

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

February 18, 2018

“Overcoming 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.*

You've been wanting to talk with a family member about Jesus. They know you go to church, and if asked about their religion, they would say that they believe in God, but aren't real interested in church. You have had a few discussions in the past about politics, and some moral issues, but never talked specifically about the Lord Jesus and His work to save sinners. Finally, you have some time with them, and you have been praying for this chance to talk to them about the Lord, and their need for Christ. You know it would be a good time to have that conversations, but you clam up, and back down, and talk about something else. You just feel uncomfortable asking questions about their faith and need for Christ. What would they think of you? How might it affect the family relationship? What if they took offence? Probably better just to keep quiet. And you do.

There's a fellow in the Bible that struggled with that same issue. He was a young man that had been commissioned by God to help a local church get established, overcome error, and get grounded in the truth of the gospel. He struggled with being bold and direct and speaking the truth in love. His name was Timothy, and we have a letter from the Apostle Paul written to him to encourage and exhort him to be courageous and not be timid.

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,*

Timothy was struggling with 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.

Look back at verse 7. The greek word for timidity in verse 7 means “fearfulness”. The word denotes “cowardice and timidity” and is never used in a good sense. That spirit does not come from God. Our God does not want us to be timid and afraid of others. 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 exhortation to this young leader in the church. Timothy was struggling with the fear of man. Paul was encouraging him that he had a gift, something given to him by God to offer the church, that needed to be stirred. He needed to resist the temptation to give in to fear and timidity and quench the work of God in his life and the ministry God had given him for others.

I want to stir you up today. If you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then God has gifted you uniquely to be a blessing to other people. The fear of others can bind and ensnare you, thereby hindering the ministry God has given you to help other people. One of the keys to overcoming this fear of people is choosing to love them. Fear and anxiety by its very nature is self-focused and self-centered, and love overcomes and casts out fear.

For us to overcome the fear of man, we need to first understand it as the Bible defines it. So what does the Bible teach about fearing others? Does the Bible address 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. It is closely tied to our mission and His will for us. Let's look at another key passage that helps define this problem.

Proverbs 29:25

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

We can learn much from this small verse by looking at the definitions of two words. The Hebrew word translated "fear" means anxiety, quaking, trembling, extreme anxiety and anxious care. The root of the word means to tremble.

The Hebrew word translated "snare" means a bait, a lure, or a snare – a trap.

These two words combined define the problem. When you are anxious around other people, and have a trembling inside, you are caught in a trap. You are hindered and bound from loving people because of inner anxiety and trembling. The fear of other people, or of being around other people, is a bondage, a limitation, in a sense, a jailhouse that has you trapped and hinders you from being free and 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.

At this point you may be tempted to become a bit defensive. You may think, "People 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?"

It is always challenging to place our thoughts under the authority of God's Word. Is it God's intention for His children to be afraid of others? Is He the source of fear and timidity in our lives? Paul was clear in his letter to Timothy that God is not the source of the fear of other people. In place of fear and timidity, He gives us power, love, and self-discipline. Our relationship and demeanor around others is important because of our mission.

God has redeemed us and birthed us into a family called the church. As members of His body, we have been given a mission to evangelize and disciple other people. Though we are all gifted differently, serving others is in a context of relationship. As sinners, we all struggle with anxiety around other people. We want to hide from God and others. Shame and guilt are the result of the fall. Perhaps you have struggled with this social anxiety all of your life. When we come to Christ and are saved, all of our problems and

struggles don't just disappear. We begin to learn to walk as redeemed people. God leads us through a process of sanctification that delivers us from fear through His perfect love. The Scriptures provide answers on how to overcome problems and struggles like the fear of man. It begins by understanding the problem from a biblical paradigm.

FIRST, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT PROBLEMS LIKE THE FEAR OF MAN ARE ROOTED IN THE HEART

A key principle in overcoming problems and changing for the glory of God is recognizing that the godly change is an inside-out process. It begins in our hearts, and a changed heart produces a changed life. Mere behavioral change 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 can only 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 from the Spirit of God.

Jesus teaches us about 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.

Godly desires, motives, and beliefs produce godly words, actions, and emotions. Sinful desires, motives, 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 two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to 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 uses this living sword and penetrates to the depth 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 understand and recognize.

I John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Once we recognize our sin and weakness, the path to cleansing 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 weaknesses and sins. Because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for all 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.

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 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, agreeing 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. Once these idols of the heart are exposed, then the Lord can 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

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

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 to serve Him and others. What ministry opportunities have you have avoided because of the fear of man? What does God want you to do that you have neglected because of the fear of man? You may be thinking "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 Romans 12:4-6a I Peter 4:8-10

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.

THE FEAR OF MAN IS OVERCOME BY THINKING BIBLICALLY

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 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.

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 4:23 says that we are to be made new in the attitude of our minds. Colossians 3:1-2 says that we must choose to set our minds on heavenly things, and reject worldly philosophy. Romans 12:1-2 states that we are enabled by God to change by allowing the Word of God to transform us from the inside out. Proverbs 4:20-23 tells us that our mind is the door to our heart, and what is in our heart determines who we are. There is a battle raging, and it is between our ears.

Here are several examples of thoughts that we must battle to overcome the fear of man:

- 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.
- 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.

These thoughts are flaming darts that must be extinguished by faith in God's Word.

Listen to our defense:

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?"*

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."*

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has a mission. We cannot be passive and fearful if we are going to fulfill it. My prayer and encouragement is that we all confess our weakness and sin of fearing others to the Lord, and by faith rise up in a loving boldness to proclaim the salvation of our great God and King!!