



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

13th January 2023

"Therefore I urge you to imitate me." "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."
1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1

'...imitate me'

Recently I have become increasingly aware of the word "influencer". We know what an *influence* is, and what *to influence* someone means, but an *influencer* seems new. Only recently has the word entered the dictionaries as a role, a job, an occupation. Now we hear people being introduced as 'influencers'. It has set me wondering what they do, and what gives them the right or the credibility to do it, to '*influence*' other people.

It's mostly associated with the social media and marketing, -influencing people to buy certain things or live in certain ways. It seems to go with fashions, 'trend-setters' and the so-called 'cult of celebrity' trying to persuade (mostly younger) people to be like the 'influencer' in appearance, lifestyle, activities and attitudes. In short, the influencer says, "Be like me, live like me, have what I have, buy what I buy; you *want* to be like me because I'm 'cool' or successful or desirable or beautiful." ... or whatever! So it is that many people pursue things they think they need, to be what they long to be. It can lead to perpetual self-dissatisfaction, over-spending, materialism and so on. Our concern is that our loved ones may be too easily influenced, -led into things which are profoundly unhelpful.

It makes me angry to see the effects this can have on people's minds and behaviours and finances, the damage to relationships and families. I ask, "Who are these people who set themselves up as 'influencers'? What right have they to influence anyone? Why should they twist the minds of the vulnerable to think that theirs is the way to live? How dare they suggest we should imitate them in self-centred lifestyles and careless attitudes?"

Two thoughts: The first is that the best and most effective influencers are those who do not set themselves up as such. Their influence arises from observing their quality of life, their work, personal relationships and characteristics, selfless living, godliness, the fruit of the Spirit in them (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control -Galatians 5:22-3). "*By their fruit you will know them*", says Jesus (Matthew 7:16). And by their lives they will influence others, but would never claim to be 'influencers', or even know that they are.

The second thought, rather surprisingly, is that St. Paul *does* make such a claim. Writing to the troubled church in Corinth he says "*I urge you to imitate me*". It is a call few of us would dare to issue, because it seems to put us into the same category as the arrogant, boastful, presumptuous 'influencers' of modern culture. But Paul adds a second phrase in the same letter, "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*" (11:1). That is his key to the matter, and it must be ours! It is in our following of the example of Christ -in life, work, relationships, devotions and everything else, that our influence, our witness for Him, will be most powerful.

It is a sobering thought, and a wonderful gift, that we are influencers for Christ. And we are being watched. So we pray that those around us will see Christ in us, and thus be led to Him (Matthew 5:16).

Every blessing for the week!