

There is no fear in love... perfect love drives out all fear.

(1 John 4: 18)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

(Galatians 5: 22, 23)

Love is the Answer... Really
(or, ***Calm Down... He's Still in Control***)

If you're like me, it's a dicey proposition these days to turn on the news or pick up a newspaper... if you still have one, that is. Many are worried about their jobs in this economy while others – grown cynical over the state of politics in this nation for the last few decades – are worried about the effect such times will have on its government and, by extension, its people.

Those who have taken heed of the philosopher Santayana's warning about not learning from history fear these times to be an opportunity for changing the nature of American government from one of a republic (power emanating from the people to the government through elected representatives) we were designed to be to one of central command and control (power emanating from government), with an accompanying loss of the individual freedoms we have come to overindulge in and abuse. Such a change is eagerly anticipated by some, as the chaotic nature of the last few generations seems to call for government taking a firmer hand in its dealings with a people increasingly unable or unwilling to govern themselves. On the opposite side of this spectrum lie those who fear governmental ineptitude in attempting to deal with the situation – I refuse to call this a *crisis*, simply because America is in far better shape overall than it was in the days of 1929 which triggered the Great Depression – will lead not to America's transformation to the "dark side," but simple collapse under the weight of its own bloated bureaucracy. Still others see this downturn as already starting to end and the nation picking up where it left off, rendering both alternatives moot. The bottom line is that people are uncertain about today, let alone the future; anxiety abounds and all ahead looks only like pea soup-thick fog.

In the midst of all this is the church's opportunity to shine – and you really don't have to do a thing except be who you are in the Body of Christ. Because God's still on the throne and He's still in control of everything.

Now, when a believer says that sort of thing, to the world it sounds like some Pollyanna-type departure from reality; *Don't worry, be happy* (or perhaps, *What? Me Worry?* From MAD Magazine's Alfred E. Newman... we *are* thought of by some as close relatives to him). And perhaps the particular phrase has been overused to the point of it sounding like a mantra of sorts. But stay with me on this one because first, it's quite true and second, it leaves us free to display His great love for us.

Spring Break came for us in Texas a little early this year, and Carolyn and I took the rig into the western half of the state to a town called Alpine. You've probably never heard of it, unless you've passed through there on your way to Big Bend National Park,

you're an alumnus of Sul Ross State University or you're interested in things like the Marfa Mystery Lights or the McDonald Observatory of the University of Texas, which are nearby. There's not much to Alpine, really – a couple of good restaurants, a hotel which flies the Royal Standard of Scotland (the red rampant lion) along with those of the U.S. and Texas – and lots of what we were interested in the most, which was peace and quiet and time to be with the Lord. I think it turned out that He was even more eager to meet with us, because the blessings started to flow while we were still on the way to our first stop, Fort Stockton. This was verified by the fact that when the Holy Spirit comes upon me in a greater way, He gives me laughter. Fortunately, Carolyn was driving, because I was getting quite hysterical.

Without eating up web space with minutiae, what happened was that God manifested Himself in a greater way to us, because we were open to Him. I was healed of a generational condition that had run rampant in my family, while a problem in Carolyn's ear that rendered it almost useless for hearing was corrected. I was even privileged to experience His presence in a greater way – still partly veiled, perhaps, but tangible nonetheless. And permeating the rig after such an experience was the scent of wine which, according to one Bible commentary, represents Covenant blessings and joy. (It also shows God has a marvelous sense of humor, since He knows I don't drink alcohol.)

It is important to note at this point that before the trip took place, we were getting all kinds of messages about the uncertain times we currently live with very few of them positive. Tales of laying up emergency supplies, stores running out of ammunition and trading in old gun collections for something more... reliable... were coming at us from every direction. After the event, however, came a greater sense of peace in His presence I haven't felt since I first accepted Jesus as my Savior. And both Carolyn and I have been able to share this experience with others and bless them as well.

There are times in our walk with the Lord when our eyes are suddenly opened to just how much He loves us; never fully, mind you, because if we knew the full extent of His love our heads would explode since finite human minds cannot take in all of the infinite love of God. But when His love dawns in our minds and in our hearts it is both humbling and liberating. No matter how "bad" we've been, no matter how far we may have strayed from His ways, He is always ready to take us back. Someone who is *omnipresent* – everywhere at once – never really leaves us; we are the ones who always walk away. And when the light of this truth is switched on, it leaves us free to love Him. And love is the basis of our relationship with the Lord.

It was love that motivated God to spare us after the Fall, and not simply wipe us out and start all over again (which we surely would have done had we been in God's place... c'mon, be honest). It was love that drove Him to set His Glory aside and to become one of us, fully human while fully God at the same time, in order to become take the punishment for our sins that we deserved and restore our relationship with Him. (Not to mention doing so by possibly the nastiest means of execution ever devised by man.) And it is love that calls us back to Him; it is His kindness that, ultimately, leads us to repentance. You can be yelled and cursed at all day long (we expect that in this culture) but isn't it the good thing, the *nice* thing that is done for us that gets our attention faster? Especially when it is undeserved? And that makes us want to respond to that love in kind. How many times have you done for your spouse something that you ordinarily would recoil from? When Carolyn was recovering from back surgery, do you think she just got

up and went to the bathroom on her own those first few days of recovery as though it was nothing? No, she needed help. And guess who provided it – not out of a sense of *OK, she's my wife so I have to do this*. No, this was more like *I love this woman, she needs help and I can help her*. When Jacob met Rachel in Genesis, the bride price of seven years of labor for her father Laban was nothing to him; he was so in love with this woman that he would have done anything for her.

So it is when you realize just how much God has done for us so that we could be what He made us to be. That moment is when the idea that *God loves us* stops being a generic, abstract concept and becomes *God loves ME* and earth-shatteringly real. The knowledge moves from your head to your heart, and nothing is ever the same again. Obedience to His Will and His Commandments is easy. Loving those that hate God is simple – I love God, God loves me and them, so I love them also; to spin the ancient proverb, *The object of my Lord's desire is my desire, too*.

When you have this kind of love, suddenly the miserable, fear-filled headlines just don't have as much impact. Now, please don't misunderstand me; in saying this I am in no way trying to dismiss the feelings and concerns of those of you who might be reading this that just lost your jobs or your pension funds or what you thought was a secure future because of greedy people. I've been out of work too, and it's not something you casually blow off. But when you know *God loves me*, the idea that *God's got my back* kind of naturally follows. He won't let you go through anything more than you can bear; it may not seem like it at the time, but He really does make all things work together for good for those that love Him. It's at times like this that the kind of love I'm talking about makes trusting Him in these kinds of situations that much easier.

God's love is perfect and (as the passage from 1 John states) perfect love drives out all fear. The fruit of the Spirit, which comes as we surrender our lives to Him, enables us to love like He does – and no matter what sorts of laws are enacted, even if the government of the United States goes completely insane and moves us into a fascist or totalitarian state, no laws will ever be enacted against love, peace, joy, etc.

Yes, there will be times when persecution will intensify against believers; it's one of the signs that God is having His way with us. But He's right there beside us, and He will ultimately prevail. And His love shining through us is one of the things that draw people to Him... and the chief reason, perhaps, why persecution ultimately backfires on its perpetrators.