

Lesson Three

Review from Previous Lessons: As Joshua's dependence upon the information complex demonstrated, we can be swayed by what we see, feel, experience, and can measure. And the problem is compounded if a lot of us agree on an assessment based on the information complex! In addition, the story of Moses showed us that information and revelation are two distinct sources for assessment and decision making. Information must be differentiated from and subordinated to revelation. Revelation must actively context information. Finally, revelation has a unique ability: to link the two aspects of reality (the seen and the unseen) in a way information never could.

The Problem: Many Christians express a difficulty in knowing what the will of God is for their lives and/or for specific situations. They feel themselves surrounded by conflicting representations of reality: those provided by the information complex and those provided by Scripture. Many just want to give up and surrender to the information complex because it seems hopeless to try to figure out what the will of God is.

The Underlying Assumptions as Expressed in Everyday Terms:

1. I can predict results when I work from data and experience. I can't do that with Scripture.
2. How can anyone really know the will of God? Is that possible?
3. I'm comfortable with the idea that the Bible has great insights into human nature and a lot of historical credibility, but the human mind has advanced so much in the last two thousand years.
4. I like methods and systems I can control, that have a track record.
5. The whole idea of depending on something that my friends and colleagues would see as either outdated or subjective makes me uneasy.

Background Reading Before Teaching this Lesson:

Prepare for this class by carefully reading the book of James at least three times. As you read, keep notes for yourself on how this book addresses:

- 1) The contrast between information and revelation
- 2) The way James acknowledges earthly difficulties but gives solutions that directly contradict what you would read in "general interest" magazines or on network television
- 3) The necessity of seeking God's will
- 4) (Any other issue you find here that contrasts two ways of thinking)

Also, before class, familiarize yourself with the concept of a *representation* (see excerpt from Scott at the end of this lesson) and be able to explain it, with examples, to the class. We will be concentrating on linguistic symbols (words) in this lesson.

The Scripture Passages: Romans 12: 1-2; James 4:13-17

The Lesson:

- 1) Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud.
- 2) This passage illustrates several principles that we've already discussed.
 - a. There is almost always a clash between worldly patterns and what pleases God.
 - b. This clash is played out between our bodies – that is, everything having to do with our abilities to see, measure, and assess outside of revelation – and what Paul calls here “the renewing of your mind.”
 - c. The process of distinguishing between the two involves personal cost, what Paul calls “living sacrifice.”
 - d. We can see here illustrated the principles of **differentiation, subordination, contextualization and utilization.**
 - e. Finally – and perhaps most significant for today's discussion – this passage demonstrates that God's will is something that can be accessed and to some extent evaluated by us: “Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will” (v. 2)
3. Read aloud James 4:13-17.
 - a. This passage involves an area in which the information complex is largely unchallenged, even by Christians. Though it specifies business decisions, it can be generalized to other areas as well. Here we see that we should seek the will of God before acting: And to seek it and know it, means that it is knowable. Of course we can't know His will through information, only through revelation.
 - b. In order to deal with a situation, you have to represent it, and the most efficient way to do that is with words. In the case of the 12 spies who surveyed the Promised Land (Deuteronomy chapter 1, Numbers 13 and 14), all 12 spies saw the same daunting obstacles but represented the situation with different stories; one based on information, the other on revelation. From this situation, the example of James, and many other places in Scripture we can see that representations arise from either information or from revelation.
 - c. Thus we see that representations – specifically words – are themselves differentiated according to their sources. We'll call those which come from revelation **differentiated** representations. A differentiated representation of a situation doesn't “just happen.” You have to go make a deliberate choice to distinguish what God has revealed about a situation, from what information would cause you to say about it.
 - d. An undifferentiated thinker would see all representations as equal – those revealed as well as information. He or she would put the Bible on equal (or lesser!) footing than what is derived from information.

- e. Differentiated representations have a special function: they make **apparent** the will of God. That is the function of revelation: to reveal.
- f. Differentiated representations are a special class of words. They link the unseen purposes of God to the material world. They have their **origin** in the mind of God, they carry **power** to change reality, and their purpose is to make **apparent** His will. (James 1:1-8.)
- g. Finally, James 4:13-17 points out that undifferentiated representations not only do not originate in heaven and thus do not link the seen and the unseen, they also do not ultimately have the power to change reality. (For instance, your life could end before you carry out your intentions—verse 14.) On top of all that, they do not make God’s will apparent.

Worst of all, anyone who operates on undifferentiated representations would, according to James, be guilty of the sin of pride!

Questions for Discussion with Class:

- 1) How can it be said that our bodies are the source of information?
- 2) What is the best source of differentiated representations? What role does this source play in testing and approving the will of God?
- 3) Which Scripture passages have we studied thus far that demonstrate that the will of God is knowable?
- 4) How is the sin of pride directly connected to undifferentiated representations?
- 5) Differentiated representations allow the growth of what we might call a differentiated mind, and a differentiated reading of Scripture. How would a differentiated mind teaching the Bible be different from an undifferentiated mind?
- 6) What situation did you face this last week in which you were aware of differentiated and undifferentiated representations? Did you choose? Would you do it any differently now?
- 7) Read the book of James at least three times in the next week, and bring to class examples of principles you have learned in lessons one, two and three of this lesson series.)

“Yeah, but...”

The unseen realm of God doesn’t seem as “real” as what I can see and measure.

Come back next week for a tool that will help you with that!

(Teacher Resource follows):

*THE NATURE OF SYMBOLS

(from *A Definitional Study Of Biblical Representational Research And Its Current Applications*, Scott, 2003.) The entire work, with its footnotes, will be posted soon on this Web site.

By definition, representational research is about the study of symbols. Now, when most Christians hear the word symbol, they rightly make association with many of our most treasured concepts. The Bible is full of symbols: a lamb, a staff, anointing oil, manna, living water. We know that these objects are signs, and are meant to carry significance beyond themselves.

We know, for instance, that two wooden beams that intersect carry more weight, symbolically speaking, than just any structure: a cross, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, can represent the power of God to those who are being saved.

But the very same cross, Paul tells us, is foolishness to those who are perishing. Same cross, different meaning. In 2 Corinthians, Paul said that the message which he called "the aroma of Christ" would be to some a sweet fragrance of life; yet to others the same thing would be a smell of death. Same message, different effect.

That is because a fact—a person, an object, an event, a circumstance—can be represented many ways. Here is where representational research gets its name. And here is the core of all of representational thought. *We can either choose the representations of God about reality, about the world, about every detail of our lives; or, we can make our own representations and operate on them. It is that simple.*

The goal of representational research is to help people look at the way they represent the facts of their lives.

In order to do that, let us examine the way we form representations.

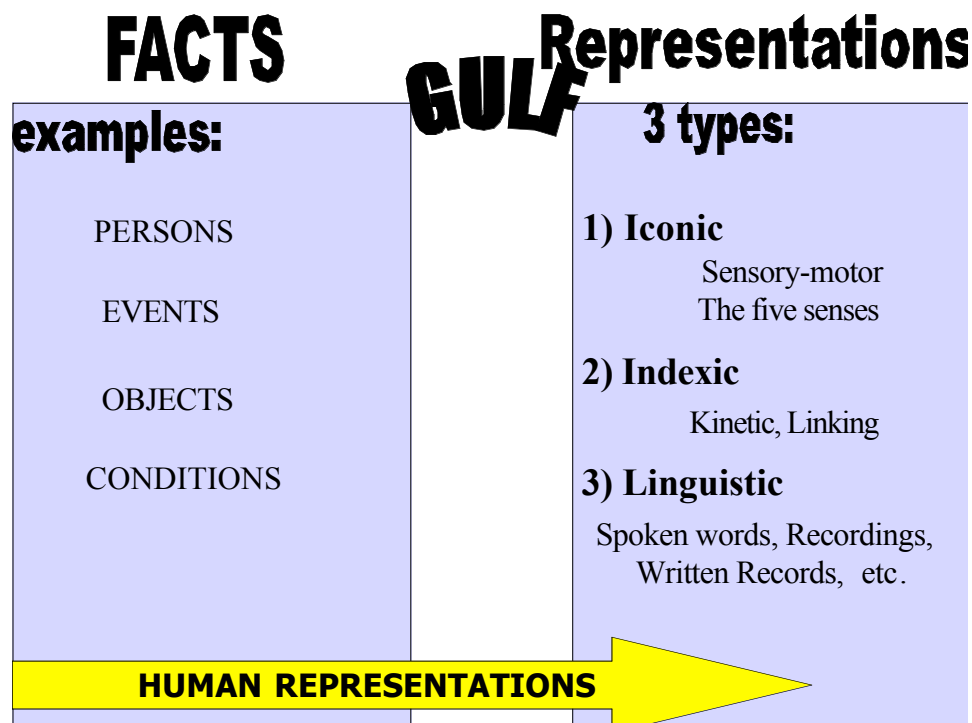
THINKING

Because the process of thought and its most precise manifestation, language, are so closely linked, it should come as no surprise that much of the terminology used in language studies are helpful in understanding the thinking processes that underlie language. Semiotics, or the study of signs, is particularly helpful. For our theological usage, representational thinkers have kidnapped some of the terminology of traditional semiotics and redeployed it for our specific use. Its precision in certain areas makes it ideal; while its unsuitability in others is overcome by carefully defining terms from within semiotics and from without.

It is essential that we think about thinking. Man alone of all the animals has this capacity of self-reflection and articulation about his own thinking processes; for while a monkey or dolphin can be taught to communicate in a rudimentary way that some term language, no other creature has the ability we call "recursive"—the ability to think about thinking and to analyze it. Much like the concept of a worldview which is "caught rather than taught," we assume that the way each of us thinks is natural and normal. Actually, our patterns of thought reflect both God's preprogramming of thought patterns in us

which reflect His thinking processes; as well as less-desirable forms and patterns from our sinful environment and nature.

To begin to ferret out how our thinking processes work, consider the triadic structure of thought. We are surrounded in our environment by those elements we could refer to as facts. Suspend for purposes of this discussion the element of "truthfulness" which we customarily assign to the word fact. "Fact," as we will use the word here, refers to things, objects, persons, states of affair, events, etc. A thing like a table is a fact, an object like a house is a fact, President Bush is a fact, terrorism is a fact. All exist in our environment, all can be accessed through our senses in some way.



Contrasted to the concept of "fact" is the concept of "representation." A representation is a way of symbolizing or conveying the idea of a fact. For instance, the object upon which a computer customarily rests is a fact. The spelling out of d-e-s-k conveys an image of that object into the brain of a reader who does not have to actually see the solidity of the wood, feel its texture, or to experience with the senses at all.

Representations are the only access we have to the physical world that surrounds us—we access it through symbols. When we see an object, for instance, and then turn away from it, the image that is in our brain is what informs us of the nature of the "fact" our senses access. We do not take a desk into our brains, we take a representation of that desk into our brains. We carry around not the fact of the desk but rather a representation of it in our brains: an image conveyed from our eyeballs through the nerves to the brain.

A fact is not its representation. A representation is not a fact. In order to sort out which is which, one must mentally separate them in some way.

