

STEWARDS OF INFLUENCE

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."
Romans 14:7.

Nothing in the universe stands alone. No atom of matter, no drop of water, no particle of air and no ray of light exists in a state of isolation. Likewise, since every person is a social being, each of us has been influenced by past generations, and each is influencing the present and the future generations. "No one of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself." All of us are formed for society, and are dependent on each other for prosperity, mental improvement, comfort and happiness.

Influence baffles definition. It is that something which distinguishes us from all others; that silent something that goes out from every life like heat from fire, or fragrance from a flower, and gives shape and color to other lives. Influence is the power we exert over others by our thoughts, words and deeds.

I. The Reality Of Influence.

From the beginning to the present hour there has been a system of reciprocal pleasures and benefits, sorrows and evils working in the affairs of men. Every person has been placed on the earth for some definite purpose, and has impressed those around him for good or evil. There is an invisible something which radiates from every personality. Our influence is inevitable. We cannot shut our lives away from others and go through life in complete isolation. As we come in contact with others, whether it be in the high roads of public position or in the quiet paths of private life, we are always exerting an influence upon their minds. What we say or do influences those about us in their saying and doing. No one can think, speak or act without influencing others. In fact, nobody can live without wielding an influence. Every person is either a blot or a blessing, but he cannot be a blank. Some hold the strange idea that what they think, say or do cannot affect anyone but themselves, but they are sadly mistaken. Influence is as much a reality as is your existence. You exert an influence whether you wish to do so or not.

Voluntary influence is the type which one consciously and purposely exerts in an endeavor to sway another, as by speaking, persuading, threatening or promising. When we bring our minds into play and exercise our wills to accomplish specific objectives we exert a voluntary influence.

Involuntary influence is the type of which we are not aware. It may be exerted unconsciously or unintentionally, but it is one of the most far-reaching things in the world.

Robert Burns, the Scotch poet, who was idolized in his day and whose songs are still sung around the world, once placed his hand on the head of a twelve-year-old boy named Walter Scott and said, "My dear boy, you will some day be a great

man; yes, a greater man than your father or grandfather." For the young lad that was a mountain-top experience. Years afterward, when he had become a famous writer, the author of the Waverly novels declared, "My meeting Robert Burns was the greatest event in my life. I felt an ordination into literature the moment he put his hand on my head, and whatever I have achieved, I owe it in a large measure to the inspiration I got from him." That personal contact with Burns touched Scott into flame. As I stood one day near the towering monument on Princess Street in Edinburgh, which had been erected in memory of Scott, I thought of the tremendous influence which Burns had wielded in the life of the famous writer through his encouraging words. One never knows the influence of the spoken word.

Frequently our most effective and abiding influence is involuntary. When Peter ran with John to the sepulcher on the day of the resurrection of Christ, after having heard that the tomb was empty, John, being younger and more active, outran Peter and reached the tomb first. But he was afraid to enter. As soon as Peter arrived he went into the tomb and saw how empty it was. The record says, "Then entered in also that other disciple, and believed." Peter was not trying to influence John when he hurried into the sepulcher, but his courageous act was contagious and caused John to follow his example. Whether or not you intend it, your influence goes out hourly to heal or to hurt, and to bless or to blight all whom you touch in life. You cannot move in any sphere of life without causing ripples of influence which will break on the shores of eternity.

II. The Results Of Influence.

Some influence has evil results. The wise man wrote, "One sinner destroyeth much good." One bad person is often the center of corruption to the whole circle in which he moves. No man's actions stop with himself. Nobody can do wrong and somebody not suffer the consequences.

Some influence has good results. What an influence Christian parents may exercise over their children as they live for God before them, teach them, win them to the Lord and train them for Him! Such influence has far-reaching effects on the world.

Many years ago a young fellow by the name of Wray, a student at Princeton, applied for appointment as a foreign missionary. He was a thoroughly godly man, but not very quick in respect to learning, and when he reached the field of his prospective labors he found it difficult to master the language. Although the simple natives could not understand his talk, they could understand his walk. One day when they were seated in a circle on the ground, listening to the instruction of one of their teachers, the question was asked, "What is it to be a Christian?" And none could answer. Finally one pointed to this young man and said, "It is to live as Mr. Wray lives." Not one of them could read the gospel according to Matthew,

Mark, Luke or John, but all of them could read the gospel according to Wray. There is nothing so powerful for good as a godly life. Samuel Johnson wrote correctly when he said, "Example is always more efficacious than precept."

Influence is permanent in its character. When once a look, word or deed escapes a person, it is beyond his power to call it back. When influence is exerted it cannot be undone or destroyed. Every day we are exerting an influence that will live long after we are gone. Whether it be for good or evil, it will survive the stroke of death, outlive the pulverizing process of the grave and be found working when time hushes and eternity dawns. Knowing that our influence will never die, let us be careful how we live!

Moreover, influence not only lives to the end of time, but it keeps on growing as long as it lives. The time will not come when it will reach its maturity and its growth be arrested. The influence which you wield today, and which perhaps is very small now, will roll forward through the ages, growing wider and deeper and stronger with every passing hour, and blighting or blessing as it rolls.

III. The Responsibility For Influence.

Like Cain we may deny that we have any responsibility for our influence, but we are responsible nevertheless. Others are being helped or hurt by the way we live. The inevitableness of our influence involves us in the duty of determining its worthy quality. Wherever we go, we wield an influence for good or evil. At first your influence may be small, but it will increase in volume and momentum until it becomes a great power. Near the source of the Mississippi River the stream is so small that a leaf falling from a tree will change the course of the water; while at New Orleans the river is so wide and deep that when prices were low it took thirteen million dollars to span the stream with a bridge. This is an example of life. When a habit is beginning to form in the life of a youth, a kind word from a friend can change the course of that life; but, if the habit is allowed to mature, it gets the upper hand of the individual and there doesn't seem to be anything that can stop it. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful of our influence.

We should live for the glory of God and the welfare of others. We are commanded to do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Each is to inspire the others in his church to some loving ministry or to some good work. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Christ emphasized the responsibility of Christians for their influence by saying, "Ye are the salt of the earth ... Ye are the light of the world." Salt has three outstanding properties --

penetration, purification and preservation. Christ's statement, "Ye are the light of the world," is one of the most striking and remarkable things that was ever said about Christians. Being light, we can shine. God has given us the ability to glow, to radiate light or to shine. Our Lord said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

To each of God's children is offered the privilege of using his life, its songs and smiles, its position and power, its example and influence, in a ministry of blessings to the human race, and of bringing glory to God. For such a glorious opportunity Christians should thrill with gratitude and praise to God. As the trusted stewards of influence Christians must not fail to use their opportunities in life in such a way as to bring to God the greatest glory which it is possible for their lives to yield.

Ever remember that your life, with all of its powers and possessions, influence and possibilities, is a stewardship, or a trust which you have received from God; that God sees, knows and is making a record of all that you think, say or do; and that you are not only responsible but you must give an account to Him for all that you hold in trust. Be a faithful steward of your influence. "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

The time will soon come for you and me when all that we leave behind us, so far as this life is concerned, will be our influence. It cannot be buried with us. What kind of influence will you leave? That will depend upon your relationship to Christ. What have you done with Christ? You have rejected Him or received Him. If you have not received Him as your Saviour, do so now and wield the remainder of your influence for Him Who died for you.