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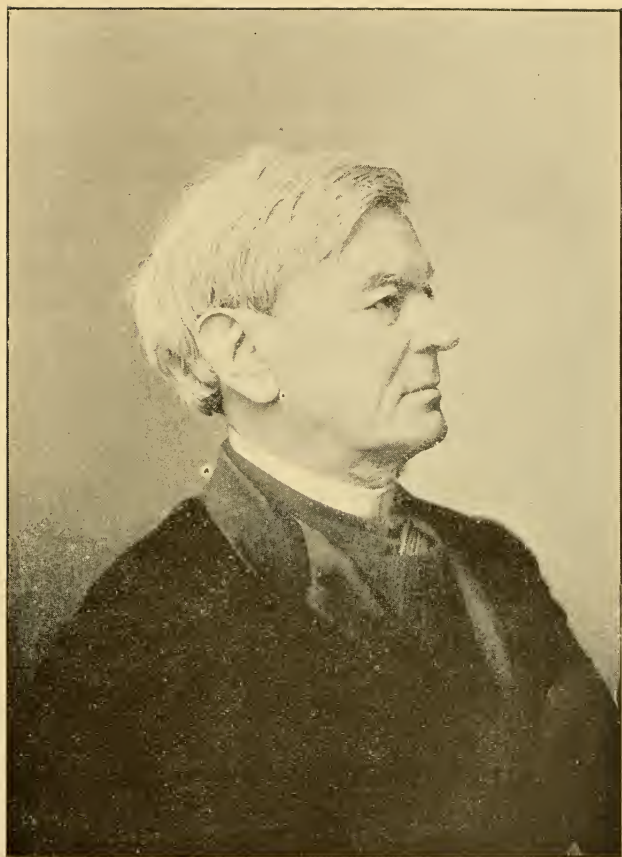
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TRUST IN THE LORD.

BY REV. JOSEPH R. WILSON, D. D.

“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.”
—PSALM cxviii. 8, 9.

IT is not meant that no man at all is to be at all trusted, that everybody is unworthy of confidence on the part of anybody, for such is not the truth. Men do, and ought to, have confidence in one another, not only, but *must* have, or society itself would fall to pieces, and each person (if he could think life to be worth having on such terms) would be compelled to live fenced around by walls of gloom resembling those of a grave. This earth would be an absolutely intolerable abode were there no play of mutual confidence. No doubt there are persons here and there who know little or nothing of the experience of a confiding disposition—who go through their ice-clad lives, from one frozen day to another, without finding, or caring to find, a single human being on whom to lean, self-poised and self-sufficing, who long for no friendship and yearn for no love. Why, even the wild animals must have their co-helpers and their alliances of mutual trust. The lion seldom hunts alone; the tiger is most defiant of danger when he has a companion near. It would seem that where there is intelligence, to *any* degree, whether in man or beast, there also is a feeling of dependence, and in this feeling is imbedded the principle of confidence. It is only the *insane* who wish to be always by themselves.



Far from God, therefore, we must conclude, is the purpose to forbid the trust which one person places in another, and which he cannot but place so long as he retains his sanity, or so long as he remains true to the very make-up of his being. This natural interchanging of trust is in obedience to one of his own laws, a law impressed as deeply upon our individual and social manhood as is the law of gravitation upon the material universe. The great Lord simply tells us that it is “*better*” to trust in him than in men, or in the princes of men; not that it is a bad and a wrong thing—our mutual confidence—no, it is a good and a right thing; but there is that which, in the comparison, is “*better.*” He would not have us to cease trusting whatsoever creature *deserves* to be trusted, but would have us not to stop in this, as if thus we had reached the highest point to which we are capable of climbing in the same direction, and which we all are bound to reach if we would trust in a manner worthy of the nature God has given us, and unto the finest and noblest results.

The truth is, that, in yielding to the promptings of our implanted principle of trust, we are apt to go *too far*. We are apt to trust each other, not too little, but too much; *i. e.*, we are prone to expect *too great a benefit* from the trust that terminates upon the mere creature. That benefit is, indeed, considerable—often a very large source out of which a heartfelt gratitude should songfully spring; it may, however, be easily overestimated; for, always—yes, *always*—there is an element of disappointment in the most rewardful confidence that one human being ever placed in another—something being still lacking to render the satisfaction complete. In other words, no person can ever do for another person *all* that is wanted. Take even that instance of trust which is, perhaps, the

purest, and the fullest of heart-ease, the instinctive trust of a little child in its mother. However trustful the trusting child, and however deserving of it the trusted parent, there is many an ache of this child's affections which lies beyond the most soothing touch of the most sympathizing mother; achings which it is compelled to sob out upon its lonely pillow in tears which can give no account of themselves to the very fondest of maternal coaxing—tears which thereby declare their need of a hand to dry them up which the whole world does not extend any one, the hand that tells of his presence whose love is beyond a mother's, and "better" than hers.

And it is just the same around the entire circle of human trust where it touches alone upon a human object. It is a trust that is always a more or less *defeated* trust; is thrown back upon itself, having, at this point or at that, missed its mark.

There are, indeed, many matters in which men do not vainly trust each other, the trusters getting all they expected from the trusted. You may trust a neighbor with portions of your property and find him true to your confidence. You may safely trust him not to lie when you are in want of his testimony. In a hundred supposable cases you can securely trust; can even sometimes go so far as to trust another to play with your very heart-strings, as is done every day where love exchanges itself for corresponding love, or for the promise of it; and yet you may, in all this, not have to regret what you have done. But your trust will be disappointed if you expect to get from man—be he ever so faithful, be he ever so honorable, be he ever so eminent for trustworthiness, be he ever so large in resources—*all* that your soul desires. You, perhaps, get the whole which that man is able to give; but there are some things which he cannot give,

however loudly, however honestly even, he may promise them. He is not competent, for example, to give you happiness—not even that amount of happiness you have thought that he was in a condition to bestow, and which he himself believed that he was. Wives and husbands, to take an extreme instance, trust each other for happiness, as they ought to do, thinking that they have only to draw upon the rich treasures of their mutual affection for as much as they can want. Well, do they always get it? Is there not a drawback, sometimes nameless, yet real and felt? Is there not often an ache like that of the child, which no quantity or quality of human love, even the most assiduous and most self-sacrificing, can soothe—an ache which belongs to the soul's own independent and unapproachable individuality, and which, accordingly, it must just learn to endure, unless, indeed, it is at liberty to resort to a far higher and far choicer fountain of good than any that is filled from an earthly source?

Or take the instance of one who trusts another in a partnership whose object is to acquire wealth, and at the same time cement a friendship which has already stood the test of years. This chosen partner is all right; he discharges his whole duty; his undivided talent, is devoted to the business; there is nothing about him which is not completely satisfying. The result is, ever-increasing riches. And yet, somehow, you are now and again forced to feel that he has not done all that you had expected of him. You have his utmost help, and still his help has not conferred happiness, even though it has brought wealth. You do not blame him; you are even sure that he is not at fault; nay, you are certain that the greater share of your success is what he has achieved. *So far* you have not trusted in vain; but, then, you trusted him for something *more*, which it was not in his

power to bestow with all his other bestowments; you trusted that in his many helpings towards accumulations of property he would also add to it more and more peace of mind, or that both of you together would do this, for in this respect you trusted not only his capability, but also your own; and he has not disappointed you any more than you have disappointed yourself or disappointed him. The gold is there, but not the good you had thought was in it. There is still a void unfilled. The partnership has proved a failure on the highest ground of all—the ground where contentment ought to be awaiting your summons. No neighbor is richer than you in merchandise and money, but many a neighbor may not be so poor in the matter of that true treasure, heart-sunshine, the one only thing that was worth your partner's trouble and your own to gain and to lay up.

So the ambitious man trusts to the people to lift him into eminence of position. They raise him as high as he wished, higher even than once he had dreamed. They lavish upon him their honors and their stations. They place him at the very top. He is grateful; but, as he quaffs the bowl of their laudations, he by-and-by becomes conscious of a want that he had fondly hoped would also be met in the wine-taste of his gratified desires. Elevation has not made him happy; it has only made him cold and lonely, and envied—maybe hated—by some. The people had not that to give which comes exclusively from a satisfied mind, a mind restful, as on a rock of security; and, this being absent, all the rest resembles ashes. He evidently needs to go to a source of power higher still. People and princes can confer many favors upon those whom they greatly regard, and who know how to trust or to court them; but they cannot confer that smile which lights up the living-room of the soul,

where the man is at home with his own thoughts, and where he holds converse with his immortality; and if that room remains dark, no lamps burning in any or in all of the other rooms can suffice to illumine the great house.

In what has thus been suggested, I have referred you alone to the fact that, for many of the things which are considered desirable, you have good reason to trust your fellow-man. Shall I now, however, turn the picture, and refer you to another and quite opposite fact, the fact that your fellow-man often deceives you, even when you trust him for such common assistances and even for such mere courtesies as every one needs from those with whom he mingles? In how many of your acquaintances, in how many of your so called friends, may you confidently trust when you are in actual want either of their sympathy or of their helping hand? How long would it take you to count the number of such as *seem* trustworthy when all is prospering with you, but the shallowness of whose assurances of good-will is discovered when a "friend in need would be a friend indeed"? Let the broken and scattered hopes of a too-confiding inexperience, the world over, answer the mournful question. I am not disposed to view with a gloomy eye the world about me, nor should any of you be so disposed. It becomes us all, on the contrary, to look with as cheerful an aspect as possible upon the characters and conduct of the members of the common family to which we all belong, to the very meanest member of which we are all related by a blood which is as old as the creation, and multitudes of whom are far better than ourselves. But, it cannot be denied, even by one who gives the utmost possible credit to the fair intentions and the fine words of his brother-sinners, that their promises are often larger than their

performances, and that the man who acts upon a contrary belief must at some critical hours of his life pay the penalty of his faith in not a few grievous disappointments. In truth, is not the whole earth a scene, throughout, of the war which men are waging with men because of the ill-starred trusts they mistakenly place in each other? How largely, how variously, how distressfully could this be illustrated, were the unpleasant task a necessary one! Your courts of justice are full of the evidences of the fact. Every person knows it in many a bitter experience, or may too easily learn the sad lesson from what others are able to tell him of their experience. On every account, therefore, is it not "better" to trust in the Lord than to trust in any man? and for the reasons I have given: no such earthly trust brings a steadfast happiness, and such happiness is what we all are pursuing—rightly pursuing, too. Only, let us learn what true happiness is, in what it consists, and we are at full liberty to secure it if we can, God himself being the approving witness of our efforts. But now the question arises, even on the part of those who think they *do* know what happiness is, does *God* make happy those who trust in him? I confess that it does not always *look* as if he did. It must be acknowledged that he leaves many of his trusters poor and forlorn, tossed and torn; and that there is not one of them, however favored in a worldly point of view, who does not have reason, daily, to shed tears of more or less racking grief, or utter groans of more or less remorseful sorrow. You cannot listen to their public prayers or their private petitionings without feeling convinced that they have that to cause them unhappiness of which even the trusters in man know nothing, and at which they sometimes are constrained to wonder. How, then, can it be said that

it is "better" to trust in the Lord? Well, were there no other answer to such a question, might we not wisely rest the whole matter on this: *He has said so*, and does he not *know*? Is not the entire history of our race open to his view as it cannot be to our own? and has he not seen the long result of such trusting as man places in his fellow-man when there was also no higher person in which he confided? Does God need to be told of that weakness in man which causes him, even in his best estate, to be as a broken reed to whomsoever, with his whole weight, leans upon him; does he need to be told of one man's treachery to another, of the selfishness which everywhere reveals itself in the intercourse of life, of the meanness which gets all it can whilst giving only as little as it may, of the inhumanity, even, which pushes dependence to the wall when it would trust to the stronger but dare not? And is not God so far acquainted with what he himself is as to know that he at least is a fit object of man's trust, being so full of mercy, so full of might, so full of truth, so full of wisdom, so full of tenderness? We may well, therefore, take his word for it that we had better repose our trust in him than even in the princes of men, who, to say the most, are as frail as others, and who, to say the least, are as false.

But, then, where is the *happiness* of trusting in him? is a question still to be asked. Why, it is found in the very act of our trust itself. For what *is* happiness? It is not a thing which you can see, or handle, or get into your embrace. It is not what you may *have*, it is what you *ARE*. You do not need to go one step out of yourself for it. Gold does not contain it. Pleasures do not conduct to it. Fortune-building does not construct it. Industry does not collect it. It is a possession of the soul, or, rather, is the soul possessing itself. It is a principle

and a power *within*, where no outward circumstances can intrude to place a destructive hand upon it; a lighted candle at the centre of us, which no wind can blow out. It is *being what we ought to be*, right with ourselves and right with our God; a rightness that shall last, therefore, so long as the soul shall last, that is, so long as God shall last. Out of such rightness, planted as it is in our very immortality, springs happiness, in the just sense of that much-used and much-abused word. And it is to bring about this supreme rightness that we are exhorted to put our trust in the Lord, which is altogether the same as exhorting us to love him; for, otherwise, to trust him were impossible, love being, indeed, only another word for confidence. It may, then, be said, with an assurance which nothing can gainsay, that they who thus love God are they who are right, in the very deepest meaning of the term; right at the core of their being; right as the saints and as the angels are. But, whilst this is true, it is also true that his children's trustful love is not yet complete; and it is because of their struggles and of their Father's discipline to make it complete that they experience most of the sorrows to which I have referred; sorrows which are themselves more to be desired than the raptures of the world. They trust, but do not trust perfectly, and will not until they see him as he is, in the home towards which they climb. In thus climbing, however, they needs must suffer, for the hill is high, and it is both steep and rugged, where progress is assured only at the expense of toil and trouble. Nevertheless, with all that it costs, it is "better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man"; for so great a trust must have a correspondingly great issue; so supreme a trust must have a correspondingly supreme reward. It is trusting in a *word* that never was broken,

and which nothing can ever break; in a *wisdom* that never was baffled, and which nothing can ever baffle; in a *watchfulness* that never has been thrown off its guard, and which nothing can ever throw off its guard; in a *will* whose decrees of good have ever been, and must always be, sovereign; and in a *welfare* that is as certain as eternity. It is trusting in him who has proved himself the one Friend of the friendless, the one Father of the fatherless, the one who is faithful when all others are faithless. It is trusting the only Being who can destroy for us our sins, and dry up for us our sorrows, and bestow upon us a salvation compared with which the utmost blessedness of earth is as a dying lamp to the living sun. It is trusting for peace of heart whilst living, for strength of heart when expiring, and for wealth of heart when the treasures of heaven burst upon the view. It is trusting unto *holiness*, the fountain of *happiness*. It is trusting GOD, as God is in CHRIST, which says all in one exhaustless word.