

Monday, October 19, 2020

SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Influence

John Maxwell said “leadership is [all about] influence”. If you influence someone, you are a leader. Now I could debate John about the validity of that statement, but I think there is something to be said about the power of influence. Let's just think about some different areas of life:

-Clothing - who influences the way you dress? Maybe it's no one, and if so, good for you. But the majority of us are influenced, whether it's by a picture, or a movie, or a magazine, or a celebrity. We are influenced in how we dress.

-What about the TV shows you watch? Did you come across them by scrolling on your phone or by channel surfing? Did some person suggest a show at work, and so you began to watch it? Or was it the person in the show that made you curious to check it out?

-What about your favorite beverage? Was it a commercial? A celebrity? Your workplace provides it? What influenced it?

Now the things I just mentioned are trivial. The influence of clothes, tv, or a soft drink are not life changing. But what about the big things in life?

- How you vote - What influences you as a voter? Is it a parent or family member? Friends? A pastor? What about the Bible?

- How about the church you attend? What influenced you to be there? Did someone suggest it? Was it your family's church? Was it the Google reviews online? Was it the preaching pastor you wanted to see?

- Now let's talk about your faith: How did you come to faith in Jesus Christ, if you came to saving faith? Was it a friend? A family member? A Bible teacher on the radio or online? What influenced you in your faith?

I could keep going, but let me ask you one more question: What would influence you to change your mind on a larger, more important topic, like how you vote, which church you go to, or even your faith? You're probably wondering, what does influence have to do with our faith? That's what we want to talk about today as we continue our series “We are Free” from the book of Galatians.

Now, in the book of Galatians, we see in the first 2 chapters, that Paul has been writing on the importance of the one true Gospel, and also the authority of that Gospel. The Gospel comes from Jesus Christ. That's where the Apostles got it from. Paul says that the moment you add anything to it, or take anything from it, it ceases to be the Gospel. That's a staggering thought.

Last week, we looked at a small portion of Chapter 2, where Paul called Peter on an error he made. Peter had compromised his faith and his witness, based on the influence of others. So let's pick this story back up in Galatians Chapter 2, beginning in verse 11 (ESV):

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. (Vs.11-12)

Paul rebuked Peter because he was influenced to compromise on his faith. And here's how it happened: People who claimed they were from James were not actually from James. They were just an extension of these Judaizers. They were legalists. They were people who said Salvation comes through grace by faith, *plus* keeping the law. Well, these Judaizers found Peter eating with Gentiles and eating the food of the Gentiles. Remember, Orthodox Jews had very strict dietary laws. They did this to honor God and to be displaying their holiness. But, here's the problem: Jesus fulfilled the law. We learned last week that according to Mark 7, Jesus said that it's not what a person eats that defiles him. What defiles a person is what is inside them already! It's their sin nature. It's their heart. What flows out of their mouths and in their lives is a reflection of their heart. So it's not the eating of certain kinds of foods that is sinful.

This is what Peter said in Acts 10! Peter was brash and bold in his conviction: What God has made clean, nothing can contaminate it. So the law was fulfilled in Christ. Peter knew that, but as soon as these Judaizers showed up, it says that Peter drew back and separated himself. The term "separated" is a military term to withdraw from battle. In other words, he stopped the eating with the Gentiles and went back to eating a kosher diet. Why? What would motivate him? It says, *he feared the party of the circumcision*. In other words, he was influenced by these legalists. These legalists didn't have any power or authority. They didn't actually come from James. They didn't come from the Sanhedrin. They didn't come from the government. The most they could do is a good smear campaign. As Pastor John MacArthur put it, "Peter was afraid of...losing his popularity and prestige with a group of self-righteous hypocrites whose doctrines were heretical and whose tactics were deceitful."

Peter was afraid. Now, it would be easy to call Peter a coward. It'd be easy to say what a loser he was. He was influenced by the wrong people, for the wrong reasons. And that'd be right. But what makes me different than Peter? What makes you different than Peter? We do the very same thing. Peter could show great confidence in God. He could show conviction, only to compromise the next opportunity. Peter was a Jerusalem Apostle; a pillar; a big dog; and yet, he was influenced by a bunch of nobodies.

What Peter fell victim to impacts us yet today. So how are you being influenced to compromise? We are all tempted to compromise, but where are you falling victim? Is it in the area of giving? Everything you have today is because of God's grace. We are called to pour that same grace out

upon others. But maybe you haven't given to your church or any other ministry in years. Yet, like many of us, you still find the money for your cable tv, your vacation, or your Amazon purchases. Maybe you haven't compromised in how you handle your money. Maybe it's in the area of sex. You're single, but you're tired of waiting on God's provision or timing, so you feel the occasional use of pornography is no big deal. Maybe you're married, but your spouse isn't quite what you remembered them being, so you're having an online relationship with someone younger and more exciting. You've compromised. You've been influenced. How are you compromising because of influence?

Peter was influenced not by authority or money or power, but because of the popularity of self-righteous heretics. But as we said, we too compromise for the lamest of reasons. We see this compromise individually, in the lives of believers, but we also see it in the church as well. For the sake of looking relevant, tolerant, or popular in their city, churches are compromising in the areas of sexuality, marriage, and communion. But the real compromise that impacts the others is in the area of the Gospel. They, in some cases add to the Gospel, but in many instances, they take away from the Gospel. That's how they invite non-believers into communion, homosexuals into the pulpit, and atheists into the youth groups.

We in the church must not compromise by influence of the world, of heretics, celebrities, or anyone else. As followers of Christ, we get our marching orders from Christ through the Bible. And individual compromise doesn't just impact us – it impacts others as well. Listen to Paul beginning in verse 13:

¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

You see, people are always watching: the people you love and the people you lead. Chances are, people you don't even know are watching. So how you live really matters, because you will influence others for the good and the bad. That's what's happening here. The local Jews followed Peter's example. Barnabas, who was "legit" in his faith, began to compromise and abandon the true Gospel. Think about how crazy this is: Peter, the guy that Jesus said would be a key player in the growth of the church, began to compromise in the Gospel message. The locals who were watching compromised as well. And then Barnabas, who was committed and passionate in his faith, saw the influence of these legalists and he followed suit.

Paul calls this behavior hypocrisy. The Greek term behind hypocrisy referred to an actor who would wear a mask. It was a character, but not the real thing. A hypocrite hid their true self with a mask. Peter said that Salvation comes by grace through faith alone. But the problem was he lived a different way when the legalists showed up. He put on a mask because the legalists influenced his behavior. You see, we can do so much damage to the Gospel, by preaching one thing and doing another.

As I think about this whole exchange between Paul and Peter, I actually think about some moments in my own life. I remember, in high school, there was a time where I said I believed in what the Bible says about holy living, about living life pleasing to God. I preached it in my

words. I talked about it at my Christian school. I talked about it with my friends at church. But there was a disconnect. I remember some of my friends at the time, who are my friends today, called me on my behavior. I was listening to music that was offensive and ungodly. I'm not talking secular that's really indifferent - but this was really offensive. They said, "You can't do this. If you are a follower of Christ, you need to live like a follower of Christ." We've said this before: If we are free, we should live as free. Therefore, we are free to follow God. My friends said, "You've got to knock it off! You can't say one thing and do another." And you know what? They were right. Now, I didn't like it at the time. I made excuses. I pushed back. But because they were true friends, and they really cared about the integrity of the Gospel, they called me on my sin.

Love does not endorse sinful behavior, no matter how close your relationship to the sinner. In fact, because Paul loved God and cared about Peter, he wasn't concerned about the rebuke or the fall-out of the relationship. I think this is something we struggle with today. If we really loves someone, we won't endorse sin. Paul really loved God, and He cared about Peter enough, to call him out on his sin. I think this is something we can and must do today. This is called accountability, as we talked about. Paul would continue this accountability in this exchange in Verse 14:

¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" ¹

Paul calls out Peter in front of everyone. Some people may say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, that's completely inappropriate. Doesn't the Bible, even Jesus, tell us to correct people in private?" Yes, Jesus does. However, this is a public setting. His compromise was influenced by others, but more importantly, it influenced others to fall to sin as well. When we sin publicly and hurt people, it is perfectly appropriate to call out and address the sin in front of others. This is not to shame them or to ruin a reputation. We are trying to make right the wrong. So that's exactly what Paul does with Peter. And then Paul says, that he *saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel*. This literally means to walk upright, but I think we can just think of it as walking in a way consistent with the truth or reality.

Paul says you are free; therefore, live as free. Do not go back to slavery of any kind, whether it's to the law, or an addiction, or anything. He says, "Peter, you are free; these people are free; don't tell them in your actions to live like a slave."

Today we have the same risk and responsibility. Jesus said, that with great power comes great responsibility (paraphrased Luke 12:48). I hate to break it to you – Spiderman did not come up with that quote – first it was Christ - but it's true. We have great responsibility. We must constantly evaluate our hearts and our lives. Which gospel do we truly believe? The gospel of legalism? That we must *add* to the free gift of Salvation? Or do we *take away* from the power of

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ga 2:11–14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Salvation, and in turn, we follow a gospel of license? Whenever we stray from the straight path, we don't follow a false gospel, we follow NO gospel – we are lost, and that is bad news.

The alternative is to **live a life according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we do this, our influence will increase. We will influence people to Jesus Christ, and we will influence fellow sisters and brothers to stay on the right path. When we love God more than the opinion of others, that is when we know we believe the true Gospel.**

N: Well, let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney and break down today's message a bit more. Cara, today we have social media influencers - People who actually get paid by marketing firms, to influence the public through social media. How do you filter their impact for yourself and your family?

C: Personally, I don't really follow any social media influencers. I have friends that do, and truly I find it super annoying. I try to use my social media to influence in positive ways. So what I mean by that is, you know, I like to put the Gospel out there. And then the reverse way of that is, I avoid it, and I only follow Biblical people. And then I try to teach my kids to do the same, because I say, what you allow in is going to change you – period. [Right] It's hard though. My husband has to talk to my son a lot about the scantily clad girls and their bikini pics that pop up. And you know what my husband tells him is, it's going to be thrown in your face, and you can't help that. And there's nothing wrong with you for looking. Because you're a guy, you're going to look, but don't seek it out. Because once you go down that rabbit hole, you're not going to be strong enough to come out of it on your own. So I just - you know what? You just have to teach your kids how to navigate that. Me personally, I just don't want to see it. No one's going to influence me to buy shampoo. You know, it's so stupid, but it's the way our world is now, right?

N: Right. You do shampoo your hair though, correct?

C: Yes. And let me tell you about

N: Just making sure; if not, I'll try to influence you. It's an important practice. [Yeah, seriously.] Maybe the brand we could debate. But no, I think, I think it's so important what you're doing with your family. We have to be vigilant in trying to filter what comes into our lives. And you know, it's hard enough to master that for myself, but then trying to encourage it and to influence my family - that can be really frustrating. And you just hope, and you pray, that what you're displaying, what you're teaching, and what you are trying to influence, will stick. But it's really hard, because the voices are only getting louder, and the opportunity to be influenced negatively, is just one click away. And so we need to be vigilant.

Arnie, let's talk about leadership and influence. From your perspective, what is the difference between a leader and an influencer?

A: Well, let me see if I got this right. In my mind, a leader isn't always an influencer, but an influencer is always a leader, whether they want to be or not.

N: Yeah, it's interesting to read through Maxwell, and Maxwell was very big on this idea of "leadership is influence - nothing more and nothing less." But, but I like what you just said, comparing those two, because I think there's a subtle nuance there. So in your role as CEO, where do you find the most bang for your buck? Is it in those leaders, or is it in those influencers, and how do you coach that as well?

A: Yeah, I mean, I can remember growing up with various leaders in different areas, and thinking, "Well, you know, they may be a leader, but they're an idiot." And so influencer, I think, has much more impact, and is a much more natural way of leading, and I think has tremendous results. How you teach someone to become an influencer is a completely different subject.

N: Absolutely. You're right. You're right. Well, let's talk just a little more, going back to the message today. And Peter - the Apostle Peter - he gave in and he compromised. I think he forgot his own power of influence. Talk to us about the influence that we carry as Christ followers.

A: Yeah. I think it shows when you get something wrong, you can take a lot of people with you, even if it's not intentional. So, there is a definite responsibility, where you have to be very careful.

N: What do you think Cara?

C: I would agree with that. I mean, I've literally stress-sweated over things that I've written. It's out there, and once it's out there, you can't take it back. So usually when I write something, I like to have at least three people check the theology in it. And part of it is a lack of confidence on my part, but I just think it's just a heavy burden to bear. But also too, even I - you probably Nat, and even Arnie - would say that we follow the teachings of certain pastors and things, to see how they're going to react to current events, and things in church leadership. And you know, we have the responsibility ourselves, as followers of Christ, to check it out for ourselves. But it just shows you, that there's always someone watching, right? [Right.] So it's a heavy, sure.

N: It is. And especially when it comes to the Word of God, as you talked about, there's a unique burden there. And so what we say does get measured, and we are going to be held accountable with what we teach. The Bible is very clear on that. But we, as Christians - as you've said and Arnie has said - we are influencers. And so every decision matters. People are watching - even people that we don't think are watching - they are. So what we say, what we do matters, so today let's carry ourselves worthy of the Gospel, so we're not adding more stumbling blocks, but rather helping people see Jesus clearly - so that we can share the Good News and we can pray that they will receive it.