

## Intimidation, Manipulation, or Influence

People have always tried to control other people. Various means are utilized to achieve this objective:

**Intimidation** is most often *physical* and trades upon coercion through violence. As a biblical example, note John 11:9-11. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, “a great multitude” heard about it and came “not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead,” v.9. Now note carefully the next two verses, “But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus,” vv.10-11. This proposed assassination would serve two purposes: 1) remove a cause of belief from the Jews- a resurrected Lazarus; and, 2) send a clear message to the people that the authorities would not tolerate this “movement.” **Intimidation.**

**Manipulation** is typically *psychological* and often preys upon the objects own ignorance, prejudices, desires, fears, and foibles. Demetrius, a silversmith, sought to turn people away from Paul, the Truth he spoke, and the rapid expansion of Christianity in Ephesus in Acts 19:23-34. He used a two-prong *psychological* attack: 1) draw upon the Ephesians’ long and emotional attachment to the idol god *Diana/Artemis*, and suggest that “converting” to Christianity would be a disloyal abandonment of their ‘religious’ heritage, vv.26,27b; and, 2) suggest that conversion to Christianity would hurt them *financially*, since the *silversmiths* who made the idols and trinkets depicting her and those who sold them were dependent “upon this business,” cf. vv.24-25, 27a. Demetrius sought to manipulate others’ actions through *guilt* and *fear*. **Manipulation.**

**Influence** is different than either intimidation or manipulation in that rather than seeking to *externally control* others, it hopes to *change* others from the inside out by showing them a better way to *think, feel, and act*. Instead of merely intimidating or manipulating someone else’s *behavior* or *actions*, influence seeks to change their *hearts* and *minds*. Its *tools* are rooted in *truth* and *understanding* rather than violence or psychology. Influence is also differently *motivated* than intimidation and manipulation as they seek control of others for *personal* benefit. But influence seeks to change others for *their own* benefit. For an example of properly utilized influence, consider Acts 17. Much as was the case in Ephesus, Athens was “a city full of idols,” v.16. So how and why did Paul seek to “convert” them to Christ and Christianity? Note v.17 where the text says he was “reasoning” with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. The original word is *dialegomai*, and more literally means to “revolve in the mind.” Paul utilize the truth of the gospel to get these Athenians thinking; to get them to “revolve” in their minds what they currently thought about their idol gods in comparison to the *new* and *strange* deity of *Jesus* and His *resurrection*, vv.18-21. He then further *reasoned* that: *God made the world and all things in it*, v.24; that *we need Him* rather than the other way around, vv.25-29; and therefore, that such things required us to *repent* and *serve Him* instead idols of our own making so that we might be *saved eternally*, vv.30-31. He used *truth* to *reason* with them hoping to *influence* them to *change* (repent) for their *own benefit* (salvation). That’s **influence** how it’s properly done!

When someone- either a “bully” in life or a “preacher” in a pulpit, seeks to *intimidate* or *manipulate* you into doing what *benefits them*, know that they are simply seeking to

*control* you. But when someone seeks to *influence* you with *truth* and *reason* hoping thereby that you'll *change yourself* for *your own good* or *benefit*, they're trying to *help* you!

Now, here's the point of all of this: Some consider "organized religion" to be a cult that uses *intimidation* and *manipulation* of the masses for their own benefit. It's not a charge without evidence or merit in many cases. But (and thankfully there is one!), when a church or one of its members seeks only to *reason* with you via *truth* and encourage you to *change yourself* for *your own benefit*, they're simply trying *influence* you for truth and righteousness. And that's another matter entirely! Don't shut yourself off from eternal salvation and those who truly want to help you achieve it because others have tried to intimidate and manipulate you. Not everyone is like that. There are some who simply want to "*further God's provision which is by faith*" and the "*the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith,*" [1Tim.1:4b,5](#).

If you're looking for spiritual *guidance* rather intimidation or manipulation, let me know and I'll be most happy to either do what I can or point you to someone in your area that truly has your best interest at heart. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org))