

Lesson 17

Conquering Worry

Philippians 4:6-7

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Do you ever find yourself worrying? Have you experienced the sensation of having your stomach tied up in knots because of severe anxiety? Have you been so worried about something you could not concentrate on anything but the problem you were concerned about? Have you found yourself in a nervous frenzy, agonizing about something over which you have absolutely no control? If you have, then you are human and you need to know how to deal with worry biblically.
- B. Worry or anxiety is a very common emotion in Christian circles, and very few really believe it is sin. But the Bible says it is sin. John Wesley said that he would just as soon sin as worry, but the Bible says worry is sin because it is breaking the command: "Do not be anxious." Sometimes Christians will almost boast of the fact that they are worriers. They would never say, "I'm an adulterer. I'm a homosexual. I'm a liar." But if they say, "I'm a worrier" no one seems to care and it is laughed off. However, worry is sin and we should care. Why? Because worry is breaking the moral law of God; it destroys our bodies; it breaks our fellowship with God and it makes us ineffective as Christians. Worry causes Christians to spin their wheels spiritually. Vance Havner said, "Worry, like a rocking chair, will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."
- C. The context of Philippians 4:6-7 is about division in the local church between Euodia and Syntyche. These two women were feuding in the local church at Philippi. The church was about to choose up sides and a split could easily occur in that body of Christians. The Philippians were worrying about the future of their church as Paul in Philippians 4:4-5 explained to them how to prevent worry before it gets started: 1) rejoice in the Lord; 2) be big-hearted, living a selfless life; and 3) live life with a consciousness of Christ's second advent which causes us to put our eyes on Christ and not things which cause us to worry. Now, in Philippians 4:6-7, Paul tells the Philippians how to conquer worry when they fall into it. He gives a command not to worry; he gives a cure for worry and tells them what God will substitute for worry when they apply the cure to their lives.

II. THE COMMAND NOT TO WORRY 4:6a: ***Do not be anxious about anything.***

- A. This could be translated, “Stop worrying about anything: or “Do not under any circumstances worry about anything.” This is a command. It is not simply an exhortation. It is not something optional that would be nice to do if we decide to do it. This is a holy command to all Christians and it is to be obeyed. To disobey this command is sin. As to whether the Christian will stop worrying involves the positive exercise of the will, for he must choose to trust God rather than yield to anxiety.
- B. The Christian is commanded not to worry about anything. There are no small worries which are acceptable to God. Everything is to be turned over to God for Him to work it out.
- C. What Is Worry? The Greek word for anxiety is *merimno* which means “to divide, part, rip or tear apart.” It is to have a divided mind which bats things back and forth and cannot decide what to do. It turns problems around and around in the mind until the mechanism just wears out. Worry is a mind that is so distracted it cannot think straight. Worry is an emotion which brings fretting, vexing and torment to the mind. Worry is unnecessary anxiety about the future. It is trying to figure out the future when the future belongs to God alone, for He is sovereign. Worry is undue concern about something we can do nothing about and that we cannot even be sure about.
- D. How Is Worry different than Concern? Worry is not genuine concern about someone or something. There is a place for godly concern about ourselves, others and circumstances, for concern is a way to show genuine interest and love. When we are concerned, we are desirous to fulfill our responsibility to God and to others. The Apostle Paul spoke of having the care of the churches on his shoulders (**2 Cor. 11:28: *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.***). Paul was also concerned for the situation which was going on in the Philippian Church (**Phil. 2:28: *I am all the more eager to send him [Epaphroditus], so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.***). We are also told that if a man does not provide for his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel (**1 Tim. 5:8: *If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.***). We are to be concerned to fulfill our responsibilities in life. Scripturally, we are to do all we can to solve a problem but the future belongs to God. We can only do so much then we must place the situation in God’s hands. Someone has said, “The beginning of worry is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of worry.” NOTE. When we are commanded not to worry, this does not mean we are not to plan ahead. We must plan ahead, but when we do, we must, according to the Apostle James, do it in dependence on God and allow the outcome to be whatever He wants it to be (**James 4:13-14a: *Now listen, you who say, “today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”***). Our plans should always have written over them, “The Lord willing.” Anything else is pure presumption. Again, the future is

always in God's hands not ours. NOTE. Christ does not ask us to stop being concerned. Instead, He tells us to redirect the focus of our concern. We are not to focus on the future which we cannot control or predict but on Christ and today's problems.

E. Why Do We Worry? While people sometimes worry about things which happened in the past, which they obviously can do nothing about, the primary cause of worry is excessive concern about the future. We worry about food, drink, clothing, housing, relationships, bills, business, home life, social life, children, marriage, retirement and even our church life. We get frustrated over things of which we have no control. We may worry about a mother dying of cancer; a father who may lose all his money in the stock market; a prompt daughter who is three hours late on a date; a son who is in active military combat or whatever. It is excessive concern about the unknown and uncontrollable future which tears us apart. Albert Einstein said, "I never think about the future. It comes soon enough." NOTE. Most of the things we worry about never actually happen. Part of worry is an over active imagination. We worry and worry about what we picture may happen, and then it neither happens at all, or if it happens, it was not as bad as we thought it would be. Let me give you a memory test. What were you worrying about this time last year? You can't remember! Furthermore you got through it! NOTE. Continual worriers are usually pessimistic people who can never enjoy today because they are worrying about tomorrow. In actuality, things are not really as bad as they appear beforehand, and there are very few situations so bad as they could be. You heard of the chronic worrier who was told, "Cheer up things could be worse." So he cheered up and sure enough they got worse!

F. What Is Behind Worry? The ultimate cause of all worry is a failure to believe God and to trust His promises as they are given to us in the Word of God. Worry is accusing God of falsehood. By our actions we are saying God cannot fulfill His promises. Worry is sin because it defames the character of God. Worry is saying, "I'm not sure God is in control and that He works all things for good." Worry is casting doubt on God's ability to regulate the future. Worry mocks the sovereignty of God and says that I can control my own circumstances but God can't. Worry is sheer hypocrisy; for it professes faith in God while at the same time assails the reality of His truthfulness.

III. THE CURE FOR WORRY 4:6b: But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. – God's prescription for worry is a life of prayer. Our very first line of defense against the destructive force of worry is prayer.

A. ***But in everything***, -- The cure to worry is prayer and commitment of our future to God. The way to cure worry is not by suppression but by expression to God. It is taking everything to God – not some things, the good things, the bad things, the big things but to God – not some things, the good things, the bad things, the big things but everything to the Lord in prayer. NOTE. We go to God in prayer because He has

promised to meet our needs. In Matthew 6, God promises to meet all our needs just like He meets the basic needs of the birds and the lilies of the field. So why worry?

Said the robin to the sparrow,

I should really like to know

Why these anxious human beings

Rush about and worry so.

Said the sparrow to the robin,

I think that it must be

They have no Heavenly Father

Such as cares for you and me.

- B. **By prayer** – This word speaks of prayer in general which involves praising God in times of joy, confiding in Him in sorrow and looking to Him for guidance and direction.
- C. **And petition** – The word refers to particular, specific prayer about things which are needed and desired. NOTE. Sometimes prayer can be used as a gripe session by the Christian. There is a place to bring our complaints to God but we are not to wallow in our gripes over and over again. When we pray the same problem repeatedly, this causes us to become problem conscious. We are to bring our gripes and complaints to the Lord but we should make them brief and to the point. Identify the problem, give it to God quickly and get away from it, so we will not become problem centered in our prayer life. So many Christians want to hang on to the problem a little longer, wallow in it to feel a little more miserable, engulfing themselves in self-pity, but God says, “Hand it over to Me. Believe Me. Get up and think positively by faith and follow Me. NOTE. Prayer is talking to God. We do not have to pray continuously for hours – pleading, longing, waiting, hurting. We are to pray and believe.

Francois Fenelon, a 17th century Frenchman, gave the following description of prayer: “Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack

of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart; without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God."

- D. ***With thanksgiving***, -- Prayer to conquer worry must be accompanied with thanksgiving. Prayer and petition relieves anxiety by trusting. Thanksgiving relieves anxiety by accepting our circumstances as from a loving God. "Prayer has more to do with aligning our hearts with God's purpose than with aligning His heart with us and our purpose. Thanksgiving puts our prayer into perspective, for it reminds us again of God's faithfulness to us as His children. Thanksgiving involves thanking for God's past faithfulness to us, for He has never failed any true child of God. Thanksgiving also involves thanking God for what He is going to do in the future. It also involves thanking God for the present circumstances, even when we don't see how, we can't understand why and we cannot grasp the whole picture. We can always thank God that he is bigger than all our problems and He will work it out, even though it may not always be to our liking. Yet, it will always be for our own good.
- E. ***Present your requests to God***. -- The word "requests" refers to the intricate details of life. Nothing is too big that God cannot handle and too small that He is not concerned. The God who made the universe also made the atom, and He has perfect control over both.

IV. THE COUNTERPART TO WORRY 4:7: ***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

- A. ***And the peace of God***, -- When Christians bring the things which are causing them to worry to God in prayer, God will substitute that worry with His own divine peace. This peace is the feeling we get when we roll our burden off ourselves and roll it on God. Christians can have God's peace now. In the midst of crisis, in the midst of struggle, in the midst of tragedy, the Christian can experience God's peace. The strain and stress caused by worry can be replaced by the peace of a sovereign, loving God.
- B. ***Which transcends all understanding***; -- The peace of God is a supernatural peace which goes beyond all human reasoning or logic. This peace defies the psychologist. It is a peace beyond human comprehension. It is a peace which is a contradiction to common sense. It is a peace which can be achieved in the midst of trouble with the problem unsolved, with the future unknown. NOTE. This peace is not tranquility or the absence of conflict, but it is a spiritual calm that comes from having a divine

viewpoint about life. It is an inner assurance that comes as one trusts in God's sovereignty.

- C. Will guard your hearts and your minds – The peace of God is like a sentinel standing guard over the heart and mind of the believer, making both heart and mind impregnable to the temptation of worry. NOTE. The heart is the emotional nature of man and the mind is the mental nature of man. All mental and emotional illness, which is spiritual in nature, can be healed through experiencing the peace of God through prayer. The battle goes on in the heart and mind of the Christian. Sometimes God will remove the circumstance causing the worry, but more often He changes our attitudes about the circumstances, changing us and not the situation (**Isa. 26:3: You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.**”).
- D. **In Christ Jesus.** – The peace of God comes through the Christian's daily fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ – obeying, trusting, loving, serving, and being generally occupied with Christ and His Word is the key to stopping worry. NOTE. If we fall into the sin of worry, we must confess it, even if we confess it a hundred times, and then keep on trusting. The human mind must be trained to think God's thoughts after Him.

O Thou whose bounty fills my cup, With every blessing meet!

I give Thee thanks for every drop— The bitter and the sweet.

I praise Thee for the desert road, And for the riverside;

For all Thy goodness hath bestowed, And all Thy grace denied.

I thank Thee for both smile and frown. And for the gain and loss;

I praise Thee for the future crown And for the present cross.

I thank Thee for both wings of love Which stirred my worldly nest;

And for the stormy clouds which drove Me, trembling, to Thy breast.

I bless Thee for the glad increase, And for the waning joy:

And for this strange, this settled peace Which nothing can destroy.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Saved. The essence of what has been said can be summed up in a simple story. All of Joe's friends knew him as a chronic worrier. One day Bill saw his worrying friend bouncing along as happy as a man could be. Bill could hardly believe his eyes, so he had to find out what happened. "Joe, what's happened to you?" Bill asked. "You don't seem worried any more." Joe said, "It's wonderful. I haven't worried in weeks. "That's great," Bill said, "How did you manage it?" Joe explained, "I hired a man to do all my worrying for me." "What?" "Right." "Well," Bill mused, "I must say that is a new wrinkle; tell me, how much does he charge you?" "A thousand dollars a week," said Joe. Bill replied, "A thousand dollars a week? How could you possibly raise a thousand dollars a week to pay?" Joe answered, "That's his worry!" NOTE. This illustration can be easily applied into our Christian lives. We have Christ to handle our problems and worries for us. We can turn our worries over to Him and He will give us victory. But He will do it for no charge. When we start to worry, we should say, "That's Christ's worry, not mine. I'm going to let Him handle it." Then we have entered into the real life of faith.

B. Unsaved

1. For you who are not Christians, there is a peace which you know nothing about. For you to experience this peace, you must first come to Christ in faith receiving Him as your Savior from sin and Lord of your life.
2. Surely you must long for peace, but your Christ-less heart is like a troubled sea which cannot rest.
3. Jesus Christ makes this promise to you. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."