

FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS

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CHRISTIAN SAFETY

Jonathan Edwards

JONATHAN EDWARDS

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is often regarded as America's greatest theologian and philosopher. Born in Windsor, Connecticut as the only son of eleven children to a well-known pastor, Timothy Edwards, whose wife, Sarah, was the daughter of the famous minister, Solomon Stoddard, Jonathan received his early education in his father's school, where he was nurtured in Reformed theology and Puritan piety. At age 13, he went to college at New Haven, earned the BA degree in 1720, and stayed on at Yale to complete a master's degree. He was ordained as a Congregationalist minister and as pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts, where his powerful preaching was abundantly blessed in stimulating the Great Awakening. From 1751 to 1758, he ministered in Stockbridge, while evangelizing the Indians. In 1758, he accepted the presidency of Princeton, only to die a month later from a smallpox injection. Edwards was a prolific writer of scores of books as well as a champion of Christian zeal and spirituality.

Christian Safety

*But whoso putteth his trust
in the Lord shall be safe.*

—PROVERBS 29:25

God is the chief, yea, the all and only good to the godly; He is all in all to them; He is all their good, and their only defense from evil. He is called in Scripture by the names of all those things from which we either receive good, or are defended from evil: He is frequently called the Father, the guide, the friend, the Savior, the Redeemer, the light, the life, the portion and inheritance, the shield and buckler, the strong tower and hiding place, of those that are His.

And who are those that are His, but those that trust in Him? There wants nothing to make a man one of His, but

his being willing. It is said in our text that those that trust in God are safe, and it is said in the next chapter, at the fifth verse, to the same purpose: "He is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. 30:5), and in many other places, to the same purpose, He is called their refuge in time of trouble, a strong rock, and a wall of fire round about them that fear Him.

In the words, observe: first, the subject spoken of, and that is, he that puts his trust in the Lord. Second, what is asserted of him, that he shall be safe; and third, the universality of it: "whoso putteth his trust in the Lord," however mean and low their state in this world. The poorest beggar that trusts in God, He will be his safeguard and will take him into His gracious protection.

Doctrine: They are safe that trust in God.

- I. What the trusting in God here spoken of is.
- II. That they are safe that so trust in Him.
- III. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

I. What does it mean to trust in God? It is indeed difficult for those to be made to understand what it is that have never experienced it. There is that sweet repose and rest in it that cannot be expressed, and is fully understood only by those who have it; but yet, everyone may be made to understand so much of it as to know whether or not he has it, and so may know whether he is safe or not. For our doctrine is reciprocal: as all that trust in God are safe, so none are safe but they that trust in God, but are in a dreadful, dangerous condition, continually exposed to ruin on all sides, without anything to safeguard them.

Wherefore, that we may not be mistaken in the nature of trust in God, and so be mistaken about our own safety, I shall show, first, what this trust is not; second, what it is.

First. Negatively:

1. It is not barely a desiring that God would deliver us from evil and bestow good things upon us. A man may wish that God would defend him from misery and make him happy, that yet dares not trust himself with Him, but must have something else to depend upon. They don't care to trust in such a defense as God; they don't care to leave themselves entirely in His hands but must have some other fortress of their own building. Beside the fountain of living waters, they will have a cistern of their own building. The children of Judah, when the Chaldeans came against Jerusalem, they doubtless wished that God

would deliver them; but yet they would not trust Him, but would have the king of Egypt, too, if God should fail.

2. Nor is barely a hoping that God will bestow blessing and salvation upon them sufficient. There is a hoping in God that is false, and the hope of a hypocrite that will come to nothing when God takes away his soul. And there is a sort of hope in God that all men have: that is, they hope when they die that God will receive them to happiness; neither can this be said to be a trusting in Him, for at this rate the wickedest man upon earth would trust in God, and be safe and yet continue wicked.

Second. But affirmatively, there must be these following things in order to a right trust in God:

1. There must be a lively sense of our need of Him, and the insufficiency of all other confidences. If we see not our great and

perishing need of help and relief, we shall never come to God for relief, because we shall think we can do without Him; and except we see that nothing else is sufficient to afford us help but God alone, we neglect to come to God, and seek something else in which to put our confidence. Such is man's natural enmity against God that he had rather trust in anything in the world than God.

2. There must be a firm belief in His all-sufficiency. After we have seen our need and necessity—that we are poor, wretched, blind, and naked, and stand in great need of help—the next thing is to see where the help is to be had: we must see who is able to help us before we shall come to Him for help. After we have seen our own insufficiency and the insufficiency of everything else but God; after we have seen that there is nothing else to take hold of, but we must take hold

on God or perish, then we must see God's all-sufficiency, and that there is enough in Him for us. We must believe His almighty power, that He is able to do everything for us that we need to have done.

3. There must be a firm belief in God's merciful nature, and that He is willing to help us and do for us: a trusting in God is a trusting in His mercy and goodness. Many are kept from trusting in God because they think they have committed so much sin that there is not mercy in God enough for them. He therefore must be sensible that there is mercy enough, as well as power enough, to save the most vile returning sinner.

4. A firm belief of God's truth and faithfulness to His promises. There is no trusting in God without a firm belief in the Word of God and the revelation He has made concerning Himself, especially His gracious promises. As men will not trust

men, except they think them faithful to their trusts, so they will never trust God till they see His faithfulness. It is a contradiction to suppose that a man can quietly and sweetly commit himself, soul and body, forever into His hands, when he at the same time questions whether He will be true to His trust.

5. A love to God. There is no such thing as trusting in God as long as we are enemies to Him and hate Him. It is not possible that we should come to God, and sweetly repose our souls upon Him, as long as we have an aversion and antipathy toward Him, as we all naturally do. As soon as we come into this world, and look behind us, upon Him that has just made us, we fly from Him as we would from a mortal enemy; and instead of trusting in Him, we continue to run with all our might from Him until He discovers His excellency and loveliness to us, and powerfully changes

us and causes us to love Him. Then we shall venture quietly to rely upon Him, and rest in Him.

6. A hope in Him, that He will bestow His mercy on us. Neither can we be said to trust in God, except we hope that He will bestow upon us what we trust in Him for. How can we trust in God for that which we don't believe, nor hope that He will ever bestow upon us what we trust in Him for? Therefore, when once we are come to this hope, arising from this belief of and love to God, there remains nothing but to trust in Him.

7. A rest and satisfaction in the soul arising from such a belief of love to and hope in God. The sight of his great necessity and danger makes him restless and uneasy. When he sees danger all around him, and destruction every minute ready to take hold of him, and sees nothing that he can trust to, he must needs be very restless

and in a very uneasy state. But when he sees a God that can save him, and stands ready, and is very willing to do it, and besides that has given His word and oath that He will do it if he will depend upon Him; when he sees that God is excellent and lovely, and worthy to be trusted and depended upon, he then hopes in God, and places his dependence there, and so no more fears those evils that he was in danger of before. There follows a rest, satisfaction, and repose in the soul, relying upon God. This rest in God, and satisfaction from believing in Him, loving Him, and hoping in Him, is that trust that we speak of.

II. All those that thus trust in God are safe. We shall show, first, what they are safe from; second, how they are safe.

First. What they are safe from.

1. They are safe with respect to temporal evils. Their faith and trust lifts them so

high that they are above clouds, storms, and tempests. Worldly afflictions do often happen to them, but the evil of them doesn't befall them. They may be exposed to difficulties, losses, and troubles, but he is not properly in danger of them, except as he may be said to be in danger of that which cannot do him any hurt. A true Christian may perhaps be exposed to be burnt at the stake, but not to be in danger of it, except it is proper to say that he is "in danger" of being crowned with a crown of glory. Let sickness or health, poverty or riches, honor or dishonor, wars, famine, or pestilence, or whatever will, come; yet he that trusts in God is safe.

2. They are safe from death. Those that are in Christ are as truly safe from death as those that are with Him in glory because they are safe from any hurt that death can do them. Death is turned into a blessing, and there is a great deal of mercy shown

in the death of a saint; He doth thereby graciously and kindly receive them to happiness. God stands by His dying children, and while their bodies are languishing, He is the physician of their souls. His angels guard them, and are ready to receive their departing spirits.

3. They are safe from the devil. While they trust in God, they need not fear the devil. He is full of spite and malice against them but he cannot hurt them. The devil knows this: that if once they come to place their confidence in God, they are out of his reach; and this makes him so violent to hinder men from it. He knows that when God has taken them into His protection, they are not for him; he has no hopes of getting them. The devil with all his army, with all the powers of hell conjoined, cannot come at them with all their rage and fury, and it will not be long

before God will give them a glorious triumph over them.

4. They are safe from hell. As the danger of hell is a danger that is above all others to be dreaded—because nothing else that we can be in danger of is comparable to it and no other misery but what is as nothing to it—so safety from it is desirable above all safeties. Now, there is nothing else whereby a man can be safe from hell, but trusting in God.

Second. How are they safe? I answer, because nothing can hurt them: “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1 Peter 3:13). There is nothing that can do them any harm. Wicked men, do what they will, cannot do them any hurt. Wicked men are often spiteful, malicious, envying and hating the godly. They exercise all their wit and power against them, but it is to no purpose. They trust in God; God is on their

side. What can a wicked man do to him whom God defends and fights for? This discouraged the proud Egyptians when pursuing after Israel through the Red Sea: "The Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians" (Ex. 14:25).

Nero and Diocletian, and other persecutors, did the Christians no real hurt when they ordered them to be burnt. Neither could they hurt them with all their power, though they were very powerful emperors, but the Christians would sometimes thank them for their sentence against them.

The sting of death is taken away, and the poison of afflictions. All these things are made harmless, yea, profitable and gainful, to him that trusts in God. These are poisonous serpents in themselves, but God takes away their poison. That prophecy in Isaiah 11:6–9 is fulfilled upon all true Christians: "The wolf also shall dwell

with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

The mystical sense of this prophecy is that all these things that are hurtful in themselves shall become harmless to the godly. As also is that promise partly accomplished upon every true believer: "And they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16:18). Satan cannot hurt them. All the powers of darkness, with all their spite and malice, can do

them no harm, and the flames of hell cannot reach them.

III. Now follow the reasons of the doctrine.

First. Because none are strong enough to encounter that God who protects them. All those that fly to God for refuge, He will protect. And if God protects them, it is to no purpose for all the world to endeavor to hurt them. This God is their shield, buckler, and high tower, before whom all the world is as nothing.

If He wills that a man shall be happy, all the world can't make him unhappy: "When he giveth quietness, who can make trouble?" (Job 34:29).

Those that trust in God are His favorites, His dear ones. Devils, the prince of devils, and wicked men, although kings and emperors, would fight against Jehovah, the Almighty God, to as much purpose as they endeavor to hurt those that trust in Him.

Second. Jesus Christ has overcome all their enemies. He has overcome this world, as He tells us: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Christ has overcome the afflictions of this world. He met with abundance of them, but He went through them all and overcame them. He has overcome the pomps and glories of this world. When the devil carried Him to an exceeding high mountain, and made a pompous show of all the kingdoms of the world, He rejected and despised them. He has overcome the devil. He has bruised his head and given him his mortal wound: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15).

Third. Their happiness is of such a nature as nothing can deprive them of. It is not a carnal, earthly, and worldly happiness that is

thrown down with every breath of wind; but it is a spiritual happiness which is stable as a rock, and can be no more moved by storms and tempests than a mountain.

“Fear not,” says Christ, “those that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” They may cut and mangle the body as much as they please; they cannot deprive of peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Some of the martyrs used to be cheerful while their flesh and blood were frying in the fire, despite the malice of their persecutors. Yea, a man would be happy in hell-flames if he enjoyed communion with God there. For these reasons, he is always safe that puts his trust in God.

Improvement.

Exhortation 1. To all, to put their trust in God. Certainly, it is very desirable to be safe and out of danger. Now those that trust in God, as you have heard, are safe with respect to temporal evils, safe with respect

to death, the malice of the devil, and hell torments. Wicked men know they are not safe with respect to these things, and this makes them always afraid. They are so fearful and timid, that they flee when no man pursues (Proverbs 28:1). They are, all their lifetime, subject to bondage by fears of death, except they are so accustomed unto presumptuous sinning that they are come to a beastly thoughtlessness, or rather the stupidity of stones. For the ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; the swallow knows the time of her coming and of her going, to avoid the winter; and the ant provides in summer, and lays up in harvest.

But most wicked men that have heard of hell have those internal uneasinesses arising from the thought of their unsafety that a wise man would not endure upon any worldly consideration, although they don't dare manifest it outwardly. For Solomon tells us in Proverbs 14:9, "the

fools mock at sin"—that is, as if they did not regard, and never felt any twinges of conscience for, the committing of it. Yet in the next verse, he says that the heart knows his own bitterness. The other men cannot perceive it, yet he himself feels it. And, in the thirteenth verse, that "in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness."

They that don't trust in God, when afflictions come, have nowhere to go and must stand and bear them. Neither have wicked men such abundance of patience that they can stand quietly and bear the brunt of troubles, disappointments, and losses, without any remedy. They have neither any refuge nor defense to fly to from afflictions, nor the patience to bear them. They are in a miserable condition, for they have nothing to ease them or defend them. They can't comfort themselves and say, "those afflictions are from a father" for they are inflicted by Him whom they have

made their dreadful enemy, and who is angry with them every day: "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). They can't say, to comfort themselves, that "Those things shall surely work together for my good," for there is no such promise to any but those that love God.

It is said that "the godly man shall not be afraid of evil tidings" (Ps. 112:7). His heart is fixed, trusting in God. If he hears news of wars, or pestilence, or anything else whereby his life is in danger, he shall not be afraid: "Let it come, if it will. It is of my Father's ordering, and I know He loves me as His child, and will never do anything to me but out of love."

Now, such evil tidings put the wicked into a terrible consternation. They are dreadfully frightened at the sight of death upon his pale horse, because they know hell comes behind him (Rev. 6:8).

The most bold and daring of sinners are the worst cowards upon a deathbed. How

do they fear and tremble; how do they shrink back; how do their proud hearts tremble at the sight of his frightful face; while those that they used to laugh at and ridicule as strict and precise, that dared not swear, or say anything, and dare not behave so courageously as they used to, yet can meet death as bold as lions because they know they are safe. And nothing can hurt them because they trust in God, who they know is able to keep that which they have committed unto Him (2 Tim. 1:12).

As they that trust in God are safe from everything, so those that don't trust in Him are safe from nothing. If God be for us, who shall be against us? But if God be against us, who shall be for us? For be sure, everything else will be against us. Angels will be against us. The godly will be against us; although they endeavor to recall us, yet it will prove to our hardening, and so turn to our misery. Wicked men will be against us; for though they

will seem to like us the better for being on their side, yet they are but the devil's instruments to entice us to come to hell with them. The devil, we know, is against us; for he wants nothing but to have us with him in hell, that he may torment us. Worldly prosperities will be against us, and afflictions will be against us; life will be against us, and death will be against us. And whom shall we go to to find that which will be for us? Certainly, we shall be very unsafe in the midst of so many that are against us. There is hardly anything but may be a door to let the wicked man down into the pit.

How happy then is it for us, when God is on our side. Then all these things shall be for us. How happy it is to be so safe! Who would not get into that tower that will defend us from every evil thing? How well is it worth our while to trust in God if that is all we need to do to be safe!

Wherefore, let us all be exhorted to

immediately put our confidence in Him, to cast our burdens upon Him, to commit our way unto Him, to dedicate ourselves to Him, and to deliver up our bodies and souls into His hands, and so go fearlessly on through this world, neither fearing men, nor death, nor the devil: "In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" (Ps. 11:1).

Exhortation 2: Particularly to the godly, to trust and rely on God. Surely God's own children may venture to trust in God! Labor to get an assurance of your being one of His adopted ones, one whom He loves, and one who has a right to the privileges of the sons of God, and you need not be afraid to put your trust in Him.

Whatever difficulties you may be under—whatever trials and afflictions—you may say, as Job did, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). Let

Him do with me what He please. Whatever afflictions He orders to me, I know I am His child, one of His family, and have an interest in His Son, and I will place my confidence in Him, and let Him do what He will with me.

Surely a child of God, one that Christ died for, one that God dearly loves, one to whom God has promised that all things shall surely work together for his good, may very safely do thus without any danger. God never yet failed any of His children that thus trusted in Him. They that thus trusted in God have never yet found occasion to be ashamed because of their disappointments: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth

wicked devices to pass" (Ps. 37:5–7). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer thy righteousness to be moved" (Ps. 55:22).

Surely you can believe God, when He so positively promises. For "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it; or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

Certainly, if you were fully resolved to trust in God, and to give yourself up entirely into His hands and let him do as He will, trusting in His mercy through his Son, Jesus Christ, who died for you, you need not to afflict yourself, but might lie down and sleep and awake, the Lord sustaining you. You will not find yourself disappointed; but though sorrow continue for a night, yet joy would come in the morning.

A child of God may come with boldness up to the throne of grace and say, "Lord,

surely I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant. I am Thy child; Thou hast made a covenant with me and with my dear Savior for me. I am a member of Thy Son and will trust in Thee, whatsoever Thou doest to me—whatever afflictions Thou layest upon me.”

Jonah, although he was in the fish’s belly, and there was no manner of appearance of ever being delivered—for what hope can a man have of deliverance that is swallowed by a whale?—but yet he trusted in God. He prayed unto Him, and looked towards His holy temple. The floods compassed him about, the billows and the waves passed over him; the waters compassed him about, even to the soul; the depths closed him about, the weeds were wrapped about his head; he went down to the bottoms of the mountains, the earth with her bars was about him. Now, what hope could there be for such a man, in this condition? But yet he says, “I will look again toward thy holy temple” (Jonah 2:4).

And what was the effect of it? See the last verse, "And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited up Jonah upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:10).

They that thus trust in God are certainly safe in whatever condition they are in. They are safe in affliction, and safe in prosperity. Jonah was as safe in the fish's belly, down under the bottoms of the mountains, as if he had been in a strong tower, for he trusted in God and he was in God's hand. God's mercy and love is a bulwark and defense, so strong that the forces of all the creation are not able to hurt us therein.

Whatever God does to those who are His children, He does as a father. It is all from love and tender affection. Wherefore, if they meet with affliction, they ought patiently to receive it, considering that their heavenly Father orders it out of love to them. And though they cannot see God's gracious design in it now, yet they

will see it hereafter, and will break forth into singing praises to God for His merciful inflicting of them.

If God gives them prosperity, they ought to receive it joyfully and gladly, as a gift of their kind Father, knowing that God sends it to them as children. Now the wicked can't have this comfort in their outward good things because they don't trust in God. The godly are nourished and provided for of God, as children are provided for by a father; but the wicked know not but that they are fed as beasts are fed, and fattened for the slaughter.

Wherefore, whatsoever your state and condition be, throw by all other confidences, and resolve to trust in God, and cast your whole burden upon Him; for it is good for a man to hope, and quietly to wait, for the salvation of the Lord.

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