

The Safety of Religion.

by Edward Payson

The safe course is to walk uprightly, or to pursue a course of uprightness and integrity, with respect both to sentiment and practice.

Scripture: Proverbs 10:9, Matthew 7:13, John 3:16, John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Eternal Salvation", "Justification By Faith"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of walking uprightly, emphasizing that those who pursue a course of uprightness and integrity walk safely and are assured of eternal salvation. He delves into the significance of believing in key doctrines such as the Scriptures being a revelation from God, the immortality of the soul, human sinfulness, the necessity of a moral renewal, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and justification by faith in Christ. Payson highlights the dangers of disbelief in these doctrines and the importance of embracing them for spiritual safety and salvation.

Transcript

"He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely."

Proverbs 10:9.

term walk, as used by the inspired writers, signifies a course of conduct. To walk uprightly, then, is to pursue a course of uprightness, or integrity. Our text assures us, that he who pursues such a course walketh surely. He walks safely, for he is safe while pursuing such a course; and safety, or eternal salvation, will be the end of it. He may therefore walk confidently, or with an assurance of present safety, and of final salvation. If any proposition of a religious nature be demonstrably true, it is this.

It is demonstrably true, that God is righteous. It is demonstrably true, that, possessing this character, he must regard the righteous with approbation and complacency; or, as an inspired writer expresses it, The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; for he cannot but approve of his own character; he cannot but love his own image in his creatures. And it is demonstrably true, that those whom he loves and approves must be safe here, and happy hereafter. We may, therefore, consider it as a most certain and well established truth, that he who walketh uprightly walketh safely.

But here a question arises, and a difficulty occurs. What is it to walk uprightly? It is well known, that various opinions are entertained respecting this question, and that different persons answer it in a very different manner. Now how shall we ascertain which of these various opinions is correct? And unless we can ascertain which of them is correct, of what service is our text? What does it avail us to know that he who walketh uprightly, walketh safely, unless we can ascertain what it is to walk uprightly?

My hearers, if I am not greatly deceived, our text will assist us in surmounting this difficulty. If it is true that he who walketh uprightly walketh safely, then it must be true that he who walks safely, walks uprightly. If then we can ascertain which is the safe course, we shall ascertain which is the upright course. If we can ascertain who walk safely, we shall ascertain who walk uprightly. It will, therefore, be my object in the following remarks, to show which is the safe course, or who walk safely.

Every religious course, whether right or wrong, safe or unsafe, includes two things; first, the doctrines which are believed; and secondly, the precepts which are obeyed by those who follow it. In other words, it includes sentiments, and conduct or practice. It will be proper to consider these two things separately. Let us then inquire, I. What sentiments are safe, or what we may safely believe. In answer to this inquiry we may remark, 1. It is safe to believe that the Scriptures are a revelation from God, and that those who wrote them were inspired.

This, it is presumed, no infidel will deny. No infidel will pretend that we expose ourselves to any evil, or danger, in a future state, by believing the Scriptures to be the word of God, even though it should prove that they are not so; for believing them does not lead to the neglect of any duty, which infidels regard as necessary to the attainment of future happiness. Allowing then, for argument's sake, that they should prove not to be a revelation from God; those who believed that they were so, will still stand on as safe ground, as those who rejected them.

It is then safe to believe the Scriptures. But it is not safe to disbelieve them; for if they are the word of God, all who do not receive them as such, will perish. And no one will deny that it is possible they may be the word of God. No one can, with the least shadow of reason, pretend, that it is not probable they are so. A book which thousands of the learned and the wise, after a thorough examination, have received as a revelation from heaven, must, surely, have at least probability in its favor.

Its claims must be supported by proofs of no common strength. Taking the infidel, then, on his own ground, it is by no means safe to reject the Scriptures. He who rejects them is far from walking safely. 2. It is safe to believe in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of retribution. This assertion requires no proof; for it is impossible that any future evil or danger should result from believing these doctrines, even if they are not true. If the soul is not immortal, if there is no future state, they who believed, and they who disbelieved these doctrines, will alike cease to exist at death.

On the other hand, it is not safe to disbelieve these doctrines. Even those who disbelieve them must allow, that they may possibly be true; nay, that there is some probability of their truth. And if they are true, the consequences of disbelieving them will be terrible; for he who does not believe that his soul is immortal, will take no care of it; and he who does not believe in a future state of retribution, will make no preparation for it, and will, of course, die unprepared.

He then who disbelieves these doctrines does not walk safely. 3. It is safe to believe that men are naturally destitute of holiness, or, in other words, wholly sinful. No one; it is presumed, can point out any danger, either present or future, to which a belief of this doctrine exposes men. The Scriptures caution us against

every danger to which we are exposed; but they never intimate that there is any danger of entertaining too low an opinion of ourselves. On the contrary, they give us this caution, Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

It must, I conceive, be acknowledged by all, that we are far more disposed to form too high, than too low an estimate of our own characters; that we are more in danger of being too proud, than we are of becoming too humble. Even then if we were not wholly sinful, it would be erring on the safe side to believe that we are so. But it is by no means equally safe to embrace the opposite opinion. Most awful threatenings are denounced in the Scriptures against all who do not repent of, confess, and renounce their sins.

But he who does not believe that he is entirely sinful, will not feel that repentance, nor make those confessions, which a belief of this doctrine would produce, and which the Scriptures require. Besides, if it is true that men are naturally destitute of holiness, it follows, that he who disbelieves this truth, mistakes something for holiness which in fact is not holiness; and a mistake respecting this point must be fatal. If a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

And is there not, at least, some probability, that the doctrine is true, even its enemies themselves being judges? Do not the inspired assertions, that men are dead in trespasses and sins, that if one died for all then were all dead, that the heart of the sons of men is full of evil and madness, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; I say, do not these, and other similar assertions, with which the Scriptures abound, seem to mean that men are entirely sinful? Do they not make it at least probable that they are so?

Now if there is the least probability that such is the fact, it is safe to believe it, unsafe to deny it. To believe it, if false, can do no harm. To disbelieve it, if true, will be fatal. 4. It is safe to believe that a moral renovation, or change of heart, is necessary to salvation. No harm can result from believing this doctrine, even if it is not true. But much harm, fatal harm must result from disbelieving it, if it is true. The man who does not believe that a new heart is necessary will give himself no concern respecting its attainment.

He will live and die without it. Of course, if it is necessary to salvation, he will not be saved. And is it not possible that it may be necessary? Nay, is it not probable? If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. Do not these, and the numerous other passages of the same import, which are found in the Scriptures, seem to teach that a great moral change or renovation is necessary?

Do they not render it probable that it is so? Surely then, it cannot be safe to disbelieve it? He who disbelieves it cannot walk safely. 5. It is safe to believe in the proper divinity of Jesus Christ. Some may deny this assertion, on the ground that if Christ is not God, to worship him as such, will involve us in the guilt of idolatry. But whether he is or is not God, it is certainly our duty to worship him. We are commanded to honor him even as we honor the Father; and we are told that when the Father brought him into the world, he said, Let all the angels of God worship him.

If it is the duty of all the angels to worship him, much more, we may conclude, is it ours. We may add, that though prophets, apostles, and angels always checked and reprov'd those who attempted to worship them, our Saviour, even during his state of humiliation on earth, frequently received worship from men as his due. Nor among all the cautions which are given us in the Scriptures, is there the least intimation that we must beware of loving and honoring Christ too much, or that there is any danger of placing him too high.

Indeed, it would be strange if there were such intimation, for why should we be cautioned against worshipping one who is worshipped in heaven, and who shares with his Father the praises of its inhabitants? In fine, if it is safe to obey God, to imitate the apostles; to utter the language of heaven, then it is safe to worship Jesus Christ. And if it is safe to worship him, it cannot be unsafe to believe that he is God. You cannot suppose that any man will be condemned at the judgment day, for thinking too highly of his Saviour, or loving and honoring him too much.

But if Christ is God, it is by no means equally safe to disbelieve that he is so. If the doctrine of his proper divinity is true, it must be a fundamental doctrine, a doctrine the belief of which is necessary to render us Christ's. This, Dr. Priestley, the great apostle of Unitarianism, has acknowledged. If you are right, said he to a distinguished clergyman in this country, who believed our Saviour's divinity; if you are right, we are not Christians at all, and I do not wonder in the least at the bad opinion you entertain of us.

And is there not at least a probability that those who believe Christ's divinity are right? Do not many inspired passages appear to assert it in the most unequivocal terms? And since no evils can result from believing it, even though it should not prove to be true, while the most terrible evils will be the consequence of disbelieving it, if it is true, is it not the safer and wiser course to believe it? Does not he who believes it walk safely? 6. It is safe to believe that Christ has made an atonement for sin, and that we must be justified by faith in him, and not by our own works.

From a belief of these doctrines rightly understood, no evil or danger can result, even if they are not true. It has indeed been asserted, that these doctrines are unfavorable to morality, but the assertion is groundless; for all who believe that we are justified by faith in Christ, believe that this faith will produce good works, and that a faith which does not produce them, cannot be genuine. They believe that good works are as necessary to our salvation, as if we were actually justified by performing them.

In fine, they believe that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. This being the case, it is impossible that their reliance on the atonement and righteousness of Christ should make them negligent of moral duties. Nor can it be shown, that the belief of these doctrines occasions any other evil, or exposes them, either here or hereafter, to any danger. It is then safe to believe them, even if they are not true. But it is very unsafe to disbelieve them if they are true. A mistake respecting the terms of acceptance, the way of salvation, must be fatal, if any mistake can be so.

Those who make the mistake, incur the guilt, and expose themselves to the fate of the Jews, who, being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about to establish their own righteousness, and thus failed of salvation. One of the most zealous advocates of the doctrine, that we are justified by our own works, after writing a large volume in support of it, concludes with this remarkable concession, "Nevertheless, since we are prone to estimate our good works too highly, and fancy that they are sufficient for our justification, when in fact they are not so, the safer way is to renounce all dependence on them, and rely on the righteousness of Christ alone."

Finally; It is safe to believe that all men will not be saved, and that without repentance, faith and holiness none will be saved. To prove this, little need be said. If the doctrine that all men will inherit salvation is true, those who deny, are as safe as those who believe it. If it is not true, those who trust in it trust to a lie, and will utterly perish in their own deceivings. And even its warmest advocates must allow, that there is at least a possibility of its proving false.

No man then walks safely who ventures his soul, his all, upon its truth. Thus have I attempted to show who pursue a safe, and who an unsafe course, so far as doctrines, or sentiments are concerned. I shall now proceed, as was proposed, II. To pursue the same inquiry with respect to practice. In attempting this, however, we cannot descend to particulars. The precepts of revelation, are so numerous, that it is scarcely possible, in a single discourse, to mention them all. Nor is it necessary to our present design.

It will be sufficient to remark, that, with respect to practice, all who are called Christians, may be divided into two great classes. Of these two classes, one is distinguished by a strict, the other by a lax interpretation of the divine precepts. The former suppose that these precepts are to be understood and obeyed in their plain, obvious sense. The latter contend that, understood in this sense, it is impossible to obey them; and that it is therefore, necessary to explain away much of their apparent meaning, and bring them more nearly to a level with the inclinations and pursuits of mankind.

The former suppose, that we must obey them, though obedience should displease our friends, draw upon us contempt and reproach, and expose us to sufferings and losses. The latter seem to think, that we are to obey them so far only as is consistent with our temporal interest and convenience. The former consider the salvation of the soul as the one thing needful, and religion as the great business of life. They suppose that it is our duty to be continually under its influence; and whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God.

The latter contend, that we are not required to be so very religious, that there is no need of feeling much concern respecting our spiritual and eternal interests, and that we are not forbidden to indulge in what the world calls innocent amusements. Hence a corresponding difference is found to exist between the conduct of these two classes, The latter allow themselves in many things which the former consider as forbidden, sinful, and dangerous. The latter are conformed to this world; the former are not so.

Hence they have in all ages been censured and ridiculed as precise, superstitious, bigoted, and morose; while the other class has been complimented for its liberality, and freedom from narrow views and prejudices. Now the question before us is, Which of these two classes pursues the safe course? Which is most dangerous, --to have too little religion, or too much? And on which side are we most tempted, and most prone to err? My hearers, the bare statement of these questions renders an answer needless.

You all know, that we are naturally prone, not to go beyond our duty, but to fall short of it. You know, that all the temptations to which we are exposed exert their influence on the same side. There is nothing to tempt us to be too religious. There are a thousand things which tempt us to rest satisfied with too little religion. On this side, then, our danger lies. On this side only do we need a guard. Besides, how can any man be too religious? How can any man go beyond the precepts which require him to love God with all his heart; to do everything to his glory; to renounce everything which causes him to sin; though dear as a right hand or a right eye; to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; to deny himself, take up the cross, and to be holy as God is holy?

How can any man be more humble, prayerful, thankful and heavenly-minded than the Scriptures require him to be? And even if it were possible to do more than our duty, could any harm result from doing it? Would God punish a man for being too religious, for loving him too well, and serving him too faithfully? Did you ever hear of a man who, on his dying bed, repented of having paid so much attention to religion, or who expressed any fears that God would be displeased with him, on account of his zeal and devotion?

Did you ever hear of a man's saying, in such circumstances, Were I to live my life over again, I would be less strict and scrupulous than I have been, in obeying the divine commands? On the contrary, do not even the most pious, reproach themselves, in a dying hour, for their deficiencies; and say, were we to pass through the world again, we would strive to be more faithful and more devoted to God? Surely then, there is no danger of being too religious. Surely the strict course is the safe course.

Even if those who pursue it go farther than is absolutely necessary, yet their salvation is sure. In a word, they are safe, even if their opponents are right. But the same cannot be said of the opposite course. If the former are right, the latter are fatally wrong. Though it is not easy to conceive of a man's having too much religion, we can easily conceive of a man's having too little. Though it is impossible to believe, that any one will be punished for going beyond what God requires of us, it is very possible that many may be punished for falling short of it.

He only, then, who walks strictly, walks safely. Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum. He that walks uprightly, walks safely. Of course, every one who walks safely, walks uprightly. The safe course is the upright course. Which is the safe course, we have attempted to show, with respect both to sentiment and practice. We think no one will assert, we are sure no one can prove, that the course which has been described is not safe. And if it is safe, it is right; for rectitude and safety are inseparably connected.

Will you not all be persuaded then, to adopt this course? Will you not embrace sentiments which, even allowing they are not true, can expose you to no danger, but which, if true, cannot be rejected without exposing you to destruction. Does any one reply, The course which you have described, though it may be safe, is not pleasant. If it does not lead to unhappiness hereafter, it must render those who walk in it unhappy here? I answer, all who have made trial of it, deny this assertion, and those who have not, make it without any knowledge of the subject.

But allowing for a moment, that this course is attended with some present unhappiness; can this afford the shadow of a reason for exposing ourselves to everlasting wretchedness? No man, who really believes that he has an immortal soul, that he is an accountable creature, will assert that it does. Indeed, every man who pays any regard to the dictates of wisdom or prudence, will say, It is folly, it is madness, to incur the smallest risk of everlasting wretchedness, for the sake of any temporal advantage whatever.

If there is only a bare possibility that the threatenings of God's word will be executed, nothing shall tempt me to pursue a course which may bring them upon my head. Whatever I lose, I will not place my soul at hazard. If any course is safe, I will pursue it, cost what it may. It has probably already occurred to you, my hearers, that the course which we have now described is the same which has often been recommended to you from this place. It is a course which we can recommend to you with full confidence.

We are under no apprehensions that any of you will complain of it in the other world, or at the judgment day, for having recommended this course. We are under no apprehensions that you will then say, we required of you more than God requires, or represented the way to heaven as narrower than it really is. If you have then any cause of complaint, it will be that we did not press you with greater earnestness and importunity to walk in this way. To you, my Christian friends, who are pursuing the course which has now been described, the preceding remarks are unnecessary.

You need no additional arguments to convince you, that the course you have adopted is both right and safe. It may, however, sometimes afford you pleasure in a dark hour, to reflect, that the system of

doctrines and practice which you have adopted, includes every thing which is valuable in all other systems, together with many distinguishing excellencies peculiar to itself. If any are safe, you are so. If any religious system is right, yours is right. But if yours is right, all others are wrong. Hold fast your confidence, then to the end. Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/the-safety-of-religion/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net