

## Psychological Manipulation

### The Influence of One's Environment

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Given 05-Apr-14; Sermon #1205c

I grew up in an area that was rural at that time, just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I don't think you would ever consider it as being rural today. I wasn't born there; my parents moved there a few years after I came into this world. This rural area was bracketed by small boroughs of about 6,000-7,000 people. I noticed even as a boy that the largest and nicest business building in each borough was the bank. My family did business at one of them and it always impressed me in positive ways.

I did not learn until I was a married man and banking for my own family that I was banking in the same type of quality building in the borough Evelyn and I were living in. It was designed and built pretty much along the same lines for the same reasons by the entire banking industry.

I don't believe the reason was evil. This came to mind during this past week when I read an article on the American Eagle website that basically asked this question: "Why in the world, during the Middle Ages when the serfs had so little in worldly goods, did the Catholic religion build such huge and massively expensive cathedrals?"

It took decades of time to construct them, and of course the serfs, along with everybody else, were asked to contribute to their construction. I have been inside a number of them in Europe, and believe me, they don't really hold all that many people—and they are drafty and cold besides.

There are psychological reasons for both banks and the cathedrals as such. And they are fairly similar in both cases. Regarding the banks, it was done in that fine manner in order to impress the public with the sense of strength and stability and safety regarding what was yours. That is, what one owned. It was to impress upon the mind that this was a safe place to invest one's money.

Put bluntly, the industry was psychologically saying, "Put your money here and you won't lose your investment." Regarding the cathedrals, the reasoning was a bit more complex. The priests certainly wanted to build something they thought would glorify God, and bigness glorifies God. That was their thinking.

But there was more. Another aspect begins with the fact that life itself was on the precarious side, considering sickness, poverty, and enemy invasion. What about heaven and hell? (Remember, this was a religious edifice). They were both invisible. Thus, the thought regarding building massive cathedrals was one of sanctuary, a place of personal safety regarding life itself.

This comes close to the thought of Martin Luther's well-known hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is My God." In addition to safety from Satan and his demons, along with that was the added sense of awe gained from its sheer size when compared to other buildings in the city.

In both of these cases, the psychological influence is certainly present, but it is subdued and subtle. That is a great deal different from what we face daily from entertainment industry in movies, TV and for younger people, when music is added, this influence is more in your face. It is right there, overtly, trying to move you in a direction.

What I am leading to here is that there is no doubt whatever that one's mental state is influenced by the environment he finds himself living in. I want you to recall two scriptures that inform us of this and also begin to imply what we should do:

**I John 5:19** We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

This is clearly a heads-up to us of a fact. That fact is that unless we are on guard, our minds can be affected because Satan's presence in the world is real and at hand. The psychological influence is there. It is right in our environment all the time.

**Ephesians 2:2-3** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the

spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

This verse confirms two elements that touch on this topic of subtle, negative, environmental influence: First is that *all* of us are affected and influenced. Nobody escapes the influence of this environment that is out there. Second is that God didn't create carnal nature, but somebody did. It was created by God's and our enemy. What kind of influence is that going to give?

This brief commentary is built around the principle I have been emphasizing in the Ecclesiastes sermon series that *everything matters*. God wants us, His children, to be carefully thinking. I do not mean filled with fear; I do mean conducting life with Him and His purpose never far from our minds.

Considering the environment, recall the example God gives us in Genesis 3: 1, that when God permitted Satan into the Garden and thus Adam and Eve's immediate environment, how quickly everything in their lives changed negatively because they permitted him to influence them against God.

The King James Version translates the first phrase in that first sentence as, "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field." His approach was not overt. It was not "in your face," but at the same time, he quickly undermined God's influence on them, and they turned in submission to him. On the outside, the only thing that changed was the environment.

He has a spirit, too, and so do the demons with him. He and they are able to influence our spirit by the very means of their presence, and that spirit can turn us in toward extremes of self-centeredness while at the same time influencing us against trusting God. When words and music and visual imagery, as in movies, are added to the negative environment along with his or other demonic presence, the combination of those influences takes a good measure of spiritual power to resist.

It is a well known fact that people tend to adopt the characteristics of the people they “run” with. The immature, regardless of age, are very easily persuaded through peer pressure. In this manner, attitudes, character, and conduct in the environment are passed on with little resistance.

We are not left by God without protection besides our own mind. Satan acknowledged that God put a hedge of protection around Job. But God also shows in Isaiah 5:5 that because of Israel’s carelessness, He took that wall of protection away and let the enemies swarm in.

We must understand that this very process is happening to the Israelitish nations. The spiritual barriers have been breached and immorality is growing by leaps and bounds within our environment. Witness what is happening regarding homosexuality, lesbianism, marriage, feminism, and murderous abortion. In our homeland environment, these sins are presented in vivid Technicolor via entertainment, and the news is filled with lies of great deception depicting how wonderful they are. The days of Noah cannot be all that far off.