bargains for his own advantage?--And may his followers adopt the principle of the world--a principle that contains in it the seeds of hell! If Christians are to do this, is it not the most visionary thing on earth to suppose the world is ever going to be converted to the gospel.

2. They are required not to conform to the world, because conformity to the world is totally inconsistent with the love of God or man.

The whole system recognizes only the love of self. Go through all the ranks of business-men, from the man that sells candy on the sidewalk at the corner of the street, to the greatest wholesale merchant or importer in the United States, and you will find that one maxim runs through the whole--to BUY AS CHEAP AS YOU CAN, AND SELL AS DEAR AS YOU CAN--to LOOK OUT FOR NUMBER ONE--and to do always, as far as the rules of honesty will allow, all that will advance your own interest, let what will become of the interest of others. Ungodly men will not deny that these are the maxims on which business

is done in the world. The man who pursues this course is universally regarded as doing business on business principles. Now, are these maxims consistent with holiness, with the love of God or the love of man, with the spirit of the gospel or the example of Jesus Christ? Can a man conform to the world in these principles, and yet love God? Impossible! No two things can be more unlike. Then Christians are by no means to conform to the business maxims of the world.

3. These maxims, and the rules by which business is done in the world, are directly opposite to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the spirit he exhibited, and the maxims he inculcated, and the rules which he enjoined that all his followers should obey, on pain of hell.

What was the spirit Jesus Christ exemplified on earth? It was the spirit of self-denial, of benevolence, of sacrificing himself to do good to others. He exhibited the same spirit that God does, who enjoys his infinite happiness in going out of himself to gratify his benevolent heart in doing good to others. This is the religion of the gospel, to be like God, not only doing good, but enjoying it, joyfully going out of self to do good. This is the gospel maxim; "IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE." And again, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." What says the business man of the world? "Look out for number one." These very maxims were made by men who knew and cared no more for the gospel, than the heathen do. Why should Christians conform to such maxims as these?

4. To conform to the world in the pursuits of business is a flat contradiction of the engagements that Christians make when they enter the church.

What is the engagement that you make when you enter the church? Is it not, to renounce the world and live for God, and to be actuated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and to possess supreme love to God, and to renounce self, and to give yourself to glorify God, and do good to men? You profess not to love the world, its honors or its riches. Around the communion table, with your hand on the broken body of your Savior, you avouch these to be your principles, and pledge yourself to live by these maxims. And then what do you do? Go away, and follow maxims and rules gotten up by men, whose avowed principle is the love of the world, and whose avowed object is to get the world? Is this your way? Then, unless you repent, let me tell you, you will be damned. It is no more certain, that any infidel or any profligate wretch will go to hell, than that all such professing Christians will go there, who conform to the world. They have double guilt. They are sworn before God to a different course, and when they pursue the business principles of the world, they show that they are perjured wretches.

5. Conformity to the world is such a manifest contradiction of the principles of the gospel, that sinners, when they see it, do not and cannot understand from it the true nature and object of the gospel itself.

How can they understand that the object of the gospel is to raise men above the love of the world, and above the influence of the world, and place them on higher ground, to live on totally different principles? When they see professing Christians acting on the same principles with other men, how can they understand the true principles of the gospel, or know what it means by heavenly mindedness, self-denial, benevolence, and so on?

6. It is this spirit of conformity to the world, that has already eaten out the love of God from the church.

Show me a young convert, while his heart is warm, and the love of God glows out from his lips. What does he care for the world? Call up his attention to it, point him to its riches, its pleasures or its honors, and try to engage him in their pursuit, and he loathes the thought. But let him now go into business, and do

business on the principles of the world one year, and you no longer find the love of God glowing in his heart, and his religion has become the religion of conscience, dry, meager, uninfluential--anything but the glowing love of God, moving in him to acts of benevolence. I appeal to every man in this house, and if my voice was loud enough I would appeal to every professor of religion in this city, if it is not. And if anyone should say, "No, it is not so," I should regard it as proof that he never knew what it was to feel the glow of a convert's first love.

7. This conformity to the world in business is one of the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of the conversion of sinners.

What do wicked men think, when they see professing Christians, with such professions on their lips, and pretending to believe what the Bible teaches, and yet driving after the world, as eager as any body, making the best bargains, and dealing as hard as the most worldly?--What do they think? I can tell you what they say. They say "I do not see but these Christians do just as the rest of us do, they act on the same principles, look out as sharp for number one, drive as hard bargains, and get as high interest as any body." And it must be said that these are not things of which the world accuse Christians slanderously. It is a notorious fact that most of the members of the church pursue the world, so far as appears in the same spirit, by the same maxims, and to the same degree, that the ungodly do who maintain a character for uprightness and humanity. The world say, "Look at the church, I don't see as they are any better than I am; they go to the full length that I do after the world." If professing Christians act on the same principles with worldly men, as the Lord liveth, they shall have the same reward. They are set down in God's book of remembrance as black hypocrites, pretending to be the friends of God while they love the world. For whoso loveth the world is the enemy of God. They profess to be governed by principles directly opposite to the world, and if they do the same things with the world, they are hypocrites.

8. Another reason for the requirement, "Be not conformed to this world," is the immense, salutary and instantaneous influence it would have if every body would do business on the principles of the gospel.

Just turn the tables over, and let Christians do business one year on gospel principles. It would shake the world. It would ring louder than thunder. Let the ungodly see professing Christians, in every bargain, consulting the good of the person they are trading with--seeking not their own wealth, but every man another's wealth--living above the world--setting no value on the world any farther than it can be a means of glorifying God--what do you think would be the effect? What effect did it have in Jerusalem, when the whole body of Christians gave up their business, and turned out en masse to pursue the salvation of the world? They were only a few ignorant fishermen, and a few humble women, but they turned the world upside down. Let the church live so now, and it would cover the world with confusion of face, and overwhelm them with convictions of sin. Only let them see the church living above the world, and doing business on gospel principles, seeking not their own interests but the interests of their fellow men, and infidelity would hide its head, heresy would be driven from church, and this charming, blessed spirit of love, would go over the world like the waves of the sea.

Secondly.--Of Fashions.

Why are Christians required not to follow the fashions of the world?

1. Because it is directly at war with the spirit of the gospel, and is minding earthly things.

What is minding earthly things, if it is not to follow the fashions of the world, that like a tide are continually setting to and fro, and fluctuating in their forms, and keeping the world continually changing? There are many men of large business in the world, and men of wealth, who think they care nothing for the fashions. They are occupied with something else, and they trust the fashions altogether with their tailor, taking it for granted that he will make all right. But mind, if he should make a garment unfashionable, you would see that they do care about the fashions, and they never would employ that tailor again. Still, at present their thoughts are not much on the fashions. They have a higher object in view. And they think it beneath the dignity of a minister to preach about fashions. They overlook the fact, that with the greater part of mankind fashion is every thing. The greater part of the community are not rich, and never expect to be, but they look to the world to enable them to make a respectable appearance, and to bring up their families in a respectable manner; that is, to follow the fashions. Nine-tenths of the population never look at anything higher, than to do as the world does, or to follow the fashions. For this they strain every nerve. And this is what they set their hearts on, and what they live for.

The merchant and the rich man deceives himself, therefore, if he supposes that fashion is a little thing. The great body of the people mind this, their minds are set upon it, the thing which they look for in life is to have their dress, equipage, furniture, and so on, like other people, in the fashion, or respectable as they call it.

2. To conform to the world is contrary to their profession.

When people join the church, they profess to give up the spirit that gives rise to the fashions. They profess to renounce the poms and vanities of the world, to repent of their pride, to follow the meek and lowly Savior, to live for God. And now what do they do? You often see professors of religion go to the extreme of the fashion. Nothing will satisfy them that is not in the height of fashion. And a Christian female dress-maker, who is conscientiously opposed to the following of fashions, cannot get her bread. She cannot get employment even among professing Christian ladies, unless she follows the fashions in all their countless changes. God knows it is so, and they must give up their business if their conscience will not permit them to follow the changes of fashion.

3. This conformity is a broad and complete approval of the spirit of the world.

What is it that lies at the bottom of all this shifting scenery? What is the cause that produces all this gaudy show and dash, and display? It is the love of applause. And when Christians follow the changes of fashion, they pronounce all this innocent. All this waste of money and time and thought, all this feeding and cherishing of vanity and the love of applause, the church sets her seal to, when she conforms to the world.

4. Nay, further, another reason is, that following the fashions of the world, professing Christians show that they do in fact love the world.

They show it by their conduct, just as the ungodly show it by the same conduct. As they act alike they give evidence that they are actuated by one principle, the love of fashion.

5. When Christian professors do this, they show most clearly that they love the praise of men.

It is evident that they love admiration and flattery, just as sinners do. Is not this inconsistent with Christian principle, to go right into the very things that are set up by the pride and fashion and lust of the ungodly?

6. Conforming to the world in fashion, you show that you do not hold yourself accountable to God for the manner in which you lay out money.

You practically disown your stewardship of the wealth that is in your possession. By laying out money to gratify your own vanity and lust, you take off the keen edge of that truth, which ought to cut that sinner in two, who is living to himself. It is practically denying that the earth is the Lord's, with the cattle on a thousand hills, and all to be employed for his glory.

7. You show that reputation is your idol.

When the cry comes to your ears on every wind, from the ignorant and the lost of all nations, "Come over and help us, come over and help us," and every week brings some call to send the gospel, to send tracts and Bibles, and missionaries to those who are perishing for lack of knowledge, if you choose to expend money in following the fashions, it is demonstration that reputation is your idol.--Suppose now, for the sake of argument, that it is not prohibited in the word of God to follow the fashions, and that professing Christians, if they will, may innocently follow the fashions, (I deny that it is innocent, but suppose it were,) does not the fact that they do follow them when there are such calls for money, and time, and thought, and labor to save souls, prove conclusively that they do not love God nor the souls of men?

Take the case of a woman, whose husband is in slavery, and she is trying to raise money enough for his redemption. There she is, toiling and saving, rising up early and sitting up late, and eating the bread of carefulness, because her husband, the father of her children, the friend of her youth, is in slavery. Now go to that woman and tell her that it is innocent for her to follow the fashions, and dress and display like her neighbors--will she do it? Why not? She does not desire to do it. She will scarcely buy a pair of shoes for her feet, she grudges almost the bread she eats, so intent is she on her great object.

Now suppose a person loved God and the souls of men and the kingdom of Christ, does he need an express prohibition from God to prevent him from spending his money and his life in following the fashion? No, indeed, he will rather need a positive injunction to take what is needful for his own comfort and the support of his own life. Take the case of Timothy. Did he need a prohibition to prevent him from indulging in the use of wine? So far from it, he was so cautious that it required an express injunction from God to make him drink a little as a medicine. Although he was sick, he would not drink it till he had the word of God for it, he saw the evils of it so clearly. Now, show me a man or woman, I care not what their professions are, that follows the fashions of the world, and I will show you what spirit they are of.

Now, don't ask me why Abraham, and David, and Solomon, who were so rich, did not lay out their money in spreading the kingdom of God. Ah, tell me, did they enjoy the light that professors now enjoy? Did they even know so much as this, that the world can be converted, as Christians now see clearly that it can? But suppose it were as allowable in you as it was in Abraham or David to be rich, and to lay out the property you possess in display and pomp and fashion. Suppose it were perfectly innocent, who that loves the Lord Jesus Christ would wish to lay out money in fashion when they could lay it out to gratify the ALL-ABSORBING passion, to do good to the souls of men?

8. By conforming to the world in fashion, you show that you differ not at all from ungodly sinners.

Ungodly sinners say, "I don't see but that these Christian men and women love to follow the fashions as well as I do." Who does not know, that this leads many to infidelity.

9. By following the fashions you are tempting God to give you up to a worldly spirit.

There are many now that have followed the world, and followed the fashions, till God seems to have given them over to the devil for the destruction of the flesh. They have little or no religious feeling, no spirit of prayer, no zeal for the glory of God or the conversion of sinners, the Holy Spirit seems to have withdrawn from them.

10. You tempt the church to follow the fashions.

Where the principal members, the elders and leaders in the church, and their wives and families, are fashionable Christians, they drag the whole church along with them into the train of fashion, and every one apes them as far as they can, down to the lowest servant. Only let a rich Christian lady come out to the house of God in full fashion, and the whole church are set agog to follow as far as they can, and it is a chance if they do not run in debt to do it.

11. You tempt yourself to pride and folly and a worldly spirit.

Suppose a man that had been intemperate and was reformed, should go and surround himself with wine and brandy and every seductive liquor, keeping the provocatives of appetite always under his eye, and from time to time tasting a little; does he not tempt himself?-- Now see that woman that has been brought up in the spirit of pride and show, and that has been reformed and professed to abandon them all. Let her keep all these trappings, and continue to follow the fashions, and pride will drag her backwards as sure as she lives. She tempts herself to sin and folly.

12. You are tempting the world.

You are setting the world into a more fierce and hot pursuit of these things. The very things that the world love, and that they are sure to have scruples about their being right, professing Christians fall in with and follow, and thus tempt the world to continue in the pursuit of what will destroy their souls in hell.

13. By following the fashions, you are tempting the devil to tempt you.

When you follow the fashions, you open your heart to him. You keep it for him, empty, swept, and garnished. Every woman that suffers herself to follow the fashions may rely upon it, she is helping Satan to tempt her to pride and sin.

14. You lay a great stumbling block before the greatest part of mankind.

There are a few persons who are pursuing greater objects than fashion. They are engaged in the scramble for political power, or they are eager for literary distinction, or they are striving for wealth. And they do not know that their hearts are set on fashion at all. They are following selfishness on a larger scale. But the great mass of the community are influenced mostly by these fluctuating fashions. To this class of persons it is a great and sore stumbling block, when they see professing Christians just as prompt and as eager to follow the changings of fashion as themselves. They see, and say, "What does their profession amount to, when they follow the fashions as much as any body?" or, "Certainly it is right to follow the fashions, for see, the professing Christians do it as much as we."

15. Another reason why professing Christians are required not to be conformed to the world in fashion is, the great influence their disregarding fashion would have on the world.

If professing Christians would show their contempt for these things, and not pretend to follow them or regard them, how it would shame the world, and convince the world that they were living for another object, for God and for eternity! How irresistible it would be! What an overwhelming testimony in favor of our religion! Even the apparent renunciation of the world, by many orders of monks, has doubtless done more than any thing else to put down the opposition to their religion, and give it currency and influence in the world. Now suppose all this was hearty and sincere, and coupled with all that is consistent and lovely in Christian character, and all that is zealous and bold in labors for the conversion of the world from sin to holiness. What an influence it would have! What thunders it would pour into the ears of the world, to wake them up to follow after God!

Thirdly.--In Politics.

I will show why professing Christians are required not to be conformed to the world in politics.

1. Because the politics of the world are perfectly dishonest.

Who does not know this? Who does not know that it is the purposed policy of every party to cover up the defects of their own candidate, and the good qualities of the opposing candidate? And is not this dishonest? Every party holds up its candidate as a piece of perfection, and then aims to ride him into office by any means, fair or foul. No man can be an honest man, that is committed to a party, to go with them, let them do what they may. And can a Christian do it, and keep a conscience void of offense?

2. To conform to the world in politics is to tempt God.

By falling in with the world in politics, Christians are guilty of setting up rulers over them by their own vote, who do not fear nor love God, and who set the law of God at defiance, break the Sabbath, and gamble, and commit adultery, and fight duels, and swear profanely, and leave the laws unexecuted at their pleasure, and that care not for the weal or woe of their country, so long as they can keep their office. I say Christians do this. For it is plain that where parties are divided, as they are in this country, there are Christians enough to turn the scale in any election. Now let Christians take the ground that they will not vote for a dishonest man, or a Sabbath breaker, or gambler, or whoremonger, or duelist, for any office, and no party could ever nominate such a character with any hope of success. But on the present system, where men will let the laws go unexecuted, and give full swing to mobs, or lynch-murders, or robbing the mails, or any thing else, so they can run in their own candidate who will give them the offices, any man is a dishonest man that will do it, be he professor or non-professor. And can a Christian do this and be blameless?

3. By engaging with the world in politics, Christians grieve the Spirit of God.

Ask any Christian politician if he ever carried the Spirit of God with him into a political campaign? Never. I would by no means be understood to say that Christians should refuse to vote, and to exercise their lawful influence in public affairs. But they ought not to follow a party.

4. By following the present course of politics, you are contributing your aid to undermine all government and order in the land.

Who does not know that this great nation now rocks and reels, because the laws are broken and trampled under foot, and the executive power refuses or dare not act? Either the magistrate does not wish to put down disorder, or he temporizes and lets the devil rule. And so it is in all parts of the country, and all

parties. And can a Christian be consistent with his profession, and vote for such men to office?

5. You lay a stumbling-block in the way of sinners.

What do sinners think, when they see professing Christians acting with them in their political measures, which they themselves know to be dishonest and corrupt? They say, "We understand what we are about, we are after office, we are determined to carry our party into power, we are pursuing our own interest; but these Christians profess to live for another and a higher end, and yet here they come, and join with us, as eager for the loaves and fishes as the rest of us." What greater stumbling-block can they have?

6. You prove to the ungodly that professing Christians are actuated by the same spirit with themselves.

Who can wonder that the world is incredulous as to the reality of religion? If they do not look for themselves into the scriptures, and there learn what religion is, if they are governed by the rules of evidence from what they see in the lives of professing Christians, they ought to be incredulous. They ought to infer, so far as this evidence goes, that professors of religion do not themselves believe in it. It is the fact. I doubt, myself, whether the great mass of professors believe the Bible.

7. They show, so far as their evidence can go, that there is no change of heart.

What is it? Is it going to the communion table once in a month or two, and sometimes to prayer meeting? Is that a change of heart, when they are just as eager in the scramble for office as any others? The world must be fools to believe in a change of heart on such evidence.

8. Christians ought to cease from conformity to the world in politics, from the influence which such a course would have on the world.

Suppose Christians were to act perfectly conscientious and consistent in this matter, and to say, "We will not vote for any man to office, unless he fears God and will rule the people in righteousness." Ungodly men would not set men as candidates, who themselves set the laws at defiance. No. Every candidate would be obliged to show that he was prepared to act from higher motives, and that he would lay himself out to make the country prosperous, and to promote virtue, and to put down vice and oppression and disorder, and to do all he can to make the people happy and HOLY! It would shame the dishonest politicians, to show that the love of God and man is the motive that Christians have in view. And a blessed influence would go over the land like a wave.

IV. I am to answer some objections that are made against the principles here advanced.

1. In regard to business.

OBJECTION. "If we do not transact business on the same principles on which ungodly men do it, we cannot compete with them, and all the business of the world will fall into the hands of the ungodly. If we pursue our business for the good of others, if we buy and sell on the principle of not seeking our own wealth, but the wealth of those we do business with, we cannot sustain a competition with worldly men, and they will get all the business."

Let them have it, then. You can support yourself by your industry in some humbler calling, and let worldly men do all the business.

OBJECTION. "But then, how should we get money to spread the gospel?"

A holy church, that would act on the principles of the gospel, would spread the gospel faster than all the money that ever was in New York, or that ever will be. Give me a holy church, that would live above the world, and the work of salvation would roll on faster than with all the money in Christendom.

OBJECTION. "But we must spend a great deal of money to bring forward an educated ministry."

Ah! if we had a holy ministry, it would be far more important than an educated ministry. If the ministry were holy enough, they would do without so much education. God forbid that I should undervalue an educated ministry. Let ministers be educated as well as they can, the more the better, if they are only holy enough. But it is all a farce to suppose that a literary ministry can convert the world. Let the ministry have the spirit of prayer, let the baptism of the Holy Ghost be upon them, and they will spread the gospel. Only let Christians live as they ought, and the church would shake the world. If Christians in New York would do it, the report would soon fill every ship that leaves the port, and waft the news on every wind, till the earth was full of excitement and inquiry, and conversions would multiply like the drops of morning dew.

Suppose you were to give up your business, and devote yourselves entirely to the work of extending the gospel. The church once did so, and you know what followed. When that little band in Jerusalem gave up their business and spent their time in the work of God, salvation spread like a wave. And, I believe, if the whole Christian church were to turn right out, and convert the world, it would be done in a very short time.

And further, the fact is, that you would not be required to give up your business. If Christians would do business in the spirit of the gospel, they would soon engross the business of the world. Only let the world see, that if they go to a Christian to do business, he will not only deal honestly, but benevolently, that he will actually consult the interest of the person he deals with, as if it were his own interest, and who would deal with any body else? What merchant would go to an ungodly man to trade, who he knew would try to get the advantage of him, and cheat him, while he knew that there were Christian merchants to deal with that would consult his interests as much as they do their own? Indeed, it is a known fact, that there are now Christian merchants in this city, who regulate the prices of the articles they deal in. Merchants come in from the country, and inquire around to see how they can buy goods, and they go to these men to know exactly what articles are worth at a fair price, and govern themselves accordingly.

The advantage, then, is all on one side. The church can make it for the interest of the ungodly to do business on right principles. The church can regulate the business of the world, and woe to them if they do not.

2. In regard to Fashion.

OBJECTION. "Is it best for Christians to be singular?"

Certainly, Christians are bound to be singular. They are called to be peculiar people, that is, a singular people, essentially different from the rest of mankind. To maintain that we are not to be singular, is the same as to maintain that we are to be conformed to the world. "Be not singular," that is, Be like the world. In other words, "Be ye conformed to the world." This is the direct opposite to the command in the text.

But the question now regards fashion, in dress, equipage, and so on. And here I will confess that I was formerly myself in error. I believed, and I taught, that the best way for Christians to pursue, was to dress so as not to be noticed, to follow the fashions and changes so as not to appear singular, and that nobody would be led to think of their being different from others in these particulars. But I have seen my error, and

now wonder very much at my former blindness. It is your duty to dress so plain as to show to the world that you place no sort of reliance in the things of fashion, and set no value at all on them, but despise and neglect them altogether. But unless you are singular, unless you separate yourselves from the fashions of the world, you show that you do value them. There is no way in which you can bear a proper testimony by your lives against the fashions of the world but by dressing plain. I do not mean that you should study singularity, but that you should consult convenience and economy, although it may be singular.

OBJECTION. "But if we dress plain, the attention of people will be taken with it."

The reason of it is this, so few do it that it is a novelty, and every body stares when they see a professing Christian so strict as to disregard the fashions. Let them all do it, and the only thing you show by it is that you are a Christian, and do not wish to be confounded with the ungodly. Would it not tell on the pride of the world, if all the Christians in it were united in bearing a practical testimony against its vain show.

OBJECTION. "But in this way you carry religion too far away from the multitude. It is better not to set up an artificial distinction between the church and the world."

The direct reverse of this is true. The nearer you bring the church to the world, the more you annihilate the reasons that ought to stand out in view of the world, for their changing sides and coming over to the church. Unless you go right out from them, and show that you are not of them in any respect, and carry the church so far as to have a broad interval between saints and sinners, how can you make the ungodly feel that so great a change is necessary.

OBJECTION. "But this change which is necessary is a change of heart."

True; but will not a change of heart produce a change of life?

OBJECTION. "You will throw obstacles in the way of persons becoming Christians. Many respectable people will become disgusted with religion, and if they cannot be allowed to dress and be Christians, they will take to the world altogether."

This is just about as reasonable as it would be for a temperance man to think he must get drunk now and then, to avoid disgusting the intemperate, and to retain his influence over them. The truth is, that persons ought to know, and ought to see in the lives of professing Christians, that if they embrace religion, they must be weaned from the world, and must give up the love of the world, and its pride and show and folly, and live a holy life, in watchfulness and self-denial and active benevolence.

OBJECTION. "Is it not better for us to disregard this altogether, and not pay any attention to such little things, and let them take their course; let the milliner and mantua-maker do as they please, and follow the usages of society in which we live, and the circle in which we move?"

Is this the way to show contempt for the fashions of the world? Do people ordinarily take this course of showing contempt for a thing, to practise it? Why, the way to show your abhorrence of ardent spirit is to drink it! And so the way to show your abhorrence of the world is to follow along in the customs and the fashions of the world! Precious reasoning, this.

OBJECTION. "No matter how we dress, if our hearts are right?"

Your heart right! Then your heart may be right when your conduct is all wrong. Just as well might the profane swearer say, "No matter what words I speak, if my heart is right." No, your heart is not right, unless your conduct is right. What is outward conduct, but the acting out of the heart? If your heart was right, you would not wish to follow the fashions of the world.

OBJECTION. "What is the standard of dress? I do not see the use of all your preaching, and laying down rules about plain dress, unless you give us a standard."

This is a mighty stumbling block with many. But to my mind the matter is extremely simple. The whole can be comprised in two simple rules. One is, Be sure in all your equipage, and dress and furniture to show that you have no fellowship with the designs and principles of those who are aiming to set off themselves, and to gain the applause of men. The other is, Let economy be first consulted, and then convenience. Follow Christian economy, that is, save all you can for Christ's service. And then let things be as convenient as Christian economy will admit.

OBJECTION. "Would you have us to turn all Quakers, and put on their plain dress?"

Who does not know, that the plain dress of the Quakers has won for them the respect of all the thinking part of the ungodly in the community? Now, if they had coupled with this the zeal for God, and the weanedness from the world, and the contempt for riches, and the self-denying labor for the conversion of sinners to Christ, which the gospel enjoins, and the clear views of the plan of salvation which the gospel inculcates, they would long since have converted the world. And if all Christians would imitate them in their plain dress, (I do not mean the precise cut and fashion of their dress, but in a plain dress, throwing contempt upon the fashions of the world,) who can doubt that the conversion of the world would hasten on apace?

OBJECTION. "Would you make us all Methodists?"

Who does not know that the Methodists, when they were noted for their plain dress, and for renouncing the fashions and show of the world, used to have power with God in prayer? And that they had the universal respect of the world as sincere Christians. And who does not know that since they have laid aside this peculiarity, and conformed to the world in dress and other things, and seemed to be trying to lift themselves up as a denomination, and gain influence with the world, they are losing the power of prayer? Would to God they had never thrown down this wall. It was one of the leading excellences of Wesley's system, to have his followers distinguished from others by a plain dress.

OBJECTION. "We may be proud of a plain dress as well as of a fashionable dress. The Quakers are as proud as we are."

So may any good thing be abused. But that is no reason why it should not be used, if it can be shown to be good. I put it back to the objector; Is that any reason why a Christian female, who fears God and loves the souls of men, should neglect the means which may make an impression that she is separated from the world, and pour contempt on the fashions of the ungodly, in which they are dancing their way to hell?

OBJECTION. "This is a small thing, and ought not to take up so much of a minister's time in the pulpit."

This is an objection often heard from worldly professors. But the minister that fears God will not be deterred by it. He will pursue the subject, until such professing Christians are cut off from their conformity to the world or cut off from the church. It is not merely the dress, as dress, but it is the conformity to the

world in dress and fashion, that is the great stumbling-block in the way of sinners. How can the world be converted, while professing Christians are conformed to the world? What good will it do to give money to send the gospel to the heathen, when Christians live so at home? Well might the heathen ask, "What profit will it be to become Christians, when those who are Christians are pursuing the world with all the hot-haste of the ungodly?" The great thing necessary for the church is to break off from conformity to the world, and then they will have power with God in prayer, and the Holy Ghost will descend and bless their efforts, and the world will be converted.

OBJECTION. "But if we dress so, we shall be called fanatics."

Whatever the ungodly may call you, fanatics, Methodists, or any thing, you will be known as Christians, and in the secret consciences of men will be acknowledged as such. It is not in the power of unbelievers to pour contempt on a holy church, that are separated from the world. How was it with the early Christians? They lived separate from the world, and it made such an impression, that even infidel writers say of them, "These men win the hearts of the mass of the people, because they give themselves up to deeds of charity, and pour contempt on the world." Depend upon it, if Christians would live so now, the last effort of hell would soon be expended in vain to defeat the spread of the gospel. Wave after wave would flow abroad, till the highest mountain tops were covered with the waters of life.

3. In regard to politics.

OBJECTION. "In this way, by acting on these principles, and refusing to unite with the world in politics, we could have no influence in government and national affairs."

I answer, first, It is so now. Christians, as such, have no influence. There is not a Christian principle adopted because it is Christian, or because it is according to the law of God.

I answer, secondly, If there is no other way for Christians to have an influence in the government, but by becoming conformed to the world in their habitual principles and parties, then let the ungodly take the government and manage it in their own way, and do you go and serve God.

I answer, thirdly, No such result would follow. Directly the reverse of this would be the fact. Only let it be known that Christian citizens will on no account assist bad men into office; only let it be known that the church will go only for men that will aim at the public good, and both parties will be sure to set up such men. And in this way, the church could legitimately exert an influence, by compelling all parties to bring forward only men who are worthy of an honest man's support.

OBJECTION. "In this way the church and the world will be arrayed against each other."

The world is too selfish for this. You cannot make parties so. Such a line can never be a permanent division. For one year, the ungodly might unite against the church, and leave Christians in a small minority. But in the end, the others would form two parties, each courting the suffrages of Christians, by offering candidates such as Christians can conscientiously vote for.

REMARKS.

1. By non-conformity to the world, you may save much money for doing good.

In one year a greater fund might be saved by the church, than all that has ever been raised for the spread of the gospel.

2. By non-conformity to the world, a great deal of time may be saved for doing good, that is now consumed and wasted in following the fashions, and obeying the maxims, and joining in the pursuits of the world.

3. At the same time, Christians in this way would preserve their peace of conscience, would enjoy communion with God, would have the spirit of prayer, and would possess far greater usefulness.

Is it not time something was done? Is it not time that some church struck out a path, that should be not conformed to the world, but should be according to the example and Spirit of Christ?

You profess that you want to have sinners converted. But what avails it, if they sink right back again into conformity with the world? Brethren, I confess, I am filled with pain in view of the conduct of the church. Where are the proper results of the glorious revivals we have had? I believe they were genuine revivals of religion and outpourings of the Holy Ghost, that the church has enjoyed the last ten years. I believe the converts of the last ten years are among the best Christians in the land. Yet, after all, the great body of them are a disgrace to religion. Of what use would it be to have a thousand members added to the church, to be just such as are now in it? Would religion be any more honored by it, in the estimation of ungodly men? One holy church, that are really crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them, would do more to recommend Christianity, than all the churches in the country, living as they now do. O, if I had strength of body, to go through the churches again, instead of preaching to convert sinners, I would preach to bring up the churches to the gospel standard of holy living. Of what use is it to convert sinners, and make them such Christians as these? Of what use is it to try to convert sinners, and make them feel there is something in religion, and then when they go to trade with you, or meet you in the street, have you contradict it all, and tell them, by your conformity to the world, that there is nothing in it?

Where shall I look, where shall the Lord look for a church like the first church, that will come out from the world and be separate, and give themselves up to serve God? O, if this church would do so. But it is of little use to make Christians, if they are not better. Do not understand me as saying that the converts made in our revivals are spurious conversions. But they live so as to be a disgrace to religion. They are so stumbled by old professors that many of them do more hurt than good. The more there are of them, the more occasion infidelity seems to find for her jeers and scoffs.

Now do you believe, that God commands you not to be conformed to the world? Do you believe it? And DARE YOU obey it, let people say what they will about you? Dare you now separate yourselves from the world, and never again be controlled by its maxims, and never again copy its practices, and never again will be whiffled here and there by its fashions? I know a man that lives so, I can mention his name, he pays no attention to the customs of the world in this respect. And what is the result? Wherever that man goes, he leaves the impression behind that he is a Christian. O, if one church would do so, and would engage in it with all the energy that men of the world engage in their business, they would turn the world upside down. Will you do so? Will you break off from the world now, and enter into covenant with God, and declare that you will dare to be singular enough to be separate from the world, and from this time set your faces as a flint to obey God, let the world say what they will? Dare you do it? Will you do it?

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