

# The Christian Convert Warned of Those Discouragements Which He Must Expect

by Philip Doddridge

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*Philip Doddridge warns Christians of the inevitable discouragements they will face on their journey to faith and encourages reliance on God's strength and presence.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 6:13

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Perseverance Of Faith"

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## Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the challenges and opposition Christians face on their journey to heaven, including struggles with indwelling sin, worldly influences, temptations from Satan, and the fear of apostasy. Despite these difficulties, believers are encouraged to stand firm by relying on God's presence, Christ's help, the examples of victorious believers, and the promise of a glorious reward. The sermon concludes with a prayer committing the soul to divine protection amidst these trials.

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## Transcript

1. Christ has instructed his disciples to expect opposition and difficulties in the way to heaven.--2. Therefore a more particular view of them is taken, as arising from the remainder of indwelling sin.--3. From the world, and especially from former sinful companions.--4. From the temptations and suggestions of Satan.--5, 6. The Christian is animated and encouraged, by various considerations, to oppose them; particularly by the presence of God; the aids of Christ; the example of others, who, though feeble, have conquered; and the crown of glory to be expected.--7. Therefore, though apostacy be infinitely fatal, the Christian may press on cheerfully. Accordingly the soul, alarmed by these views; is represented as committing itself to God, in the prayer which concludes the chapter.

1. WITH the utmost propriety has our Divine Master required us "to strive to enter in at the strait gate," (Luke 13:23) thereby intimating, not only that the passage is narrow, but that it is beset with enemies; beset on the right hand and on the left with enemies cunning and formidable. And be assured, O reader! that whatever your circumstances in life are, you must meet and encounter them. It will therefore be your prudence to survey them attentively in your own reflections, that you may see what you are to expect; and may consider in what armor it is necessary you shall be clothed, and with what weapons you must be furnished to manage the combat.

You have often heard them marshalled, as it were, under three great leaders, the flesh, the world, and the devil; and; according to this distribution, I would call you to consider the forces of each, as setting themselves in array against you. O that you may be excited "to take to yourself the whole armor of God," (Eph. 6:13) and to "acquit yourself like a man," and a Christian! (1 Cor. 16:13) 2. Let your conscience answer, whether do you not carry about with you a corrupt and degenerate nature?

You will, I doubt not, feel its effects. You will feel, in the language of the apostle, who speaks of it as the case of Christians themselves, "the flesh lusting against the spirit, so that you will not be able," in all instances, "to do the things that you would." (Gal. 5:17) You brought irregular propensities into the world along with you; and you have so often indulged those sinful inclinations, that you have greatly increased their strength; and you will find, in consequence of it, that these habits cannot be broken through without great difficulty.

You will, no doubt, often recollect the strong figures in which the prophet describes a case like yours; and you will own that it is justly represented by that "of an Ethiopian changing his skin, and the leopard his spots." (Jer. 13:23) It is indeed possible, that, at first, you may find such an edge and eagerness upon your spirits, as may lead you to imagine that all opposition will immediately fall before you. But, alas! I fear that in a little time these enemies, which seemed to be slain at your feet, will revive, and recover their weapons, and renew the assault in one form or another.

And perhaps your most painful combats may be with such as you had thought most easy to be vanquished; and your greatest danger may arise from some of those enemies from whom you apprehended the least, particularly from pride and from indolence of spirit; from a secret alienation or heart from God, and from an indisposition for conversing with him, through an immoderate attachment to "things seen and temporal," which may be oftentimes exceedingly dangerous to your salvation, though perhaps they be not absolutely and universally prohibited.

In a thousand of these instances you must learn to deny yourself, or you "cannot be Christ's disciple." (Matt. 16:24) 3. You must also lay your account to find great difficulties from the world, from its manners, customs, and examples. The things of the world will hinder you one way, and the men of the world another. Perhaps you may meet with much less assistance in religion than you are now ready to expect from good men. The present generation of them is generally so cautious to avoid every thing that looks like ostentation, and there seems something so insupportably dreadful in the charge of enthusiasm, that you will find most of your Christian brethren studying to conceal their virtue and their piety, much more than others study to conceal their vices and their profaneness.

But while, unless your situation be singularly happy, you meet with very little aid one way, you will, no doubt, find great opposition another. The enemies of religion will be bold and active in their assaults, while many any or its friends seem unconcerned; and one sinner will probably exert himself more to corrupt you, than ten Christians to secure and save you. They who have been once your companions in sin, will try a thousand artful methods to allure you back again to their forsaken society: some of them perhaps with an appearance of tender fondness, and many more by the almost irresistible art of ridicule: that boasted test of right and wrong, as it has been wantonly called, will be tried upon you, perhaps without any regard to decency, or even to common humanity.

You will be derided and insulted. by those whose esteem-and affection you naturally desire; and may find much more proprietary than you imagine, in that expression of the apostle, "the trial of cruel mockings,"

(Heb. 9:36) which some fear more than either sword or flames. This persecution of the tongue you must expect to go through, and perhaps may be branded as a lunatic, for no other cause than that you now begin to exercise your reason to purpose, and will not join with those that are destroying their own souls in their wild career of folly and madness. 4.

And it is not at all improbable, that in the meantime Satan may be doing his utmost to discourage and distress you. He will, no doubt, raise in your imagination the most tempting idea of the gratifications, the indulgences, and the companions you are obliged to forsake; and give you the most discouraging and terrifying view of the difficulties, severities, and dangers, which are, as he will persuade you, inseparable from religion. He will not fail to represent God himself, the fountain of goodness and happiness, as a hard Master, whom it is impossible to please.

He will perhaps fill you with the most distressful fears, and with cruel and insolent malice, glory over you as his slave, when he knows you are the Lord's freeman. At one time he will study, by his vile suggestions, to interrupt you in your duties, as if they gave him an additional power over you. At another time he will endeavor to weary you of your devotion, by influencing you to prolong it to an immoderate and tedious length, lest his power should be exerted upon you when it ceases.

In short, this practiced deceiver has artifices which it would require whole volumes to display, with particular cautions against each. And he will follow you with malicious arts and pursuits to the very end of your pilgrimage, and will leave no method unattempted which may be likely to weaken your hands and to sadden your heart, that if through the gracious interposition of God, he cannot prevent your final happiness, he may at least impair your peace and your usefulness as you are passing to it. 5.

This is what the people of God feel, and what you will feel in some degree or other, if you have your lot and portion among them. But, after all, be not discouraged: Christ is the "Captain of your salvation." (Heb. 2:10) It is delightful to consider him under this view. When we take a survey of these host of enemies, we may lift up our head amidst them all, and say, "More and greater is he that is with us, than all those that are against us." (2 Kings 6:16) "Trust in the Lord, and you will be like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." (Psa. 125:1) When your enemies press upon you, remember you are to "fight in the presence of God." (Zech. 10:5) Endeavor, therefore, to act a gallant and a resolute part; endeavor to "resist them steadfast in the faith." (1 Pet. 5:9) Remember, "He can give power to the faint, and increase strength to them that have no might." (Isai. 40:29) He hath done it in ten thousand instances already, and he will do it in ten thousand more.

How many striplings have conquered their gigantic foes in all their most formidable armor, when they have gone forth against them; though but as it were "with a staff and a sling, in the name of the Lord God of Israel!" (1 Sam. 17:40-45) How many women and children have trodden down the force of the enemy, "and out of weakness have been made strong!" (Heb. 11:34) 6. Amidst all the opposition of earth and hell, look upward and look forward, and you will feel your heart animated by the view.

Your General is near; he is near to aid you, he is near to reward you. When you feel the temptation press the hardest, think of him who endured even the cross itself for your rescue. View the fortitude of your Divine Leader, and endeavor to march on in his steps. Harken to his voice, for he proclaims it aloud, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." (Rev. 22:12) "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) And, oh! how bright will it shine! and how long will its lustre last!

When the gems that adorn the crowns of monarchs, and pass (instructive thought!) from one royal head to another through succeeding centuries, are melted down in the last flame, it is "a crown of glory which fadeth not away." (1 Pet. 5:4) 7. It is indeed true, "that such as turn aside to crooked paths" will be "led forth with the workers of iniquity," to that terrible execution which divine justice is preparing for them, (Psa. 125:5) and it would have been "better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn aside from the holy commandment." (2 Pet 2:21) But I would, by divine grace, "hope better things of you." (Heb. 6:9) And I make it my hearty prayer for you, my reader, that you may be "kept by the mighty power of God," kept, as in a garrison on all sides fortified in the securest manner, "through faith, unto salvation."

The Soul, alarmed by a sense of these difficulties, committing itself to Divine Protection.

"Blessed God! it is to thine Almighty power that I flee. Behold me surrounded with difficulties and dangers, and stretch out thine omnipotent arm to save me, `O thou that savest by thy right hand them that put their trust in thee, from those that rise up against them.' (Psa. 17:7) this day do I solemnly put myself under thy protection: exert thy power in my favor, and permit me `to make the shadow of thy wings my refuge.' (Psa. 57:1) Let `thy grace be sufficient for me,' and `thy strength be made perfect in my weakness.' (2 Cor. 12:9) I dare not say, `I will never forsake thee, I will never deny thee,' (Mark 14:31) but I hope! can truly say, O Lord, I would not do it; and according to my present apprehension and purpose, death would appear to me much less terrible, than in any willful and deliberate instance to offend thee.

O root out those corruptions from my heart, which in an hour of pressing temptation might incline me to view things in a different light, and so might betray me into the hands of the enemy! Strengthen my faith, O Lord, and encourage my hope! Inspire me with heroic resolution in opposing every thing that lies in my way to heaven; and let me `set my face like a flint' against all the assaults of earth and hell! (Isai. 50:7) `If sinners entice me, let me not consent;' (Prov. 1:10) if they insult me, let me not regard it; if they threaten me, let me not fear!

Rather may a holy and ardent, yet prudent and well-governed zeal, take occasion from that malignity of heart which they discover, to attempt their conviction and reformation! At least, let me never be ashamed to plead thy cause against the most profane deriders of religion! `Make me to hear joy and gladness' in my soul, and I will endeavor to `teach transgressors thy ways, that sinners may be converted unto thee' (Psa. 51:8,13) Yea, Lord, while my fears continue, though I should apprehend myself condemned, I am condemned so righteously for my own folly, that I would be thine advocate, though against myself.

Keep me, O Lord, now, and at all times! Never let me think, whatever age or station I attain, that I am strong enough to maintain the combat without thee! Nor let me imagine myself, even in this infancy of religion in my soul, So weak that thou canst not support me! Wherever thou leadest me, there let me follow; and whatever station thou appointest me, there let me labor: there let me maintain the holy war against all the enemies of my salvation, and rather fall in it, than basely abandon it.

"And thou, O glorious Redeemer; `the Captain of my salvation,' the great `Author and Finisher of my faith,' (Heb. 12:2) when I am in danger of denying thee, as Peter did, look upon me with that mixture of majesty and tenderness, (Luke 22:61) which may either secure me from falling, or may speedily recover me to God and my duty again! and teach me to take occasion, even from my miscarriages, to humble myself more deeply for all that has been amiss, and to redouble my future diligence and caution! Amen."

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