

Conform Or Transform?

Romans 12:2b

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

What would you say is the clearest, most obvious symptom of maturity in a person? What is the great distinction between a person of eighteen and a person of forty? What is the great sign that a person has reached adulthood? Using "Geritol" – vitamin supplement drink? No, not "Geritol"!

We would all probably give different answers, but what about the truth of this one: Is it not true that a mature person tends at last to see things as they really are? They are prepared to see the facts as they are and not as they want them to be. Do you think there is some truth in that? As you go on through life you begin to be prepared to see things as they really are, not as you would like them to be. In other words, the immature person looks at the facts and wishes they were different and pretends they are different, but the mature person sees them as they really are.

Now, shallow cynics who have learned nothing by all their grey hair will jump in and say, "Oh, you are dead right! Young people are absolutely immature idealists, but maturity knocks that out of them." No, that is not it. A mature person sees things as they really are and then works to take them the next step towards the ideal that they have in their minds. But the immature person tends to look at the facts and either pretends that they are the ideal or just hope that they will become the ideal by wishing hard.

Loved ones, there is a basic fact that all of us sooner or later have to become mature enough to recognize. It is--you were made to be loved. Now that is easy for some of us to understand, but for many of us it is something we have not yet accepted. It is the cause of a great deal of the mystery in our lives. You were made to be loved. What do you mean, "loved"? You were made to be looked after. You were made to be protected and cared for, you were made to be fed and clothed and sheltered from the hostile things in your environment. You or I in the middle of the Sahara desert wouldn't last more than a couple days. We need certain air temperatures and certain air pressures, we need certain foods. Otherwise, we will not continue to exist. We need to be taken care of. I don't know if you know it, but you are the weakest, most vulnerable baby animal of all the baby animals in the world. If your mom didn't take intense care of you, you wouldn't have lasted a week in this world.

So at least in that way, we are made to be loved. We are not self-existent personalities that can exist on our own. We need somebody to look after us and take care of us. Indeed, eventually the bacteria in the world and your old weakened body prove finally that you cannot prolong your own life as you want. You are very dependent on other things. Loved ones that is a big step towards peace when you accept that you are not your own creator and you can't actually prolong your life one moment if somebody else is not taking care of you.

You need to be loved in another way--you need to be appreciated. You need somebody to think that you are worth something. Many of us probably have inferiority complexes. We would say, "No, I haven't a complex, I am just inferior! Believe me!"

Yet it is interesting, however pitiful and pathetic and weak we think we are, we still have a wee bit of feeling that it is important for some reason that we are here. There is some significance to us being here. It is another proof that we are not self-existent, because isn't it true, we feel

somebody else needs to know we are here. It doesn't actually matter how much we achieve--and many men and women achieve great things in their life--but if they don't have somebody else to appreciate what they are, they somehow don't feel fulfilled. In other words, you were made to be loved and valued by somebody else to feel that you had a rightful place in this world.

I think love means "enjoyed", too, and it means happiness. You were made to be happy. You were made to be happy in the sense of the happiest days that you can remember. Think for a moment of one of the happiest days you have ever had in your life. All of us know that those days had one thing in common. You enjoyed it so much you had no time to think about yourself at all. That was it. There was some great day when all the family was doing something together and you were so involved in the thing you had no time to even think that you were existing. You either lost yourself in some situation or some person or lost yourself in something that was bigger than you.

That is when you are happiest. You were made to be happy like that. You were made to lose yourself in something or somebody bigger than yourself. Now those things are true, loved ones. You can't change them. Any mature person who is really honest will eventually say, "That's right. We were made to be loved."

Now, there is a vast supernatural organization that builds its power over you on the solid basis of the fact that you need to be loved. You will see it as we go on this morning. There is a vast supernatural organization in this world, almost a world behind our world, a great supernatural structure that bases its power over you and builds its control of you on the sure foundation of this solid fact of life that you need to be loved.

The Bible refers to that organization in Romans 12:2. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed." The organization is in that English word "world". If you follow the footnote to the bottom of the page, you see the word can also mean "age". The word used for world is in the Greek word "aeon", and it, together with the other Greek word "cosmos", means not only the natural world around us or the world of people, but it also means this vast organization that lies behind the world.

In classical Greek the word cosmos means a harmonious order or arrangement or organization, a planned system that functions harmoniously in perfect order. There is behind this world that we see a world-system that is organized with one purpose in mind, and its purpose is to get you under its control and eventually destroy your life. Paul refers to it in Ephesians 6:12: "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places."

There is a whole substructure behind our world that is composed of the rulers of this present darkness, and their aim is to give you what you need. What you need is love, and one of the things that love gives is, it takes care of you, it provides for you. These world rulers say, "You can take care of anything you need in the way of material things if you have money." Now there are plenty of big corporations in our society that can provide money. They will provide money to you in return for your services, so you will be able to provide all that you need in the way of care and material provision.

Moreover, these corporations are so big that if you will not only give them service but also absolute loyalty, above that of the loyalty that you give your wife or husband or children or

parents, they will provide for you up to your death, and at your death they will provide for your children and make sure that they are all right.

Now, loved ones, I would like to point out to you a phrase in the verse that is important. It is at the very beginning of Ephesians 5:12: "For we are not contending against flesh and blood..." It is not the flesh and blood existence of 3M or Blue Cross that takes advantage of us. The companies and corporations for whom most of us work are not evil in themselves. We are not fighting against that flesh and blood. It is the whole tangled web of unspoken loyalties and obligations that draw our hearts out into depending on these organizations for the love we feel we need.

That is the problem. It is not IBM or Standard Oil or 3M or Blue Cross, it is not the corporations that pay us our salaries; it is the whole invisible, tangled web of obligations and subtle loyalties that steal our hearts and draw them out into depending on these organizations as our gods. When William L. McKnight [former CEO of 3M Corporation] started the business, no doubt he did it on the same basis as all of us who start businesses--to serve the world.

It is not the businesses themselves that are the problem. It is the world rulers of the present darkness that begin to draw your heart and mind into regarding these businesses as more than they really are--as a possible source of love, in the sense of provision for our material needs. Our heart switches its center from the only One who can provide for our material needs in real love to a lesser.

We have to pay an incredible price for that. Because we begin to lose our free will and individuality. It is not the suits that all the people in your department have to wear to get on; it is not the way you have to do your hair; it is not even all having to come in at the same time in the morning; it is not that conformity. It is the subtle warping of your heart that takes place when you begin to say to yourself, "A little conformity to what they think I should think won't do any harm.

It is quite prudent if I really depend on these people for my money and for the insurance that is going to cover my children if anything happens to me. I owe them a lot, so maybe it wouldn't do any harm if I just quieten what I really think myself at this moment and begin to conform a little to what they think I should do." That's when we begin to "conform to this world".

It is not the outward things that matter, but it is that beginning of a loss of you yourself; that is when the conformity begins. When you begin to cease to act and do what you really think and believe, when you cease to be your own self and begin to be a little marionette-robot that you are sure will get on in this world-system. That is when the conformity begins.

That is when you lose the free, fresh spirit of what you were when you were five. That is when you cease to be your glorious different self. That spirit is like a little dove, and it takes off the moment the shadows of the cage bars begin to show. You begin to die inside and you begin to conform inside. That is the world's conformity; that is where the death begins.

It is the same with the love that appreciates. We are not fighting against flesh and blood. It isn't that your parents shouldn't have praised you when you did something well. It isn't that your teachers praised you; it isn't even that there are special positions on the football team that encouraged you to try to catch everybody's appreciation and approval. It isn't that there are certain things that you can do in the neighborhood that make you more prominent than everybody else.

That isn't the problem.

The problem is the drawing out of your own little heart towards valuing above everything else the praise of your friends or the approval of your colleagues, until you begin to be like a little dog panting until somebody pats it on the head. You will do anything like that to gain attention. When you become like that inside, you lose your dignity and your nobility. You will do anything for a cookie. That is where you conform.

You come to the point eventually where you say, "I can't remember what I was like when I first came to this company. I can't remember what I was like when I was a six-year-old or a seven-year-old. I've become a brain-washed robot that does whatever they want me to do."

Here is the tragedy. This wretched world-system can't deliver the goods that it promises. That is why you still feel so unsatisfied with it. It can't even deliver the goods, in the sense of the superficial symptoms of love. It can protect you for awhile from poverty or sickness. It can protect you awhile from discomfort. It can give you for awhile some of the things that make life seem easier, but when the chips are down, at the very most important moment of all, it can do nothing, and you die!

If we are honest with each other, the reason we are scared of poverty, the reason we are scared of discomfort, the reason we are scared of sickness, the reason we are scared that we won't have enough money to provide is--death? Because those are all stages on the way to death. It is death that we hate.

The world-system with its counterfeit love can't provide even what it claims is one of the vital symptoms of love--protecting you from the final material damage that anybody could suffer. It is the same with the appreciation thing. It can't deliver on that. Why are you concerned about self-esteem and self-worth? It is because you want to feel you have a rightful place in this universe. Who can give you that? The other silly little soul like yourself that lasts just about as long as you do?

There is only one Person who can give us that sense of value, and that is the Person who owns the universe. Only he can give us that sense of value and esteem that we are really after. The worst truth about the counterfeit love of this world-system is that it hasn't got what the very heart of love has. The very heart of love wants the best for you. It puts itself in your shoes and wants the very best for you that it knows. This world-system doesn't. It wants the best for its master and it has no interest in putting itself in your shoes.

Loved ones, the only love that you were made for is the love of your dear Maker. Your dear Creator loves you. He is your dear Father. Do you realize that he thinks of you as if you were his only son? Do you realize that he thinks of you as if you were his only daughter? Your dear Maker thinks of you as the only person in his world, and he loves you with all his dear heart. He knows your name and he thinks the world of you.

It is his love that you need in this life, because that love insures that whether the money comes or the money goes, whether the job lasts or whether it doesn't last, whether the clothes are available or the food runs out, there is a heart of love that loves you and will provide. That is what you and I need.

We don't need all these evidences of love; we need love. We don't need all kinds of people patting

us on the back. We know it is all bluff anyway and there is no real eternal meaning in it. We need to know that our dear Father knows why he put us here, that he put us here for a special reason. He knows it and he will lead us into it. That is what we need. You may say, "Yes, I think I know that, but I have been on this other track for twenty years now. Things have got coarse inside me. I do believe that God loves me, I sense that is right intellectually, but I have been listening to the praises of other people and seeking for people's approval and my peers' esteem for so long, something has gone dead inside. I know you are right. I know God loves me, but somehow I can't feel it. I don't know what is wrong. It is as if something has twisted inside."

"It seems as if I'm just crushed with this conformity until I'm almost a thing rather than a person. I don't seem to be able to respond to what you are saying. It seems as if there has to be something transformed inside me for me to be able to feel. What you say is right, but it seems as if I can't respond to it unless something changes."

Loved ones, there is a verse in the Bible that says, "If any man or woman is in Christ, he is a new creation." [2 Corinthians 5:17] Everybody who was in Jesus is a new creation. You say to me, "Yes, but it says, "If any man or woman is in Christ." But a few verses up it say, "We judge that if Christ died for all, then all died." That is it. That is you. It doesn't say "all except Jean" or "all except John" or "all except Jim" or "all except Bob" or "all except Joan" or "all except Mary" or "all except Ernest" or "all except Peter." It says, "All of us". Christ died for all of us, therefore, all of us died. You were in Christ, and the Bible says if you are in Christ you are a new creation.

Loved ones, God did change you in Jesus. The moment you believe that he rearranges all the twisted knots in your personality and enables you to begin to sense his love for you. He does a complete renewal job inside you so that you cease to be coarse and crude, able to see only the most obvious and most superficial praise, able to get security from the bank balance. He changes you inside so that you are able at last to get on to the only Person who really loves you, the only Person for whose love you were made--your dear Father. It doesn't matter how long you have been on the other thing, it really doesn't.

We are all in the same boat. We all have coarsened ourselves by trying to make do with the counterfeit love of these world rulers of this present darkness, so we are all in the same position. We have to be changed inside. God's word says if you are in Christ you are a new creation, and Christ died for all; therefore, all of us died. Therefore, all of us have been changed. You can either go on living the lie that you haven't been changed and die because of that lie. Or, this sunny Sunday morning you can say, "I believe" and stand up now and be a person, be the real person that Jesus made you to be. You can stand up in your inner man and stop lying down being a slave to these rulers of this present darkness, stop being a slave to opinions, stop being a slave to what you have or what you haven't. Stand up inside and be free.

Last night as I thought of it, Jesus said, "And his foot and ankle bones were made strong and he stood." That is what will happen if you will decide this morning to accept the change and depend on your dear Father for love and no longer on these others. Then your feet and ankle bones will be made strong and you will find miraculously that you can begin to live free and be transformed.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, I pray for any dear man or woman this morning who senses this is what they know to be

true and this is the way they want to live. Lord, I would pray that you would speak to them and say "Your faith has made you whole."

Lord, thank you that Christ died for all of us. Thank you therefore all have died. Thank you that that means me. That I was changed in Christ. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things are passed away and all things have become new. Lord, I pray for any loved one here this morning who is tired of the conformity. Will you speak to them now, "Stand and be made whole. Begin to receive the love that alone can satisfy and fulfill.

Dear Lord, we pray for each other this morning. We pray for anyone who might be conformed by the fact that we all go out the church door after the benediction. We pray for anyone who doesn't believe that something happened this morning. Pray for anyone who needs to go to the prayer room and seek you. We pray for anyone who needs to stay behind and pray. Lord, we pray that you would enable us to break those bonds of conformity this very morning and to see how deeply our dear Father loves us.

So, Lord, we would give our lives to you. Thank you that you will give us all that we need. Thank you, Lord.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us throughout today and this coming week.