

Counseling Problem #1: Fear of Man

Definition: One consumed with an inordinate desire to please others. Fearing man places others on the throne of one's life and prevents the person from obeying God and serving Him as they are called to in the Scriptures. The one who fears man is consumed with self.

Heart Issues: Pride

Manifestations (but not limited to): Talking too much, not talking at all, not praying in public, not serving others for fear of what others will think of them, asking people's opinions about all things and modifying behavior to please others, doing things for the approval of others, etc.

Scripture References:

Proverbs 29:25: *The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted.*

The fear of man is a trap. It confines people to a place where they are constantly trying to please others (who continually change and have changing expectations). People and the desire for their esteem, recognition and praise ultimately becomes a source of temptation, tempting the people please to serve people over and above the living God. A man who trusts in the Lord shall be set on high, above the power of man and the fear of that power.

Exodus 20:1-6: *Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

In Exodus 20, we are given the 10 commandments. The first commandment concerns the object of our worship, God, and Him alone! We are to have no other gods before Him. Those that struggle with the fear of man place other people in the position only God rightly desires in our lives.

Jeremiah 2:12-13: *Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate, declares the Lord. "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."*

Chapter 2 of Jeremiah was written to show God's people their sin of idolatry so they might come to repentance. In verses 12 and 13, we see this. God's people had forsaken

the Lord and were trying to find life in things (broken cisterns) that do not give life. Likewise, those who are seeking approval from others are seeking to find happiness and satisfaction in things that will never provide that for which they are hoping. True happiness and satisfaction are not possible aside from a relationship with the Lord.

Galatians 1:10 (Romans 6:16): *For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant (slave) of Christ.*

Paul wrote Galatians to the church at Galatia to counter the Judiazers who were false teachers trying to impose Old Testament law on New Testament Christians, specifically in regards to circumcision. The Judiazers were perverting the true gospel. Paul answered this perversion of the gospel by reaffirming salvation by faith alone. In Galatians 1:10, Paul asks the rhetorical question of where the New Testament Christians will place their trust. Were they going to stand on what God had revealed to them or were they going to go the way Peter went? Paul understood there was a choice to be made. They could not do both.

Matthew 6:16-18: *Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

In Matthew 5, Jesus warns his disciples against the corrupt doctrines and opinions of the scribes and Pharisees. In Matthew 6, Christ warns his disciples against hypocritical religiosity. Specifically, in verses 16-18, Christ tells his disciples that fasting, if done properly and for the right reasons, creates a spirit of contrition and humility allowing one to see their true state—having nothing of which to be proud and being completely unworthy of their daily bread. Fasting is never to be done to be noticed by others. If done for the praise, admiration and respect of others much to the disdain and dishonor of the Lord's name.

Matthew 6:5-7: *When you pray you, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.*

Context same as above. The fear of man leads to hypocrisy. In Matthew 6:5-7, we see that the religious leaders were praying to be seen by men. They wanted to say the right things, not to rightly deal with the things in their own life. They desired to be esteemed, recognized and thought well of in the eyes of others.

Matthew 6:24: *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

Matthew 6:16-24 centers on where our affections lie. We pursue that which we love. This section of Scripture asks the question, “What are you pursuing? What are your efforts and energy and being spent on? Are you seeking mammon (wealth) or God?” Matthew reminds his readers that you cannot do both! One cannot serve two masters. Either we will hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other.

Galatians 2

Peter refused to eat with Gentiles because according to Old Testament law eating with Gentiles was prohibited. Peter abided by this Old Testament practice to keeping good standing with the Jewish teachers (who were teaching a false gospel!). Peter compromised the truth in his life because he desired the good standing and approval of others before his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Exodus 3 & 13

God called Moses to speak to Pharaoh who was essentially the ruler of the known world at the time. Moses objected to God’s request on account of his frailty, his lack of abilities. Moses overestimated how much of his obedience depended on him and overestimated how much of it depended on God. The fear of man kept Moses from using his God-given gifts to the glory of God. It also kept him from being obedient. In the end, God trumps all of Moses’ excuses with His own self-revelation.

Philippians 2:3-4 (Romans 12:10): *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Paul wrote this letter of condemnation to the church at Phillipi. He was encouraging them to continue in their steadfastness, growth and love for the Lord and others. In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul is exhorting believers to consider others more important than themselves. The fear of man makes one intently self-focused. One is worried about improving his/her own reputation and standing before others instead of being involved and engaged in the lives of those around them. The fear of man also keeps us from considering the needs of others.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: *The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.*

These two verses summarize what Solomon discovered at the end of his life after he spent his life pursuing that which was vain. In the end, he tells his readers that the most important thing in life to fear God and keep His commandments. True happiness in the

life can never be achieved apart from Christ. The counselee who fears man needs to be reminded of this as they are seeking to find their happiness and satisfaction in people who will never be able to fulfill this for them.

****EXAMPLE:** It is also good to note that affluence (or anything) is given to us by the hand of God. Pursuing wealth apart from the will of God might give you affluence but it will eventually atrophy your soul. It will never give the lasting satisfaction so desired. The only thing that will provide our soul lasting satisfaction is our pursuit of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:22: *Stop regarding man whose breath of life is in his nostrils. For why should he be esteemed?*

Isaiah was warning Judah from entering into an alliance with Egypt. He is telling Judah, “If God is for you, what can man do? Why are you concerned with man? Why are you seeking alternative protection and approval from man when you can only find that in God?”

Isaiah 30:15, 16: *For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, “In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.” But you were not willing, and you said, “No, for we will flee on horses,” therefore you shall flee! “And we will ride on swift horses,” therefore those who pursue you shall be swift.*

In these verses, it is apparent that Judah is trusting in Egypt for protection. They are not trusting in the Lord where only true protection can be found. For those who fear men, the same unrest and threat is present. As the verses read, strength and safety are found when one trusts the Lord.

Psalm 27

David writes this psalm in the midst of persecution, when he has lost the favor of men and wicked people are pursuing him. For a man who trusts in the Lord, man cannot do anything of eternal significance. This verse plays to the fear of man in relation to those who are being threatened by wicked men.

Counseling Outline:

- A. Gather Information.
 - a. Don’t assume you know the situation or the person’s struggles. Have a heart of compassion, ask questions, listen well and begin to understand where this person is and how they got there.

- b. Understand where they are at in their relationship with the Lord. Ask them about their testimony, how they came to know the Lord, their understanding of who God is, etc.
 - c. Gather background information about the person re: their family life, history of their struggle, etc.
 - d. Gather information about their present struggle: In what situations does the fear of man exist?, What are specific manifestations of this fear?, etc.
- B. Hope/Identity in Christ.
- a. Change is possible because of Christ! The Holy Spirit will give them the grace and means to grow and walk in obedience in this area of struggle.
 - b. To understand their identity in Christ. As a child of God, they have no reason to fear. They have the greatest Advocate on their side!
- C. Biblical View of Fear of Man: The Holy Spirit will use the Word to bring conviction to your counselee.
- a. Fear of Man is a sin. It is serving other people (as a means of esteeming self) over and above the Living God. Use biblical terminology.
 - b. Use Scriptures passages and examples from Scripture as mentioned above.
- D. Confession & Repentance: Sin that is life-dominating (which this can be) required sweeping repentance for lasting change to take place.
- a. A right understanding of God and a right understanding of sin are necessary for genuine repentance (Psalm 51).
 - b. Genuine repentance involves a change of mind that leads to a change of life (2 Corinthians 7:9-12).
 - c. Significant changes in life's thoughts and activities. Must now all be according to biblical principles by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- E. Dealing with the Thought Life: God is concerned about the Ce's thoughts (Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:1,2)
- a. Thought feed your lustful desires which then entice you to sin (James 1:13-17).
 - b. Thoughts reveal the motivations of the heart (Hebrews 4:12)
- F. Heart Idols/Motivations: Getting to the root of the fruit! ☺
- a. Fear of man is an expression of an idolatrous heart.
 - b. It is placing people in the place that only God rightly deserves in our life.
- G. Biblical Truths to Teach your Counselee
- a. **Indwelling Sin:** Your Ce needs to understand the seriousness of the battle they face.
 - i. Progression of Sin (James 1:13-17)
 - ii. The Struggle with the flesh (Romans 7)
 - iii. Put Off/Put On (Ephesians 4:20ff)
 - b. **Pride**
 - i. Definition of Pride: An intense focus on self, exalting self to a place above the Lord. It is a form of self-worship.
 - ii. Proudful people believe that they are or should be the source of what is good, right and worthy of praise. We must help the Ce see that this is truly what they desire.
 - iii. Giving God the rightful honor and glory He alone deserves!

- iv. To remind them that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:8).

c. Selfishness

- i. Definition of selfishness: a continual and intense focus on self.
- ii. The two greatest commands are as follows: (1) to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (2) to love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39.) With this in mind, we must be more concerned about serving and blessing others than have our own needs met. In fact, we are told in the verses above to seek to love others as better than ourselves!
- iii. Ultimate example of Humility & Sacrificial Love: Jesus Christ as seen in the Gospel Message and Philippians 2:3-8

d. Understanding who God is and who they were created to serve!

- i. To know and study the attributes of God specifically His holiness, His transcendence, His power, His sovereignty and His wrath.
- ii. Considering the *ability* of man to do something over and above the ability of God to do something. God is limited by nothing! We have no reason to fear man!
- iii. Considering the *duration* of man's ability over God's ability. God's approval lasts a lifetime. Man's disfavor might last 70 years at best; God's last a lifetime. We need to live with an eternal perspective!

H. Practical Reminders for the Ces: Practical Steps as you walk your Ce through the process of change in their life.

- a. Write out a plan. Be specific.
- b. Remind Ce that temptations will come. Have Ce commit to fighting sin!
- c. Identify circumstances under which your Ce is likely to be tempted by sin.
- d. Identify reasons for temptation.
- e. Exhort your Ce not to frequent places that increase temptation.
- f. Help Ce learn how to control her thoughts.
- g. Remind Ce that perseverance and faithfulness are what God wants. He will give her the needed grace and strength to be obedient unto His will (Hebrews 4:16).
- h. Have a trusted friend or discipler hold your Ce accountable to the plan. We are not meant to live this life in isolation.
- i. Encourage your Ce to develop a grateful spirit.

Homework Assignments:

1. Often one fears the opinion and approval of men because they do not have an appropriate view of who God is. I would have a counselee study the attributes of God. Depending on where they are at in their theological understanding, the following books could be useful resources: J.I. Packer's book *Knowing God*, Wayne Grudem's book *Systematic Theology* or A.W. Tozer's book *The Knowledge of the Holy*. If you would rather take your counselee through a personal study on the attributes of God (I would have created one if I had the time!), here are a few references to get you started: Acts 17:28 (God sustains all things), Isaiah 55:8,9 (He has great wisdom!), Job 42:2 (He is sovereign over all things), Romans 8:35-37 (He is a good God!).
2. Paul Bunyan once said, "Godly fear flows from a sense of the love and kindness and mercy of God in Jesus Christ." With this being truth, it would be most appropriate to go over the gospel message with your counselee, bringing the message of the cross to bear directly on the sin: fear of man. I would do this practically by having the counselee, take a piece of paper divide it into two columns. One column would be titled *Gospel Declarations*. The other would be titled *Gospel Obligations*. I would give them passages of Scripture that speak to their identity in Christ and why they have no need to fear!
3. Jerry Bridges' book *Trusting God* with the accompanying study guide could be a very helpful study to walk through with your counselee. This book teaches the doctrine of God's sovereignty while elevating the goodness and greatness of our God, causing counselees to see and really meditate on the trustworthiness of their Savior. **It also might be good to remind your counselee that if God has given us what we have most needed (forgiveness of sin), why would He not provide for our basic (more trivial) needs here on this earth?
4. Wayne Mack's workbook *The Fear Factor* could be another super helpful resource for a counselee struggling with the fear of man. This book clearly demonstrates the sinfulness of fearing man and how one can put off selfish fear and instead love God and love others from a pure heart.
5. Assigning the attached Heart Journal. This 2 page worksheet will allow the counselee to begin to see the thoughts and motives of their heart that are driving their fear of man. This worksheet is very specific which can be very helpful in understanding how a counselee understands the depth of their sin.
6. Have your counselee write out Philippians 2:3-11 and have them break it down. What did the example of Christ model? What does it look like to specifically esteem others as better than yourself? In what specific ways is humility in the life of your counselee? Have them use the life of Christ as an example. Here are a few meditation questions to get them started thinking in this way:

Can you be proud while you believe that your Savior was clothed with flesh, and lived in modesty, and made himself of no reputation, and was despised and scorned and spat upon by sinners, and shamefully treated and nailed as a common criminal to the cross?

Did Christ take upon himself the form of a servant so that you could domineer and have the highest place of honor?

Did Christ not have a place to lay his head so that you could insist upon a home with luxurious furnishings?

Must you brave it out in your most fantastic outfits instead of your Savior's seamless garments?

Did he pray for his murderers so that you could demand vengeance for petty words and wrongs?

Did he patiently endure being spat upon and pummeled so that you could, with impatient pride, abuse others?

7. Have your counselee make a list of the people closest to him/her. On that list, have your counselee write down the interests of each person on that list. Have the counselee think of questions to ask these people that demonstrate a love for them and a desire to meet their needs. Have the counselee pray regularly for these people and his/her attitude for them. Have the counselee look for opportunities to minister to these people. Have them ask for their forgiveness when necessary and as appropriate.
8. Have your counselees choose 3 people to serve throughout their week without the person they are serving knowing it was from them. This will help cultivate a heart of service without any emphasis on your counselee who is doing the serving. It would be good to remind the counselee that our service to anyone here on this earth is to ultimately serve and glorify God.
9. Have your counselee pray through Ephesians 1:18-19 asking God to open their eyes may be opened to know the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance and the surpassing greatness of power toward those who believe. As a counselor, I would go over each aspect individually or ask them to think on: (1) the hope of His calling, (2) the riches of His inheritance and (3) the surpassing greatness of power promised to those who believe.
10. I would also give my counselee memorize and meditate on Isaiah 30:15,16 to begin to understand the grave danger and consequences that come when one chooses to fear people over the living God.

****Other Helpful Resources for those struggling with the fear of man: *People-Pleasing* by Lou Priolo and *People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch**