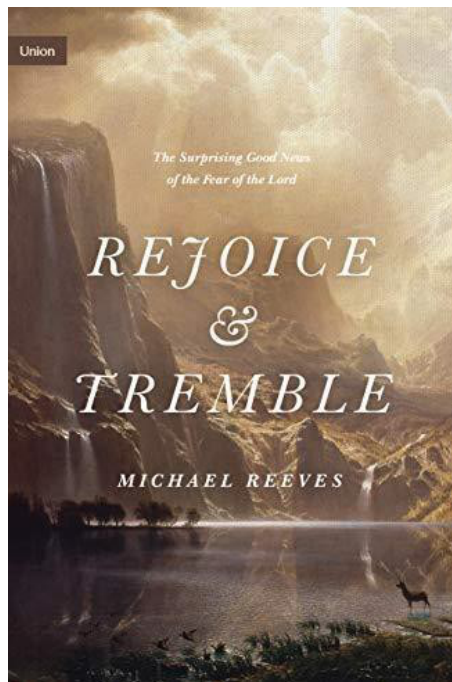


Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord

By Michael Reeves

Crossway, 2021, 192 Pages



Summary

Fear is one of the strongest human emotions—and one that often baffles believers, even mission workers. In the Bible the picture can seem confusing: Is fear a good thing or a bad thing? And what does it mean to “fear the Lord?” Michael Reeves clears the confusion and shows that the fear of the Lord is not a negative thing at all, but rather an intensely delighting in wonderment at God, our Creator and Redeemer.

Best Illustration

“So how can the fear of the Lord free us from our anxieties and our fear of man? Essentially, it acts like Aaron’s staff, which ate up the staffs of the Egyptian magicians. As the fear of the Lord grows, it outgrows, eclipses, consumes, and destroys all rival fears.” Page 143

Best Idea

“My aim now is to cut through this discouraging confusion. I want you to rejoice in this strange paradox that the gospel both frees us from fear and gives us fear. It frees us from our crippling fears, giving us instead a most delightful, happy, and wonderful fear. And I want to clear up that often off-putting phrase ‘the fear of God,’ to show through the Bible that for Christians it really does not mean being afraid of God.” Page 16

Best Take Away

“Not afraid of anything, the saints will be caught up into God’s own fearful happiness and will be overwhelmed by exultation in the glory of God. In other words, our eternal joy will consist precisely in this fear of God: rejoicing and marvelling so entirely that, like the angels, we burn and tremble and fall on our faces in wonder.” Page 163

Our Recommendation

The book is a masterful handling of the topic of fear. Rarely do we stop to think what it really means to have a healthy fear of the Lord, that outdoes our personal fears. Reeves brings a biblical perspective to this topic, giving balance to the emotion of fear.

Best Quotes

"Children have grown up so protected that they are not expected to be able to cope with opposing viewpoints or criticism. It is just one indicator that they are considered more fragile than students were a generation ago. However, it is wrong to single out the pejoratively named Generation Snowflake." Page 18 "Though we are more prosperous and secure, though we have more safety than almost any other society in history, safety has become the holy grail of our culture. And like the Holy Grail, it is something we can never quite reach. Protected like never before, we are skittish and panicky like never before." Page 19

"When your culture is hedonistic, your religion therapeutic, and your goal a feeling of personal well-being, fear will be the ever-present headache." Page 19

"It is God who provides the logic and matrix of morality: when he is no longer feared, moral confusion must follow. In other words, moral confusion is not the root of our anxiety: our moral confusion today and our general state of heightened anxiety are both the fallout of a cultural loss of God as the proper object of human fear. That fear of God (as I hope to show) was a happy and healthy fear that shaped and controlled our other fears, thus reining in anxiety." Page 20

"It is completely understandable, but it is tragic: the loss of the fear of God is what ushered in our modern age of anxiety, but the fear of God is the very antidote to our fretfulness." Page 24

"Anxiety grows best in the soil of unbelief. It withers in contact with faith. And faith is fertilized by the fear of God." Page 25

"We all know fear. When you experience fear, your body reacts: you feel the adrenaline release as your heart races, your breathing accelerates, your muscles tense, and your brain goes hyperalert. Sometimes that can be intensely fun: think of the rush of the roller coaster or the big game. Sometimes it can come as a terrifying 'amygdala hijack' as panic grips you so utterly, you cannot think but only shake, sweat, and fret." Page 27

"But it is not only that we fear losing those things we love; strange to say, we also fear precisely that which is lovely. You would expect us to turn away only from ugliness and sights that revolt us. In reality, we also find we must avert our gaze in the face of great beauty, for sheer loveliness can be overwhelming." Page 28

"Fear also has a tendency to create a groove in our minds: the more we fear something, the more we become engrossed with it and can't let it go." Page 28

"Adam was the first one to feel this fear, and his reaction in that moment shows us its essential nature: sinful fear drives you away from God. This is the fear of the unbeliever who hates God, who remains a rebel at heart, who fears being exposed as a sinner and so runs from God." Page 31

"Sadly, Christians are not immune to this sinful fear. Poor teaching, hard times, and Satan's accusations can all cultivate this cringing fear of God in our hearts." Page 41

"It is, Bunyan says, the devil's work to promote a fear of God that makes people afraid of God such that they want to flee from God. The Spirit's work is the exact opposite: to produce in us a wonderful fear that wins and draws us to God." Page 44

"Unlike that devilish fear we have seen that would drive us away from God, this is a fear that keeps us from drawing back or turning away from him." Page 45

"They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. (vv. 8–9) This is not a fear of punishment—of what God might do if his people turn away from him. Quite the opposite: in Jeremiah 33, the Lord reels off a catalog of pure blessing. He will cleanse them, forgive them, and do great good for them. And they fear and tremble precisely because of all the good he does for them." Page 46

"Looking at the biblical evidence, John Bunyan concluded that those who have no faith will have no true fear of God, those who have a devil's faith will have a devil's fear, and those who have a saint's faith will have a saint's fear." Page 50

"Instead, we can say with Spurgeon that this is the 'sort of fear which has in it the very essence of love, and without which there would be no joy even in the presence of God.'" Page 50

"True fear of God is true love for God defined: it is the right response to God's full-orbed revelation of himself in all his grace and glory." Page 53

"Overwhelmed by his goodness and majesty and holiness and grace and righteousness—by all that God is—the faithful tremble. The biblical theme of the fear of God helps us to see the sort of love toward God that is fitting. It shows us that God does not want passionless performance or a vague preference for him." Page 53

"He is not a truth to be known unaffectedly, or a good to be received listlessly. Seen clearly, the dazzling beauty and splendor of God must cause our hearts to quake." Page 53

"Because this fear finds a heartfelt delight in God himself, it begins to find a genuine pleasure in walking in his ways. The 'man who fears the Lord' will be the very one 'who greatly delights in his commandments' (Ps. 112:1). And at the same time, God finds a delight in those who have this trembling, exquisite pleasure in him." Page 60

"This right fear of God, then, is not the minor-key, gloomy flip side to proper joy in God. There is no tension between this fear and joy. Rather, this trembling 'fear of God' is a way of speaking about the sheer intensity of the saints' happiness in God. In other words, the biblical theme of the fear of God helps us to see the sort of joy that is most fitting for believers." Page 61

"The fruit of the Spirit is precisely that character which grows out of a God-fearing heart. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the beautiful, lived embodiment of the fear of God." Page 65

"The first sort of right fear is the weak-kneed and trembling response to the fact that God is the Creator. It appreciates—indeed, it enjoys—that God is splendid in his transcendence, above and beyond creation." Page 70

"The holiness of the sovereign Lord is tremendous, vivid, and dazzling. Not to fear him would be blind foolishness." Page 71

"Through sending his Son to bring us back to himself, God has revealed himself to be inexpressibly loving and supremely fatherly. Luther found that not only does that give great assurance and joy—it also wins our hearts to him, for 'we may look into His fatherly heart and sense how boundlessly He loves us. That would warm our hearts, setting them aglow with thankfulness.'" Page 97

"This filial fear is part of the Son's pleasurable adoration of his Father; indeed, it is the very emotional extremity of that wonder. It is not the dread of sinners before a holy Judge. It is not the awe of creatures before their tremendous Creator. It is the overwhelmed devotion of children marvelling at the kindness and righteousness and glory and complete magnificence of the Father." Page 101

"In other words, the filial fear the Son shares with us is quite different from the sinner's dread of God and dread of punishment. It is an adoration of God that dreads sin itself, not just its punishment, for it has come to treasure God and so loathe all that is ungodly." Page 102

"Having a right knowledge of God is inextricably bound up with having a right fear of God. Those who do not know God as a merciful Redeemer and compassionate Father can never have the delight of a truly filial fear. At the very best, they can only tremble at his transcendent awesomeness as Creator. At worst, they can only shudder at the thought that there is a righteous Judge in heaven and hate him in their hearts." Page 102

"The fear of God is the heartbeat of our new life in Christ and 'the soul of godliness.' As such, it is not the mere sum of certain behaviours, or something we can acquire with simple self-effort. If it were, it would be an entirely superficial and infinitely less precious matter. Instead of being a consequence of any particular practices, the fear of God is a matter of the deeper orientation of a renewed heart—something that causes truly Christian behaviour." Page 109

"The one who fears the Lord, then, is not merely one who grudgingly attempts the outward action of keeping the Lord's commandments. The one who truly fears the Lord greatly delights in God's commandments!" Page 110

"The fear of God as a strong biblical theme thus stands as a superb theological guard dog. It stops us from thinking that we are made for either passionless performance or a detached knowledge of abstract truths. It backs us into the acknowledgment that we are made to know God in such a way that our hearts tremble at his beauty and splendor, that we are remade at the deepest level." Page 111

"That is to say, only the Holy Spirit can bring about the fundamental change in our disposition that we need, and he does this through the gospel, which preaches Christ. Only the preaching of Christ can turn a heart truly to desire righteousness and fear God with loving, trembling, filial adoration. And it is not that the Spirit does that work once only, when we are born again, leaving us from then on to sweat out our sanctification by pure self-exertion. It is always the gospel that does the deepest plow work in our hearts." Page 114

“So, what does it look like when a believer is filled with a right, healthy, filial fear of God? Not a cold, dead, outward, hypocritical show of reverential religion, but a heartfelt quaking at the goodness and greatness and glory of the Redeemer.” Page 131

“Believers who have a right fear of the Lord, who know God and know these promises, will bemoan their prayerlessness but will know something of a heartfelt, affectionate prayer life. They will want to know God better and enjoy sweeter and more constant communion with him.” Page 133

“Only in the light of God’s holiness and majesty do I truly understand how puny, how vicious, and how pathetic I naturally am. In other words, I do not have a true knowledge of myself if I do not fear God. Without that fear, my self-perception will be wildly distorted by my pride and by the messages of the sinful culture around me.” Page 136

“The fear of the Lord makes believers both knowledgeable and wise. In fact, in essential matters—in knowing God, ourselves, and the nature and story of the universe—the fear of the Lord makes believers more knowledgeable than the greatest geniuses, and wiser than the wisest sages.” Page 137

“A true and happy fear of God simply eclipses self. It is, in other words, the antidote to pride and the prayerlessness that springs from pride. When God is so marvelous in our eyes that we rejoice and tremble, we cannot but praise him and throw ourselves on him in hearty and dependent prayer.” Page 140

“Since fear is a matter of the heart, reorienting our fears is no easy, quick matter. And we have an enemy whose spiteful aim is to make us afraid of God and afraid of everything, who would have us sulk and tremble. But reorienting our fears and affections is a daily battle we must join, as both a duty and a joy.” Page 148

“In the fear of God, believers become—like their God—blessedly and beautifully fearsome.” Page 154

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