

# *The Safety Net*

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*“Fear Not”*

Dear ones,

With all of our security, we live in a society that seems to thrive on FEAR. I don't take a daily newspaper, and I don't watch most of the newscasts on television. TV stations have to fill 30 minutes with news, several times a day, and they either tell the same things over and over again or fill in with stuff that is of no interest to me at all. I don't like to hear fearful things all day long.

I get most of my news off the Internet. I simply see the online listing of the headlines and I pick which stories I want to read. I don't read too many.

One day recently I looked at the Internet headlines for the day. There didn't seem to be a whole lot of major events taking place in the world, so the stories reflected conditions that they wanted to highlight. But they were all NEGATIVE!

The first headline said: *“Killer Algae Haunts California's Shores.”* So it went on to tell how birds, sea lions and dolphins have been killed by some kind of algae.

The next headline said: *“Global Warming Worsens.”*

Another said: *“State Department says Terrorism Increased Four-fold Last Year.”*

And on and on it went. Bees disappearing from their hives and how we're all going to starve eventually as a result, tainted pet foods that are killing our pets now and will kill us eventually, a meteorite that may hit the earth in 30 years, etc.

I thought, “Do I need this?” “Can I do anything about any of these things?”

There are people that get so worked up about all the crises in the world that they think about little else. And they seem to welcome the opportunity to pull you into their fears. There is a woman that I see occasionally and she is always on some fear crusade: MSG, fluoride in the water, the evils of television, deadly viruses, etc. I frankly don't want to hear her alarmism. I consider it as something

akin to pornography.

I am even more offended by those “nay-sayers” who are always warning about changes in the church.

I can already hear some of you saying, “Didn’t he already write about this in April?”

Caught red-handed!

Yep, I talked in April about garbage, especially as it is passed on in erroneous emails.

And still others are saying, “Didn’t he already write about this last month?”

Caught again.

I talked last month about people judging each other in the church over matters of conscience that may have more to do with opinion than truth.

So why am I writing about this subject again?

Well, I think I’ve hit a nerve. And my acupuncturist says that when you do that, that’s good! When she pokes in a needle in a certain spot and I say, “Ouch” she says “Good. It’s working!”

Now I don’t know whether that’s true. But I certainly heard some “ouch’s” in April and others in May. Both times I got negative responses and have lost substantial financial support. I’ve gotten some very negative feedback. So here I am again.

Mind you, I wasn’t really trying to say anything controversial before. And I’m not now. I’m just trying to be truthful. If you’ve read this letter for any time at all you know that I am not trying to be a theologian or church critic. This is a Samaritan ministry where I simply try to apply spiritual first aid to those who are in pain.

For years I’ve had hurting preachers coming to my place with the same testimony: “When I condemn the opinions and traditions of people in other churches I get PRAISED, but when I suggest that there might be some opinions and traditions in our church I get CANNED!” I haven’t agreed with that or disagreed with it. I’ve just tried to point people back to God and I’ve tried to assist people in turning loose of animosity and not be bitter.

There has to be a lot of pain and uncertainty out there because I’ve had people turn on me recently that I thought would be in my corner no matter what foul thing I did or said. I’ve felt like the dog owner that got bitten by his own lovable pup because the pup was hurting.

Since the first of the month I have done a lot of study in Matthew 10. Some interesting things were going on there. Jesus was sending His disciples out to talk about the Kingdom of God. They were well equipped because they knew that God was doing some great things in the world and they had experienced it in their own lives. But the difficult thing was that Jesus was sending them out WITHOUT HIM!

They were terrified! It was one thing to talk about Him when He was there with them, but another matter indeed to be out there on the limb without Him.

So, Jesus did some of the most interesting teaching of His whole ministry, in my opinion. What He told them was complex and paradoxical. But it was also quite profound and worthy of our study.

In verse 16 he said, *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men. They will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account, you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, don’t worry.”*

It’s a very bad situation. And so here is Jesus instructing the troops. “Hey, you’re going out on your own to share this great news about what God is doing in the world...” And then He gives them all of this terrible news. He talks about wolves, and floggings, and arrests. Now I don’t know about you, but it doesn’t sound like the way to motivate workers.

And then, after all the bad stuff, He tells them “Don’t worry!” He even tells them if they were going to be afraid of someone, it would be far better to be afraid of the One who can destroy the soul as well as the body!

I think Jesus’ words are actually quite profound. I also believe they apply to us in much the same way that they did to the first disciples.

I see three significant things here:

1. Jesus wanted His evangelists to be cautious. It’s OK to be shrewd and watchful.
2. But He didn’t want them to live in fear. There’s a difference between being realistically cautious and being irrationally paranoid.
3. And finally, God is far more to be feared than other people.

Do we need those three things today? Absolutely!

Caution is certainly in order. There are lots of pitfalls in the church and in the world. Believing in God

doesn't mean you don't wear your seatbelt in the car, and it doesn't mean that you walk blindly into situations where you know there are going to be vicious critics.

But we must not see a demon hiding in every shadow. Even though we're cautious we still live in faith and expect our work to be blessed.

And finally, we must be more concerned about offending God than offending people. I know people that don't honor their convictions because they think of what their parents or grandparents would have said, or what some Christian college forum might say about them. "Political Correctness" has too much influence with many churchmen. We don't want to "rock the boat" or be considered "unsound." So we follow the party-line even when we know it is flawed.

The principle that Jesus gives us in dealing with fear is that we take all of our "small" fears and replace them with one central fear, which is: are we right with God? That is an appropriate thing to think about. Not in a panic-stricken way, because Jesus is now going to tell us about how much this God loves us. But we have to deal with the fact that to not respond to the love of God brings consequences bigger than any of the other mistakes or dangers that we worry about in life.

*"Don't fear people who can only kill you! Fear God!"* Jesus says.

But then He goes on to tell us that this God cares about us. He gives us this image of the sparrows. *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered, so don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows."*

In this one short illustration, Jesus teaches us a number of things about God. The first is, that God knows everything. He knows all the things that we are worried about around us. Not one sparrow falls, apart from God knowing it. God knows!

But God also cares! He cares about all the things that face us, but primarily He is concerned about our relationship with Him. That's why He gave His Son.

The third thing is that God is with us. If He allows danger to come close, He's there to keep it from overwhelming us or from doing any eternal, permanent damage to us. But He's there in the midst of it.

Don't be afraid!

Yours in Christ,

Silas