

The Reader Reminded How Much He Needs the Assistance of the Spirit of God

by Philip Doddridge

Philip Doddridge's sermon emphasizes the critical need for divine assistance through the Holy Spirit in living a fruitful Christian life.

Scripture: Romans 8:2

Topics: "Divine Guidance", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the importance of seeking Divine grace in pursuing a life of true Christianity, emphasizing the reality and necessity of religion from both reason and Scripture. He encourages seeking the spirit of Christ as the source of strength for the soul, highlighting the need for humility and dependence on God's assistance. Doddridge concludes with an exhortation to pray for the Spirit's guidance and a humble supplication for the influences of Divine Grace to form and strengthen religion in the soul.

Transcript

1. Forward resolutions may prove ineffectual.--2. Yet religion is not to be given up in despair, but Divine grace to be sought.--3. A general view of its reality and necessity, from reason.--4. And Scripture.--5. The spirit to be sought as the spirit of Christ.--6. And in that view the great strength of the soul.--7. The encouragement there is to hope for the communication of it.--8. A concluding exhortation to pray for it. And an humble address to God pursuant to that exhortation.

I HAVE now laid before you a plan of that temper and character which the Gospel requires, and which, if you are a true Christian, you will desire and pursue. Surely there is, in the very description of it, something which must powerfully strike every mind which has any taste for what is truly beautiful and excellent. And I question not, but you, my dear reader, will feel some impression of it upon your heart. You will immediately form some lively purpose of endeavoring after it; and perhaps you may imagine, you shall certainly and quickly attain to it.

You see how reasonable it is, and what desirable consequences necessarily attend it, and the aspect which it bears on your present enjoyment and your future happiness; and therefore are determined you will act accordingly. But give me leave seriously to remind you how many there have been, (would to God that several such instances had not happened within the compass of my own personal observation!)

whose goodness hath been "like a morning cloud and the early dew," which soon "passeth away." (Hos. 6:4) There is not room indeed absolutely to apply the words of Joshua, taken in the most rigorous sense, when he said to Israel, that he might humble their too hasty and sanguine resolutions, "You cannot serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:12) But I will venture to say, you cannot easily do it.

Alas! you know not the difficulties you have to break through; you know not the temptations which Satan will throw in your way; you know not how importunate your vain and sinful companions will be, to draw you back into the snare you may attempt to break; and, above all, you know not the subtle artifices which your own corruptions will practice upon you in order to recover their dominion over you. You think the views you now have of things will be lasting, because the principles and objects to which they refer are so: but perhaps tomorrow may undeceive you, or rather deceive you anew: tomorrow may present some trifle in a new dress, which shall amuse you into a forgetfulness of all this.

Nay, perhaps before you lie down on your bed, the impressions you now feel may wear off. The corrupt desires of your own heart, now perhaps a little charmed down, and lying as if they were dead, may spring up again with new violence, as if they had slept only to recruit their vigor; and if you are not supported by a better strength than your own, this struggle for liberty will only make your future chains the heavier, the more shameful, and the more fatal. 2. What then is to be done?

Is the convinced sinner to lie down in despair? to say, "I am a helpless captive, and by exerting myself with violence, may break my limbs sooner than my bonds, and increase the evil I would remove?" God forbid! You cannot, I am persuaded, be so little acquainted with Christianity, as not to know "that the doctrine of divine assistance bears a very considerable part in it." You have often, I doubt not, read of "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, as making us free from the law of sin and death," (Rom. 8:2) and have been told, "that through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body." (Rom. 8:13) You have read of "doing all things through Christ, who strengtheneth us," (Phil. 4:15) whose grace "is sufficient for us," and whose "strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9) Permit me, therefore, now to call your attention to this, as a truth of the clearest evidence, and of the utmost importance. 3.

Reason, indeed, as well as the whole tenor of Scripture, agrees with this.* The whole created world has a necessary dependence on God: from him ever, the knowledge of "natural things" is derived, (Psa. 94:10) and "skill in them is to be ascribed to him." (Exod. 31:3-6) Much more loudly does so great and excellent a work, as the new-forming the human mind, bespeak its divine Author. When you consider how various the branches of the Christian temper are, and how contrary many of them also are to that temper, which hath prevailed in your heart, and governed your life in time past, you must really see divine influences as necessary to produce and nourish them, as the influences of the sun and rain are to call up the variety of plants and flowers, and grains and fruits, by which the earth is adorned, and our life supported.

You will be yet more sensible of this, if you reflect on the violent opposition which this happy work must expect to meet with; of which I shall presently warn you more largely, and which if you have not already experienced, it must be because you have but very lately begun to think of religion. 4. Accordingly, if you give yourself leave to consult Scripture on this head, (and if you would live like a Christian, you must be consulting it every day, and forming your notions and actions by it) you will see that the whole tenor of it teaches that dependence upon God which I am now recommending.

You will particularly see, that the production of religion in the soul is matter of divine promise; that when it has been effected, Scripture ascribes it to a divine agency; and that the increase of grace and piety in the

heart of those who are truly regenerate, is also spoken of as the word of God, who begins and "carries it on until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6) 5. In consequence of all these views, lay it down to yourself as a most certain principle, that no attempt in religion is to be made in your own strength.

If you forget this, and God purposes finally to save you, he will humble you by repeated disappointments, till he teach you better. You will be ashamed of one scheme and effort, and of another, till you settle upon the true basis. He will also probably show you, not only in the general, that your strength is to be derived from heaven, but particularly that it is the office of the blessed Spirit to purify the heart, and to invigorate holy resolutions; and also that, in all these operations, he is to be considered as the Spirit of Christ, working under his direction, and as a vital communication from him under the character of the great Head of the Church, the grand Treasurer and Dispenser of these holy and beneficial influences.

On which account it is called "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," (Phil. 1:19) who is "exalted at the right hand" of the Father, "to give repentance and remission of sins," (Acts 5:31) "in whose grace alone we can be strong," (2 Tim. 2:1) and "of whose fullness we receive even grace for grace." (John 1:16) 6. Resolve, therefore, strenuously for the service of God, and for the care of your soul: but "resolve modestly and humbly." Even "the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men utterly fall; but they who wait on the Lord" are the persons who "renew their strength." (Isai. 40:30,31) When a soul is almost afraid to declare, in the presence of the Lord, that it will not do this or that, which has formerly offended him; when it is afraid absolutely to promise that it will perform this or that duty with vigor and constancy, but only expresses its humble and earnest desire that it may by grace be enabled to avoid the one or pursue the other; then, so far as my observation and experience have reached, it is in the best way to learn the happy art of conquering temptation, and of discharging duty. 7.

On the other hand, let not your dependence upon this Spirit, and your sense of your own weakness and insufficiency for any thing spiritually good, without his continual aid, discourage you from devoting yourself to God, and engaging in a religious life, considering "what abundant reason you have to hope that these gracious influences will be communicated to you." The light of nature, at the same time that it teaches the need we have of help from God in a virtuous course, may lead us to conclude that so benevolent a Being, who bestows on the most unworthy and careless part of mankind so many blessings, will take a peculiar pleasure in communicating to such as humbly ask them, those gracious assistances which may form their deathless souls into his own resemblance, and fit them for that happiness to which their rational nature is suited, and for which it was in its first constitution intended.

The word of God will much more abundantly confirm such a hope. You there hear divine wisdom crying even to those who had long trifled with her instructions, "Turn ye at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you" (Prov 1:23) You hear the apostle saying, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need." (Heb. 4:16) Yea, and you there hear our Lord himself arguing in this sweet and convincing manner: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13) This gift and promise of the Spirit was given unto Christ when he ascended up on high, in trust for all his true disciples.

God hath "shed it abroad abundantly upon us in him." (Tit. 3:6) And I may add, that the very desire you feel after the farther communication of the Spirit, is the result of the fruits of it already given; so that you may, with peculiar propriety, interpret it as a special call "to open your mouth wide, that he may fill it." (Psa. 81:10) You thirst, and therefore you may cheerfully plead, that Jesus has "invited you to come unto him

and drink;" with a promise not only that you shall drink if you come unto him, but also that "out of your belly shall flow," as it were, "rivers of living water," for the edification and refreshment of others. (John, 7:37,38)
8.

Go forth, therefore, with humble cheerfulness, to the prosecution of all the duties of the Christian life. Go and prosper "in the strength of the Lord, making mention of his righteousness, and of his only." (Psa. 71:16) And as a token of farther communication, may your heart be quickened to the most earnest desire after the blessings I have been now recommending to your pursuit!" May you be stirred up to pour out your soul before God in such holy breathings as these! and may they be your daily language in his gracious presence!

An humble Supplication for the Influences of Divine Grace, to form and strengthen Religion in the Soul.

"Blessed God! I sincerely acknowledge before thee my own weakness and insufficiency for any thing that is spiritually good. I have experienced it a thousand times; and yet my foolish heart would again 'trust itself,' (Prov. 28:26) and form resolutions in its own strength. But let this be the first fruits of thy gracious influence upon it, to bring it to an humble distrust of itself, and to a repose on thee! "Abundantly do I rejoice, O Lord, in the kind assurances which thou givest me of thy readiness to bestow liberally and richly so great a benefit.

I do therefore, according to thy condescending invitation, come with boldness to the throne of grace, that I may find grace to help in every time of need. (Heb. 4:16) I mean not, O Lord God, to turn thy grace into wantonness or perverseness (Jude, ver. 4) or to make my weakness an excuse for negligence and sloth. I confess that thou hast already given me more strength than I have used; and I charge it upon myself, and not on thee, that I have not long since received still more abundant supplies.

I desire for the future to be found diligent in the use of all appointed means; in the neglect of which I well know that petitions like these would be a profane mockery, and might much more probably provoke thee to take away what I have, than prevail upon thee to impart more. But firmly resolving to exert myself to the utmost, I earnestly entreat the communication of thy grace, that I may be enabled to fulfil that resolution. "Be surety, O Lord! unto thy servant for good. (Psa. 119:122) Be pleased to shed abroad thy sanctifying influences on my soul, to form me for every duty thou requirest.

Implant, I beseech thee; every grace and virtue deep in my heart, and maintain the happy temper in the midst of those assaults from within and from without, to which I am continually liable while I am still in this world and carry about with me so many infirmities. Fill my breast, I beseech thee, with good affections towards thee, my God, and towards my fellow-creatures. Remind me always of thy presence, and may I remember that every secret sentiment of my soul is open to thee.

May I therefore guard against the first risings of sin, and the first approaches to it; and that Satan may not find room for his evil suggestions, I earnestly beg that thou, Lord, wouldst fill my heart with thine Holy Spirit, and take up thy residence there. Dwell in me, and walk with me, (2 Cor 6:16) and let my body be the temple of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. 6:19) "May I be so joined to Christ Jesus my Lord, as to be one spirit with him, (1 Cor. 6:17) and feel His invigorating influences continually bearing me on, superior to every temptation, and to every corruption; that while the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men utterly fall; I may so wait upon the Lord as to renew my strength, (Isai. 40:30,31) and may go on from one degree of faith, and love, and zeal, and holiness, to another, till I appear perfect before thee in Zion; (Psa. 84:7) to drink in immortal vigor and joy from thee, as the everlasting fountain of both, through Jesus Christ

my Lord, in whom I have righteousness and strength, (Isai. 45:24) and to whom I desire ever to ascribe the praise of all my improvements in both. Amen."

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