

BIBLE STUDY ON SOCIAL ANXIETY – THE FEAR OF MAN

Session 3: Keys to Overcoming Fear: Loving God and Others

Key Verses: Romans 8:28-39; I John 4:16-19; I Corinthians 13:4-8

Review:

WE MUST DEFINE SOCIAL ANXIETY BIBLICALLY

In our first meeting, we emphasized describing and defining the struggle of social anxiety, or in Biblical terms, the fear of man. We looked at two key verses, Proverbs 29:25 *“Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe”*, and II Timothy 1:7 *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”* To deal with a problem Biblically, we must define it Biblically. Anxiety and stress in social situations is a form of the fear of man, and the Bible has much to say about fear.

WE MUST ADDRESS LIFE’S PROBLEMS BIBLICALLY

We also examined some general principles in approaching and solving life’s problems Biblically; specifically developing a Biblical goal when dealing with problems. Our goal needs to be first and foremost to bring glory to God and be God’s kind of person.

SOCIAL ANXIETY IS ROOTED IN THE HEART

Last week we examined principles concerning heart issues related to the fear of man. Jesus used an analogy of fruit trees in Luke 6:43-45 to illustrate the relationship of the human heart to actions, words and emotions. The root of our lives is our heart, which includes our attitudes, beliefs, and motives. Heart desires and motivations produce a crop; words, actions and emotions. Godly desires, motivations, and beliefs produce godly words, actions, and emotions. Sinful desires, motivations, and beliefs produce ungodly words, actions, and emotions.

THE WORD OF GOD ALONE CAN EXPOSE THE HEART

We also examined the power of the Word of God to expose our hearts from Hebrews 4:12-13, and then turned to I John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* which teaches us that the pathway to a cleansed heart begins with confession, which is agreeing with God’s assessment of our heart condition.

CLEANSING STARTS WITH RECOGNIZING HEART IDOLS

Fear and anxiety are bad fruit, and bad fruit has a bad root. There is something unconsecrated in our hearts that produces fear and anxiety. We call this an idol of the heart. Idolatry is the worship of a false god. It is placing trust, allegiance, affection, desire, homage, and/or praise on something or someone other than the true and living God. The root of the fear of man is misplaced worship. God commands that He alone should have our awe, fear, and obedience. When fear of man is present, it is occupying a place in our hearts that rightfully belongs to God. When we fear people, we have exalted them and put them in a place in our lives that belongs only to God.

Hopefully you have been able to identify some of these heart idols that are producing the fear of man in your life. The following is just a sampling of some the heart issues that might produce social anxiety and the fear of man.

Likely candidates for those who battle social anxiety.

- Acceptance by others; fear of rejection by others vs. content in accepted by Christ
- Finding identity in others vs. identity in Christ
- Individuals or groups of people vs. Christ
- Dependence on self vs. dependence on Christ
- Pride that manifests in fear of humiliation vs. humility and transparency
- Fear of exposure vs confidence from integrity and openness

To overcome the fear of man, we need to address the core beliefs and values that reside in the heart. One key heart issue is the source of confidence and security in life.

THE SOURCE OF OUR CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY IS GOD ALONE

What should be the source of a believer's confidence in life? Should believers look within themselves to find security, and rely on their own strength, intelligence, and abilities to have confidence in life? People that struggle with the fear of man lack confidence and only feel secure when they are accepted by others. True security can only be found in acceptance by God. Listen to Romans 8:28-39:

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Through careful consideration of the love and care that the heavenly Father has for His children, fear and insecurity can be uprooted and removed. Look closely at this passage in Romans 8, especially as it relates to this issue of fear and insecurity. Consider the implication of being God's elect. If you are saved, then you are God's child, and according to the Scriptures, the following is true concerning you:

- God chose you to be His child before the world began.
- That choice was based on His own good pleasure
- Based on that choice, God called you to Himself
- You are justified (declared righteous based solely on the work of Christ)
- You will ultimately be glorified.

Everything that happens to you in life is designed by God to transform you into that ultimate expression of His glory. And the Father gave His Son to make this

transformation possible. So how does this relate to the fear of man? Consider this. Since the Father chose to save you, and offered the very life of His Son to provide this salvation, then it follows that He will keep and protect you from all harm. This passage clearly states that God has justified you no one can effectively condemn or judge you. You are God's chosen and belong to Him. He has set His eternal love on you. Since you have been accepted by God in Christ, then you are totally secure. If you believe this and keep it before you, then what others think of you or what they do to you will lose significance. If God is for us, it doesn't matter what others may do to us. You belong to Him, and He takes perfect care of His own. There is nothing in this life that can break your relationship with God or separate you from His love. Other people, and even supernatural entities can't even touch you without the permission of your Sovereign, omnipotent heavenly Father. I encourage you to allow the Spirit of God to minister this truth to your heart. As you meditate on it, then fear and insecurity will lose its hold in your life.

WE OVERCOME FEAR OF MAN BY FULFILLING RESPONSIBILITY

The fear of man is rooted in self-interest. To overcome the fear of man, your attention needs to turn away from what others think about you, and re-directed toward pleasing God. The fear of man is a snare that keeps people from fulfilling responsibilities. God sets us free from our fears and insecurities in order to serve Him and others. Make a list and consider what responsibilities (e.g. ministry opportunities) that you have avoided because of the fear of man. What does God want you to do that you have avoided or neglected because of the fear of man? You may think at this point "I really have no ministry or contribution to the body of Christ". This is another misconception that must change to have the proper motivation to attack this problem. The Scriptures assert that every believer has been gifted in a unique way to minister in the body of Christ. There is no such thing as a non-gifted believer. Your gifts may be quenched and hidden, but according to God's Word, they are there.

I Corinthians 12:7⁷ *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

Romans 12:4-6a⁴ *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,*⁵ *so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*⁶ *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*

I Peter 4:8-10 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*⁹ *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*¹⁰ *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

Remember our passage in I Timothy concerning fear? Paul was admonishing Timothy to stir up his gift, and not to allow fearing others to keep him from expressing his God given gift. The gifts that the Spirit gives are for the building up of one another. And each of us has been gifted to minister the grace of God into one another's lives.

WE OVERCOME THE FEAR OF MAN BY LOVING GOD AND OTHERS

The proper motivation for expressing gifts in the body is love for one another. Our love for God and others will overcome the fear of man. This principle is expounded in I John 4:16-19

¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

Notice the relationship of confidence, boldness, and love. You can be confident and secure in life because God has set His love on you. And as this love is matured, it casts out all fear. Again, this confidence is linked with our acceptance by God. Because Christ has born the wrath and punishment for our sins, we experience the blessing, acceptance, and security of God. And because you have been loved in this way, you are empowered and enabled to love others. To love another person deeply, you have to make yourself vulnerable. As you reach out, and disclose yourself to others, you risk rejection and criticism. As you seek and find your security and acceptance in God alone, then you are willing to take such risks. In fact, we are commanded to love sacrificially. We are commanded to love others the way we have been loved by God. We are called to follow our Savior. Jesus was hated, despised, rejected, spit upon, ridiculed, misunderstood, and humiliated. He did it for the joy set before Him, even though He despised the shame. That joy was satisfying His Father and completing the work that had been given to Him to do.

Agape love, true biblical love, gives regardless of the response. Because we have been unconditionally accepted and loved by God, we are free and in fact obligated to express this love we have received to others, even to our enemies. Such love frees us from the fear of rejection. We love others out of love for our Father and to please Him first and foremost. The response of those we love is not our motivation. This type of love is described in a familiar passage, I Corinthians 13:4-8.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

This love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit – it is beyond our natural ability, and has its source in the grace of God. It is born in our weakness. Expressing love towards others is a major key in overcoming the fear of man. We need to choose to love others despite how it makes us feel. Jesus chose to love us by giving His life on the cross. He certainly did not feel like suffering the torments of Calvary.

In closing today, I would like for us to think of some practical examples of where God has called us to love others, even when it may be difficult or unpleasant. True love takes risks in dependence on the Lord.

1. Proclaiming the gospel or witnessing
2. Speaking, singing, or praying in public
3. Confronting a fellow believer that is in sin

4. Building relationships with those of differing backgrounds (economic, social, educational, recreational)
5. Giving your time, attention, money, and help to those who will likely not reciprocate.
6. Offering advice or counsel to those who may reject it, or ignore it, or despise it.
7. Being the initiator in friendships and relationships
8. Performing acts of kindness toward enemies
9. Sharing your insights or thoughts in a study group