

Sanctification: Transformed Into the Image of Christ

Lesson 24

I. Introduction

- a. The only thing a brain can know and register is the **pattern** of neural activity induced by its own response to perceived experience. These neural patterns are the information stored within the brain.
- b. Since the brain is a pattern seeking organ, as experience is perceived, the incoming stimuli is categorized and **matched** with anything that is stored that is like the incoming data.
- c. If the incoming data is matched with stored information, the brain already has an experiential baseline and knows how to respond to the new data. This calls forth an **automatic** mental model which directs the body how to respond.
- d. Since these automatic responses do not pass through the conscious mind, but rather immediately prepare the body for a physiologic **action**, the conscious mind (spiritual mind) more often than not will be delayed in reining in the planned action of the brain.
- e. The one thing that the believer can do to prepare himself to militate against this automatic process is to stimulate a **mental force** circuitry in the brain which directs the brain to attend to the spiritual mind.
- f. The mental force circuitry is a clear **intention** of the will that tells the brain that only those responses which conform to the Spirit should be selected for attention and action.
- g. Mental force must be present in order **to interdict** the automatic response circuitry of the brain. In addition to mental force, there are three remaining cognitive steps that will lead to successful control over the sinful responses of the old man (brain).
- h. If followed diligently over a 30 day period these cognitive steps will **increase** the number of active brain cells which respond to external stimuli and will assure one's ability to walk according to the Spirit.
- i. We have thus far established that these changes in response will necessarily create new neuro-pathway connections within the brain. This will cause the brain to literally change shape and mass and is called Brain **plasticity**.
- j. The focus of this lesson is to explain the remaining three **cognitive** steps in this process which will create new brain mass and bring about stronger Biblical responses to temptations to sin.

II. Relabeling

- a. After creating an intentional mental force by **visualization** of yourself approaching the throne of God and making your every thought, word and deed a sacrificial deed sanctified to Him, the next step is called relabeling.
- b. Relabeling occurs as a result of a **mindful** conscious intention that upon the urge to act in a sinful way, the automatic behavior called for by the brain is relabeled as sin.
- c. Because the intended behavior is recognized as inconsistent with the Spirit and is labeled as **sinful**, this clarifies the nature of the problem. This act by itself causes the attentional circuitry of the brain to take a different path.
- d. This circuitry is somewhat like a recognition of danger. The effectiveness of this path is dependent upon the **thoroughness** of ones' preparation for the subsequent cognitive steps of this process.
- e. Relabeling is an acknowledgement that the sinful impulse to act is not the **true self**, but rather the manifestation of sin that dwells within the old sin nature. *Rom 7:17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. KJV*
- f. The sinful impulse does not reflect the New Man of the Spirit, does not reflect the new person that you are in Christ Jesus, but has to do with the man of the earth who is a **slave** to his earthly nature (brain) and the senses which drive it.
- g. The ability to make this recognition **objectively** and without an overpowering sense of guilt for being tempted is key to success. Should one experience guilt for the temptation, those guilt feelings would activate unhelpful neuronal circuitry in the brain.
- h. It is not hard to imagine how the feeling of guilt could cause denial, recrimination, self castigation etc. All of these responses are **already** programmed into the brain and once activated will not prove helpful in overcoming sinful responses.
- i. Rather, relabeling is an **objective** statement more akin to facing a fork in the road and making a decision which way to turn rather than a question of one's moral inclination.
- j. The spirit of man is driven by an unfailing and objective love, not guilt and not fear. This step makes a purposeful cognitive mental **shift away** from the self-identification with the sin and to Christ-likeness.
- k. Relabeling clarifies what is happening and why it is happening and activates the conscious will in a **positive** direction.
- l. As soon as the impulse to act is relabeled as a product of the old sin nature and a decision is made to counter it with a godly response, a neural circuit is set in motion to **enable it**.

III. Refocusing

- a. The next step is to **refocus** your attention on a Biblical response to the stimulus to sin. This is building a Christ-like circuit in ones behavioral repertoire. The more frequently it is activated the easier it becomes to activate it.
- b. Whereas the Relabeling step tells the brain to stop, the Refocusing step instructs the brain as to what good and godly action to **produce**.

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- c. It is well documented in child rearing practices that taking something harmful away from a toddler produces **resistance** and a temper tantrum whereas replacing the harmful object with something acceptable generally produces a good end.
- d. This same principle is at work with adults. Just saying no is an **imbalanced** equation and is likely to set up an unsuccessful attempt to defeat sinful behavior. Therefore, there must be a balancing part of the equation.
- e. The Bible states this principle in the New Testament by giving us those things to **put off** and those things to **put on**. In the absence of something to positively put on we will not be successful in putting off the old man with his deeds. Eph 4:22-24 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; ²³ And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ²⁴ And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. KJV
- f. Another way to think about this step in Biblical terms is: **Mortify** the deeds of the body and set your affections on things above. Mortification (a subsequent lesson) is the negative side and setting your affections is the positive side. Rom 8:13 *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. KJV*
- g. Increased synaptic strength is the **key** to the formation of enduring neural circuits. Cells that fire together wire together. Biblical thinking will bind these cells to one another and will simultaneously fire together as often as they are stimulated.
- h. This is what causes the patterned behavior we experience when we encounter situations which our brain classifies in a particular way. Anytime that set of stimuli is **encountered**, the brain knows exactly how to react.

IV. Revaluing

- a. The last step is to **revalue** the correct response. This, in essence, reinforces the positive decision to act Christ-like and at the same time reiterates the sinfulness of the urge just defeated.
- b. Emotions **dictate** attention. It is biologically impossible to learn something to which the brain has not paid attention. We have an emotional response to new learning that we truly value and this emotion causes the brain to attend to it.
- c. So what can produce this revaluing neuro-activity? Revaluing is seeing both sides of the equation (temptation and response) from **God's point of view**. To do this requires concentrated time in the Bible.
 1. Identify the context. **Pray**, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the situations in which you are likely to encounter this temptation. Brainstorm and journal about it. What is it that you get out of doing this sin? (All behavior has a payoff).
 2. Identify by **name** the Bible word that best captures the essence of this sin. Make a list of synonyms.
 3. Go to an **exhaustive** concordance and look up every verse where that sin or synonym is referenced. This is a topical study.
 4. Read each verse slowly and carefully. **Interact** with that verse by placing yourself in the passage as the one guilty of that particular sin. Pay particular attention to what God says about this sin.
 5. Meditate on God's view point as to how specifically that sin is an affront to God. What characteristic of God does it **violate**?
 6. Now make a list of the Biblical **opposites** of this sin. This is what you will value going forward. How specifically does putting on this opposite glorify God and emulate Christ?
 7. Consult an exhaustive **concordance** to identify and then study all the verses in which the opposites of this sin are used.
 8. Make the putting on of this attribute a matter of **consistent** prayer multiple times per day.
- d. As you follow this protocol and revaluing occurs, neurons **respond** by reaching out to one another in an elaborate branching process that connects millions of previously unaligned cells into neural networks.
- e. This concerted **effort** over a thirty day period will create new responses to old sinful habits and contribute to your personal experiential sanctification process.

V. Application

- a. To strengthen Relabeling, keep a journal of the internal dialogue which acknowledges the sinful impulse.
- b. To strengthen Refocusing pick a particular sin area that you know you will encounter and make a list of appropriate Biblical things to put on in place of those things that you will put off.
- c. To strengthen Revaluing prepare a study list of all the verses you can find that help you gain God's perspective on a particular sin area.