

Critical Characteristics of a Christian Influencer (Part 3)

Introduction

The Text

- A. This is now our third week looking at Paul's farewell address delivered to the elders, the official leaders, of the local church there in Ephesus—a prominent city in what is today Asia Minor. Paul is wrapping up his third missionary journey and heading towards Jerusalem. And he knows he's not going to be coming back again. So he's got a lot of important things to say.
1. A few weeks ago we read the entirety of this address, which spans from [v. 18](#) all the way down to the end of the chapter (esp. [v. 35](#)).
 2. This morning, we're just going to read those verses which we shall be particularly focusing upon in our time together ([vv. 28-32](#)) . . .

²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32)

Critical Characteristics of a Christian Influencer

- A. Now, if you haven't been with us for parts 1 and 2 of these sermons, we're talking about what it looks like to influence others for Jesus.
1. As elders in a local church, these guys in our text had more formal positions of influence.
 2. But every Christian is called to influence others for Jesus in one way or another—whether inside the church or outside it. We're all called to be "Christian influencers" in that sense.
- B. And in this farewell address by Paul here to the Ephesian elders, we're given, I think, what I've been calling the "Critical Characteristics of a Christian Influencer." If you want to influence others for Jesus, and I know you do, this is what you've got to be like.
1. We've seen nine of these characteristics to this point. I'll rattle them off for you quickly now: (1) They Make Time for People; (2) They Lead with Their Lives; (3) They Serve the Lord (Alone!); (4) They Come in Humility and Weakness; (5) They Share the Hard Truth; (6) They Do It All in Love; (7) They Get Alone with God; (8) They Answer with Abandon; and (9) They Treasure Jesus Over Everything.

- C. This morning, for the sake of time, because we have a number of folks getting baptized later in our service, I can really only add one more to the list: (10) They Watch Themselves.
 - 1. With regard to this tenth characteristic I want to organize my thoughts under three headings: (1) That We Should Do It; (2) Why We Should Do It; and (3) How We Should Do It. So let's go!

(1) That We Should Do It

The Self-Watch

- A. For this, I just want to make sure we see what's being asked of these elders here—and, by extension, what's being asked of us in a more general sense, if we want to be influencing others for Jesus.
- B. Look at what Paul says there in the first part of [v. 28](#): “Pay careful attention to yourselves . . .” Stay alert. Be on your guard. Watch yourselves.
- C. Now, to be clear, there are plenty of people these days concerned for themselves, paying attention to themselves, watching themselves . . . but not in the manner in which Paul is calling us to here.
 - 1. He's not talking about “selfie culture”—“I just want to watch myself. And I want others to watch me too. Here's me out dinner. Here's me at the gym. Here's me on the beach. Here's me . . . here's me . . . here's me!” That's not what he's talking about.
 - 2. He's talking about watching yourself with concern for your own spiritual vitality and health.
- D. In a way, the principle being established here is analogous to that which we are confronted with every time we get on an airplane. You remember what the flight attendants always say as they're going through their little speech about safety and things before the plane takes off: “In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling. It is important that you first secure your own mask—placing it over your nose and mouth and tightening the straps—before assisting children or others.” First get the mask on yourself, then get it on others. That's the principle. We get it.
 - 1. If I'm not breathing, I'm not going to be any good to anyone else.
 - 2. If I'm suffocating myself, I can't serve you.
 - 3. I've got to first pay careful attention to myself and then I can pay careful attention to you.
 - a. It's that way in the physical dimension. So it is in the spiritual dimension as well.
- E. This is the same sort of thing Paul is getting at later when he writes to Timothy in [1 Tim. 4:16](#): “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching [your life and your doctrine (NIV)]. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Did you catch that?
 - 1. The call isn't: focus on yourself merely for yourself.
 - 2. The call is: focus on yourself ultimately for others.

- a. If your life or your doctrine go off the rails, it's not just you who will be affected, but everyone else in your sphere of influence, however big or small.
- b. If you are twisting the truth of the gospel, if you are living in sin, if you are spiritually unhealthy, if you're not taking in oxygen, it will affect the people around you adversely.
 - i. So "Keep a close watch on yourself . . ."
 - ii. "Pay careful attention to yourselves . . ."

The Collective-Watch

- A. But there is something else here in v. 28 I wanted to bring out real quick. You see, the original Greek verb and the pronoun here, they're both plural. To translate it literally: "[You all] pay careful attention to yourselves . . ."
- 1. Certainly, as we've seen, I think this involves each of these leaders tending to their own souls, keeping watch on their own lives.
- 2. But I do think it also implies there is a sort of collective-watch as well.
 - a. In other words: Keep an eye on yourself, sure. But also keep an eye on each other, as leaders, as friends, as followers of Jesus.
- B. That's what you need if you're going to be a Christian influencer. But why? . . .

(2) Why We Should Do It

- A. Why do we need to do this? Why is Paul calling for such a thing as he's leaving the elders here in our text? Why do we need to keep an eye on ourselves and on each other?
 - 1. Well, I'll show you first what's here in the immediate context,
 - 2. and then I'd like to consider it in light of the broader context of the Bible.

The Immediate Context

- A. With regard to the immediate context, Paul gives these guys his reasons as to why they must "Pay careful attention to [themselves] . . ." Did you notice? He gives two reasons in particular . . .

Reason #1: The Threat from Outside

- A. Look at v. 29: "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock . . ."
- 1. Here he's just continuing to develop that pastoral imagery—where the church members are the sheep, the leaders are the shepherds, and then he says there are guys who are going to come in and they're going to be wolves.
 - a. They're not looking to feed the sheep.
 - b. They're looking to feed on the sheep.

B. Perhaps you've seen this play out in churches. Sadly, it's all too common.

1. Guys twisting truth. Guys tickling ears. Guys coming in, not to serve you or care for you, but to fleece you "in the name of Jesus."

Reason #2: The Threat from Inside

A. It gets even more concerning as we continue on with Paul here. In v. 30 he transitions from the threat from outside to that from within. And here see it's not just from within the church in general, it's from within this group in particular—these elders, these leaders.

1. Look at what he says: "²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."
2. He's saying: "Listen, be careful, be on your guard, pay close attention to yourselves, why?"
 - a. Because the wolves are out there. Yes.
 - b. And . . . because you could be one of them!"
 - i. These guys who are supposed to be the shepherds are some of them going to be the wolves.
3. That must have shaken things up in the room a bit, when they really let that land on them.
 - a. "This is supposed to be a nice, heartfelt goodbye Paul, why do you have to go and say that?"
 - b. Because it's true . . .

B. Later on, when he's writing to Timothy, who was a pastor there in Ephesus, he's going to some of these guys that have turned away since this conversation in [Acts 20](#).

1. So in [1 Tim. 1:19-20](#), he talks about Hymenaeus and Alexander who strayed from the gospel and "made shipwreck of their faith . . ."
2. In [2 Tim. 2](#), he mentions Philetus alongside Hymenaeus, saying they "have swerved from the truth" and "[t]hey are upsetting the faith of some" (v. 18).
3. Even Jesus himself attests to this sort of thing in his address to the church in Ephesus there in [Rev. 2](#): "¹To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: . . . ²I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. . . . ⁴But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first [or to translate it another way: 'you have forsaken your first love']" (vv. 1-2, 4).
 - a. I can attest, your doctrine is spot on. But your heart is hard.
 - b. You can sniff out false teachers with the best of them. But you have lost your love for me and for others.

- C. Some will twist their doctrine, others will harden their hearts. So we all have to keep watch on ourselves and on each other. The threat is out there, but it's also in here.

The Broader Context

- A. I want to bring in some things from the broader context of the whole Bible now. I just want to sum up what the Scriptures teach on this point, make sure it's really clear.
 - 1. There are these three layers of deception at work and they can really keep us from the truth and from God.
 - 2. And we've got to beware of them, keep a lookout for them in our own lives . . .

Layer #1: The Heart Is Deceptive

- A. This is what God is getting at in [Jer. 17:9](#), when he says: [“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”](#)
- B. It's amazing how we can convince ourselves we're all good, when we're not.
 - 1. We don't get what's really going on in our hearts, and we don't want to know.
 - 2. We always have an excuse, a way of justifying our actions.
 - 3. We have stories we tell ourselves that make our sin seem reasonable to us.
 - a. And we spin and weave these stories like a veil over our eyes, and it blinds us from really seeing things as they truly are, seeing ourselves as we truly are.
- C. I think of David as the prime example of this.
 - 1. I don't know what story David told himself to feel like he was justified in sleeping with Bathsheba and setting her husband up to get killed. But somehow he didn't see it.
 - 2. It wasn't until Nathan the prophet comes in and tears that veil right down the middle.
 - 3. But he does it in such a brilliant way. Do you remember? He first tells David a parable about this rich guy who has flocks of his own sheep and yet still he decides to steal this poor man's only little lamb.
 - 4. And David is outraged at this. He can see that this sort of thing is wrong when someone else is doing it. But he can't see it in himself. Because he's been weaving these stories around his eyes. Because the heart is deceptive. We hide ourselves from ourselves.
 - 5. But then Nathan turns on him in that moment: [“You are the man!” \(2 Sam. 12:7\)](#). And the veil is torn, and David sees!
- D. Jesus isn't just being cute in the Sermon on the Mount when he says: [“\[H\]ow can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ \[when\] behold, \[there is a log\] in your own eye?” \(Matt. 7:4\)](#).
 - 1. It sounds funny, but it's not funny. He's getting at this: the human heart is deceptive. We see sin in everyone else but ourselves.

- E. I've been slowly reading through the Bible with my kids, and we came to [Luke 5](#) the other night, where Jesus is hanging with the tax collectors and sinners and other low-lives, and the religious leaders are scoffing at him for it. But he says: "³¹ [It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.](#) ³² [I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance](#)" (vv. 31-32). Do you get what he's saying?
1. He's not saying: "Pharisees, you guys are well, and righteous, and these guys are not."
 2. He's saying: "All are sick and sinners, but only some see it. And I'm here to help those who are starting to get it."
- F. There's this irony situated at the center of the Christian faith:
1. Those who think they are healthy in themselves are truly sick (their hearts are all off).
 2. And those who finally admit they are sick and need a Savior are starting to get truly healthy.
 - a. The heart is deceptive. Watch yourselves!

Layer #2: Sin Is Deceptive

- A. This is similar to the first, but it adds another layer to it. Because now we're not just talking about your nature, we're talking about sin's nature; we're not just talking about your heart, we're talking about the things that attract your heart.
1. And here's what you've got to know about sin: it sounds good, looks good, feels good . . . while it's messing you up. That's the real danger with sin, you don't see it as bad, at least not immediately.
- B. Why did Eve reach for the fruit? Answer: because it looked good: "[So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate . . .](#)" (Gen. 3:6).
1. Listen, if the thing was all rotten, nasty, had worms burrowing into it, flies buzzing around it, you wouldn't be going after it.
 2. But it looks good, it tastes good . . . until it doesn't.
- C. Every addict can tell you this same story can't they?
1. Nothing like that first hit. Nothing like that first high. Nothing like that first buzz.
 2. But, after a while, you're not even doing it for the high anymore, are you? You're doing it because you're a slave to the substance, and it has you in its claws.
 - a. Drugs, booze, that's just a more red-letter form of addiction.
 - b. All idolatry plays out that way.
 - i. It starts with a rush and ends in a gutter.

D. This is why the author of Hebrews talks explicitly about “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Sin is deceptive.

1. It pleases you, as it pierces you.
2. It delights you, as it destroys you.
3. It kisses you, as it kills you.

a. Watch yourselves!

Layer #3: Satan Is Deceptive

A. This third reason adds yet another layer to all this. My heart is deceptive. Sin is deceptive. And, beyond even that, Satan is deceptive.

B. You remember what Paul says in 2 Cor. 11:14: “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

1. He doesn’t come with horns and a pitchfork. You wouldn’t follow him if he looked nasty.
2. He looks pretty. Even though he’s evil, he looks good.
3. And that means he’s going to work with half-truths rather than whole lies; with half-goods rather than whole evils; with Trojan Horses rather than battering rams.

a. There are two ways you can get into the city. You can pretend to give a gift and gut the place out from the inside. Or you can try to break the walls down.

i. Satan likes to roll with the former. We let him in without even realizing it.

C. I’ve been reading in 1 and 2 Timothy for my devotions lately, and there’s this text in 1 Tim. 4 that is just crazy when you really stop and see it. Paul says this: “¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared . . .” (vv. 1-2).

1. Now, you stop there, and you think: I can imagine what these “teachings of demons” might be. It’s going to lead you into things like Satan worship, or the occult, or sexual promiscuity, or hard drugs and drink. That’s what we think.
2. You know what Paul says these doctrines of demons actually entailed? They “forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods . . .” (v. 3).

a. In other words, legalism. Self-righteousness.

b. It wasn’t characterized by indulgence, but by restraint.

i. You look at it on the outside and think these people are hardcore for God.

ii. But they’re drifting from the gospel, from the cross. Their confidence before God is in their own righteousness, not Christ’s.

(1) And hear me: however clean that looks on the outside, that is as demonic as it gets.

- D. Notice: it wasn't the tax collectors and sinners that Jesus called out as "Sons of the Devil"—it was the ultra-religious, self-righteous Jews ([John 8:44](#)).
 - 1. Because they came looking like an angel of light, but inside they were all bent up and crooked—impressed with themselves and their apparent "holiness," not with God and his grace.
- E. So, again, in light of all of this—the threats from outside and from inside; the layers of deception with the heart, with sin, and with Satan—we've got to watch ourselves.
 - 1. If we want to be any good to anyone else, we have to watch ourselves.
 - 2. If we want to influence people for Jesus, we've got to watch ourselves.
 - a. So how do we do it? . . .

(3) How We Should Do It [1.5pp.]

Three Quick Suggestions

A. I obviously can't give us everything I wish I could here, but I can offer up three quick suggestions . . .

Suggestion #1: Get in the Word

- A. This is precisely what Paul tells Timothy in light of what he's dealing with there in Ephesus: "¹³ [E]vil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:13-15).
 - 1. Get in Scripture. Stay in Scripture. Do it on Sundays with the church at large. Do it in your small groups during the week. Do it in your private devotions every day. Get in the Word!
- B. But let's be clear, when it comes to watching yourself, there's more to this than just reading your Bible—getting good theology and all that. That's important but it's not sufficient.
 - 1. Remember, Paul says: watch your doctrine and your life.
 - 2. We need to make sure not just: Do I know the truth?; but: Is my life truly in line with it?
 - a. I would put it like this: Don't just get in God's Word, let God's Word get in you.
 - b. Don't just read your Bible, let your Bible read you.
 - i. Do you know what I mean?
- C. This is what Paul is warning us about in [2 Tim. 3:7](#) when says you don't want to be one of those guys or gals who is "[always learning \[but\] never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.](#)"
 - 1. You know a lot of Bible, but you don't know the Bible. You know the gospel, but you don't know the gospel. It hasn't sunk in. It hasn't changed you from the inside out.

D. Remember . . .

1. Jesus says the Word of God is like a seed implanted that should take root in your heart and bear fruit up in the branches of your life. It should get in and change you ([Luke 8:11-15](#)).
2. James says the Word of God is like a mirror revealing things about ourselves and we must respond appropriately—["be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving \[ourselves\]" \(James 1:22; cf. v. 23\)](#).
3. The author of Hebrews says it's like a two-edged sword, ["piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" \(Heb. 4:12\)](#).
 - a. Get in God's Word and let God's Word get in you.
 - b. Read your Bible and let your Bible read you!

E. But, of course, as we've seen, that's not enough. Left to ourselves, we can get twisted up. So we need . . .

Suggestion #2: Run with Others

- A. This just circles back to what I said at the beginning about the plural verb and pronoun: ["\[You all\] pay careful attention to yourselves . . ." \(v. 28\)](#). The self-watch is a group project.
- B. I referenced [Heb. 3:13](#), a moment ago, let me read to you that in context now and notice the call on the community: ["¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" \(vv. 12-13\)](#).
 1. You noticed it, right? In light of the deceitfulness of sin and things, we need others keeping an eye on us, loving us enough to talk with us when we're getting off.
 - a. I don't just need to read my Bible and let my Bible read me. Although that's true.
 - b. I also need you to get in on the action. And I've got to get in on the action for you. We need each other.
- C. I still remember this illustration CJ Mahaney shared in a sermon some 20 years ago now. He was preaching on [1 Tim. 4:16](#) and he relayed this story to make the point that we need each other if we're going to see ourselves and our Savior rightly. It seems kind of silly on the surface—maybe that's why I remember it. But he's diving into some real deep water here: ["As I sat with my family at a local breakfast establishment, I noticed a finely dressed man at an adjacent table. His Armani suit and stiffly pressed shirt coordinated perfectly with a "power" tie. His wing-tipped shoes sparkled from a recent shine. Every hair was in place, including his perfectly groomed mustache. The man sat alone, eating a bagel, as he prepared for a meeting. As he reviewed the papers before him, he appeared nervous, glancing frequently at his Rolex watch. It was obvious he had an important meeting ahead. The man stood up, and I watched as he straightened his tie and prepared to leave. Immediately, I noticed a blob of cream cheese attached to his finely groomed mustache. He was about to go into the world, dressed in his finest, with cream cheese on his face. I thought of the business meeting he was about to attend. Who would tell him? Should I? What if no one did?"](#)

After reading this, he then he turned to those in attendance and said: “Everyone here has cream cheese somewhere on your face . . . and you don’t see it!”

1. It’s on my face, it’s on your face.

- a. Do you have anyone in your life that will love you enough to tell you about it?
- b. And if they do tell you about it, will you be humble and wise enough to receive it?

i. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice” (Prov. 12:15).

D. In light of all I was seeing here, I sat with some guys in my DNA Group just this last week and I said: “Listen, if you see concerning stuff in my life, I don’t care if I’m the ‘pastor’ and you feel like it would be disrespectful or awkward or something, please love me enough to tell me about it.” Is that going to be fun stuff for me to hear about? No. But it’s so important.

- 1. Do you have people you’re running with like that?
- 2. Get in a Home Group. Get in a DNA Group. Or just grab someone after the service and say: “Listen, let’s meet up and start watching our lives and doctrine together.”

E. We’re going to celebrate some baptisms in just a little bit. I wonder if you realize: this is one of the truths baptism is meant to impress on us—that we need each other!

- 1. Have you ever noticed that you can’t baptize yourself? Someone else has to do it for you, do it to you. Why?

Well, there’s at least a couple reasons:

- a. One, because it’s a picture of your salvation. And you can’t save yourself. You bring nothing to this equation but your sin. The only action required of you is that you fall into his arms.
- b. But then second, it’s because when you come to a saving relationship with Jesus, you come into the family of God. You don’t do this alone, because you can’t do this alone. We need each other.

Suggestion #3: Entrust Yourself to God

A. I realize that, with all this talk about watching ourselves, we might come away thinking it’s all ultimately up to us. Maybe you’re feeling a little heavy, a little overwhelmed at this point.

- 1. If that’s where you’re at, listen: While it’s true we play a part in this in one sense,
- 2. in the deepest sense, it’s not on me, or on you, it’s on God. He’s paying attention to you. He’s watching over you. He’s committed to keep you.

B. That’s why Paul goes where he goes in v. 32, did you notice? “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

1. The Greek word translated “commend” here means: “to entrust for safekeeping; to give over; to commit someone to the care or protection of someone else.”
 - a. In other words, Paul is saying: “Yes, watch over yourselves.
 - b. But, don’t forget: God himself is already watching over you. He’s got you. His grace will sustain you.”

- C. You’re not alone in this. Not just because you have the church. But because you have the Christ, the Chief Shepherd of the sheep—you’re in his hands and no one can snatch you out.
 1. Entrust yourself to him today!