

BIBLICAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL ANXIETY – THE FEAR OF MAN

Section I: Introduction and Case Studies

Social anxiety disorder (social phobia) is the third largest psychological problem in the United States today. Very few people understand this, and even in psychological circles, it is often misdiagnosed. First, consider some descriptions of people who suffer with this problem. This information comes from the “Social Phobia/Social Anxiety Association” Web Site.

Case Study #1

A man finds it difficult to walk down the street because he’s self-conscious and feels that people are watching him from their windows. Worse, he may run into a person on the sidewalk and be forced to say hello to them. He’s not sure he can do that. His voice will catch, his "hello" will sound weak, and the other person will know he’s frightened. More than anything else, he doesn’t want anyone to know that he’s afraid. He keeps his eyes safely away from anyone else’s gaze and prays he can make it home without having to talk to anyone.

Case Study #2

A woman hates to stand in line in the grocery store because she’s afraid that everyone is watching her. She knows that it’s not really true, but she can’t shake the feeling. While she is shopping, she is conscious of the fact that people might be staring at her from the big mirrors on the inside front of the ceiling. Now, she has to talk to the person who’s checking out the groceries. She tries to smile, but her voice comes out weakly. She’s sure she’s making a fool of herself. Her self-consciousness and her anxiety rise to the roof.

Case Study #3

Another person sits in front of the telephone and agonizes because she’s afraid to pick up the receiver and make a call. She’s even afraid to call an unknown person in a business office about the electric bill because she’s afraid she’ll be "putting someone out" and they will be upset with her. It’s very hard for her to take rejection, even over the phone, even from someone she doesn’t know. She’s especially afraid to call people she knows because she feels that she’ll be calling at the wrong time -- the other person will be busy — and they won’t want to talk with her. She feels rejected even before she makes the call. Once the call is made and over, she sits, analyzes, and ruminates about what was said, what tone it was said in, and how she was perceived by the other person....her anxiety and racing thoughts concerning the call prove to her that she "goofed" this conversation up, too, just like she always does. Sometimes she gets embarrassed just thinking about the call.

Case Study #4

A man hates to go to work because a meeting is scheduled the next day. He knows that these meetings always involve co-workers talking with each other about their current projects. Just the thought of speaking in front of co-workers raises his anxiety. Sometimes he can’t sleep the night before because of the anticipatory anxiety that builds up. Finally, the meeting is over. A big wave of relief spills over him as he begins to relax. But the memory of the meeting is still uppermost in his mind. He is convinced he made a fool of himself and that everyone in the room saw how afraid he was when he spoke and how stupid he acted in their presence. At next week’s meeting, the boss is going to be there. Even though this meeting is seven days away, his stomach turns raw with anxiety and the the fear floods over him again. He knows that in front of the boss he’ll stammer, hesitate, his face will turn red, he won’t remember what to say, and everyone will witness

his embarrassment and humiliation. He has seven miserable days of anxiety ahead of him, to think about it, ruminate over it, worry about it, overexaggerate it in his mind...over and over again...

Case Study #5

A student won't attend her university classes on the first day because she knows that in some classes the professor will instruct them to go around the room and introduce themselves. Just thinking about sitting there, waiting to introduce herself to a roomful of strangers who will be staring at her makes her feel nauseous. She knows she won't be able to think clearly because her anxiety will be so high, and she is sure she will leave out important details. Her voice might even quaver and she would sound scared and tentative. The anxiety is just too much to bear -- so she skips the first day of class to avoid the possibility of having to introduce herself in public.

Case Study #6

Another young man wants to go to parties and other social events -- indeed, he is very, very lonely -- but he never goes anywhere because he's very nervous about meeting new people. Too many people will be there and crowds only make things worse for him. The thought of meeting new people scares him -- will he know what to say? Will they stare at him and make him feel even more insignificant? Will they reject him outright? Even if they seem nice, they're sure to notice his frozen look and his inability to fully smile. They'll sense his discomfort and tenseness and they won't like him -- there's just no way to win -- "I'm always going to be an outcast," he says. And he spends the night alone, at home, watching television again. He feels comfortable at home. In fact, home is the only place he does feel comfortable. He hasn't gone anywhere in twelve years.

Section II: General Characteristics of Social Anxiety

In public places, such as work, meetings, or shopping, people with social anxiety feel that everyone is watching and staring at them (even though rationally they know this isn't true). The socially anxious person can't relax, "take it easy", and enjoy themselves in public. In fact, they can never relax when other people are around. It always feels like others are evaluating them, being critical of them, or "judging" them in some way. The person with social anxiety knows that people don't do this openly, of course, but they still feel the self-consciousness and the judgment while they are in the other person's presence. It's sometimes impossible to let go, relax, and focus on anything else except the anxiety. Because the anxiety is so very painful, it's much easier just to stay away from social situations and avoid other people.

Many times people with social anxiety simply must be alone -- closeted -- with the door closed behind them. Even when they're around familiar people, a person with social phobia may feel overwhelmed and have the feeling that others are noticing their every movement and critiquing their every thought. They feel like they are being observed critically and that other people are making negative judgments about them.

One of the worst circumstances, though, is meeting people who are "authority figures", especially people such as bosses and supervisors at work, but including almost anyone who is seen as being "better" in some way. People with social anxiety may get a lump in their throat and their facial muscles may freeze up when they meet this person. The anxiety level is very high and they're so focused on "not failing" and "giving themselves away" that they don't even remember what was said. But later on, they're sure they must have said the wrong thing...because they always do.

These are some terms that describe this struggle:

- Self-conscious
- Fear of other's judgment and evaluation
- Feelings and thoughts of inferiority
- Emotional stress when in the presence of other people
- Fear of humiliation or embarrassment
- Small mistakes seem exaggerated
- Feeling that everything you say is messed up
- Difficulty getting thoughts together and saying what you mean

Here are some situations that may be difficult for such a person:

- Fear of using a public bathroom
- Fear of eating in public or in front of other people
- Fear of writing in front of others, such as signing a check
- Fear of making a mistake in front of others

Here are some situations that typically trigger the anxiety:

- Being introduced to new people
- Criticism from anyone
- Being watched by others
- Meeting authorities
- Having to speak in front of others, especially groups of people
- Meeting others eyes

Section III: The World's Answer to Social Anxiety

The world's answer to this problem is basically 2-fold. There is medication available, that only masks the problem and addresses physical responses and the symptoms of anxiety. The other answer offered is behavioral modification, which at best can only change outward responses to stressful situations through psychological techniques. These techniques are often based in a self-esteem based model, and building self-confidence. Though some outward relief from symptoms may be attained by these approaches, both fail to deal with root issues Biblically and do not provide godly motivation for change. Only God and His Word are sufficient to address and change the human heart.

Section IV: Defining Social Anxiety Biblically

If we want God's answer and help for this problem, we need to first embrace a Biblical understanding and definition of the problem. You will not find the term "social anxiety" or "social phobia" in the Bible. However, you will find many passages that address the issue of fear, specifically the fear of man. If you accept the term "social anxiety" for what we have been describing, then it is a relatively small step to see that this is the same as the fear of man. "Social" means involving people and "anxiety" is a type of fear – hence the fear of situations involving people becomes our Biblical definition. So what does the Bible teach about fearing others? What do the Scriptures teach about fear in general? What does the Bible teach us as Christians about our relationships and social interactions with other people? Is God concerned with our ability to be around other people, and is He concerned with how we feel around others and how we respond to them? He most certainly is. And if you struggle in this area, He has provided answers and deliverance from this bondage. Let's look at a passage that addresses this problem.

Proverbs 29:25

²⁵ *Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.*

Let's consider a couple of words in the first part of this verse. First, the word "fear", which is the Hebrew word *charadah*. It means fear, anxiety, quaking, trembling, extreme anxiety and anxious care. The root word means to tremble.

Now the word "snare". It is the Hebrew word *mowqesh*, and it means a bait, a lure, or a snare – a trap.

Think about those definitions, and how they describe this problem. If you suffer with this problem, it is important for you to recognize the nature and extent of the problem Biblically. This fear or anxiety that causes you to tremble or quake inside is a trap. It is something that controls, and limits you. Fear of others, or of being around others, is a bondage, a limitation, in a sense, a jailhouse that has you trapped and keeps you from being free. It prevents you from fully experiencing the Lord's best for your life. But be encouraged. The rest of this verse is a promise. The Word of God says that if you can learn to trust in the Lord, you will be kept safe from this snare. Recognize that the Scriptures not only describe the problem, but also offer a superior solution and release from this trap of fear.

At this point you may be tempted to become a bit defensive. You may think, "You don't understand. This is just the way I am." In other words – "God made me this way, why can't people just accept me the way I am – I just don't feel comfortable around other people, and prefer to be by myself. What is so wrong with that? Why do I have to be around other people?" Let's analyze that thinking Biblically. Is it God's intention for His children to be afraid of others? Is He the source of fear and timidity in our lives?

There is a passage that addresses this question directly. It is II Timothy 1:6-8. II Timothy is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his junior associate, Timothy. Timothy was struggling with a type of the very issue we are addressing – He was intimidated and tempted to be afraid of some people in the church he was called to lead – and here is Paul's counsel to him:

II Timothy 1:6-8

⁶ *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. ⁸ So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,*

The word for timidity, or fear means is *deilia*, "fearfulness" (from *deos*, "fright"), is rightly rendered "fearfulness" in II Timothy 1:7. The word denotes "cowardice and timidity" and is never used in a good sense. That spirit does not come from God.

God has not made us timid and afraid of others. This is not the way He intends for you to be. And this is great news. If He has not intended this for you, then He surely has provided a way to overcome this problem.

This letter from the Apostle Paul to Timothy was a letter of encouragement and exhortation to this young leader in the church. He was evidently being tempted to be

afraid and timid of people. Paul was encouraging him that he had a gift and something given to him by God to offer the church, and that he needed to stir it up, and not allow fear and timidity to quench the work of God in his life and the ministry God had given him for others.

I want to encourage you today. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then God has gifted you uniquely to bless other people. And fear of others can bind and ensnare you, thereby hindering the ministry God has given you to help other people. This is going to be one of the keys to overcoming this anxiety and fear – loving other people. Fear and anxiety by its very nature is self-focused and self-centered, and perfect love casts out fear.

Six Basic Principles to Solving Problems Biblically

Before we address the fear of man specifically, we want to examine six basic principles for solving problems biblically:

PRINCIPLE #1 – God’s sufficient Word has the answer for all my problems.

II Peter 1:3-4

³ *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

PRINCIPLE #2 – God has provided a way for me to effectively address every problem in my life.

I Corinthians 10:13

¹³ *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

PRINCIPLE #3 – To deal with problems God’s way, I must first know Christ as my Savior.

I Corinthians 2:11-14

¹¹ *For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

PRINCIPLE #4 – Knowing Christ as my Savior does not automatically solve all my problems. I must learn to appropriate what He has provided.

Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

²⁰ You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

PRINCIPLE #5 – Problems are not bad, but opportunities to grow to be more like Christ.

James 1:2-4

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

PRINCIPLE #6 – The foremost goal in addressing my problems is to glorify God.

Romans 11:36

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

TO OVERCOME THE FEAR OF MAN, YOU MUST RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS ROOTED IN THE HEART

A key principle in overcoming problems and being transformed to the glory of God is recognizing that the change that God produces begins in our hearts, and a changed heart produces a changed life. In other words, true transformation from God is based in our hearts, and changed outward actions are a fruit of that inward change of heart. Mere reformation of behavior is not sufficient and does not constitute true Biblical change. God is interested in addressing anxiety and fear at the heart level. He is interested in changing the motivation and source of behavior, not just outward reformation of actions and reduction of symptoms. We must realize that the ability to truly change from the heart must come from the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Though we must cooperate with God for such change to occur, the ability and power to change does not come from within us, but comes from the Spirit of God.

Let's examine a key passage of Scripture that teaches us the relationship of the heart to actions, Luke 6:43-45.

⁴³ *“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.*

Jesus uses an analogy of fruit trees to teach us about this relationship of the heart to words and actions. He says that bad fruit comes from a bad root. A thorn bush never produces figs, and grapes don't grow on briars. The root of our lives is our heart, which includes our attitudes, our beliefs, and our motives. Our desires reside in our hearts. And these 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.

To address the fear and anxiety, the Spirit of God must expose and address the root issue, which is in the heart. Fear and anxiety are not entities that attack us from the outside. Their source is from a heart that has not fully learned how to trust in God. This is an essential concept to grasp. God desires to change our hearts; our beliefs, motives and desires, and the effect will be a changed actions and emotions.

THE WORD OF GOD ALONE CAN EXPOSE THE HEART

So how do we uncover the beliefs, motives, desires, and intent of our hearts? How do we come to understand what is in our hearts that produces anxiety and fear of others? The Word of God has the power to uncover the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

Hebrews 4:12-13:

¹² For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

As we listen carefully to the Word of God as it is preached, as we read the Word of God, as we discuss the Word of God with others, as we memorize the Word of God, and think about it, we will begin to discern our weaknesses and our sins. The Spirit of God will take this living sword and penetrate to the depths of our very soul, and it will judge us. It will expose our thoughts and our motives. And this, though painful, is good. To be cleansed, we must confess, and to confess, we must recognize.

I John 1:9

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The path to cleansing from impure and unrighteous heart conditions is the pathway of confession. The word "confess" means to "agree with" or "speak the same thing as". As God uses His Word to expose our heart, and we recognize our shortcoming, sin, rebellion, or weakness, then we can choose to agree with God. To confess means that we agree with God that we have fallen short of His standard. We admit and confess our condition, and God cleanses us and removes it from our lives. In this passage, the Apostle John also says that if we say that we have no sin, if we don't agree with God about our condition, then we deceive ourselves, and we remain in darkness. Jesus told the Pharisees that because they failed to acknowledge and recognize their sin, that they remained blind and spiritually dead.

If you are a believer in Christ, God fully accepts you based solely on the work of Christ. This frees you to face and admit your sins. Because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for all of your sins through His death on the cross, you can never again fall under His condemnation. Sin legally has no hold over you, for Christ has broken its power.

However, for you to experience the freedom from the power of sin that is legally yours, you must recognize, confess and forsake your sin. And you need the Holy Spirit and God's Word to do that.

James 1:22-25

²² *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* ²³ *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

God gives us His word to expose our sin, and declare His righteousness. We need to look intently into this perfect law, and it will produce freedom in our lives as we respond to what we see.

THE ROAD TO LIBERATION BEGINS WITH RECOGNIZING HEART IDOLS

At this point you may be thinking, “All of this is great, but what does it have to do with my fear and anxiety?” Fear and anxiety are bad fruit, and this bad fruit has its source in a bad root. There is something rotten in our hearts that causes fear and anxiety. There is something in our hearts not submitted to God that manifests in the fear of man. We are going to call this bad root an idol of the heart. Let's explain this concept of an “idol of the heart”.

What is an idol? It is a false god. What is idolatry? It 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.

Are you recognizing the relationship of the fear of man and spiritual idolatry? The fear of man has its root in misplaced worship. God commands that we worship Him alone, and that He alone should have our awe, fear, and obedience. When fear and anxiety are in operation, something is in the place in our hearts that rightfully belongs to God.

Luke 12:4-5:

⁴ *And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*

When we fear people, we have exalted them and put them in a place in our lives that belongs only to God. It's because our perception and view of others is too big, and our perception and view of God is too small. And this, my dear brother and sister, is spiritual idolatry! Are you beginning to understand why this issue holds much importance to God. He deserves and demands all of our fear, reverence, and worship. It is wrong for anyone or anything to hold that place in our lives.

We are going to see some practical steps we can take to uproot this idol of the fear of man. But first you must recognize the fear of man in your life, and must also seek to understand the false beliefs, motives, and desires that are behind it. You need to ask God to help you see the source of it, and where it has ruled you, and where you have obeyed it and allowed it to control you. You need to begin to confess this as sin, and agree with God that these attitudes and actions are wrong, and that the Lord Jesus deserves to have all of your fear and respect and devotion.

One way to start to recognize the fear of man in your life is to keep a journal of upsets. By taking a close look at the particular situations and persons that cause this anxiety and fear, then it will help you identify the heart idol. Your thoughts and desires during times of upset are indicators of what is ruling your heart at that moment. Even the desperate desire to be free of the anxious feelings can become a ruling desire.

Once these idols of the heart are exposed, then the Lord can start to remove them and replace them with Himself. He is to be the only fear and ruler in our lives.

Exodus 20:³ *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

Idols are not just statues and images. They include anything that we put in the place that God deserves. Here are some likely candidates for heart idols for those who battle the fear of man:

- 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

THE FEAR OF MAN IS OVERCOME BY PLACING YOUR CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY IN GOD ALONE

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. 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.

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 meditation on 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.

THE FEAR OF MAN IS OVERCOME 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 12:7 ⁷ *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

Romans 12:4-6a ⁴ *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.

THE FEAR OF MAN IS OVERCOME 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.

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 as follows:

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.

THE FEAR OF MAN IS OVERCOME BY THINKING BIBLICALLY

We are in a battle – not against people, but against spiritual foes that wage war in the arena of the mind. We will win or lose based on what we allow in our minds, and what we choose to think about and meditate on.

The Scriptures present the Christian experience as spiritual war waged on the battleground of the human mind. Victory over spiritual foes is rooted in learning to think Biblically. This principle is expressed throughout the Bible.

II Corinthians 10:1-5

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Paul was waging a spiritual war. He was being accused by false teachers and apostles of lacking authority and validity. False teachers followed behind him and brought false ideas about the gospel and how to have a right standing with God. They also propagated lies about the Apostle Paul’s authority and integrity. They were undermining his ministry, and this letter is largely Paul’s defense against these attacks against his apostleship and the truth of the gospel. In this passage Paul makes it clear that the fight that we are in is not against people, but against false ideas, doctrines, and heresies. And what is the weapon given to Paul and to us to fight this battle? It is the sufficient Word of God ministered by the power of God’s Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:1-4

¹ When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power

Paul did not fight against these false ideas and lies with his own intellect and reasoning. He did not depend on his own eloquence and wisdom to try to stand against the attack. Rather, he depended on the power of the Spirit of God. Paul viewed himself as fearful and weak, and rested in simple faith on the power and wisdom of God to fight these battles.

In our Christian experience, we are facing the same foes. Our enemy is false belief and wrong doctrine, which are enemies that attack our minds and thinking. According to verse 5 in II Corinthians 10, our fight is against strongholds and fortresses of false

thinking, understanding and beliefs that have exalted themselves above the truth. Our calling is to expose and subdue these thoughts and ideas by submitting our minds to the Word of God. This is the means of spiritual victory.

This basic principle of spiritual warfare is the key to being set free from the fear of man to serve Christ. Look again at verse 4 in II Corinthians 10. There are strongholds in the mind that consist of ideas and thoughts contrary to Biblical truth. Satan binds and controls people by controlling their minds and thinking.

John 8:32

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

For us to gain the victory over the snare of the fear of man, we need to know, believe and act upon the truth of God's Word. It is the weapon that we have been given to overcome the enemy. It is through the renewal of our thinking that we are transformed into the image of Christ and set free to serve Him and love others.

Ephesians 4:20-24

²⁰You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. ²¹Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Verse 23 says that we are to be made new in the attitude of our minds. This process of putting off of the old self and putting on of the new self has its foundation in changing our thoughts, attitudes, motives and beliefs. There is no mystical way to become a holy and righteous person. It happens as we submit our thinking and then our actions to the Word of God.

Colossians 3:1-2

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

We have to choose to set our minds on heavenly things, godly things, truthful things, and not on earthly things – the philosophies and ideas of fallen men. Again, these things that we need to set our minds on are found exclusively in the Word of God.

Romans 12:1-2

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

How are we enabled to obey the will of God? We are enabled by God to change by allowing the Word of God to transform us from the inside out. Godly action starts with godly thinking. True spirituality starts in the heart; the motives, affections, desires, and thoughts. Again, the Word of God has the unique power to expose our vain and sinful attitudes and thinking, and replace that thinking with the truth that will set us free.

Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* ⁸ *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* ⁹ *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you*

The thoughts that we allow in our minds should have these characteristics: Decent, honest, of good reputation, respectable, true, noble, righteous, just, pure, chaste, modest, free from fault, clean, pleasing, lovely, speak well of others, a good report, virtuous, morally excellent, praiseworthy.

This list should serve as our mind's doorkeeper. As thoughts approach our mind, from the newspaper, or a textbook, or the television, or a movie, or a friend, or a preacher, or just from our own musing, we need to evaluate them in light of this list of characteristics. And if they don't meet this criterion, they should not be allowed to stay.

Proverbs 4:20-23 *My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

Our mind is the door to our heart, and what is in our heart determines who we are. There is a battle raging for the control of our minds.

The following are some homework suggestions to help you apply this study:

1. Describe in detail situations where you have struggled in this area of social anxiety. List the following information: Who you were with; the circumstances; what you were thinking; what you said to others; how you were feeling; what you were wanting or desiring; what you were thinking about yourself in the situation; what you were thinking about other people in the situation; why you were in the situation;
2. List activities that you would participate in if you did not have this problem. List activities that you currently dread and would probably enjoy if you did not have this problem. List responsibilities that you procrastinate or avoid because of this problem.
3. Try to recall and record the details of the worst situation(s) in the past related to this problem.
4. Describe how has your relationship to Christ affected this problem?
5. Read Luke 6:43-45 and describe the relationship of the heart to actions.
6. Read Hebrews 4:12-13 and reflect on the power of the Word of God to affect the human heart.
7. Memorize and meditate on *Proverbs 29:25 and II Timothy 1:7*

8. Consider the following “X-ray questions” and ask God to reveal what “idols of the heart” may be causing the fear of man and anxiety in your life. These questions are aimed to expose our motives, desires, and thoughts – in other words, our hearts. Confess these idols before the Lord and ask Him to help you remove them from your life. Many of these questions came from Dave Powlison’s article “X-ray questions: Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior”:

- What do you think that you need from other people?
- What do you want, desire, crave, and wish for?
- What are your goals, pursuits, and expectations?
- What do you fear? Worry about? Don’t want?
- What would you like to accomplish in life?
- What makes you tick? What do you delight in? What really matters to you? What do you dream about?
- What brings you safety, security, refuge, comfort, pleasure, escape?
- What or who do you trust?
- Whose performance matters to you? Who do you desire to see do well in life? Who influences your world and life?
- Who must you please? Whose opinion matters to you? Who do you desire approval and acceptance from and fear rejection?
- Who would you like to be like? Who are your heroes?
- What gives your life meaning?
- What is your measure of success and failure?
- What would make you joyful and happy in life? What would bring you the greatest sadness and unhappiness?
- What do you pray for and ask God for?
- What bothers you and irritates you? Who or what gets under your skin?
- What occupies your mind and thoughts, especially at “down times”
- What do you like to talk about?
- Where do you place your hope and trust? Where do you take refuge when threatened or harmed? Who is the protector, judge, controller, provider in your world?

- What controls you? What are you addicted to?
- Complete this sentence: If only I could have _____, or be _____, then I would be happy.
- How do you define yourself? Where do you find your identity?

9. Read I Corinthians 13 and consider what true love is.

10. Think of some practical examples of where God has called you to love others, even when it may be difficult or unpleasant. True love takes risks in dependence on the Lord. Here are some examples:

- Proclaiming the gospel or witnessing
- Speaking, singing, or praying in public
- Confronting a fellow believer that is in sin
- Building relationships with those of differing backgrounds (economic, social, educational, recreational)
- Giving your time, attention, money, and help to those who will likely not reciprocate.
- Offering advice or counsel to those who may reject it, or ignore it, or despise it.
- Being the initiator in friendships and relationships
- Performing acts of kindness toward enemies
- Sharing your insights or thoughts in a study group

11. Write down thoughts that you have when battling the fear of man, and search for a Scriptures that can expose these thoughts, refute these thoughts, and replace these thoughts: Here are several examples:

- I must be accepted by others to be safe and secure.
- I can only be confident if people appreciate and accept me
- I can't get involved with people because I they might hurt me.
- If people don't like me, I just should stay away from them.

Here are Scriptures that would refute this thinking.

Psalm 27:1-3 (NIV)

The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? ² When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

Isaiah 51:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ *“Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. ⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”*

Psalm 56: 1-4; 10-11 (NIV)

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. ² My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride. ³ When I am afraid, I will trust in you. ⁴ In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise— ¹¹ in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Hebrews 13:6 (NIV)

⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

Here are some more thoughts, and scriptural replies:

- I have nothing to contribute of worth to others.
- God hasn't called me to be involved in other people's lives
- I don't need other people.
- Other people don't need me.

Ephesians 4:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

1 Peter 4:7-11 (NIV)

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. ⁸ 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. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Finally, one more:

- The Lord would not want me to be uncomfortable or suffer; It is too painful for me to be around others, or, I can't witness or talk about my faith to others because they may not like it and try to harm me.

1 Peter 2:20-23 (NIV)

²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

1 Peter 3:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”