

## SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM PAUL

### INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul in writing to the people of Rome in the year 57 A. D. had this to say: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind". It's a familiar bit of advice. J. B. Phillips in his translation of the new Testament puts it this way: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould you from within". J. B. Phillips has a way of paraphrasing some of these Biblical passages with the result that it often makes a fresh impact upon our minds. ~~I often turn to him. I find him rather helpful and I know some of you do to.~~ I'd like to take this little piece of advice that the Apostle Paul is offering us and hold it up to the light and see if there's anything in it that's valuable for us. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind". Or if you prefer the J. B. Phillips translation: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould you from within"

### POWER OF OUR ENVIRONMENT TO MOULD US INTO ITS OWN SHAPE

To begin with Paul's advice reminds us immediately of the power of our environment to mould us into its own shape. I think you know what I mean. It's something like this. For instance just this past Friday evening I was standing on the street corner (86th and Lexington) waiting for the cross town bus. Not far from where I stood were a dozen or so teen ages boys between the ages of 15 and 20. They were standing around and milling around in front of the pizza place. I've gotten to know some of those boys quite well through the activity of Club 86. As I stood there watching them I couldn't help but wonder how many of them would be ultimately moulded into the shape of the city and live here and die here just as they were born here without making any contribution that amounts to anything, and on the other hand I couldn't help but wonder how many of them would perchance rise above the influence of the city and not let it mould them.

I suppose you could think of this bit of advice to in reference to a child in an unhappy home where there is friction and lack of understanding and harmony between husband and wife. Such a child has three strikes against him from the beginning and if the scars of that unhappy home life go deep enough into that young life, it may be moulded for the rest of its days by the twisted pattern of an unhappy home.

And so you see when you come right down to it, all of us need to be reminded of this advice from Paul for all of us--even the strongest and sturdiest of us, are suggestible to environment and we are all made of such stuff as the world finds it easy to imprint itself upon. In a sense, we are plastic, and it is easy for us to conform to the world, easier perhaps than anything else, and this is first thing that Paul would suggest to us and while it isn't perhaps a pleasant thing, it is often necessary for us to be reminded of this.

### PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MOULDED BY THEIR ENVIRONMENT.....

In the second place, this bit of advice from Paul reminds us of the fact that there are some people who are not moulded by their environment. We think of someone like Franklin Roosevelt, stricken with paralysis. Most men would have been so moulded by that fact that they would never have been heard of again,

## SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM PAUL

**INTRODUCTION**      The Apostle Paul in his Letters displays a tendency to offer advice, often in abundance. For instance in the 12th Chapter of his Letter to the people of Rome, he says: "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". J. B. Phillips in his translation puts it this way: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould you from within". I should like to take that piece of advice and hold it up where we can look at it and see whether there is anything in it that is valuable for us. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind".

**POWER OF OUR ENVIRONMENT TO MOULD US INTO ITS OWN SHAPE**      To begin with Paul's advice reminds us of the power of our environment to mould us into its own shape. I think you know what I mean. It's something like this. Just this past Friday evening I was standing on the street corner (86th Street and Lexington) waiting for the bus. About a dozen or so teen-age boys, ranging in age from 15 to 20 stood in front of the Pizza place. I've gotten to know some of those boys quite well through the activity of our own Club 86. As I stood there watching them, I began to wonder how many of them will be ultimately moulded into the shape of this city, and live here and die here just as they were born here without making any contribution that amounts to anything, and on the other hand I also wondered how many of them will perchance rise above the city and not let it mould them.

Or I suppose you could think of this bit of advice of Paul in reference to a child in an unhappy home where there is friction and lack of harmony between husband and wife. Such a child has ten strikes against him from the beginning and if the scars of that unhappy home go deep enough into that young life, he may be moulded for the rest of his days by the twisted pattern of an unhappy home.

And so you see when you come right down to it, all of us need to be reminded of this advice from Paul for all of us, even the strongest and sturdiest of us, are suggestible to environment and we are all made of such stuff as the world finds it easy to imprint itself upon. In a sense, we are plastic, and it is easy for us to conform to the world, easier perhaps than anything else, and this is the first thing that Paul would have us remember and while it isn't a pleasant thing, it is often necessary for us to be reminded of it.

**PEOPLE WHO ARE BY NO MEANS MOULDED BY THEIR ENVIRONMENT**      In the second place, this bit of advice from Paul also reminds us of course that there are some people who are by no means moulded by their environment. One thinks immediately of someone like Franklin Roosevelt stricken with paralysis. Most men would have been so moulded by that fact that they would never have been heard of again, but he was not moulded by it; he began to mould things to himself. Or take another man further away from our own time - Booker T. Washington. Some men, born as he was, a negro with all of the cards stacked against him, would have been buried under the mass of race hatred and never heard of again, but he was a man who was not moulded by his environment but rose up out of it strong and beautiful. And then too, there are children and young people brought up in homes where everything has been against them and yet they have turned out wonderfully well. It reminds me of something one of those teenage boys

that I referred to earlier once said to me: "I intend to get out of the city. I'm not going to let it mould me. I want to do something more than just live on First Avenue the rest of my life".

We want to know what the secret of that power is. I don't think it would do any good for me to go on giving you more examples because you all know people like that. On the one hand you have people who live strictly under the influence of the world around them, and on the other hand you have those who influence the world around them to such an extent that the world is never the same afterwards. What is it that makes the difference. That's what we want to find out.

Perhaps it will bring us somewhere near an answer by looking at a specific example. Let's think about Lincoln for a moment. He was born as you know on the frontier of our country. He spent his boyhood and young manhood on the frontiers of Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, and to say the least, life was primitive, rough, uncouth and uncultivated. Lincoln, of course, bore the marks of the frontier to his dying day; no matter how elegant his clothes were he never looked well dressed and he always walked with the walk of a man who was plowing the fields and not a man walking on city pavements. He always bore the marks of the roughness and sturdiness which the frontier had built into his body and brain, but as he grew older he came to acquire a dignity which put everyone who was in his presence, at ease. His wit was sharp; he still had a certain roughness about his exterior, but he had a sweetness and a compassion about his inner life that astounds us, and even though he may have had a bit of midwestern twang in his voice which was an echo of his frontier days, he achieved an elocution such as few men in our time have ever achieved.

What is the explanation? Obviously there were many things at work upon him, and we cannot put our finger on any one thing, but this small incident which I will describe to you had something to do with the change which slowly took place within Lincoln. In the winter of 1831, when Lincoln was 22, a man by the name of Dr. John Allen who was a graduate of Dartmouth College went west for his health and happened to settle in a little town called New Salem. It was a small town indeed, nothing more than a few log cabins and a store and a post-office. While he was there, Dr. Allen started a debating society, a temperance society and a Sunday School and the interesting thing is that Lincoln and Dr. Allen spent a lot of time together and it is not hard to imagine what was happening. The young untutored fresh mind of Lincoln was receiving what the cultivated mind of the man from the eastern school was so eager to give him. One mind was fertilizing another, until the mind of the frontier began to glow with the conception of what the human mind could be when it took in the full scope of human culture.

To be sure, Lincoln had a mind to begin with; probably no one else in the town had a mind as good as his, but the point is that he exposed it to the best mind he could find and opened it to all the mind had to offer. He came to the point where he got a new idea and the idea was that plain people are able to govern themselves. They had proven their ability in the new world of the west; nothing must happen to that country which would thwart or destroy that great achievement they had made.

You see, he was no longer conformed to the frontier, but transformed by the renewing of his mind. It was that new idea, the depth of it, the fulness of it, that transformed his whole inward being and led him

but he was not moulded by it; in fact, he began to mould things to himself. Or take another man further away from our own time - Booker T. Washington. Some men, born as he was, a negro with all of the cards stacked against him would have been buried beneath the mass of race hatred and never heard of again, but he was a man who was not moulded by his environment, but rose up out of it - strong and beautiful and powerful. And then too there are children and young people brought up in homes where everything has been against them and yet they have turned out wonderfully well.

We want to know what the secret of that power is. On the one hand you have people who live strictly under the influence of the world around them, and on the other hand you have those who influence the world around them to such a degree that the world is never the same afterwards. What is it that makes the difference. This is what we want to know.

Perhaps by looking at a specific example we shall come somewhere near an answer. Let's think about Abraham Lincoln for a few moments. Here was a man born on the frontier of our country. He spent his boyhood and early manhood on the frontiers of Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, and to say the least, life on the frontier was primitive rough, crude, uncouth and uncultivated. Lincoln, of course, bore the marks of the frontier to his dying day. No matter how elegant his clothes were he never looked well dressed, and he always walked with the walk of a man who was plowing the fields and not walking the city pavements. He always bore the marks of the frontier; it was built into his body and his brain, but as he grew older he came to acquire a dignity which put everyone who was ever in his presence at ease. There was always a certain roughness about his exterior, but he had a sweetness, a compassion, a gentleness about his inner life that astounds us when you stop to consider that he came from the rough and primitive frontier. ~~And even though he may have had a bit of midwestern twang in his voice which was an echo of his frontier days, he achieved an eloquence such as few men in our own time have ever achieved.~~

How do you account for it all? What's the explanation? Obviously there were many things at work upon him, and it's difficult to put your finger on any one thing, but this small incident which I am going to describe to you had something to do with this change that took place within Lincoln. In the winter of 1831, when Lincoln was 22, a man by the name of Dr. John Allen who was a graduate of Dartmouth College went west for his health and settle in the little town of New Salem. It was just a small town with a few log cabins, a general store and a post office. While he was there, Dr. Allen started a debating society, a temperance society and a Sunday School and the interesting thing is that Lincoln and Dr. Allen spent a great deal of time together and it's not difficult for us to imagine what was taking place. The young untutored fresh mind of Lincoln was receiving what the cultivated mind of the man from the eastern school was so anxious to give. One mind, you might say, was fertilizing the other until the mind of the man from the frontier began to glow with the conception of what the human mind could be when it took in the full scope of human culture.

To be sure Lincoln had a mind to begin with; probably no one else in New Salem had a mind as good as his, but the point is this that

he exposed his mind to the best mind he could find and he opened his mind to all that it had to give. He came to the point where he got a new idea and the idea was that plain people were able to govern themselves. They had proven their ability to do this in the new world of the west; nothing must happen to that country which would thwart or destroy that great achievement that had been made. It was this new idea, the depth of it, the fullness of it that transformed his whole being and led him toward his destiny until he transformed the life of his world. All of this gives us a clue; mind you it's not much more than a clue because these inner things that take place in a person's life are not things that you can easily put your finger on or analyze easily. But it is a clue and it would be something like this: **WE CEASE TO BE CONFORMED AND ARE TRANSFORMED WHEN OUR MIND IS GIVEN A NEW DIRECTION.** And for us it is the mind of the man from Galilee that gives us this new direction. This is what Paul was pleading for - that his reader and listeners would let their minds be set in an entirely new direction by Christ so that they would be transformed and would not be in a position any more to be conformed like putty to an undesirable situation.

*omit*

I always like to be as specific as I can be in my sermons and come as close to our own lives as possible. After all, if what we say here on a Sunday morning doesn't have some bearing on our lives, then there isn't much point in saying anything at all. With this in mind, let me just take one hypothetical situation. That's about all that we have time for. Suppose you're a person who is gradually withering away in a situation that is hard, hopeless and discouraging. Perhaps you have some domestic burdens or problems that have been rubbing you until you feel like your skin has become raw. Or suppose you're involved in an office situation where the pressure is extremely great and you feel on edge every minute. Perhaps you're saying something like this: "I just feel that little by little I'm conforming to this frantic, panicky pattern and I don't want to. Sometimes I just feel I can't breathe. It isn't what I want. I don't like it and yet I don't know what to do". About all that we can do for you is to bring you into communication with the mind of this man from Galilee and let him give you a new idea - the idea of making something out of your hard situation rather than by being done in by it. This apparently is the idea that he had when he saw that there was nothing else for him to do but to die. He knew that people would look upon his death as a great disaster, but he was prepared to make it the event that would ultimately save the world. You see - once you get the idea of life that He gives to people, you'll be transformed to such an extent that you will no longer be willing to conform to the world you're now moving in and once you cease to be willing, you make some progress in the right direction.

So I say this - that this advice of Paul is worth thinking about. It assumes if we may go back to the story about Lincoln and use it as a parable, that once upon a time a man came to live on the frontier of the world, and he brought with him some new ideas and a way of life that was quite different from anything that had been given to people before. And when people expose their minds to his mind - to his ideas, to his way of life, something happens, and soon they find themselves transformed and transforming. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind".

**PRAYER:** Thou who hast shown us in Christ how we may be transformed, help as we come to thy table this morning, so to expose our minds and hearts and souls to him that his ideas about life and love may take possession of our minds, renewing, transforming...  
Amen