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Title: The Urgency of Influence

Text: 3 John 1-14

This morning we are going to look at another letter of Scripture that was written with an urgent message. It addresses another quality that just can't wait. This letter, too, is a one-page letter of the New Testament. This, like the passage of scripture we looked at last week, is a brief letter written with a sense of urgency. It also focuses on an important quality that Christians need to apply to their lives.

Today we're looking at 3 John, which talks about choosing your influences. In leadership, we have the task of being a positive influence on those we lead, because leadership basically seeks to accomplish one goal: INFLUENCE. But, BEFORE we can influence others, we need to make sure that WE are positively influenced ourselves. We need to choose with great care those who have the power to shape our THOUGHTS and BELIEFS and ATTITUDES and BEHAVIORS. Solomon said... *"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared"* (Proverbs 22:24-25). He's saying, "Be careful who you let get close to you, because people close to you will influence you. They can lead you in the RIGHT direction or the WRONG direction." People have a tendency to imitate the habits of their friends. So we must watch who and how much and to what extent we allow ourselves to be influenced by others.

Perhaps you've heard Dr. Dorothy Law Nolte's essay, *Children Live What They Learn*. It's rather long, so I won't share the whole of it, but it begins by saying... "If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn. If children live with hostility, they learn to fight. If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive. If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves. If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy." It was written as a warning to parents: be careful how you influence your children. But, the flip side of it is that believers need to take a stand for themselves and say, "I have decided that I will UNLEARN what I was taught that isn't for my good." And as much as you love your parents, you shouldn't let their mistakes continue to have a negative influence on you. Starting today you may need to choose better influences.

There are two ways to be influenced. One is INADVERTENTLY. Maybe you could call it influence by osmosis, where you just pick up the habits that those around you have. Most of us here speak differently than those due north of us or due south. Up north there is the New England accents. They don't have as many letters in their alphabet. "Pahk the cah in Hahvahd Yahd." South of us you get the southern accents where many a word is drawn out. There are Texas accents and British accents. Our speech is inadvertently influenced generally by the places we live or have lived. We often tend to pronounce words like those around us. I read the account of a man who is in voice-over advertising who lives in the south, and his family is as country as cornbread, but he speaks plain and pleasant unaccented English – because he has made it a point to learn to speak without an accent. His job depends on it. That's the second way we are influenced: influence by INTENTION. This is where you decide for yourself, "THIS is who I will listen to, THIS is who I will be like." Today we'll talk about that kind of INTENTIONAL influence. Here the question is – WHO should YOU choose to help shape the person you become? Today we are looking at 3rd John. There are three things in this letter that we can see about choosing influences. What are they? First of all...

1. Choose Influences who GENUINELY CARE ABOUT YOU. John writes... *"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth"* (vs. 2-4). If you attended college, I suppose you had a few of those professors in school who didn't really seem to care so much about their students and who didn't even seem to care about the subject they taught. Their style of teaching was to just give the facts. Take it or leave it. Learn it or fail. You spend a semester in their class and they might not even know who you are. And then, there are those of us who were fortunate enough to have had a few teachers for whom teaching was their PASSION, and helping students was their CALLING. They were often able to take a bland subject and make it come alive. Weren't those teachers great? Didn't you just love their class? EVERY chance you get – when the option is yours – choose that kind of teacher. William Arthur Ward said, "EVERY person has the power to make others happy. ONE does it simply by ENTERING a room; ANOTHER by LEAVING the room." Perhaps you know people like that. EVERY chance you get, choose the person who BRIGHTENS the room by COMING IN,

NOT by going out. Should I have the occasion to seek out financial advice, do you know what I look for? Obviously, I prefer someone who knows a lot about investments and money management. And I also prefer someone who KNOWS me and CARES about me. Someone who's NOT just trying to make a sale, OR someone who isn't just looking out for HIS interest, rather someone who sincerely wants ME to DO WELL financially. THAT determines who I listen to. This also works on a spiritual level. I read books and read and listen to a goodly number of sermons and blogs, but do you know who has the greatest influence on me spiritually? The people who LOVE ME. Even when they speak things I don't want to hear, I know that their words are motivated by love and a sincere desire to see me walk worthy in Christ. When you think about who is going to influence your LIFE and your FAITH and your BELIEFS and your ATTITUDES and your BEHAVIOR...choose those who have demonstrated that they GENUINELY CARE ABOUT YOU.

2. Choose Influences who WALK THE TALK. John wrote... *"Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth. I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church"* (vs. 5-10). Then John says it as plainly and as simply as he possibly can. *"Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God"* (vs. 11). What's he saying? Watch out for Diotrephes. He's all about himself. He thinks he's better or more important than the rest. He's gossiping maliciously. He refuses to welcome the brothers, AND he puts them out of the church. He's a BAD influence. He is saying: Look for those who WALK the TALK; who LIVE what they SAY. Several times in his letters Paul makes a rather bold statement: "IMITATE ME. Follow my example. Do what I do." Every leader worth his or her salt SHOULD be able to say that. ILLUSTRATION: Drew Manning is a fitness trainer with a unique approach to helping people get in shape. He was in excellent shape, as most personal trainers are, but not so long ago (last year) he stopped working out and spent six months eating everything in sight. He gained 70 pounds in the process. Then he said to his fan base, "Follow me. Do what I do and I will show you how to go from being fat to being fit. If I can do it, you can do it." And in six months he was back in tip top shape. By his own example, he proved that his fitness advice ISN'T JUST THEORY (more than talk or hot air); He personally demonstrated that it works in real life. In choosing our influences, we must ask the questions: Does this person PRACTICE what he PREACHES? Do I SEE in his life what I HEAR in his words? Perhaps you have heard the poem...I'd rather SEE a sermon than hear one ANY day; I'd rather one should WALK with me than merely tell the way. The EYE'S a better pupil and more willing than the ear. Fine counsel is confusing, but EXAMPLE'S ALWAYS clear; And the BEST of all preachers are the men who LIVE their creeds. For to see GOOD PUT INTO ACTION is what EVERYBODY needs. I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me SEE it done; I can WATCH your HANDS in action, but your tongue too fast may run. And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true, but I'd rather get my lessons by OBSERVING WHAT YOU DO; For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give, but there's NO misunderstanding how you ACT and HOW YOU LIVE. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach at ALL times. IF NECESSARY, use words." Look for people who preach with their actions.

3. Choose Influences with a GOOD REPUTATION. John said... *"Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true"* (vs. 12). A person's reputation gives them a measure of credibility. Demetrius is the opposite of Diotrephes mentioned earlier. There are times – we've all seen it happen – when a person's reputation is either BETTER THAN or WORSE THAN his real character, but MOST of the time a person's reputation is what they've earned. Not ALL of the time, there are exceptions to be sure, but MOST of the time this is true. That's why Paul, in his letter to Timothy says that a leader must have a GOOD reputation with outsiders because MOST of the time the reputation a person HAS is the reputation he has EARNED. Henry Ford said, "You can't build a reputation on what you're GOING to do." In other words, it's ACTION and ACCOMPLISHMENT that gives a person a GOOD reputation. Solomon said that *"A GOOD name is more desirable than great riches"* (Proverbs 22:1). Why is that? Two reasons: because a GOOD name is harder to EARN and a good name is harder to HANG ONTO. So when someone, over the course of time, has maintained a good reputation and is well spoken of by good people – you generally can put stock in what they say. Earlier I used the example of seeking FINANCIAL ADVICE. If a financial consultant has a reputation for LOSING MONEY for his clients, you would be wise to think twice before you hand him your hard earned money. This also applies to employers and employees and leaders in the church. Take a look at the name they have earned for themselves among people you respect. Another reason a good reputation is important is because of the TIME FACTOR. It's rather EASY to make a good first impression. Sometimes we don't get a second chance to make a first impression. So,

I'm not minimizing a good first impression. But, many a person can WOW people in the first couple of months, BUT the leader who can WOW people for 10 years has some substance to his message and his life. ILLUSTRATION: Brother Martin, whose life we celebrated on Friday – he served the Lord the last 96 years and 5 months. The old hymn goes – “It’s not the first mile that’s so important, but the last mile when day is done.” If you’re going to allow someone to influence you – if you are going to imitate someone – wouldn’t it make good sense to pay more attention to someone who has been running the race effectively for a while? So choose to be influenced by those who have enough maturity to have built a HISTORY of leadership.

CONCLUSION. Life is far too complicated for us to make it all the way on our own. We need leadership. We need EXAMPLES to follow. We need teachers and coaches to train and motivate us. We will ALL be influenced by others – good OR bad. The question is: Will you be INADVERTENTLY influenced or INTENTIONALLY influenced? Will you just be a product of your SURROUNDINGS and your CULTURE and the people who JUST HAPPEN to be around you in any given moment, OR will YOU CHOOSE who you will listen to and who will shape your way of thinking and doing? CHOOSE WHO YOU WILL ALLOW TO SPEAK INTO YOUR LIFE! Look for those who CARE ABOUT YOU. Look for those who WALK THE TALK. Look for those who have EARNED A GOOD NAME. And when you meet people who fit these criteria, you would do well to LISTEN to their words (TALK), AND LEARN to follow (WALK THEIR WALK) AND IMITATE them AS THEY FOLLOW CHRIST.