

Should We Fear God?



Behold I Bring You Good Tidings Of Great Joy by Tom duBois

“Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the Lord with fear;
with trembling kiss his feet,
or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled”
Psalm 2:10-11(*NRSVue*)

There are several parts of the Bible that mention fearing God, I chose to open with the one from the Psalms for a simple reason, I really liked Father Anderson from Hellsing and the scene where he quotes this before fighting Alucard in the art museum was the coolest shit ever to 15 year old me.

I think this is the fastest that I felt the pull to write something new and it's something of a tricky topic isn't it? After all, why should we be afraid of a God who is supposedly merciful and loving?

Fear is a complicated topic in the faith after all, most people's conception of the fear of God is the ever present threat of Hell that the evangelical movement so loves. I think the great tragedy is that God is no longer the loving father, he is no longer the God of Abraham, of Issac, and Jacob, instead he's a stick to beat people into line with.

But back to the question, I think to a certain extent "Fear" isn't the right word, for one thing the use of fear I think conveys a sense of impending danger of a nearby threat and I don't think that quite fits. The German theologian and philosopher Rudolf Otto coined the term "*Numinous*" meaning "arousing spiritual or religious emotion; mysterious or awe-inspiring" and I think that fits God, He is mysterious and fascinating to us because we are created in His image we are unique among all of creation in that regard.

To "fear" God is to come face to face with the knowledge that the creator of all things the Alpha and the Omega, knows you, He knows your every thought, your every emotion. In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* the beavers tell the children about Aslan and the following conversation plays out "Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." I think to some extent that is a decent explanation for the fear we feel towards God, on a cosmic level God is in fact terrifying. He is the creator of the universe, when He speaks the world obeys, He sees our every mistake, our every lie. He sees our everything , our good and bad.

"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also." 1 John 4:16-21 (*NRSVue*)

Now in true biblical fashion I will seemingly contradict myself. I joke but I do think what John talks about in his letter and what the Old Testament writers discussed can be reconciled. When we are far from God the fire of his essence, the fire of creation, His very being burns and terrifies us, but as we get closer the burning, the fear begins to lessen. When we look upon God from afar He is terror, He is wrath. But as we approach God as we take up our cross we finally begin to understand God is love. In the book of Revelation, John (a different one than the disciple, confusing I know) sees Jesus Christ in all his divinity and he falls to his his feet as if he had died and begins to tremble then the Lord above places his hand on John's shoulder and tells him "Do not be afraid"

We fear God because He is something so much greater, so much more than us. Like he tells Moses "I am that I am" but yet through Jesus Christ we can be and do more. When we make the choice to deny ourselves and take up the cross, when we accept that Jesus Christ is the son of God something profound and beautiful shifts, suddenly that fear of a distant God becomes something so much more something so beautiful.

"If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least regard or favour, that instead of that, he will only tread you under foot: and though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of Omnipotence treading upon you, yet he will not regard that, but he will crush you under his feet without mercy; he will crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments, so as to stain all his raiment. He will not only hate you, but he will have you in the utmost contempt; no place shall be thought fit for you, but under his feet, to be trodden down as the mire of the streets."

I talked about him briefly in my previous writing but I want to talk a bit more about Mr. Jonathan Edwards, and in particular his delightful work I just quoted from *Sinners in The Hands of an Angry God*. It's definitely vivid in its description of God's burning anger, his all consuming wrath, I bring it up because I read this sermon in school and it and I mean this in all seriousness broke me for a long time. I still too this day sometimes feel overcome with a deep and abiding fear that at any moment the wrathful and angry God will strike me down because of my sins or because I have some belief that could be called heretical. Edwards throws a small bone a single drop of relief to his fearful audience if and only if they repent will this angry hateful being consider not torturing them and burning them for all of eternity.

"By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had, in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment."

How sad must life be worshipping this god, this being who delights in our pain and suffering, this being who judges not with mercy and righteousness but by arbitrary feeling, how sad to follow a god who has no love for you. But that's not the God I follow, I do not know Edward's god, I know The Living God, who sent His son to earth so that all his creation might know Him, who sends His Holy Spirit to comfort and guide our steps. I follow the God who felt every crack of the roman whip, who felt as the roman drove nails into him, whose legs were broken, whose garments were gambled for by bored uncaring soldiers. I am a servant of the he who broke Death for the sake of His children.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, the titular son demand his inheritance early and proceeds to spend foolishly and wastefully and he ends up destitute and with nothing and he decide that he will go back to his father and beg his mercy, that his father may pity him and make him a slave or servant but when he arrives his father instead is overjoyed, he starts planning a feast! For the rebellious son who spurned him!

God is of course the father and we are the prodigal son, when he is far we fear his wrath and judgment but when we finally approach we find out that the father did and does still love us and accept us.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10:31 (*NRSVue*)

Evangelicals often say we should fear the judgment of God more than any earthly authority and for once I agree but perhaps not for the same reasons. The judgment of God is terrifying because He can not be bought, he can not be bribed as Satan found when he tempted the Lord, The Holy One desires no earthly wealth, he has no need for thrones of gold and palaces of power. He is power, He is wealth. On earth justice is a pretty idea for philosophers to debate, but when we stand before the Throne, when we are looked upon by our Father as Jesus says "Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Matthew 5:26 (*KJV*)

Those who act evilly, those who have turned the house of the father into a den of thieves, who when tempted knelt before Satan and swore their worship of him and were granted earthly thrones will be called to account. Their debt is great and they will tremble on the day of judgment.

The judgment of God is the terror of the wicked and the joy of the oppressed, the orphan, and the destitute. Finally they will be looked upon as human beings, finally the eyes looking down from the seat of judgment will be loving instead of the cold dead eyes of the world's justice.

I don't know if any of that answered the question in a way that is really satisfying, I think to a certain extent I will always have a certain fear of God, but every day I keep pushing forward because I know that someday I will stand before the Holy Trinity and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will place their hands on me and say "Child, be not afraid"

Thank you for reading, God bless.