Food for Thought—Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear; because fear hath torment…. I John 4:18

This verse is one that is familiar to many of us, but what does it mean? How exactly does love drive out fear? Whose love for whom?

Many people point out that the love of our Lord which led Him to the cross for us saves us and that when we come to understand and take hold of this, then we can be released from the fear of hell (as well as hell itself). And that is true. I think this passage is talking about even more, however. I think it speaks to the effect love has on all fears.

How true it is, by the way, that fear *torments* us. And this passage is a good reminder that our Enemy is not just a comic character dressed up in a red suit trying to lure us into saloons. *Fear hath torment*. Satan is pleased when we feel tormented by fear—he *likes* it. THAT is evil. That tells us what sort of enemy we have.

Joyce Meyer has written well about how her experiences of abuse as a child ingrained fear in her—fear of being hurt, fear of being let down, fear that there was nobody she could depend upon to care about her and look out for her. And that fear, as fear always does, robbed her. As an adult, she was afraid to let people get close to her, she tried to control everything and everyone in her life (in an effort to avoid being hurt or disappointed), she worried about her finances constantly, and she was miserable. It was only when she finally became convinced that God really did love her that she was able to experience freedom from these fears and the bad fruit they produced in her life.

I think there is even more, however. Not only is God's love important, but the love we exercise is vital as well. I John 4 is full of cosmic truth, and another thing it says is that as Jesus behaved in the world, so are we to behave. And what did Jesus do? He loved. He loved the Father. He loved mankind. And I find that it is loving God and loving people which can free us from many fears. Who in scripture was brave? Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego are great examples. They believed God would deliver them from the fire but said that even if He didn't deliver them, they would still not bow down to any other god. How were they able not to be afraid when threatened with tortuous death by fire? They believed God was real (not just an emblem of their cultural traditions, but real), that He cared what they did, and that He was good—a God they could love, a God worth dying for. What about Esther? Faith in a God who was real (otherwise there would've been no prayer and fasting before she asked to have an audience with the king) and love for her people. Let's look at Jesus Himself: Hebrews 12 tells us that Jesus endured the cross (and counted the worldly shame of it as worth nothing) because of "the joy that was set before him" upon which He fixed his eyes. What was that joy? As best as I can discern, it was the joy of knowing what He would be accomplishing for us (and that it would also please the Father). His love for us and for the Father drove out fear and replaced it with joy.

When I think of my own fears, I find that love is the cure for them. What am I afraid of? Here's one—being in a situation in which I'd have to try to fit in with the country club set. Notice that fear is always inward. It's about me. What will happen to me? How will this make me feel? How will I compare with them? Love, however, is outward. If I remember, "Hey, every one of these ladies has hard things in her life. I know this because *every* person does. Instead of feeling insecure, I need to be thinking about the fact that they are carrying burdens, just like I am, and I need to pray for them," then the fear vanishes. The focus becomes outward as I begin to think and act in love toward the women I'd before been afraid of. Here is another--What if something went badly financially and I were to lose my house? You may be surprised, but my most comforting, fear-repelling thought is this: "Well, if that happened, I would learn what that is like. Many people experience this. If it happened to me, it would at least open my eyes more fully to them. I would never (I hope) thereafter forget to pray for them, and for refugees and others in even worse straits." That perspective hacks away a lot of my fear. The focus goes away from me to others, and it makes me think of God's value system—the value of the kingdom of heaven truly outweighing the kingdom of this world.

I think unforgiveness often has a component of fear within it. We want someone to remember and care that we were hurt; and perhaps some part of us suspects that the only way to do that is to keep hanging on to the pain ourselves in case no one else remembers it. I recall a time when I was finding it difficult to forgive someone. The person in this case didn't even seem to feel bad about what she'd done. That made it harder for me to let go. Then I felt the Lord speak to me, saying, "Can you forgive her for my sake? " And I thought, "Wow. Yes, I *can* let go of it for *You*!" To think that there would be anything I could do that would bless the Lord! To think that there is anything we can do that would make Him actually *happy/pleased* (and I think He was telling me it would)! Yes, I *could* do it *for Him*. And immediately the pain and connected fear dissolved.

No wonder love drives fear out. There's not room for fear in love.   ***--Sally***