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By LuisnCervino

INFLUENCE – OR CONTAMINATION?

A few days ago, I went to a paint store to purchase a gallon of paint to match a paint sample that I had taken earlier. The clerk took a gallon can of white paint and began mixing in drops of other colors to achieve the specific paint color that I had requested. He was following the computer specifications that tell the clerks how to blend the correct proportions or amounts of different paint hues necessary to create the desired color.

Observing this process in action, I began thinking about how something like this happens to us on a daily basis. We all are subject to the influences or contamination from the environment around us, for our good or for our detriment. A little bit of influence, like a few drops of paint, can result in big changes in each one of us. The consequences – positive or negative – can follow us forever. Like the example of the paint that has been blended with other colors, never to return to its former state, influence or contamination from our surroundings can permanently affect us.

Having this in mind, we can see that it takes only a very little influence from the environment to change us, and that can be good or bad. As many of us have discovered, sometimes painfully, by ourselves, we cannot return to our previous state.

But how can we go about identifying what are the right and wrong influences? How are we to discern which ones are the best, and which we should avoid? I would suggest two important steps are the power of prayer, for discerning good and bad influences, and repentance, when we realize we have become contaminated by wrong influences. Through prayer we can receive wisdom and guidance from God. We also must follow what the Lord has told us

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Room 905, Nathan Center, 580G-K, Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong

TEL.: (852) 2805 1923 Fax (852)3747 6218 ▪ E-MAIL: enquiry@CBMC.org.hk

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through His Word, the Bible. As we respond in obedience to Him, we will find blessings. Here are suggestions from the Scriptures:

Recognize the danger of contamination. Everything around us can affect us, for better or worse, so we should seek what benefits us and builds us up. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That you may prove what the will of God, good, acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2)

Prayer gives us certainty. As we pray to God we find the conviction that what we present to the Lord must be according to His will. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; rather, fear the Lord and shun evil" (Proverbs 3:6-7).

Through prayer, God calls us to obedience. By obeying God and being tenacious in seeking to serve Him, we find success. "I only ask you to be very strong and courageous to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. do not turn from it all; only be successful wherever you go" (Joshua 1: 7).

Prayer and repentance bring restoration. Turning to God and acknowledging when we have fallen to negative influences, we can experience His restoration and healing. "If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Luis Cervino is a maxillofacial surgeon in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico, where he resides with his wife, Rocio, and their two sons. He has been a CBMC/CPEC member in Mexico since 1997, and has been translating Monday Manna from English into Spanish since 1999. His translations reach readers in Mexico and many other parts of the world.

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CBMC INTERNATIONAL: Jim Firnstahl, President
 2850 N. Swan Road, Suite 160 ▪ Tucson, Arizona 85712 ▪ U.S.A.
 TEL.: 520-334-1114 ▪ E-MAIL: mmanna@cbmcint.org
 Web site: www.cbmcint.org Please direct any requests or change of
 address to: jmarple@cbmcint.org

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had a can of paint tinted, and then found it had been turned into the wrong color? If so, what did you do with it? Did you keep the paint and use it, or did you discard it and purchase a new can of the desired color?

2. Using the paint analogy, how are we to respond when we discover we have become tinted – or tainted – by undesirable influences?

3. How can we go about discerning when we have been influenced in positive ways by the environment around us, and when it has contaminated us in detrimental ways?

4. What about the consequences of yielding to bad influences that contaminate us and our behavior? Is there a way to undo the wrong that has been done? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Psalm 18:25-26; Proverbs 27:17; Romans 12:1; Philippians 4:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:15-16; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

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