

Sanctification: Transformed Into the Image of Christ

Lesson 19

Perception

I. Introduction: Here's what we know

- a. God has **imparted** His nature to the believer as a function of regeneration.
- b. God has **empowered** believers to not sin.
- c. God commands his people to be **holy**.
- d. God holds the believer **accountable** for his personal sin.
- e. All of this means that believers, through faith, must have the moral **ability** to choose to abstain from sin or conversely to choose to sin.

II. Here's what we need to find out

- a. Why, then, does it seem that sin is such a natural and automatic **response** at times?
- b. If the believer has the capability to abstain from sin, what are the **processes** by which behavioral choices to sin or not sin are made?
- c. What do we know about these processes that **produce** human behavior?
- d. What, if anything, can one do to **change** those processes which produce one's behaviors?

III. Perception: The Root of Interpersonal Behavior

- a. Cognitive psychology teaches us that our perception of the external world begins with the inputs to the brain through the **senses**, which lead us to our understanding of the world around us. It is an automatic process.
- b. Since perception leads one to his view of the world and his **response** to it, the study of perception should provide a better understanding of interpersonal communication, personal relationships, the self, and one's experience of situations.
- c. What we perceive in reality is a balance between two sets of powers, one the outside world's power to force us to perceive specific things, and the second our power to impose a certain perception on the world. This is called our **mental field**.
- d. Once we have perceived a stimulus it invariably leads to some sort of decision as to how we will respond to that stimulus. This is the **root cause** of human behavior.
- e. Two people may physically see the same thing but each because of their diverse language skills, values, experience, and personal history, etc. may perceive it differently and will therefore, endow it with their own unique personal **meaning**.
- f. This meaning that we have bestowed becomes our **reality**. Inside the process of perception we assign value to this reality. Thus, what we perceive becomes good or bad, repulsive or attractive, dangerous or safe to us.
- g. If the resultant behavior which flows out of our perception is **responsive** rather than reflective we can be relatively certain that from a biblical perspective its source is the old sin nature rather than the new man. (More on this next week).

IV. The Cognitive Process of Perception

- a. The perceptual process (a brain function) is actually a sequence of steps that begins with the environment and leads to our perception of a **stimulus**, including an action in response to the stimulus perceived.
- b. The world is full of stimuli that can attract our attention through various senses. An **environmental** stimulus is everything in our environment that has the potential to be perceived.
- c. The **attended** stimulus is the specific object in the environment on which our attention is focused.
- d. Next, the attended stimulus if it is visual, is formed as an image on the **retina**. The image has still not been perceived, and this visual information will be changed even more dramatically in the next step of the process.
- e. The image on the retina is then transformed into **electrical** signals in a process known as transduction. This allows the visual messages to be transmitted to the brain to be interpreted.
- f. The electrical signals then undergo **neural** processing. The path followed by a particular signal depends on what type of signal it is (i.e. an auditory signal or a visual signal).
- g. In the next step of the perception process, we actually perceive the stimulus object in the environment. It is at this point that we become **consciously** aware of the stimulus.
- h. Perception doesn't just involve becoming consciously aware of the stimuli. It is also necessary for our **brain** to categorize and interpret what it is we are sensing.
- i. Our ability to interpret and give **meaning** to the object is the next step, known as recognition. The areas of the brain which create the interpretation are by default controlled by the old sin nature.
- j. Unless the perceiver **actively routes** the interpretation through his spirit, the interpretation will default to the dominant old sin nature.
- k. The final step of the perceptual process involves some sort of **action** in response to the environmental stimulus. This could involve a variety of actions, such as turning your head for a closer look or turning away to look at something else.

V. Exercise 1: Face or Word?

- a. What enables you to see both images? What would keep you from seeing both?

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- b. Once you perceive something in a particular way is it more difficult to change that perception to include new information?
- c. When you see something in a new way what happens to the old understanding you had of it?

VI. Exercise 2: Length of Lines

- a. Upon perceiving these two lines, how certain were you that there is a difference in their respective lengths?
- b. Did you base your certainty on scientific facts or upon opinion?
- c. Where was the information stored that gave rise to your opinion?
- d. If you feel fairly certain about something you believe to be true how does it affect your emotions?
- e. What percentage of the time do you base your conclusions about situations on opinion?
- f. In your own experience, how often do you think that a perception could cause erroneous beliefs about something?
- g. How would you know if your perception is erroneous?

VII. Exercise 3: Inward and Outward

- a. What changed from one image to the other?
- b. What effect does the way others perceive a thing influence your own?
- c. You were quite able to build all sorts of speculation about each of these images, where did the information come from to feed these speculations?
- d. In your own experience, how much of the time do you speculate about situations and circumstances in order to give them your own unique meaning?
- e. If you do not speculate about situations how will you ever really understand what is happening in situations?

VIII. Exercise 5: Amazing Brain

- a. What are the implications of the ability of the brain to organize scrambled information in such a way as to enable us to make sense of it.
- b. Do you think that your brain has the ability to organize missing or scrambled information in situations unrelated to reading?

IX. Exercise 4: Bill Gates

- a. What effect does your history or experience with a person have on your perception of them?
- b. What part do expectations we have about people and the context in which we encounter them play in our understanding of situations?

X. Application Questions:

- a. What lessons do you take away from this experience? Prov 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. KJV
- b. Pick one situation or relationship problem with which you have wrestled in an attempt to gain victory.
- c. What do you see when you look at your circumstance/relationship? (write down your first impressions)
- d. From the words you used to describe this situation, are you approaching this from the flesh or spirit?
- e. What evidence do you have that your perception is correct? What do you not see?
- f. What is the missing information about your circumstance that you supply so that it makes sense to you?
- g. What is the source of the missing information which you supplied?
- h. How much of the missing information that you supply is actually true (provable)? How much is your opinion?
- i. Do emotions change when you see a relationship or circumstance in a new way?
- j. What happens to the number of opportunities and options for dealing with a situation when you see it in a new way?
- k. Do you think that perceiving the spiritual reality of a situation might be quite different from a fleshly understanding of a situation? In what ways might it differ?
- l. How reliable or trustworthy is your perception of a problematic or troublesome circumstance or relationship?
- m. Do you have a choice in the way you perceive situations? If so, what must be true in order to exercise that choice?
- n. Do you have a choice in the way you respond to perceptions that you have formed?