

To Those Who Will Not Be Persuaded to Fall in With the Design of the Gospel

by Philip Doddridge

Philip Doddridge's sermon urges individuals to confront their doubts about Christianity and consider the serious implications of rejecting the Gospel.

Scripture: Romans 10:21

Topics: "Christian Apologetics", "Repentance Needed"

Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the importance of examining one's beliefs and not presuming to oppose Christianity without thorough investigation. He addresses those who doubt Christianity, urging them to inquire into its evidences and warning of the fatal consequences of rejecting it. Doddridge compassionately prays for those who may be unwilling to surrender to Christ, those who oppose Christianity, and those who are nominal Christians but do not live according to its teachings, emphasizing the need for repentance, faith, and holiness. He concludes with a solemn warning of the eternal consequences of rejecting the Gospel and offers a compassionate prayer for the salvation of impenitent sinners.

Transcript

1. Universal success not to be expected.--2-4. Yet, as unwilling absolutely to give up any, the author addresses thou who doubt the truth of Christianity, urging an inquiry into its evidences, and directing to prayer methods for that purpose.--5 Those who determine to give it up without further examination.--6. And presume to set themselves to oppose it.--7, 8. Those who speculatively assent to Christianity as true, and yet will sit down without any practical regard to its most important and acknowledged truths. Such are dismissed with a representation of the absurdity of their conduct on their own principles.--9, 10. With a solemn warning of its fatal consequences.--11. And a compassionate prayer, which concludes this chapter, and this part of the work.

1. I would humbly hope that the preceding chapters will be the means of awakening some stupid and insensible sinners, the means of convincing them of their need of Gospel-salvation, and of engaging some cordially to accept it. Yet I cannot flatter myself so far as to hope this should be the case with regard to all into whose hands this book shall come. "What am I, alas! better than my fathers," (1 Kings 19:4) or better than my brethren, who have in all ages been repeating their complaint, with regard to multitudes, that they

"have stretched out their hand all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people!" (Rom. 10:21) Many such may perhaps be found in the number of my readers; many, on whom neither considerations of terror nor of love will make any deep and lasting impression; many, who, as our Lord learned by experience to express it, "when we pipe to them, will not dance; and when we mourn unto them; will not lament." (Matt. 11:17) I can say no more to persuade them; if they make light of what I have already said.

Here, therefore, we must part: in this chapter I must take my leave of them; and O that I could do it in such a manner as to fix, at parting, some conviction upon their hearts, that though I seem to leave them for a little while, and send them back to review again the former chapters, as those in which alone they have any present concern, they might soon, as it were, overtake me again, and find a suitableness in the remaining part of this treatise, which at present they cannot possibly find.

Unhappy creatures. I quit you as a physician quits a patient whom he loves, and is just about to give over as incurable: he returns again and again and re-examines the several symptoms, to observe whether there be not some one of them more favorable than the rest, which may encourage a renewed application. 2. So would I once more return to you. You do not find in yourself any disposition to embrace the Gospel, to apply yourself to Christ, to give yourself up to the service of God, and to make religion the business of your life.

But if I cannot prevail upon you to do this, let me engage you, at least, to answer me, or rather to answer your own conscience, "Why you will not do it?" is it owing to any secret disbelief of the great principles of religion? If it be, the case is different from what I have yet considered, and the cure must be different. This is not a place to combat with the scruples of infidelity. Nevertheless, I would desire you seriously to inquire "How far those scruples extend?" Do they affect any particular doctrine of the Gospel on which my argument hath turned; or do they affect the whole Christian revelation?

Or do they reach yet farther, and extend themselves to natural religion, as well as revealed; so that it should be a doubt with you, whether there be any God, and providence, and future state, or not? As these cases are all different, so it will be of great importance to distinguish the one from the other; that you may know on what principles to build as certain, in the examination of those concerning which you are yet in doubt. But, whatever these doubts are, I would farther ask you, "How long have they continued, and what method have you taken to get them resolved?"

Do you imagine, that, in matters of such moment, it will be an allowable case for you to trifle on, neglecting to inquire into the evidence of these things, and then plead your not being satisfied in that evidence, as an excuse for not acting according to them? Must not the principles of common sense assure you, that, if these things be true, as when you talk of doubting about them, you acknowledge it at least possible they may be, they are of infinitely greater importance than any of the affairs of life, whether of business or pleasure, for the sake of which you neglect them?

Why then do you continue indolent and unconcerned, from week to week, and from month to month, which probably conscience tells you is the case? 3. Do you ask, "What method you should take to be resolved?" It is no hard question. Open your eyes: set yourself to think: let conscience speak, and verily do I believe, that, if it be not seared in an uncommon degree, you will find shrewd forebodings of the certainty both of natural and revealed religion, and of the absolute necessity of repentance, faith, and holiness, to a life of future felicity.

If you are a person of any learning, you cannot but know by what writers, and in what treatises, these great truths are defended. And if you are not, you may find, in almost every town and neighborhood, persons capable of informing you in the main evidences of Christianity, and of answering such scruples against it as unlearned minds may have met with. Set yourself, then, in the name of God, immediately to consider the matter. If you study at all, bend your studies close this way, and trifle not with mathematics, or poetry or history, or law, or physic, which are all comparatively light as a feather, while you neglect this.

Study the argument as for your life; for much more than life depends on it. See how far you are satisfied, and why that satisfaction reaches no farther. Compare evidences on both sides. And, above all, consider the design and tendency of the New Testament. See to what it will lead you, and all them that cordially obey it, and then say whether it be not good. And consider how naturally its truth is connected with its goodness. Trace the character and sentiments of its authors, whose living image, if I may be allowed the expression, is still preserved in their writings; and then ask your heart, can you think this was a forgery, an impious, cruel forgery? for such it must have been, if it were a forgery at all: a scheme to mock God, and to ruin men, even the best of men, such as revered Conscience, and would abide all extremities for what they apprehended to be truth.

Put the question to your own heart, Can I in my conscience believe it to be such an imposture? Can I look up to an omniscient God, and say, "O Lord, thou knowest that it is in reverence to thee, and in love to truth and virtue, that I reject this book, and the method to happiness here laid down." 4. But there are difficulties in the way. And what then? Have those difficulties never been cleared? Go to the living advocates for Christianity, to those of whose abilities, candor and piety you have the best opinion, if your prejudices will give you leave to have a good opinion of any such; tell them your difficulties; hear their solutions; weigh them seriously, as those who know they must answer it to God; and while doubts continue, follow the truth as far as it will lead you, and take heed that you do not imprison it in unrighteousness." (Rom. 11:8) Nothing appears more inconsistent and absurd than for a man solemnly to pretend dissatisfaction in the evidences of the Gospel, as a reason why he cannot in conscience be a thorough Christian; when at the same time he violates the most apparent dictates of reason and conscience, and lives in vices condemned even by the heathen.

O sirs! Christ has judged concerning such, and judged most righteously and most wisely: "They do evil, and therefore they hate the light; neither come they to the light, lest their deeds should be made manifest, and be reprov'd." (John 3:20) But there is a light that will make manifest and reprove their works, to which they will be compelled to come, and the painful scrutiny of which they shall be forced to abide. 5. In the mean time, if you are determined to inquire no farther into the matter now, give me leave, at least, from a sincere concern that you may not heap upon your head more aggravated ruin, to entreat you that you would be cautious how you expose yourself to yet greater danger. by what you must yourself own to be unnecessary; I mean attempts to prevent others from believing the truth of the Gospel.

Leave them; for God's sake, and for your own, in possession of those pleasures and those hopes which nothing but Christianity can give them; and act not as if you were solicitous to add to the guilt of an infidel the tenfold damnation which they, who have been the perverters and destroyers of the souls of others, must expect to meet, if that Gospel, which they have so adventurously opposed, shall prove, as it certainly will, a serious, and to them a dreadful truth. 6. If I cannot prevail here, (but the pride of displaying a superiority of understanding should bear on such a reader, even in opposition to his own favorite maxims of the innocence of error and the equality of all religions consistent with social virtue, to do his utmost to trample down the Gospel with contempt) I would, however, dismiss him with one proposal which I think the

importance of the affair may fully justify.

If you have done with your examination into Christianity, and determine to live and conduct yourself as it were assuredly false, sit down, then, and make a memorandum of that determination. Write it down: "On such a day of such a year, I deliberately resolved that I would live and die rejecting Christianity myself, and doing all I could to overthrow it. This day I determined, not only to renounce all subjection to, and expectation from Jesus of Nazareth, but also to make it a serious part of the business of my life to destroy, as far as I possibly can, all regard to him in the minds of others, and to exert my most vigorous efforts, in the way of reasoning or of ridicule to sink the credit of his religion, and, if it be possible, to root it out of the world; in calm, steady defiance of that day, when his followers say, He shall appear in so much majesty and terror, to execute the vengeance. threatened to his enemies."

Dare you write this, and sign it? I firmly believe that many a man, who would be thought a deist. and endeavors to increase the number, would not. And if you in particular dare not do it, whence does that small remainder of caution arise? The cause is plain. There is in your conscience some secret apprehension that this rejected, this opposed, this derided Gospel may, after all, prove true. And if there be such an apprehension, then let conscience do its office, and convict you of the impious madness of acting as if it were most certainly and demonstrably false.

Let it tell you at large, how possible it is that "haply you may be found fighting against God," (Acts 5:39) that, hold as you are in defying the terrors of the Lord, you may possibly fall into his hands; may chance to hear that despised sentence, which, when: you hear it from the mouth of the eternal Judge, you will not be able to despise. I will repeat it again. In spite of all your scorn: you may hear the King say to you. "Depart, accursed. into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41) And now, go and pervert and burlesque the Scripture, go and satirize the character of its heroes, and ridicule the sublime discourses of its prophets and its apostles, as some have done, who have left behind them but the short lived monuments of their ignorance. their profaneness. and their malice.

Go and spread like them, the banners of infidelity and pride thyself in the number of credulous creatures listed under them. But take heed lest the insulted Galilean direct a secret arrow to thine heart, and stop thy licentious breath before it has finished the next sentence thou wouldst utter against him. 7. I will turn myself from the deist or the sceptic, and direct my address to the nominal Christian; if he may upon any terms be called a Christian, who feels not, after all I have pleaded a disposition to subject himself to the government and the grace of that Savior whose name he hears: O sinner, thou art turning away from my Lord, in whose cause I speak; but let me earnestly entreat thee seriously to consider why thou art turning away; and "to whom thou wilt go," from him whom thou acknowledgst "to have the words of eternal life." (John 6:63.)

You call yourself a Christian and yet will not by any means be persuaded to seek salvation in good earnest from and through Jesus Christ, whom you call your Master and Lord. How do you for a moment excuse this negligence to your own conscience? If I had urged you on any controverted point it might have altered the case. If I had labored hard to make you the disciple of any particular party of Christians, your delay might have been more reasonable; nay, perhaps your refusing to acquiesce might have been an act of apprehended duty to our common Master.

But is it matter of controversy among Christians, whether there be a great, holy, and righteous God; and whether such a Being, whom we agree to own, should be revered and loved, or neglected and

dishonored? Is it matter of controversy whether a sinner should deeply and seriously repent of his sins, or whether he should go on in them? Is it a disputed point amongst us, whether Jesus became incarnate, and died upon the cross for the redemption of sinners, or not? And if it be not, can it be disputed by them who believe him to be the Son of God and the Savior of men, whether a sinner should seek to him, or neglect him; or whether one who professes to be a Christian should depart from iniquity, or give himself up to the practice of it?

Are the precepts of our great Master written so obscurely in his word, that there should be room seriously to question whether he require a devout, holy, humble, spiritual, watchful, self-denying life, or whether he allow the contrary? Has Christ, after all big pretensions of bringing life and immortality to light, left it more uncertain than he found it, whether there be any future state of happiness and misery, or for whom these states are respectively intended? Is it a matter of controversy whether God will, or will not, "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil?" (Eccl. 12:14) or whether, at the conclusion of that judgment, "the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal?" (Matt. 25:46) You will not I am sure, for very shame, pretend any doubt about these things, and yet call yourself a Christian.

Why then will you not be persuaded to lay them to heart, and to act as duty and interest so evidently require? O sinner, the cause is too obvious, a cause indeed quite unworthy of being called a reason. It is because thou art blinded and besotted with thy vanities and thy lusts. It is because thou hast some perishing trifle, which charms thy imagination and thy senses, so that it is dearer to thee than God and Christ, than thy own soul and its salvation. It is, in a word, because thou art still under the influence of that carnal mind, which, whatever pious forms it may sometimes admit and pretend, "is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7) And therefore thou art in the very case of those wretches, concerning whom our Lord said in the days of his flesh, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life," (John 5:40) and therefore "ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24) 8.

In this case I see not what it can signify, to renew those expostulations and addresses which I have made in the former chapters. As our blessed Redeemer says of those who reject his Gospel, "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father," (John 15:24) so may I truly say with regard to you, I have endeavored to show you, in the plainest and the clearest words, both Christ and the Father; I have urged the obligations you are under to both; I have laid before you your guilt and your condemnation; I have pointed out the only remedy; I have pointed out the rock on which I have built my own eternal hopes, and the way in which alone I expect salvation.

I have recommended those things to you, which, if God gives me an opportunity, I will, with my dying breath, earnestly and affectionately recommend to my own children, and to all the dearest friends that I have upon earth, who may then be near me, esteeming it the highest token of my friendship, the surest proof of my love to them. And if, believing the Gospel to be true, you resolve to reject it, I have nothing farther to say, but that you must abide the consequence. Yet as Moses, when he went out from the presence of Pharaoh for the last time, finding his heart yet more hardened by all the judgments and deliverances with which he had formerly been exercised, denounced upon him "God's passing through the land in terror to smite the firstborn with death, and warned him of that great and lamentable cry, which the sword of the destroying angel should raise throughout all his realm;" (Exod. 11:4-6) so will I, sinner, now when I am quitting thee, speak to thee yet again, "whether thou wilt hear, or whether thou wilt forbear," (Ezek. 2:7) and denounce that much more terrible judgment; which the sword of divine vengeance, already whetted and drawn, and "bathed, as it were, in heaven," (Isai. 34:5) is preparing against thee;

which shall end in a much more doleful cry, though thou wert greater and more obstinate than that haughty monarch.

Yes, sinner, that I may, with the apostle Paul, when turning to others who are more likely to hear me, "shake my raiment, and say, I am pure from your blood," (Acts 18.6) I will once more tell you what the end of these things will be. And, O that I could speak to purpose! O that I could thunder in thine ear such a peal of terror as might awaken thee, and be too loud to be drowned in all the noise of carnal mirth, or to be deadened by those dangerous opiates with which thou art contriving to stupify thy conscience! 9.

Seek what amusements and entertainments thou wilt, O sinner! I tell thee, if thou wert equal in dignity, and power, and magnificence, to the "great monarch of Babylon, thy pomp shalt be brought down to the grave, and all the sound of thy viols; the worm shall be spread under thee, and the worm shall cover thee;" (Isai. 14:11) yes, sinner, "the end of these things is death!" (Rom. 6:21) death in its most terrible sense to thee, if this continue thy governing temper. Thou canst not avoid it; and, if it be possible for any thing that I can say to prevent, thou shalt not forget it.

Your "strength is not the strength of stones, nor is your flesh of brass." (Job 6:12) You are accessible to disease, as well as others; and if some sudden accident do not prevent it, we shall soon see how heroically you will behave yourself on a dying bed, and in the near views of eternity. You, that now despise Christ, and trifle with his Gospel, we shall see you droop and languish; shall see all your relish for your carnal recreations and your vain companions lost. And if perhaps one and another of them bolt in upon you, and is brutish and desperate enough to attempt to entertain a dying man with a gay story, or a profane jest, we shall see how you will relish it.

We shall see what comfort you will have in reflecting on what is past, or what hope in looking forward to what is to come. Perhaps, trembling and astonished, you will then be inquiring; in a wild kind of consternation, "what you shall do to be saved:" calling for the ministers of Christ, whom you now despise for the earnestness with which they would labor to save your soul! and it maybe falling into a delirium, or dying convulsions, before they can come. Or perhaps we may see you flattering yourself, through a long, lingering illness, that you shall still recover, and putting off any serious reflection and conversation, for fear it should upset your spirits.

And the cruel kindness of friends and physicians, as if they were in league with Satan to make the destruction of your soul as sure as possible, may perhaps abet this fatal deceit. 10. And if any of these probable cases happen, that is, in short, unless a miracle of grace snatch you "as a brand out of the burning," when the flames have, as it were, already taken hold of you; all these gloomy circumstances, which pass in the chambers of illness and on the bed of death, are but the forerunners of infinitely more dreadful things.

Oh! who can describe them? Who can imagine them? When surviving friends are tenderly mourning over the breathless corpse, and taking a fond farewell of it before it is laid to consume away in the dark and silent grave, into what hands, O sinner! will thy soul be fallen? What scenes will open upon thy separate spirit, even before thy deserted flesh be cold, or thy sightless eyes are closed? It shall then know what it is to return to God, to be rejected by him as having rejected his Gospel and his Son, and despised the only treaty of reconciliation; and that so amazingly condescending and gracious!

Thou shalt know what it is to be disowned by Christ, whom thou hast refused to entertain; and what it is, as the certain and immediate consequence of that, to be left in the hands of the malignant spirits of hell.

There will be no more-friendship then: none to comfort, none to alleviate thy agony and distress; but, on the contrary, all around thee laboring to aggravate and increase them. Thou shalt pass away the intermediate years of the separate state in dreadful expectation, and bitter outcries of horror and remorse.

And then thou shalt hear the trumpet of the archangel, in whatever cavern of that gloomy world thou art lodged. Its sound shall penetrate thy prison, where, doleful and horrible as it is, thou shalt nevertheless wish that thou mightest still be allowed to hide thy guilty head, rather than show it before the face of that awful Judge; before whom "heaven and earth are fleeing away." (Rev. 20:11) But thou must come forth, and be reunited to a body now formed for ever to endure agonies, which in this mortal state would have dissolved it in a moment.

You would not be persuaded to come to Christ before: you would stupidly neglect him, in spite of reason, in spite of conscience, in spite of all the tender sollicitations of the Gospel, and the repeated admonitions of its most faithful ministers. But now, sinner, you shall have an interview; with him; if that may be called an interview, in which you will not dare to lift up your head to view the face of your tremendous and inexorable Judge. There, at least, how distant soever the time of our life and the place of our abode may have been, there shall we see how courageously your heart will endure, and how "strong your hands will be when the lord doth this." (Ezek. 22:14) There shall I see thee, O reader! whoever thou art that goest on in thine impenitency, among thousands and ten thousands of despairing wretches, trembling and confounded.

There shall I hear thy cries among the rest, rending the very heavens in vain. The Judge will rise from his throne with majestic composure, and leave thee to be hurried down to those everlasting burnings, to which his righteous vengeance hath doomed thee, because thou wouldst not be saved from them. Hell shall shut its mouth upon thee for ever, and the sad echo of thy groans and outcries shall be lost, amidst the hallelujahs of heaven, to all that find mercy of the Lord in that day. 11.

This will most assuredly be the end of these things; and thou, as a nominal Christian, professest to know, and to believe it. It moves my heart at least, if it moves not thine. I firmly believe, that every one, who himself obtains salvation and glory will bear so much of his Savior's image in wisdom and goodness, in zeal for God, and a steady regard to the happiness of the whole creation, that he will behold this sad scene with calm approbation, and without any painful commotion of mind.

But as yet I am flesh and blood; and therefore my bowels are troubled, and mine eyes often overflow with grief to think that wretched sinners will have no more compassion upon their own souls; to think that in spite of all admonition, they will obstinately run upon final, everlasting destruction. It would signify nothing here to add a prayer or a meditation for your use. Poor creature, you will not meditate! you will not pray! Yet as I have often poured out my heart in prayer over a dying friend, when the force of his distemper has rendered him incapable of joining with me, so I will now apply myself to God for you, O unhappy creature!

And if you disdain so much as to read what my compassion dictates, yet I hope, they who have felt the power of the Gospel on their own souls, as they cannot but pity such as you, will join with me in such cordial, though broken petitions as these:

A prayer in behalf of an Impenitent Sinner, in the case just described.

"Almighty God! `with thee all things are possible." (Matt. 10:26) To thee therefore do I humbly apply myself in behalf of this dear immortal soul, which thou here seest perishing in its sins, and hardening itself against that everlasting Gospel which has been the power of God to the salvation of so many thousands and

millions. Thou art witness, O blessed God! thou art witness to the plainness and seriousness with which the message has been delivered. It is in thy presence that these awful words have been written; and in thy presence have they been read.

Be pleased, therefore, to record it in the book of thy remembrance, that 'so, if this wicked man dieth in his iniquity, after the warning has been so plainly and solemnly given him, his blood may not be required at my hand,' (Ezek. 33:8,9) nor at the hand of that Christian friend, whoever he is, by whom this book has been procured for him, with a sincere desire for the salvation of his soul. Be witness, O blessed 'Jesus, in the day in which thou shalt judge the secrets of all hearts,' (Rom. 2:16) that thy Gospel hath been preached to this hardened wretch, and salvation by thy blood hath been offered him, though he continued to despise it.

And may thy unworthy messenger be 'unto God a sweet savor in Christ,' in this very soul, even though it should at last perish! (2 Cor. 2:15) "But, oh! that after all his hardness and impenitence, thou wouldst still be pleased, by the sovereign power of thine efficacious grace, to awaken and convert him! Well do we know, O thou Lord of universal nature! that he who made the soul can cause the sword of conviction to come near and enter into it. O that, in thine infinite wisdom and love, thou wouldst find out a way to interpose, and save this sinner from death, from eternal death!

O that, if it be thy blessed will, thou wouldst immediately do it! Thou knowest, O God, he is a dying creature! thou knowest that if any thing be done for him, it must be done quickly! thou seest, in the book of thy wise and gracious decrees, a moment marked, which must seal him up in an unchangeable state! O that thou wouldst lay hold on him while he is yet 'joined to the living, and hath hope!' (Eccl. 9:4) Thy immutable laws, in the dispensation of grace, forbid that a soul should be converted and renewed after its entrance into the invisible world: O let thy sacred Spirit work while he is yet as it were within the sphere of its operations!

Work, O God, by whatever method thou pleasest; only have mercy upon him! O Lord! have mercy upon him, that he sink not into these depths of damnation and ruin, on the very brink of which he so evidently appears! O that thou wouldst bring him, if that be necessary, and seem to thee most expedient, into any depths of calamity and distress! O that, with Manasseh, he may be 'taken in the thorns, and laden with the fetters of affliction,' if that may but cause him to 'seek the God of his fathers.' (2 Chro. 33:11,12) "But I prescribe not to thine infinite wisdom.

Thou hast displayed thy power in glorious and astonishing instances; which I thank thee that I have so circumstantially known, and by the knowledge of them have been fortified against the rash confidence of those who weakly and arrogantly pronounce that to be impossible, which is actually done. Thou hast, I know, done that, by a single thought in retirement, when the happy man reclaimed by it hath been far from means, and far from ordinances, which neither the most awful admonitions, nor the most tender entreaties, nor the most terrible afflictions. nor the most wonderful deliverances, had been able to effect.

"Glorify thy name, O Lord, and glorify thy grace, in the method which to thine infinite wisdom shall seem most expedient! Only grant, I beseech thee, with all humble submission to thy will, that this sinner may be saved! or if not, that the labor of this part of this treatise may not be altogether in vain; but that if some reject it to their aggravated ruin, others may hearken and live! That those thy servants, who have labored for their deliverance and happiness may view them in the regions of glory, as the heaven, 'to him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us,' of condemned rebels,

and accursed, polluted sinners, `kings and priests unto God; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!' (Rev. 1:5,6) Amen."

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