

BIBLE STUDY ON SOCIAL ANXIETY – THE FEAR OF MAN

Session 2: Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Key Verses: Luke 6:43-45; Hebrews 4:12-13; Luke 12:4-5; Exodus 20:3

Review:

Last week, our focus was on 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.” I encourage you to continue to meditate on and memorize these verses. To meditate on God’s Word means to roll it over and over in your mind – to carefully consider the meaning and the words – to assimilate it. The Word of God is the means that God uses to change us, to produce faith, and thereby set us free. Both of these verses contain powerful promises given to us to help us to overcome the fear of man. Romans 10:17 says that “...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” As you come to know God more intimately through the Scriptures, you will grow to trust Him and His Word. This trust in Him will shelter you and set you free from the fear of man. You will experience the power, love, and sound mind that will replace the fear of man.

Tonight we want to examine another key principle in overcoming this problem and being transformed to the glory of God. The principle is this: The change that God produces is in our hearts, and the change of heart produces a changed life. In other words, true transformation from God is based in our hearts, and our changed actions are a fruit of that 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 an 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.

First, let’s examine a passage of Scripture that teaches us the relationship of the heart to actions. Turn to 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 briers. 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 briers. 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.

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. Listen to 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. Listen to 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, 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.

As believers, God fully accepts us based solely on the work of Christ. This frees us to face and admit our sins. Because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for all of my sins through His death on the cross, I can never again fall under His condemnation. Sin legally has no hold over me, for Christ has broken its power. However, for me to experience the freedom from the power of sin that is legally mine, I must recognize, confess and forsake my sin. And I need the Holy Spirit and God's Word to do that. Listen to 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.

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.

Listen to the word of Jesus in [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.

In the coming weeks, 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. This was part of the recommended homework from last week. 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. Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to help identify what may be going on in your heart. Many of these questions came from Dave Powlison’s article “X-ray questions: Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior”:

1. What do you think that you need from other people?

2. What do you want, desire, crave, and wish for?
3. What are your goals, pursuits, and expectations?
4. What do you fear? Worry about? Don't want?
5. What would you like to accomplish in life?
6. What makes you tick? What do you delight in? What really matters to you? What do you dream about?
7. What brings you safety, security, refuge, comfort, pleasure, escape?
8. What or who do you trust?
9. Whose performance matters to you? Who do you desire to see do well in life? Who influences your world and life?
10. Who must you please? Whose opinion matters to you? Who do you desire approval and acceptance from and fear rejection?
11. Who would you like to be like? Who are your heroes?
12. What gives your life meaning?
13. What is your measure of success and failure?
14. What would make you joyful and happy in life? What would bring you the greatest sadness and unhappiness?
15. What do you pray for and ask God for?
16. What bothers you and irritates you? Who or what gets under your skin?
17. What occupies your mind and thoughts, especially at "down times"?
18. What do you like to talk about?
19. 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?
20. What controls you? What are you addicted to?
21. Complete this sentence: If only I could have _____, or be _____, then I would be happy.
22. How do you define yourself? Where do you find your identity?

These questions are aimed to expose our motives, desires, and thoughts – in other words, our hearts. This is the level where the Lord desires to change us. To be sure, our behavior and actions are important. But God is not interested in just an outward change.

He wants to address the total person, the real you on the inside, the part of you that is really only seen by Him.

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. The first commandment is:

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.

Suggested Homework:

1. Consider these “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. Confess these idols before the Lord and ask Him to help you remove them from your life.
2. Continue in your memorization and meditation on Proverbs 29:25 and II Timothy 1:7. Add Exodus 20:3 to the list.
3. Next week we are going consider how to overcome the fear of man through exercising love for God and others. Read I Corinthians 13 and consider what true love is.