

Sanctification: Transformed Into the Image of Christ

Lesson 20

The Problem With our Interpretation

I. Introduction

- a. Last week we discussed the process of perception and stated that perception takes place in the **brain**. For reasons which will become evident in a future lesson we can assert that perception as a product of brain functioning is that of the “old man”.
- b. The source of all stimuli to which the brain responds is **sensory**. Therefore, the old man is sensory based, making it dependent upon those stimuli for activation.
- c. The fact that perception is hard wired into us and is **unrelated** to one’s spiritual condition, and that it more often than not leads to a sinful response, suggests that the brain function of perception is not under the influence of the Holy Spirit.
- d. On the other hand, the source of all spiritual interpretation of stimuli to which the new man responds is the **Spirit**. The “new man” is therefore dependent upon the Spirit for the interpretation of environmental stimuli. 2 Kings 6:17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD , I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. KJV
- e. We described a series of steps in which perception automatically occurs in response to any stimulus within our mental field. One of the steps in the process of perception is that of “**interpretation**” of the stimulus perceived.
- f. The interpretation that occurs in response to any stimuli is extremely complex and not completely understood by neuroscientists. However, from what is known we can infer several things about what happens **inside** the interpretation sequence:
 1. Interpretation involves brain functioning in which a stimulus is compared to **all stored** experience, values, beliefs and context etc. so that the stimulus may be categorized.
 2. Once categorized, this stimulus is matched with a **preexisting** mental model which basically determines what sort of response is needed for a particular stimulus.
 3. It is at this precise point that the perceiver of a stimulus derives his **response** to it. Here lies the source of corrupt behavior. Therefore, it is here that we might logically infer that the Biblical idea of the heart resides. Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. KJV
 4. It is this functioning within the old nature that the believer must learn to **recognize** and to control if s/he is to live consciously before the face of God and in the likeness of Christ. This is the unending task of sanctification for the believer.
- g. In order to better understand the internal working of interpretation within the process of perception, it is helpful to explore the concept of **mental models** because this aspect lies at the root of many sinful responses to interpersonal situations.

II. Definition of Mental Models

- a. Mental models have been studied by cognitive scientists as part of efforts to **understand** how humans know, perceive, make decisions, and construct behavior in a variety of environments.
- b. Mental models are the images, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, values and stories that we carry in our own minds of ourselves, others, and every other aspect of our **cognitive** world.
- c. Cognitive researchers tell us that mental models are **essential** to our functioning because human beings cannot navigate through the complex environments of our world without cognitive mental maps.
- d. These mental maps help us to understand and **predict** experience. They are semi-permanent and held in long-term memory in the brain. They literally shape the short-term perceptions which we use to derive our everyday reasoning processes.
- e. The creation of mental models begins as soon as there is brain functioning within the **embryo**. The problem with our mental models is that they are uniquely and idiosyncratically shaped by our own brain functioning. They are incomplete and flawed in many ways
- f. Because our mental models are usually tacit, existing below the level of our conscious awareness, they are often untested and unexamined. They are, for the most part **invisible** to us....until we look for them.
- g. Since we have these unique mental models we generally have little **tolerance** for multiple interpretations of events which others hold because we often “see” only our own interpretation which is shaped by our existing models of reality.
- h. Our mental models create a predisposition towards most situations so that as situations arise we are ready to respond in a sort of **pre-programmed** way.

III. Mental Models and Inference

- a. When we understand that mental models exist and analyze how they operate as we interpret our interactions with others we begin to see how important it is to recognize them and to **consciously** bring them under control:
 1. I hear or see data that has gotten my **attention**.
 2. Based on **pre-existing** mental models, I select certain aspects from what I have observed or heard to which I will specifically give meaning.

Sanctification: Transformed Into the Image of Christ

Lesson 20

The Problem With our Interpretation

3. Because there is missing data, I add my own **unique** meaning which comes from the situational context, my culture, my personal experience, language, etc
4. I make assumptions based on the meanings I added (I see what I want to see or **expect to see**)
5. I make **predictions** and draw conclusions from the total picture which I have created about this situation.
6. I adopt beliefs about the total picture and form an **intention** which prepares me to act based on my picture. This creates a continuous feedback loop and causes me to narrow the data that I process in step 2. above.
7. I take **action** in response to the picture that I have created.

IV. Exercise

Acts 21:27-31 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. KJV

Put yourself in the place of these Jerusalem Jews in Acts 21. Referring to the statements in the left hand column:

1. State whether you believe that the statement is based on facts or a mental model.

INFERENCE: Assumptions that were made; feelings that were generated, beliefs that were formed, in response to what has seen and heard.	Based on fact or mental model?
Paul is in Jerusalem	Fact V27 saw him in the Temple
Trophemus is not a Jew	Fact V 29 Trophemus an Ephesian
Paul brought Trophemus into the Temple	Mental model V 29 whom they supposed
Non-Jews are forbidden in the Temple.	Fact Well known fact posted outside Temple
Such conduct is worthy of death.	Fact Well known fact posted outside Temple
Paul is an arrogant blasphemer who will stop at nothing to destroy Judaism.	Mental model V28 against the people and the Law
People like Paul do not deserve to live and must be exterminated at once	Mental model V31 about to kill him
It is my sacred duty to God to participate in his death.	Mental model V30 people ran together

V. Application

- a. While our beliefs may be our truth, they aren't usually The Truth. Conflict arises when two or more people of differing opinions need their truth to be recognized as The Truth. This is the way of the flesh. To what extent do your mental models create problems for you?
- b. In default mode, we don't easily separate our beliefs and opinions from our concept of who we are. As a result, we may take differences of opinion very personally, draw quick conclusions, get offended and respond with sinful interactions. Do you see yourself in this sequence?
- c. String a bunch of these sinful interactions together, and you've got chronically offended people storming around alienating one another while giving themselves heart disease and grieving the Spirit. How do you clean up such messes?