

THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part thirteen

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HOW FAITH AND SIN ARE EACH GENERATED BY WHERE OUR HOPE IS PLACED (Part 3) - Anxiety

1 Peter 5:6-7 - "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, [7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

Matthew 6:25-34 - "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

For all our talk about sin, it's amazing how rarely we study where sin comes from. I mean, we know it comes from the Fall, or Satan, or our rebellious nature. So we know in some **general** sense the birthplace of our sinful actions and attitudes. But that's not the same as knowing **how** we encounter sin in our **experience**. So we've been examining the relationship between **sin** and **hope**. Specifically, as the title suggests, we've been studying the relationship between sinful actions and attitudes and the placement of our hope. We all long for two things - **satisfaction** and **security**. And how we **hope** for these determines the birth of both **faith** and **sin**.

So important is this process that we should take a quick tour of the ideas we've put into place so far. Here's a review:

- a) **People become ruled by sin when they believe the promise sin offers. Remember - no one sins out of duty.** Sin always offers either **satisfaction** or **security**. It never comes empty handed, without some offering, some reward in some area of life.

People **lust** because they believe certain promises about illicit sex and the excitement and fulfillment it will bring. People **covet** because they believe the promise that material goods will satisfy the desires of their heart. People turn to **bitterness** and **anger** because they believe certain promises about the joys of revenge and getting even. They tell themselves their actions are maintaining **justice**. They become convinced they'll find satisfaction in settling scores.

Now, in each of those cases God has a better way - a better plan - a better **hope** for the desire burning in the heart. In fact, God promises **greater** rewards for those who will honor him than any sinful course of action can ever bring.

So why do people sin? Sin rules when I believe the **promise** of sin. Sin rules when my **hope** for either satisfaction or security becomes fastened to a course **other** than the promise of God's Word. Conversely, holiness rules when I believe the Word of God. But **believing** the Word of God has become so vague that it's almost meaningless. Believing God's Word **doesn't** mean believing the Bible is the Word of God. It doesn't even mean believing the Bible is true. Believing God's Word means **hoping** in it - committing to its promise for my **satisfaction** and my **security**.

This leads into our second point of review:

- b) **Hope is faith looking into the future.** Perhaps some of you will remember that I said faith and hope are almost impossible to separate in the Scriptures. Consider **1 Peter 1:21** - "**....who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**" God raised Christ up from the grave, not just so we might **believe** in Him, but put our **hope** in Him.

Faith and hope can't be split up. This is because they really aren't **two** things but **one**, looking in **two** directions. **Faith** looks **back** at what God has accomplished in Christ and **hope** looks into the **future** and **banks** on what God has said and done for **satisfaction** and **security**.

So hope looks into the future and says, "God, I am looking to all of the evidence of your love and your faithfulness in the past - all through the Word of God and through your past faithfulness in my own life - and especially I look at your faithfulness in sending Jesus to die for me on the cross. And because of the evidence of your past faithfulness - because of the truth of your Word - I have come to see the promise of satisfaction and security in sin to be a lie. It's fool's gold. Your loving kindness is better than life - better and more satisfying than anything else I will ever find in life!

There's one more important point of review:

- c) ***Because the devil knows that nothing is more vital to your holiness than your hope in God's promise, he attacks that hope more than anything else.*** This is the underlying thread of *all* temptation. Satan's denial of God's goodness to Eve in the garden gets reworded and repeated throughout all history. Satan is clever, but he is a one-trick pony.

This brings us right up to speed in our review. We began to look at the **tools** Satan uses to kill our hope. Satan works overtime to create **dissatisfaction** with God - to cause you to look to something else - anything else - to find satisfaction or security. This started in the Garden of Eden and has continued successfully to this day.

We launched our study of Satan's hope quenching tools looking at **pride**. Today we study his tool of **anxiety**:

- 1) **LIKE PRIDE, ANXIETY IS SUCH AN EFFECTIVE PLOY BECAUSE, WHILE NOT A SPECIFIC ACTION, IT IS AN ATTITUDE OF HEART THAT GENERATES AN ENORMOUS VARIETY OF SINFUL DEEDS**

In other words, through anxiety, the devil can lead Christians into other sins they would never dream of committing under normal circumstances. And here's the important point. There's a **reason** anxiety, like pride, spawns an enormous variety of sins. Anxiety spawns sins because anxiety **shifts our hope**. Anxiety, like pride, puts our eyes on something **other than God** for our **satisfaction** or **security**. And false hopes are the generator of all sin.

Anxiety about **finances** can lead to greed, hoarding, sometimes even theft. Anxiety about **succeeding** can make for irritability and even dishonesty. Anxiety about **fulfillment** can make one lustful, vain, and short-sighted about dangerous risks. No doubt about it - eliminate anxiety and you destroy the root of all sorts of other sins from your heart as well.

- 2) **JESUS ALWAYS LINKED ANXIETY TO OUR FUTURE HOPES FOR SATISFACTION AND SECURITY**

Matthew 6:30 - "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, **O you of little faith?**"

Notice the time words in this familiar verse. They describe a life that lives **today** but isn't sure of **tomorrow**. The grass of the field is here **today** but not **tomorrow**. So what about **us**? What about **our** tomorrow? How shall we **secure** our future? **That's** the issue of this verse. And the promise from this verse is, we **can't** secure our own futures. Only Father God can do that - and He has promised that He will - "**....will he not much more clothe you** [future tense], **O you of little faith**"

Remember, the devil labors to destroy your **ultimate satisfaction and security in God**. He labors to remove God as the object of your hope. And one of his key tools is **anxiety**. What are we going to do to protect our minds and hearts?

- 3) **REMEMBER IT IS SPIRITUALLY UNPRODUCTIVE TO WALLOW IN GUILT ABOUT THE ANXIETY YOU HAVE**

While anxiety is sinful, to be sure, you can't defeat it with a head on attack. I think the Bible offers a different, more effective approach: **Psalms 56:3** - "**When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.**"

Fear and anxiety aren't quite the same thing, but they're close cousins. Anxiety is fear stretched out - fear unleashed to prey on the future. Anxiety is fear gone malignant. We **all** experience fear. We can't live on earth **without** experiencing fear. And that's where this text is relevant.

The Psalmist doesn't say, "I will never experience fear." He does and he will. The trick is to deal with fear **before it comes to the point of shifting our hope**. Because it's at that point of shifting our hope that fear morphs into an anxiety that gives birth to a host of other sins.

Anxiety leads to **self-reliance** which leads to **independence** from God and the hopeful promise of His Word. And remember, the goal of the devil is **always** the same. His goal is to morph fear into anxiety and loosen my confidence in God as the source of my **satisfaction** and my **security**.

With this in mind you can see the deep significance of Jesus' well known words in **Matthew 6:25, 27-28** - "Therefore I tell you, do not be **anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?....27-28.... And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin...."**

Notice the way Jesus asks, almost with amazement, "**Why are we so anxious about these visible, temporary, material things?**"(28). Why, indeed? That's the right question. Where does this anxiety come from - even when the sources of our anxiety are things we can do absolutely nothing about - like **adding an hour to the length of our appointed days on earth (27)?**

What you eat, drink, wear, and the comfort of your physical body - Satan wants all our attention pasted to these things. That's because he knows we can't secure our own lives around **these** things and **hope in God** at the same time. And if we don't hope in God for our **satisfaction** and our **security** we are destined to be forever slaves of sin. Anxiety, like pride, is the perfect tool - the perfect storm - for dislodging God-centered hope.

4) **IRONICALLY, ANXIETY CAN'T BE REMEDIED BY GREATER SUCCESS OR MORE WEALTH**

1 Peter 5:6-7 - "**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, [7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**"

It's one of the great tragedies of the church that these two verses are so frequently quoted, but so rarely quoted **together**. The Apostle Peter strains language to show how **anxiety** is only remedied by **humility**. In other words, the energy of anxiety that causes us to work harder for our **own** satisfaction and security only makes the power of anxiety **deeper** and **stronger**.

Peter says the reason we have a problem with **anxiety** is we have a problem with **humility**. This isn't obvious at first. He doesn't mean we run about bragging our heads off. And he doesn't even mean we consciously think of ourselves as being greater than everybody else. Most of us are passed that. I'm talking about something much more subtle - something that is rampant in the body of Christ.

I'm talking about the cherished notion in my heart - never said out loud in words - that my life is the sum total of what my work, power and ingenuity will make it. In our best moments we might call it the work ethic. And we can marshal verses from the Bible to support it - like the one who doesn't work, shouldn't eat - the one who doesn't provide for his own family is worse than an infidel. And those words are true enough.

But then a line gets crossed and something good becomes something wicked. And crossing the line has a lot to do with anxiety and humility.

The line is crossed by the business person who can't tear himself away from the home office on Sunday night - not because of what he **does** believe about work, but because of what he **doesn't** believe about God. He believes in the work ethic, all right. But he believes in it **out of balance**. In fact, he really doesn't have the humble trust to believe that God can look after his business to whatever level of success God deems necessary as he honors his first commitment to the Lord's day. So this man is diligently working to secure his own satisfaction and security.

Take another example. Picture the man who has been wronged by a close brother. How easy it is to feel that this injustice has to be righted. And how easy it is to put himself at the center of the universe and feel he must take the initiative to make things just and right again!

But it's not my job to do that. And to the business person alone in the office polishing his gold and the distracted brother trying to balance the scales of justice for all, God Almighty comes along and says "You need to **humble** yourself under My mighty hand and then cast all your **anxieties** upon Me because I care for you. Only you're too proud and self-reliant to keep your **hope anchored in Me** rather than in **yourself**."

And please hear me, friend. You have no idea - **no** idea what sins you will commit in the next few weeks once your hope for **satisfaction** and **security** become detached from God. Or, to put the same thought into the positive form

- and in much more poetic beauty - "***Delight yourself in the Lord***, and he will give you the desires of your heart"(Psalm 37:4).