

2020 IFCA Convention
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Taking Our Anxious Thoughts Captive

Our convention theme this year is *Taking Every Thought Captive*.

“For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...”

2 Corinthians 10:4–5, NASB

The perennial conflict we all face as Christians is the fight to remain faithful to Christ.

- This battle is external (cultural and doctrinal pressures)
- This battle is internal (dealing with our own thoughts and struggles)

The purpose of this seminar is to connect the dots between our convention theme and how that relates to worry and anxiety. When anxiety comes upon us, it feels like we are the captive! However, the Bible equips us to be more than conquerors over this common problem.

Anxiety = the emotion we feel at the prospect of losing something.

When you want to know what the Bible says about an issue like this, you’re not going to find one passage that sums it all up.

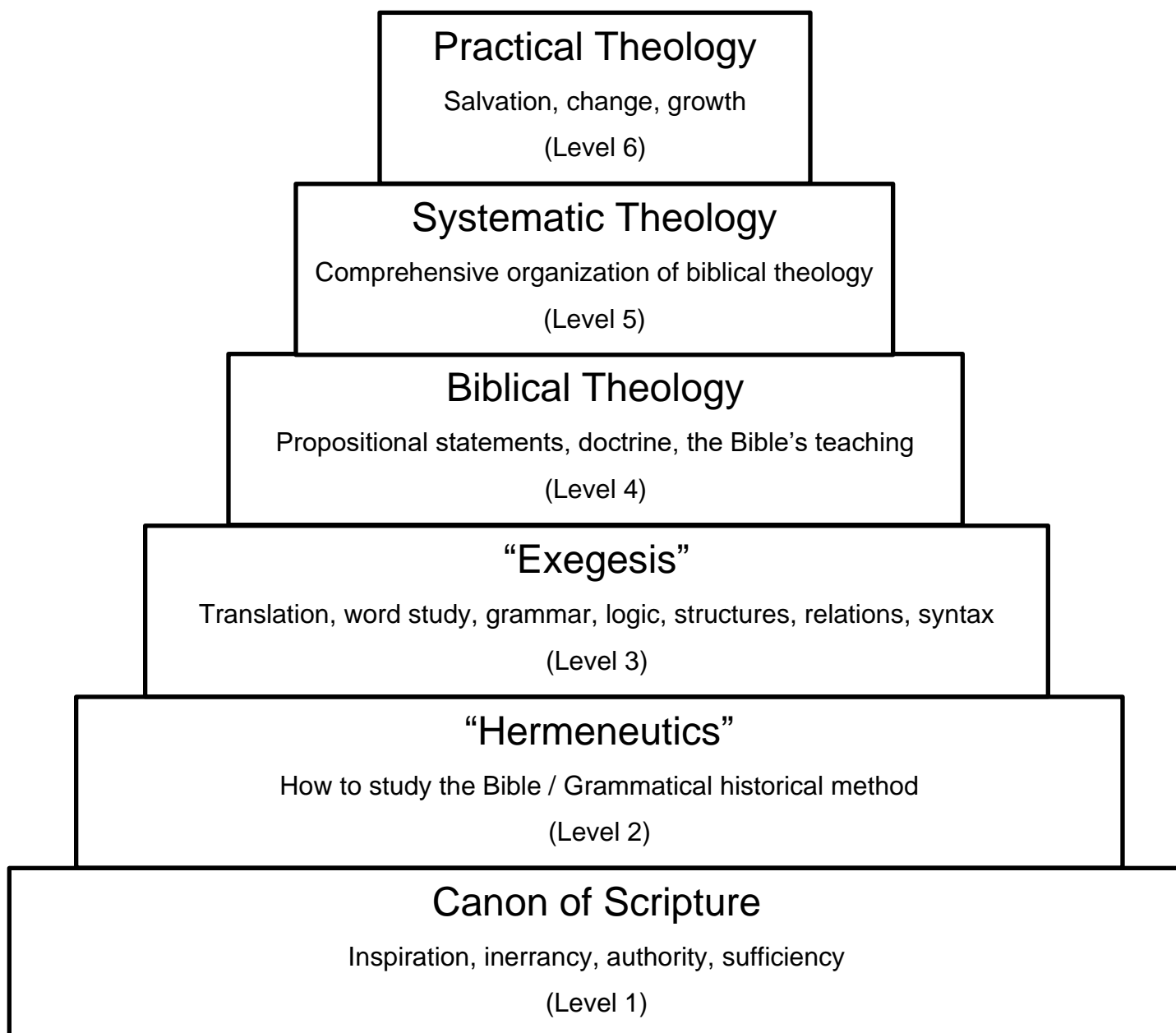
Anxiety is a practical theology issue (see theological pyramid on page 2)

It is a “level 6” issue

It must not be divorced from levels 1–5

Levels 1–5 must not be divorced from level 6

“Theological Pyramid”¹



To understand worry/anxiety and fear biblically, we especially need this foundation.

¹ Materials in this handout are adapted from Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries (Lafayette, IN).

1.) We take anxious thoughts captive by learning to see them as God sees them.

In other words, we want to understand how *God's Word* defines this problem.

The Bible has specific terms for “worry” and “fear” with some overlap:

Worry (*μεριμνάω*) = generally translated as “worry” or “anxiety”; it means expending unduly concerned thought based upon *apprehension* about *possible* danger or misfortune.

Whenever worry is mentioned in the Bible, it is **forbidden** (Matthew 6:25, 31, 34; Philippians 4:6)

Worry is forbidden because **worry is a problem**: It is an over-concerned focus upon the *future* that keeps us from fulfilling our biblical responsibilities in the *present*. In short, worry is a problem because it keeps us from being faithful.

Fear (*φόβος*—*most prevalent NT term*) = an emotional we experience in anticipation of some specific pain or danger; it makes us want to flee or fight.

Unlike worry (which is always forbidden in the Bible); fear is *not* necessarily always wrong. Fear can be spiritual constructive; worry never is.

Fear is ungodly when it *keeps* us from loving God and neighbor (i.e., neglect biblical responsibilities). Fear is godly when it *motivates* us to love God and neighbor (i.e., fulfill biblical responsibility).

Ungodly fear is often clustered around several key themes in the Bible:

- **Fear of man** (Prov 29:25; John 12:42–43)
- **Fear of losing temporal things** (Luke 12:4)
- **Fear of circumstances outside our control** (Proverbs 3:25; Genesis 4:14)

Ungodly fear is DIFFERENT from:

- Appropriate concern and care (Matthew 23:37–38)
- Proper planning that acknowledges God's sovereignty (James 4:15–16)
- Fear of God (Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13–14; Luke 12:5)
- Respecting, avoiding/protecting from danger (Matt 4:5–7)

2.) We take anxious thoughts captive by learning to believe that God cares.

We need to be aware that ungodly fear and worry always come from some level of believing the lie that God doesn't care.

We should view the presence of worry and sinful fear as smoke alarms that alert us to problems in our beliefs—worry and fear have everything to do with what we *think* and *believe* about the *future*.

The reason we know he's trustworthy to care for our **future** is because of the **past**.

- God cares deeply to the point that he humbled himself in the incarnation to deliver believers from fear (Hebrews 2:14–15),
- God cares deeply to the point that he gave of himself to provide true freedom from fear for believers (John 14:27; Galatians 5:22).

3.) We take anxious thoughts captive by learning what's really going on in our hearts.

- Learn from your worry/fear **what you really think about God**.

“Fear is sinful when it attributes to God characteristics that are inconsistent with His [perfect] nature. When Christians are afraid, it is almost certainly because they have misconceptions about God.” (Lou Priolo, *Fear: Breaking Its Grip*, 8)

What does your fear reveal to you about your “working/practiced” theology?

- Learn from your worry/fear **what you really think about yourself**:
- Learn from worry/fear **what you really think about others**:

4.) We take anxious thoughts captive by learning practical steps to trust God:

The 10 “R’s” of trusting God:

Record anxious feelings, thoughts, desires, words, and actions (write them down!) and analyze them in light of God’s Word in order to categorize them as either godly concern or ungodly worry.

Repent of habits of unbelief, doubt, and disoriented desire (recognizing and confessing them, starting to think differently about them).

Remind yourself over and over again about the temporal nature of many fears and worries (Matthew 6:25).

Reflect over and over again upon God’s faithfulness in providing for all His creation (Matthew 6:25, 28–29).

Remain close to your sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–15).

Rejoice in your identity “in Christ” (Romans 8:31–35).

Recognize the wasteful nature of fear and worry (Matthew 6:27).

Rely upon God in prayer (Hebrews 4:16)

Resist spiritual unfaithfulness and irresponsibility (Matthew 6:33–34).

Reinvest in loving God and loving neighbor rather than focusing upon what you might lose (1 John 4:18; Philippians 2:3–4)