

Christians of influence

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning once again to you. It was interesting this morning as I was driving up to church and I had Hope 103.2 on.

Simon Manchester today is preaching on Galatians, which was somewhat intimidating, I have to say. But it was Galatians chapter 3. And he has done a couple of other sermons in previous weeks. So if you want to hear some more on Galatians, I'd commend going to the website of Hope and listening to Simon's messages also. Let me pray for us.

Our Father and our Lord, we thank you that you give us your word. We thank you that you give us the privilege of being able to meet together today and to look at your word.

And so, Father, I ask that you would use the words that I say, that by your spirit you would touch each of our hearts that we would be changed people, that we would serve you, that we would be people of influence for your gospel's sake, in Jesus' name.

[1 : 07] Amen. Well, I've titled this message Being a Person of Influence. And I'm wondering, is that you? Or is that me?

Do you want to be a person of influence? Do you want to influence how other people think? What their attitudes are? How they act? I looked up who the Times magazine believe the top 100 most influential people are.

Now, you'll be pleased to know that Jesus is number one. Martin Luther comes in at number 17. Albert Einstein is 19. Elvis Presley is down at 69.

And way down the list is John Calvin, who is at 99. Now, the question for you today is, do you want to be a person of influence?

With humility, you might answer that question by saying, no, no, no, my goal is not, that is not my goal in life. My goal isn't to be egocentric.

[2 : 18] It's not about influence. It's about God's influence. I don't want to be influential. I want to be faithful. Which all sounds really quite wonderful.

And it's a great sentiment. But in actual fact, I'm not sure that it's biblical. If you are a parent, I am quite certain that you would wish to be influential towards your children, towards their behaviours, their attitudes, their values.

If you are a boss or a leader of any kind, I'm certain you will be wanting to influence those people under you in a positive way.

If you have siblings, if you have nieces and nephews, if you're a godparent, hopefully you are wanting to influence in the right way. Jesus is the most influential person.

We know that. Even the Times Magazine knows that. And even those who do not even know Jesus or follow Jesus have been influenced by him.

[3 : 33] And Paul, the writer of this letter to the churches in Galatia, is certainly the second most influential person in the history of the church.

Although in the Times list, which of course we're not going to place a lot of credence on it, but in the Times list, Paul comes in at number 39.

But we know better if we're looking at church history. As Christians, we are called to influence for the sake of the gospel and for the grace that is shown in the gospel.

For some time, I actually thought Paul was extremely arrogant. In actual fact, when I first became a Christian, I didn't like anything Paul said.

And I based it all on the verse that he had in 1 Corinthians, where he said, imitate me as I imitate Christ. I couldn't think of a more arrogant thing that somebody could say.

[4 : 39] But I've learnt over the years, thankfully, that the emphasis is about imitating Jesus. Jesus is the one who is doing the influencing here.

Further, in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 11, we see Paul say, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.

Christ. It's all about Jesus. And the Bible says that we are to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, which is just another metaphorical way of speaking about influence.

We are called to be lights so that others will move away from the darkness toward the light of Christ. Now, we're not shining our light so that people will follow us.

If we're making it all about us, then we are being ungodly and we are being sinful. We're letting our light shine, we are letting the light shine through us so that others might know what a great and glorious God that we are serving.

[5 : 55] And if we want to follow, if we want to influence others to follow Christ, we will be greatly encouraged and they too will come to a relationship of Jesus.

Influencing others so that they influence us is not what we're on about. But how do we do that?

Well, back to our passage, Paul founded the churches in Galatia during his missionary travels in Asia Minor. Most of the converts were Gentile pagans.

The Galatians had heard Paul's preaching of Jesus Christ crucified. They had accepted the message with glad hearts. They were baptised and they had experienced dramatic manifestations of the Spirit.

The churches were running really well when Paul had left that area. But time went by and then Paul had heard what was actually happening then, now.

[7 : 05] And at the time of Paul writing this letter, the churches were experiencing trouble. Paul's work was being undermined by a group of converted Jews who were trying to blend the traditions of their Jewish heritage with the Christian gospel.

And to do so, were preaching what Paul calls a different gospel. They tried to convince the Galatian churches that they needed to be circumcised to be full or true Christians.

Now, when Paul heard about this teaching, he immediately sent off this letter to the churches. And in verse 7, we see that Paul believed that the different gospel that they were hearing was in actual fact a perverted gospel.

Pretty strong word. He's shocked that they are turning to a different gospel. And in verse 7 says, which is no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Therefore, he wanted to influence the Galatians toward the gospel of grace. And we too need to become people of influence for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace.

[8 : 29] You might be thinking that you don't wish to be a person of influence at all. But let me say very clearly, as far as the gospel goes, we have to be a person of influence.

And whether we like it or not, we are people of influence. The difference is, we will either be influencing people toward Jesus or we will be influencing people to ignore him and to turn their back on him.

There is no middle road for a Christian. Let me repeat it. It will either be influencing people toward Jesus or we will be influencing people to ignore him or to turn our back on him.

At the end of chapter 1, Paul concludes a defence of his leadership and message in the regions of Syria and Cilicia and Jerusalem by saying, and they praised God because of me.

One of those statements that in years gone by I would have had trouble with. Would you like people to say that of you? Would you like people to say they praised me?

[9 : 51] Would you like them to say that they praised God because of what you did? Paul wasn't saying that they praised me because of what I did. He's saying that they praised God.

This is an enormous responsibility. I want to commend Paul's statement to us here at St. Paul's.

Chatswood wouldn't it be just terrific if the people in Willoughby in Chatswood were to praise God because of what the people at St. Paul's Chatswood did and said and were and are.

Wouldn't that be fantastic? We would be testimony to the gospel of grace and all that God has given us. What did Paul do to lead to this praise of God?

And consequently what must we do to have a similar influence? Because it's all well and good to know that Paul's done this but we need to actually learn from it.

[10 : 58] So first of all we need to seek God's approval over above all else. Listen to Paul's words again from verse 10.

Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were striving to please men I would not be a servant of Christ.

Right away we see the beginning point in becoming a person of influence is grounded in our seeking God's approval rather than man's approval.

This is the great irony. To become a person of influence for Jesus Christ you cannot be motivated by pleasing men and women.

You are being called to have people follow you who aren't necessarily going to be pleased with you. Our base instincts tell us that we must please people if we want to influence them.

[12:05] They must like us. They must agree with us. They must think like us. Politicians preachers and people in all walks of life make this mistake.

Every time you are disappointed by another's reaction or a lack of reaction to what you have said or done I want you to ask yourself this who is in my grandstand?

That is if we are doing good deeds and saying nice things so that we are applauded by people or applauded by a person then they are the ones in our grandstand.

They're the ones we are performing for. If we are serving quietly knowing we are serving the Lord and it is only the Lord who we are wanting to please then it is the Lord who is in our grandstand.

Now don't get me wrong here it is right and proper that we give thanks to people and that people and are given thanks for the things that we have done.

[13:19] The difference is we are not dependent on the thanks from another person to know and to feel whole and secure as a person.

and the reason for that is because we are secure in Christ and his love for us in all that we do and say and be.

It is that freedom in Christ that you have heard me mention in years gone by. Here's the common mistake though. There is a difference between being people of influence and being people who are popular.

Someone can be very, very popular with large masses of people and not exert any influence.

Someone like Paris Hilton is very popular. Maybe not so with this group of people and certainly not with me but she doesn't exert much influence.

The same goes for many television stars, for sports heroes. Yes, they're all well known and yes, the sporting stars might be able to give some very good tips on how to kick that ball or how to hit that bat but do they influence for good in an eternal sense?

[14:43] They may be very popular but they are not influential. Paul had made his commitment to Jesus Christ known in the churches of Galatia.

He was a servant to Christ and that was his baseline priority. Naturally, he wanted to win the Galatians to his point of view. The gospel of grace that he preached didn't need to be supplemented by a legalistic commitment to the Mosaic law.

He preached Christ crucified and Christ as the only hope of salvation. There was nothing else necessary for salvation other than a simple faith in Christ.

In the end, his devotion to the revelation given him increased his influence and today we require no one to be circumcised in order to be a Christian.

But we can fall into a similar trap in the Christian church today of adding to the gospel in a similar way.

[15:51] church. When I first became a Christian, there was a huge movement that said to be truly Christian you must speak in tongues.

That speaking in tongues was the confirmation that you were born again. Now this of course is wrong, we know that now. I personally believe that speaking in tongues is a gift of God's religion. But those who speak in tongues are no more saved, they are no more important, they are no more spiritual than any person who doesn't.

That very strict movement has changed over time and it has nearly disappeared but I still know of one church or maybe you'd call it a denomination Christian that still believe it to be true and so any member of their church has to speak in tongues for them to be truly Christian.

And I would say and I think scripture also says that it is a perverted gospel. But even today there are some more subtle ways that we might like to add to the gospel.

[17:05] Some might question what version of the Bible you use will determine how spiritual you are. I remember a friend of mine many years ago being invited to a church and she took a good

news Bible.

She was told to take a Bible to the church so she took a good news Bible, that version. She wasn't allowed to take it into the church. She had to leave it at the door.

So there are some very odd things happening in our world. But there are things of what sort of Bible we use. Others might think that a true Christian might say set prayers or do church in a particular way and that makes you more spiritual.

Others might think that the ministries that you are involved in makes you more spiritual and confirms that you are truly saved. Now these things in themselves, there's nothing wrong with them. The problem is that if you elevate them and believe that they are essential to you being saved or that you are better than others or that Jesus loves you because you are doing these things, then dare I say you have perverted the gospel of grace.

[18 : 27] And if you want to be a person of lasting influence in your life, your home, your family, your work, your school or university, people will need to see a similar unwavering devotion to Jesus Christ as we see here with Paul.

Even if this means you will be unpopular for a time, in the long run your influence will expand. If people see that you are uncompromising, see your uncompromising devotion to our Lord, that doesn't mean that everybody will necessarily turn and become a Christian, that would be wonderful, but they are more likely to follow the one you call Lord if they see that he truly is your Lord seven days a week and not just at particular times of the week like a Sunday.

Secondly, to be a person of influence we need to understand God's mission for our lives. Now verse 11 says, I want you to know brothers that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.

I did not receive it from any man nor was I taught it, rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. Skipping down to verse 15, but when God who set me apart from birth called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man.

Now Paul here is doing a number of things. He's giving his testimony as to how he came to know Jesus. He's also pointing out that God spoke to him directly through his grace contrary to what those who were teaching a perverted gospel believed.

[20 : 22] They wanted to say that every revelation had come to, every revelation had to come from people in authority like themselves who were saturated in the teachings from Jerusalem.

Apparently in their view the only place where revelation can come from is from Jerusalem. And Paul's testimony is unique. I don't know anyone who has had the same type of conversion as Paul has, although over the years I've heard some pretty amazing transformations in people's lives but not the same as Paul.

But he is also smashing the idea that the gospel of grace is from God alone and does not need additional rituals or behaviours that might come from religious legalists.

Now don't misunderstand what is being said here. We cannot go around declaring whatever we want and say we have a revelation from God alone.

Absolutely everything needs to align with scripture and the gospel of grace. That is, Jesus is the son of God, died and rose from the dead, conquering death and opening the way for us to be forgiven of our sins and to live eternally in relationship with him.

[21 : 45] Paul's revelation from God was from God. He didn't consult the apostles in Jerusalem. He went to Arabia and you might like to ask what is in Arabia?

Well, we don't know really. But we suspect that he spent the three years reading the Hebrew scriptures through the lens of his experience with Jesus Christ and refining his understanding of Christ's revelation to him through the scriptures.

After three years in the desert, he finally went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter. Even then, he only stayed 15 days. And during that time, he met James, the brother of Jesus, but he didn't speak to any other apostles.

Now, why give all of this tedious detail? Well, Paul wants to make a point very clear. Jesus came to him directly and called him to be a missionary to the Gentiles.

No person persuaded him. Remember those who were perverting the gospel that I mentioned earlier on? They believed that any revelation had to come through men like themselves.

[23 : 03] So, Paul is making it very clear that his conversion, his revelation, the mission that he is being given, is direct from God. Part of being a person of influence is determining what your mission in life is.

Now, in our 2020 booklet here, we have, this helps us know our mission. In it, it tells us, in Romans 12, 2, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12, 2 encourages us to be transformed and in so doing, we will know God's will for us. We will be able to discern what is good, what is acceptable and what is perfect. This is our mission. Our mission is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Christ. We can do that in any type of work, any hobby, any career. We can be transformed. Sometimes God will direct us very clearly into a particular mission.

[24 : 27] Other times, our mission may come through trial and error in trying to serve God where you are. But we will never be clear of God leading us if we are half hearted about our commitment to him.

Let me repeat it. We will never be clear of God leading us if we are half hearted about our commitment to him. For many people, the Christian faith is just one of many options for them. They are committed to God unless it gets in the way of making more money or unless there is a better social invitation or a relationship that is not going to be helpful to their walk with God but that is chosen as a priority.

Or there are family engagements that take priority. Or there is sport becomes a priority and when the season is over, then they are back in church.

They are happy to please God as long as God is willing to take a back seat to their personal agenda that they have worked out all on their own.

[25 : 45] They want to find their purpose in life but not if it means if they have to sacrifice or suffer or take some kind of risk. Too often we want the mission of God that he gives us to fit comfortably around our chosen lifestyle.

The truth is we will only see God's purpose for our lives when we are prepared to give ourselves wholly to him. Do you want to be a person of influence?

Then get alone with God and allow him to transform you in every way. Which leads me to the third point. And that is to become a person of influence we must invest the time it takes to establish credibility.

It's not something that happens overnight. It takes time. In verse 18 we see that Paul spent three years in Arabia and Damascus preparing for his life's work and in the beginning of chapter 2 we see Paul waited another 14 years before going to see the leaders of Jerusalem.

He spent 17 years preparing for the work that God had called him to do. He didn't spend the 17 years doing nothing I might add. He was preaching the whole time.

[27 : 14] But it took that long before he received the full endorsement from the church leaders in Jerusalem. I find that absolutely staggering.

In other words Paul's message and ministry were not based on a short term whim. He stood the test of time and he proved that he was in it for the long haul.

Are you in it for the long haul? Paul. Now we are not Paul. We most probably, I'm you know sort of a prophetic word here, not going to be asked to go to Arabia for three years.

I feel that I'm fairly safe on saying that. But we can make some plans for the future under God to set ourself goals for our devotion time with God.

Maybe have a goal of a specific reading plan, specific Christian books that are going to feed our soul so that we grow spiritually.

[28 : 19] Maybe we need to address our attendance at church and be more regular in 2014, 2015 and so on. Maybe it's about our community group and the commitment that we have to our community group.

We need to grow in confidence in sharing Jesus with those around us, with our friends and our family. That indeed in our conversation we can share Jesus in such a non-threatening way that it is normal and it's not freaky that we are a follower of Jesus.

And right here and without shame I will just say to help you do that, just walk across the room starts next week at 3.30.

I would love to see many of you at it. This is a simple course that will help you in those conversations that you have with friends and family about Jesus, how to start those conversations. We need to learn and to take opportunity to learn to be these people of influence.

[29 : 38] We can put all opportunities for your growth in front of you but in the end you actually have to take them up. So the Apostle Paul was the last person any Christian would expect to exercise leadership in the early church.

Remember he was a zealous persecutor of Christians before God called him. The impact that he spent the rest of his life faithful to Jesus and committed to carrying out the mission set before him. He invested time and energy. You may not have a call to be a missionary or a preacher but God wants you to be a person of influence for someone, somewhere.

It might be your children. It might be your grandchildren. It might be a neighbour, a co-worker, another person in this church, a family member, a fellow student.

It might be a young person needing a role model. It might be someone that you have not yet met. God is preparing you to be a person of influence.

[30 : 50] If you will put him first in your life and seek only his approval, discover and commit to the mission of being transformed and invest yourself daily in growing in your relationship with Jesus.

Perhaps it might take years, it might take decades, but you will exert influence for which you have been called.

It won't happen today. It won't happen overnight. But it will happen. But it takes a long time.

Remember, it is all about Jesus.

That's who we live for. That's who we influence for. Amen.