

## **Influencers for Christ**

2 Corinthians 10:7-18

It should be self evident that mothers and fathers exert a powerful influence on the development of their children. Tragically, in our society today the positive influence a father can have is often overlooked or minimized. Moreover, many children are raised without a father and are being shaped by his absence.

Countless studies have shown that children without a strong fatherly influence are more likely to be poor, go to prison become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from physical and emotional problems. National Center for Fathering

Although it's true that despite having both a strong mother and father figure in the home some children still make really bad choices, the overall impact of parents is immeasurable.

What is also true is that although we may or may not have biological children, as Christians we all have a sphere of influence that can make a positive or negative impact on people. We can all to some degree be **spiritual influencers** by being **spiritual mothers and fathers** to others.

The Apostle Paul, for example, viewed himself as a spiritual father to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:14-15). He not only birthed spiritual children through the gospel, he also took personal responsibility for their spiritual growth. Leadership coach John Maxwell wrote, "The biggest gift of a "father" is to pour into others what is valuable and good and helpful and challenge them to repeat the process with others."

This broken world is in desperate need of believers who are willing to serve God's kingdom purposes by investing in the lives of people as spiritual influencers. This is our calling as Christians on earth.

**Main idea:** God's kingdom representatives serve His purposes by investing in the lives of people as influencers for Christ.

In today's message we're going to glean from the Apostle Paul, who was a spiritual father to the rambunctious Corinthians, some key lessons for increasing our influence for Christ.

## **1. Increasing influence comes through submitting to spiritual authority.**

To start with, increasing influence comes by submitting to spiritual authority. As we unfold our text, keep in mind that some in the church of Corinth were questioning Paul's Apostolic authority. He will later in this letter facetiously refer to his detractors as super apostles (2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11).

In order to gain influence and power these, "super apostles" criticized Paul for the counter cultural way that he exercised leadership in the church. The reality is this remains a temptation today.

People, including Christians, are prone to evaluate "the success of church leaders based on prosperity, popularity, speaking skills, and their ability to command respect and garner a following. This may make them 'super-ministers' by the standards of the world but not necessarily by God's standards." Got questions

Paul's leadership approach, on the other hand, reflected the example of Jesus. He instructed His followers: "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,*" Matthew 20:25-26

True influencers for Christ follow the example of the servant leadership of Paul, who was following the example of Jesus. Paul had spiritual authority and he had it because he was submitted to the authority of Christ.

With this in mind, notice that after asserting that he fights with spiritual weapons that are able to tear down the strongholds that oppose the

gospel, Paul continues in verse 7:

*“Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. <sup>8</sup> For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.”* 2 Corinthians 10:7-8

How many of you know, sometimes people see what they want to see, especially when they are being ruled by their fleshly desires rather than the Spirit of God? To the Corinthians who were being led astray by the smooth-talking super apostle who appealed to their Corinthian cultural sensibilities, Paul writes, *“Look at what is before your eyes.”* v.7

What Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to do is to see what God has made evident to them through Paul's gospel ministry. He wants them to look with the Spirit and see through the lens of the gospel that Paul was a God sent servant and influencer of Christ.

Notice also that to authenticate his gospel ministry which his detractors were calling into question, Paul brings attention to the **authority** he was given by the Lord for the good of others. He writes: *“For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.”* 2 Corinthians 10:7-8

The apostle Paul was sent by the Lord himself to preach the gospel and plant churches in unreached areas in his day. And because he was sent by the Lord, the power of God was at work in Paul's life to accomplish the mission.

This doesn't mean that Paul had it easy. Rather, the power of God was at work in his life not only to deliver him from trouble, but to endure trouble for the cause of Christ. To put it another way, the power of God in Paul's life not only made him an agent of God's restoring grace; but also made him willing to absorb suffering to spread His grace and thus reflect the love of Christ.

It's important to note here that the kingdom of Christ operates under the principle of authority. To know the manifest power, presence and provision of God in our lives we must place ourselves under the authorities God has ordained to govern our lives.

God has given, for example, authority to parents to raise their children to know the Lord. Likewise, He ordained the church, along with biblically qualified leaders, to be His agency of authority on earth to evangelize the lost and equip the saints for ministry.

Before His ascension, Jesus commissioned His disciples by saying, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"* (Matthew 28:18-19). As they set out to fulfill His mission of reaching the nations for Christ, Jesus also promised, *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20b).

Again, to know the power of God in our lives so that we might be true influencers for Christ, we must be under his authority. As Adrian Rogers would say, "You'll never be over what God has placed under you until you are under what God has placed over you."

## **2. Increasing influence comes through demonstrating spiritual authenticity**

Notice also that increasing influence comes through demonstrating spiritual authenticity. After appealing to his authority from the Lord, Paul continues: *"I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. <sup>10</sup> For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."<sup>11</sup> Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present."* 2 Corinthians 10:9-11

Again, Paul appears to be addressing accusations being leveled against him which questioned his fitness for ministry. When he writes, *"I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters,"* Paul is

addressing the accusation that he came off in his letters as a tough guy, but in person he was really weak, timid and cowardly.

They were insinuating that his bark was worse than his bite. Today we would call the kind of person that they were accusing Paul of being, “A key board warrior,” which refers to a person who makes aggressive and abusive posts behind a computer.

As a spiritual father, Paul did write letters that directly addressed problems in the church and he did call out those in the church that needed correction and discipline. However, Paul’s motivation for doing so wasn’t to intimidate the church to gain dominance.

Instead, Paul’s motivation was to root out anything that would threaten the spiritual health and testimony of Christ among His people. Moreover, even when Paul called for discipline to be exercised in the form of excommunication, his aim was not only to protect the church from spiritual corruption, but to ultimately restore the person being disciplined.

Notice that Paul continues to more directly address the accusations against him by adding, *“For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”<sup>11</sup> Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.”* 2 Corinthians 10:10-11

Although Paul did affirm in his letters that he wasn’t a physical specimen of a man, but was indeed weak, and that he was also not a professional speaker, Paul’s character whether present or absent was consistent with that of a devoted follower of Jesus. He lived the life that he called others to live. He wasn’t a kind of father that would say, “Do as I say not as I do.” Rather he modeled the Spirit-filled Christian life that he instructed others in his letters to live out.

As commentator Frank Matera summarized, “When he writes that *what we say by letter when absent, we do when present,*” Paul does not mean that he will suddenly appear as a highly skilled speaker and manifest a powerful physical presence to the Corinthians. Rather, he

will come armed with powerful spiritual weapons of the gospel that he preaches. In this sense, what he does will correspond to what he writes, since the boldness and courage that he will demonstrate will not come from himself but from the gospel that he preaches. Whether present or absent, Paul acts with boldness, because he is armed with powerful weapons of the gospel, and he received his authority from Christ. Although his detractors misinterpreted his humbleness for weakness, his apparent weakness is the meekness and [mercy] of Christ.”

Are you the same person in public as you are in private? Your true character, which is best measured by what you do when no one is watching, will determine what kind of lasting influence you will have in this world. You may be able to fool man for a little while, but you’re not fooling God who resists hypocrisy.

*In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*  
Matthew 6:5-6

Jesus wasn’t teaching here that it was wrong to pray publicly. Rather He’s addressing both the motivation of the heart and the spiritual authenticity that he blesses. The grace that makes us authentic influencers for Christ in our public lives shapes us as we seek to honor God in our private lives.

To put it another way, the grace you need upon your public life to be a fruitful influencer for Christ comes from your private integrity before God. Your public life before men must be consistent with the life you live before God to be a Spirit empowered change agent for Christ in your sphere of influence. Those in our circle of influence, including our children, don’t need us to be perfect, they need us to be real.

Notice also that Paul didn't exalt himself or measure his spiritual life by comparing himself to others, as his detractors did. After explaining that he wasn't by letter trying to be someone who he was not when present, He continued, *"Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding."* 2 Corinthians 10:9-12

Brother and sisters, Christians who are powerful influencers for Christ look to Him as the standard, and live to please Him in their private and public lives.

We come now to our final point:

### **3. Increasing influence comes through fulfilling spiritual assignments.**

Having addressed the insinuation that he portrayed himself as bold and strong in his letters, but in person he was actually timid and soft, Paul continues:

*"But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. <sup>14</sup> For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ."* 2 Corinthians 10:13-14

It appears from this passage that Paul's detractors, the super apostles, sought to take credit for the gospel work that Paul did in Corinth, namely winning people to Christ and planting the church. They came to Corinth after Paul set out for another assignment and they sought to build on his work for their own self-serving interests. And because Paul planted the church, they resorted to criticizing him to minimize his influence in order to gain power among the Corinthians.

So to reinsert his God given influence, Paul had to defend himself by boasting in the fact that he was the one who was sent by the Lord to Corinth—that he, along with his ministry partners, were the first to bring the gospel to them.

Now Paul doesn't remind the Corinthians that he was the first to bring the gospel to them because he wants to exalt himself for the sake of his own ego or because he was power hungry, like the super apostles were. As he made clear in the end of the chapter, Paul was boasting in what the Lord accomplished in his life.

Moreover, as he explained in verse 13, Paul's boasting was not only in the Lord, but in the area of influence God assigned to him.

Again, Paul is not trying to exalt himself for his own self-interest. Rather he's exposing the folly of the super apostles who did exalt themselves by tearing him down even though he was the one God assigned and used to plant the church of Corinth. He wasn't boasting in the labors of another. He was boasting in his own labors that he worked by the grace of God in the field that God assigned and that resulted in gospel transformation.

As Paul continues: *"We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, <sup>16</sup> so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence."* 2 Corinthians 10:15-16

It's important to note here that Paul is not saying that it's wrong for some to build on the gospel work that others started. After planting churches, Paul helped to train elders to continue the work that he began. But unlike the super apostles, he explains in verse 15 that he didn't boast beyond limits in the labors of others. That is to say, he didn't seek to take credit for the gospel work that others established.

Paul's aim in boasting in the Lord about planting a church in Corinth wasn't to gain influence for himself, but rather to regain the influence he had for Christ among the Corinthians so that he could continue to

fulfill his spiritual assignment. “He hoped the Corinthians growth would lead to additional resources to expand his gospel ministry (10:15-16). The [super apostle’s] strategy, on the other hand, involved overhauling churches that already had been planted in order to boast of their conquests. [In contrast], Paul took the approach of preaching where no churches had yet been planted.” Charles R. Swindoll

Paul’s assignment from the Lord, as he also explained in Romans 15:17-21, was to take the gospel and plant churches in unreached areas of the world as he was led by the Spirit. And notice that what would help to expand his reach and influence for Christ was the increasing faith of the Corinthians.

Again Paul writes: “*But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, <sup>16</sup> so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence.*” 2 Corinthians 10:15-16

In other words, as the Corinthian believers each did their part by faith, as each fulfilled their assignments from the Lord, not only would they become influencers for Christ, but they would also help to enlarge Paul’s influence for Christ among them and beyond.

Likewise, if you’re saved you are called to be an influencer for Christ. God may or may not be calling you to be a church planter, but he has spiritual assignments for you to fulfill.

Like the Corinthians were tempted to do, we must not give in to the consumer mentality that looks to church leaders to tell us what we want to hear, to tickle our ears, to entertain us with feel good self-help messages that appeal to our worldly desires and ambitions.

Rather, we must look to grow in faith and be equipped to step out of our comfort zones to join God in the work He’s doing around us. There are specific ways that God wants to use each of us inside and outside the church so that together we expand our influence for Christ in this broken world.

Alan Redpath put it this way, “Recognition of need must be followed by earnest, persistent waiting upon God until the overwhelming sense of world need becomes a specific burden in your soul for one particular piece of work which God would have you do.”

God has spiritual assignments that he desires for each of us to seek him for and fulfill; not for our glory but for the glory of Jesus. As Paul concludes: *“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*<sup>18</sup> *For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”* 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

The super apostles sought to commend themselves by putting Paul down and criticizing his humble gospel ministry. But Paul wasn't seeking the praise of men. Rather he sought to please Jesus, the one who saved Him by His grace and that He knew could save anyone who trust Him as Savior and Lord.

Paul greatly influenced many for Christ because his eyes were not on man; they were on Jesus and His approval was all that Paul needed. But although the approval of His Savior was His aim and motivation, Paul wasn't a Lone Ranger, he wasn't a maverick and he wasn't a dictator. Paul was a servant leader who loved the church, flaws and all, and who relied on the prayers and support of the church.

How many of you know that there are church leaders today that have lost their way or never were called of God to be pastors. But there are also many genuine Pastors today who simply need continued prayer, encouragement and support to fulfill their assignments from the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

Let us all, like Paul, keep our eyes on Jesus; surrendering to His authority so that we live authentic Christian lives while fulfilling our spiritual assignments as influencers for Christ to the glory of His name.