

*"Sir, we wish to see Jesus" — John 12:21*

## Influence

by Charles Durham, Jr.

There is an old adage which says, "Actions speak louder than words." And that is the truth. We call it "influence." The power one possesses to sway other people along certain courses of action because of his wealth, position, or ability. Influence, either for good or evil, follows in the wake of one's actions and not of what one says he will do or not do. One of the first places I fully came to be aware of this power was in the parent-child relationship. I would see parents warning their children not to smoke. In between their admonitions that smoking caused halitosis, hacking coughs, and lung cancer would be a puff from a cigarette and this feeble rebuke, "Now, don't do as I do but do as I tell you to do." Given man's propensity toward evil, I knew how far that advice went for the betterment of mankind.

What makes influence such a powerful tool is the fact that each of us possess it. There are people who watch us, who admire something about us, who imitate our actions. If put to its proper use, influence can be a great means of leading someone to obey Christ. Listen to Jesus, "For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Jesus spoke of actions. Paul wrote, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). His apostle wrote of deeds. Peter said, "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). To follow anyone's footsteps, we must walk. The word "example" as used by Peter literally means "an under-writing." It refers to teaching children the alphabet. A copy of the letters of the alphabet would be distributed to each child. They would write underneath the example of the letter as it should be drawn, trying to reproduce it as closely as possible. We must pattern our lives after Jesus. We must do our best to live as he lived, "to be holy as He is holy." Thus, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Influence begins with the heart. Only as we keep the seat of our intellect, emotions, and will unmixed with evil, can we expect to wield the silent power of influence for good. Solomon wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; For out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). In the ASV, "with all diligence" is footnoted "above all that thou guardest." We must see the necessity of keeping our heart right with God. We must see the danger in letting our thoughts aimlessly wander from sin to sin, of toying with its pleasures in our mind, of calculating our pursuit of it. We must heed the Lord, who was tempted like we are tempted, yet without sin, for He said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mk. 7:21-23).

Influence is the result of doing good. If influence is sought for its own sake, then it is a matter of selfish pride and not an attempt to glorify God. The Pharisees were guilty of seeking their own glory above the glory of the Father. They loved to spread their influence for the sake of spreading their influence (cf. Matt. 6:1-5). Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth... Ye are the light of the world... so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:13, 14, 16). The reason we do good works and influence others to do good works is not "to be seen of men." Rather, that being seen, others may understand that we serve God to glo-

### Wear Masks

Today's

### Schedule

### The Lord's Day

**8:00 - Assembly**

Parking lot - Canopy

**9:15 - Assembly**

Parking lot - Canopy

**10:30 - Assembly**

Parking lot - Canopy

rify Him. We are the light of the world. We must penetrate the evil world and show forth the excellencies of Christ as surely as the light of a burning star pierces the darkness of night. We must preserve from corruption by giving life to people who are spiritually dying as surely as salt gives protection to meat that would decay and become rancid without it (cf. Phil. 2:15, 16).

And above all things we must be steadfast, unmovable, constant in our endeavor to serve God. We cannot fellowship evil and expect our influence to be good. We must not fraternize the enemy. Our teachings and deeds must be consistent. Surely we can see this in the life of Jesus. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30 KJV).

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## Obstacles To Our Growth

by Jason Moore

The growth of the Christian's character is essential to acceptable service. "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). The disciple is either in a state of growth or decline. There is no in-between. The difference between growing and declining is the will of the Christian. Physical growth is not entirely up to you. Spiritual growth is. The desire to be taller does not make it so. But the desire to increase your spiritual stature can be fulfilled no matter your age, your medical record, or your family history. That's why it can be commanded. Hear the passage again, "long... that by it you may grow." Growth is a matter of choice. Your choice. Observe then the obstacles to growth that you must choose to remove if growth is to be realized.

**Busyness.** Over commitment to worldly aims at the expense of spiritual pursuits is the bane of the modern Christian. The devil need not involve you in wicked things to stunt your growth. He need only to fill your plate with a little of this-and-that so that you never have room for things of substance. Children spoil their appetites with cakes and snacks and in-between meals. You ruin your appetite for the word of God and for spiritual activity when you don't save room for the Lord's things. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is the motivation of the growing Christian with the Lord's promise of fulfillment

(Matthew 5:6). That incentive is missing in the heart of the Christian who is too busy.

**Hypocrisy.** Secret sin is a cancer. It's presence is not readily apparent, but it's there nonetheless—growing. From the outside, a man may seem sound and godly, but inside he is "full of dead man's bones" (Matthew 23:27). Hypocrisy is a cancer of the heart. It eats at your character from the inside out, so that you fall before anybody diagnoses your problem. Nobody sees it coming. You appear to leave the faith all at once when, in reality, you died long ago. Hypocrisy destroys the core of your character, and renders the entirety of your life and religion a mere shell. The hypocrite is a walking corpse, a living tomb. There can be no growth when you nurture secret sin. It will eat you alive. You will look to be growing, when in fact you're dying. Be sure of one thing—"your sins will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

**Performance.** Mistaking public performance for growth is a subtle and far too common variety of hypocrisy. Preachers beware. A man can suppose that as goes his preaching, so goes his spirituality. Not so. All of Nineveh repented at the preaching Jonah (3:5), while the prophet himself was eaten up with bitterness (4:1). Teachers beware. "Thou that teachest another, teachest not thyself" (Romans 2:21)? Don't mistake your skills and successes in distributing and illustrating the word of God, as the end of your service. "Be ye doers of the word" (James 1:22) and not teachers only who delude themselves. Worshipers beware. The Pharisees led fine public prayers and wore their best "Sunday dress" but neglected mercy and holiness (Luke 20:47). You can suppose that occupying a pew or even participating in the public assembly is sufficient exercise for spiritual growth. It's an exercise in futility, if day-to-day righteousness, week-in and week-out cross-bearing, and seventy-times-seven forgiveness are not habits of character for you.

Watch out for these enemies to your growth. There are others. But these, particularly, are common and doubly dangerous because of their familiarity. What you do about them is up to you, because growth is a choice. Your choice. Nobody can do it for you. Nobody will. It's up to you. "Choose you this day...." You can either stray where you are, or you can grow.



Read your Bible daily