

# West Side Fellowship

## Who is my influencer?

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*Ephesians 5v1-2*

If ever there was a New Years resolution for the believer, this scripture should be it. A renewed vision to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Sadly there should not be a need for this kind of resolution, for it should already be our central goal in life, yet as we all know things influence us and cause us to go astray and drift back to our old ways. Sometimes even our idea of following Christ is drawn astray by following a different type of Christ, a Christ we have made in our own image. We read in *1 Corinthians 1v18-25* Paul tells the church of the gospel we are to preach and the core of that message is found in *1 Corinthians 1v23* "We preach Christ crucified."

Now as Christians we would immediately say our "Amen" to that statement and yet not comprehend what it actually means in practise. For the life and death of Christ is summed up in the following few verses that tell us so much about the lifestyle of Christ crucified:

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!*

*Philippians 2v6-8*

So often we think of Christ crucified as just the final moments of Jesus life on the cross, but the life of "Christ crucified" includes the whole of the life of Christ, from decisions made before the beginning of time through his coming into the world and his daily walk from birth to death. It is only as we contemplate on what that meant, not just a following of the rules, but a daily walk in obedience to the daily instruction from the Father himself. On a moment by moment basis, sacrificing his own personal desires and goals in submission to the will of the Father. As I think on these things it only makes me more in awe of just who Christ was and what he did for me. It is a life that was led with a single influencer, the Father himself.

As we read those verses in *Philippians 2* we realise why Paul says in *1 Corinthians 1v18* that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing..." For to live a Christ like life goes against all the influences this world puts before us and as those influences come upon us we don't realise but we slowly change our view of what the Christian life is all about.

If we think about the life of Christ, it was a servant life, a life of humility. Jesus did not raise himself up, but instead made himself nothing, the idea of being nothing does not sit well with us and yet crucially when it talks of Jesus it tells us:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:  
Philippians 2v5*

The life of Jesus is not something to be watched and admired at a distance, it is to be something that we live on a daily basis to bring glory to the Father in thankfulness for the grace and mercy we have received, but more than that, it is our attitude of love towards the Father. It is not about trying to pay back some of the debt we owe, it is about wanting the same love relationship with the Father as Jesus had.

When people read *Ephesians 6v10-12* there is often an image of trying to fight against demons and claiming dominion over locations and worldly forces, a conquering of territory for the Lord and yet we miss the fact that the battle is for our hearts and who will reign. Whose will are we submitting to, the will and way of the Father or the will and way of the forces of darkness. Whose influence guides the way we live?

Of course in our pride we claim to be followers of Christ as he is our influencer. Well if that was true we would all be living sacrificial lives and imitating the life of Christ, the type of life Paul was talking about in *Galatians 2v20*. A life that was given over just as Jesus said when he told us that to be his disciples we need to pick up our crosses daily and follow Him (*Luke 9v23*). The truth is that far too often our influencer is not Christ but the ways of this world, it's just that we don't see them for what they are because not only have they become normal, but they have an appeal to the uncrucified flesh.

The first thing we need to understand about influencers of this world is that they do not come across as evil. Think about going into a shop, you look around and an assistant approaches you. The assistant's job is not to assist you, their job is to influence you into making a purchase. They will tell you how the product will benefit you and how it is superior to what you had before. A really good sales assistant is one who can work out your inner desire and find the item that will fill that need. As they carefully influence you, your need and desire for that item grows, for in it you now see satisfaction. In all this the assistant is always polite and seems to be on your side, for you buy from those you like. If the assistant is rude the chances of you buying from them are pretty remote and this is important to understand about all influencers, they will project an attitude of wanting the best for you when actually it is about the best for them. As we are told, these false influencers can seem so nice that they appear like an angel of light (*2 Corinthians 11v13-15*), in other words they appear to be on our side yet have ulterior motives.

Let's take a look at the first great influencer, Satan himself in the Garden of Eden. Satan did not appear to Adam and Eve with a burning pitchfork, venting anger, profanities and rebellion against God. Instead he appeared as someone of beauty, full of knowledge and wisdom of the ways of God and the world (*Genesis 3v1, Ezekiel 28v12-14*). This wisdom and beauty gave him an air of success and power before Adam and Eve, here before them was someone who had a self confidence and inner strength and not only that, was willing to help them to attain the same. He starts out by quoting the words of God himself, but as we read through the account of *Genesis 3v1-6* we see that his sales technique, his method of influence, was to show what they lacked in following God's ways and to offer them a better way through his. Through his influence the ways of Satan became the desires of Adam and Eve's hearts (*Genesis 3v6*) and although from the outside it all looked like the great "special offer"; only when they had bought into the ways of Satan, the ways of the world, did the true cost of the purchase become clear, spiritual death. However, more than that, they became servants of their new influencer for something that is often not understood is that the

influencer is using you to meet their needs, which is usually their need to be recognised and lifted up. In other words being an influencer builds up their ego in the sight of man, put simply, it builds up their pride.

It is why we need to constantly watch out for pride in our lives, the desire to be desired and noticed. It was the downfall of Satan (*Ezekiel 28v17*) and quickly becomes our downfall (*James 4v6*), for pride requires acknowledgement from others. We want others to constantly recognise how good we are in certain areas, both in the ways of the world and even in spiritual things for our self esteem comes to rely on how we are seen by others rather than the Lord. In our modern society with social media, this has been taken to new levels. With each post on Facebook or Twitter our self esteem becomes based on the number of likes and comments or the number of followers we have. The danger here is that just like Satan we try to raise ourselves up so that others will follow us, we are looking for our needs to be met by recognition from man, rather than the Lord (*1 John 2v15-16*). We will tell them what they want to hear, often because it is what we wanted to hear, yet we are no longer following the ways of humility, the ways of Christ crucified, we have become ear ticklers, puffed up and puffing others up, teaching and encouraging them to be lovers of themselves (*2 Timothy 3v1-8*). Please note that the scripture in *2 Timothy 3v1-8* is written about those in the church. The great danger with pride and self confidence is that it is always someone else that has the issue; in our pride we refuse to see the finger of God pointing at us as we see ourselves as the influencer rather than the influenced.

Even as believers it is so easy for us to be influenced by those we perceive to be successful, powerful and self confident. When we look at others ministries we are so easily influenced in a worldly way, measuring by the worlds standards instead of the Lords or being led by those who say what we have a desire to hear or trying to follow their pattern of perceived success rather than seeking the Lord for His plan for our lives. We need to understand that all of us can be deceived and in turn deceive others (*2 Timothy 3v13*). When it talks of these deceivers as being evil, it does not mean they have set out in a deliberate way to mislead any more than Adam and Eve understood the consequences of their sin. Sin is evil before God, not just the breaking of the rules, but the act of rebellion against God, the act of seeking a different influencer rather than the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

To ensure we are going the right way, we need to make sure that our chief influencer is God himself and that our example of godly living is Christ himself. We are told to keep our eyes and our thoughts fixed on Jesus (*Hebrews 3v1, Hebrews 12v2*), to make God our influencer. Let us look again at who we are truly following, who do we seek first? Do we look for the answer in a message from another or do we seek to be influenced by God himself? Do we seek the truth found in a book or is it taught by waiting for revelation from God? The truth is seen in our actions, for the one we go to is our influencer.

If we want the Lord to be our influencer, we need to be those who will humbly sit at his feet and wait on his call and instruction. There are no short cuts, that is the influence of the ways of this world. Satan always offers shortcuts to godliness that avoid spending time in the presence of the Lord. He did it with Adam and Eve and he did the same with Jesus in the wilderness (*Matthew 4v1-10*) and he continues to do the same to us (*1 Peter 5v8*). The noisy, the visible, the one who looks successful offers us the same, if only you will follow his ways, the pattern of this world.

The greatest influencers in our lives are those we spend the most time with, those we follow and look up to; those we seek out first in times of trouble. Sadly in the church we only have to look at

our prayer lives to realise how little influence the Lord has on us, for even when we pray we do not sit at His feet, but rather lecture Him on what needs to be changed in the world based on our own wisdom and knowledge of how we see that things need to be done, not realising that in our pride we think we have become more knowledgeable than God himself. How we need to wake up, to recognise the depths to which we have fallen. Let us not worry about how we will look before man, but let us humble ourselves out of concern for how we look before the Father.

Jesus said he would build "his" church (Matthew 16v18) and that is the church he will return for. It is a church that follows after Christ crucified. It is a humble servant church that sits at the feet of the master. Many wonder when the Lord will return or how that return can be speeded up. Let us think on the words of Peter:

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*  
*2 Peter 3v9*

Again words that are written to the church not to the world. What is it we need to repent of? Our rebellion, our pride, our worldly attitudes and assumptions. Our rebellion against the ways of the cross and most of all our rebellion against the Father himself. Our casting aside of his influence by not seeking him as we should and instead taking up the enemies offer of a short cut and wanting a godliness without God. We may see ourselves as important in church, a leader an influencer, but what direction are we influencing people in?

*Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*  
*Matthew 7v22-23*

A final thought on influencers and the dangers they pose to us can be seen as we look through the history of the world and the church. For as we look back through history we see how the best influencers have been able to distort peoples views until what they knew to be wrong is now seen as right and that the influencer, the one they follow is perfect in all he says. If we look back to the 1930's the best influencer in the world was Hitler, a man who said what the people wanted to hear and who became so idolised that his word could not be questioned. Going back further in time if we look at the crusades and how religious leaders influenced kings who in turn went out and committed huge atrocities in the name of the Lord we see how dangerous influencers can be. Similar things have happened within the modern church, leaders with such power that even when they go astray no one dare speak or challenge and the truth is covered over. Even now as we look at some of the scenes coming out of America we see how one man's word and views is taken as truth without question. It is important to understand that in these various examples people welcomed the influencer into their lives as they saw him as the one with the answers and this included and includes Christians.

As we look through scripture and read about the anti Christ, let us understand that he will be an influencer, one who will appear to have the answers and one that mankind will welcome without question, even if in practice his answers are totally against the ways of God. These kind of people will not be discerned through the intellect, for they will appeal to our worldly knowledge that will acknowledge his ways as making sense, they will only be discerned by following the instruction Jesus gave to his disciples.

*“Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”*

*Luke 22v46*

Time with the Lord, Godly revelation and instruction that leads to a walk of obedience is our ultimate weapon against the influence of the evil one and the way to defeating him in every area of our life. Only if we can see past our pride and look again at the life of Christ crucified will we find our way back onto the right course.

*Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

*James 4v7-10*