

# A Caution Against Various Temptations

by Philip Doddridge

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*The sermon cautions against various temptations that can hinder a life of devotedness to God, including a sluggish and indolent temper, an excessive love of sensitive pleasure, the snares of vain company, and excessive hurry of worldly business.*

**Scripture:** Luke 9:23

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Worldly Temptations"

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## Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the dangers that continue even after overcoming initial difficulties in a religious life, cautioning against indolence, excessive love of pleasure, neglect of business, evil company, and excessive hurry in worldly affairs. He emphasizes the need to die to the world and live for the eternal, urging young converts to seek divine protection against these snares through prayer and reliance on God's guidance.

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## Transcript

1. Dangers continue, after the first difficulties (considered Chap. xvi.) are broken through.--2. Particular cautions--against a sluggish and indolent temper.--3. Against the excessive love of sensitive pleasure.--4. Leading to a neglect of business and needless expense.--5. Against the snares of evil company.--6. Against excessive hurry of worldly business.--7. Which is enforced by the fatal consequences these have had in many cases.--8. The chapter concludes with an exhortation to die to this world, and to live to another. And the young Convert's prayer for Divine protection against the dangers arising from these snares.

1. THIS representation I have been making of the pleasure and advantage of a life spent in devotedness to God and communion with him, as I have described it above, will, I hope, engage you, my dear reader, to form some purposes, and make some attempt to obtain it. But from considering the nature, and observing the course of things, it appears exceedingly evident, that, besides the general opposition which I formerly mentioned as like to attend you in your first entrance on a religious life, you will find even that, after you have resolutely broke through this, a variety of hindrances in any attempts or exemplary piety, and in the prosecution of a remarkably strict and edifying course, will present themselves daily in your path; and whereas you may, by a few resolute efforts, baffle some of the former sorts of enemies, these will be perpetually renewing their onsets, and a vigorous struggle must be continually maintained with them.

Give me leave now, therefore, to be particular in my cautions against some of the chief of them. And here I would insist upon the difficulties which will arise from indolence and the love of pleasure from vain company, and worldly cares. Each of these may prove ensnaring to any, and especially to young persons, to whom I would now have some particular regard. 2. I entreat you, therefore, in the first place, that you will guard against a sluggish and indolent temper. The love of ease insinuates itself into the heart under a variety of plausible pretences, which are often allowed to pass, when temptations of a grosser nature would not be admitted.

The misspending a little time seems to wise and good men a small matter; yet this sometimes runs them in into great inconveniencies. It often leads them to break in upon the seasons regularly allotted to devotion, and to defer business which might immediately be done, but being put off from day to day, is not done at all, and thereby the services of life are at least diminished, and the rewards of eternity diminished proportionably: not to insist upon it, that very frequently this lays the soul open to farther temptations, by which it falls, in consequence of being found unemployed.

Be therefore suspicious of the first approaches of this kind. Remember that the soul of man is an active being, and that it must find its pleasure in activity. "Gird up," therefore, "the loins of your mind." (1 Pet. 1:13) Endeavor to keep yourself always well employed. Be exact, if I may with humble reverence use the expression, in your appointments with God. Meet him early in the morning; and say not with the sluggard, when the proper hour of rising is come, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber." (Prov. 6:10) That time which prudence shall advise you, give to conversation and to other recreations.

But when that is elapsed, and no unforeseen and important engagement prevents, rise and begone. Quit the company of your dearest friends, and retire to your proper business, whether it be in the field, the shop, or the closet. For by acting contrary to the secret dictates of your mind as to what it is just at the present moment best to do, though it be but in the manner of spending half an hour, some degree of guilt is contracted, and a habit is cherished, which may draw after it much worse consequences.

Consider, therefore, what duties are to be dispatched, and in what seasons. Form your plan as prudently as you can, and pursue it resolutely; unless an unexpected incident arises, which leads you to conclude that duty calls you another way. Allowances for such unthought-of interruptions must be made; but if, in consequence of this, you are obliged to omit any thing of importance which you proposed behave done to-day, do it if possible to-morrow; and do not cut yourself out new work, till the former plan be dispatched; unless you really judge it, not merely more amusing, but more important.

And always remember, that a servant of Christ should see to it, that he determine on these occasions as in his Master's presence. 3. Guard also against an excessive love of sensitive and animal pleasure, as that which will be a great hindrance to you in that religious course which I have now been urging. You cannot but know that Christ has told us, "that a man must deny himself, and take up his cross daily," (Luke 9:23) if he desire to become his disciple. Christ, the Son of God, "the former and the heir of all things, pleased not himself," (Rom. 15:3) but submitted to want, to difficulties, and hardships, in the way of duty, and some of them of the extremest kind and degree, for the glory of God and the salvation of men.

In this way we are to follow him; and as we know not how soon we may be called, even to "resist unto blood, striving against sin," (Heb. 12:4) it is certainly best to accustom ourselves to that discipline which we may possibly be called out to exercise, even in such rigorous heights. A soft and delicate life will give force to temptations, which might easily be subdued by one who has habituated himself to "endure

hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Tim. 2:3) It also produces an attachment to this world, and an unwillingness to leave it, which ill becomes those who are strangers and pilgrims on earth, and who expect so soon to be called away to that better country which they "profess to seek." (Heb. 11:13,16) Add to this, that, what the world calls a life of pleasure, is necessarily a life of expense too, and may perhaps lead you, as it has many others, and especially many who have been setting out in the world, beyond the limits which Providence has assigned; and so, after a course of indulgence, may produce a proportionable want.

And while in other cases it is true that pity should be shown to the poor, this is a poverty that is justly contemptible, because it is the effect of a man's own folly; and when your "want thus comes upon you as an armed man," (Prov. 6:11) you will not only find yourself striped of the capacity you might otherwise have secured for performing those works of charity which are so ornamental to a Christian profession, but probably will be under strong temptations to some low artifice or mean compliance, quite beneath the Christian character and that of an upright man.

Many, who once made a high profession, after a series of such sorry and scandalous shifts, have fallen into the infamy of the worst kind of bankrupts; I mean such as have lavished away on themselves what was indeed the property of others, and so have injured, and perhaps ruined, the industrious, to feed a foolish, luxurious, or ostentatious humor, which, while indulged, was the shame of their own families, and when it can be indulged no longer, is their torment. This will be a terrible reproach to religion: such a reproach to it, that a good man would rather choose to live on bread and water, or indeed to die for want of them, than to occasion it 4.

Guard, therefore, I beseech you, against any thing which might tend that way, especially by diligence in business, and by prudence and frugality in expense, which, by the Divine blessing, may have a very happy influence to make your affairs prosperous, your health vigorous, and your mind easy. But this cannot be attained without keeping a resolute watch over yourself, and strenuously refusing to comply with many proposals which indolence and sensuality will offer in very plausible forms, and for which it will plead, "that it asks but very little."

Take heed, lest in this respect you imitate those fond parents, who, by indulging their children in every little thing they have a mind to, encourage them, by insensible degrees, to grow still more encroaching and imperious in their demands; as if they chose to be ruined with them, rather than to check them in what seems a trifle. Remember, and consider that excellent remark, sealed by the ruin of so many thousands: "He that despiseth small things, shall fall by little and little." 5.

In this view, give me leave also seriously and tenderly to caution you, my dear reader, against the snares of vain company. I speak not, as before, of that company which is openly licentious and profane. I hope there is something now in your temper and views, which would engage you to turn away from such with detestation and horror. But I beseech you to consider, that those companions may be very dangerous, who might at first give you but very little alarm: I mean those who, though not the declared enemies of religion, and professed followers of vice and disorder, yet nevertheless have no practical sense of divine things on their hearts, so far as can be judged by their conversation and behavior.

You must often of necessity be with such persons; and Christianity not only allows, but requires, that you should, on all expedient occasions of intercourse with them, treat them with civility and respect; but choose not such for your most intimate friends, and do not contrive to spend most of your leisure moments

among them. For such converse has a sensible tendency to alienate the soul from God, and to render it unfit for all spiritual communion with him. To convince you of this, do but reflect on your own experience, when you have been for many hours together among persons of such a character.

Do you not find yourself more indisposed for devotional exercises? Do you not find your heart, by insensible degrees, more and more inclined to a conformity to this world, and to look with a secret disrelish on those objects and employments to which reason directs as the noblest and best? Observe the first symptoms, and guard against the snare in time: and for this purpose, endeavor to form friendships founded in piety, and supported by it. "Be a companion of them that fear God, and of them that keep his precepts." (Psa. 119:63) You well know, that in the sight of God "they are the excellent of the earth;" let them therefore "be all your delight." (Psa. 16:3) And that the peculiar benefit of their friendship may not be lost, endeavor to make the best of the hours you spend with them.

The wisest of men has observed that when "counsel in the heart of a man is like deep waters," that is, when it lies low and concealed, 'a man of understanding will draw it out.' (Prov. 20:5) 5. Endeavor, therefore, on such occasions, so far as you can do it with decency and convenience, give the conversation a religious turn. And when serious and useful subjects are started in your presence, lay hold of them, and cultivate them; and for that purpose "let the word of Christ dwell richly in you," (Col. 3:1) and be continually made "the man of your counsel." (Psa. 119:24) 6.

If it be so, it will secure you not only from the snares of idleness and luxury, but from the contagion of every bad example. And it will also engage you to guard against those excessive hurries of worldly business, which would fill up all your time and thoughts, and thereby "choke the good word" of God, and render it in a great measure, if not quite, unfruitful. (Matt. 13:22) Young people are generally of an enterprising disposition: having experienced comparatively little of the fatigue of business, and of the disappointments and incumbrances of life, they easily swallow them up and annihilate them in their imagination, and fancy that their spirit, their application, and address, will be able to encounter and, surmount every obstacle or hinderance.

But the event proves it otherwise. Let me entreat you, therefore, to be cautious how you plunge yourself into a greater variety of business than you are capable of managing as you ought, that is, in consistency with the care of your soul and the service of God, which certainly ought not on any pretence to be neglected. It is true indeed, that a prudent regard to your worldly interest would require such a caution; as it is obvious to every careful observer, that multitudes are undone by grasping at more than they can conveniently manage.

Hence it has frequently been seen, that, while they have seemed resolved to be rich, they have "pierced themselves through with many sorrows," (1 Tim. 6:10) have ruined their own families, and drawn down many others into desolation with them. Whereas, could they have been contented with moderate employments and moderate gains, they might have prospered in their business, and might, by sure degrees, under a divine blessing, have advanced to great and honorable increase. But if there were no danger at all to be apprehended on this bend, if you were as certain of becoming rich and great, as you are of perplexing and fatiguing yourself in the attempt, consider, I beseech you, how precarious these enjoyments are.

Consider how often "a plentiful table becomes a snare, and that which should have been for a man's welfare, becomes a trap." (Psa. 69:22) Forget not that short lesson, which is so comprehensive of the

highest wisdom: "One thing is needful." (Luke 10:42) Be daily thinking, while the gay and the great things of life are glittering before your eyes, how soon death will come, and impoverish you at once: how soon it will strip you of all possessions but those which a naked soul can carry along with it into eternity, when it drops the body into the grave.

ETERNITY! ETERNITY! ETERNITY! Carry the view of it about with you; if it be possible, through every hour of waking life; and be fully persuaded that you have no business, no interest in life, that is inconsistent with it; for whatsoever would be injurious in view of eternity. is not your business, is not your interest. You see indeed, that the generality of men act as if they thought the great thing which God requires of them, in order to secure his favor, was to get as much of the world as possible: at least as much as they can without any gross immorality, and without risking the loss of all.

Such persons may tell others, and perhaps flatter themselves, that they only seek opportunities of greater usefulness. But in effect, if they mean any thing more by this than a capacity of usefulness, which, when they have it, they will not exert, they generally deceive themselves; and, one way or another, it is a vain pretence. In most instances men seek the world--either that they may hoard up riches for the mean and scandalous satisfaction of looking upon them while they are living, and of thinking, that, when they are dead, it will be said of them that they have left so many hundreds or thousands of pounds behind them; very probably, to ensnare their children, or their heirs, (for the vanity is not peculiar to those who have children of their own)--or else that they may lavish away their riches on their lusts, and drown themselves in a gulf of sensuality in which, if reason be not lost, religion is soon swallowed up, and with it all the noblest pleasures which can enter into the heart of man.

In this view, the generality of rich people appear to me objects of much greater compassion than the poor: especially as, when both live (which is frequently the case) without any fear of God before their eyes, the rich abuse the greater variety and abundance of their favors, and therefore will probably feel, in that world of future ruin which awaits impenitent sinners, a more exquisite sense of their misery. 7. And let me observe to you, my dear reader, lest you should think yourself secure from any such danger that we have great reason to apprehend there are many now in a very wretched state, who once thought seriously of religion, when they were first setting out, in lower circumstances of life; but they have since forsaken God for Mammon and are now priding themselves in those golden chains, which, in all probability. before it be long, will leave them to remain in those of darkness.

When, therefore, an attachment to the world may be followed with such fatal consequences, "let not thine heart envy sinners," (Prov. 23:17) and do not, out of a desire of gaining what they have, be guilty of such folly as to expose yourself to this double danger or failing in the attempt, or of being undone by the success of it. Contract your desires; endeavor to be easy and content with a little; and if Providence call you out to act in a larger sphere, submit to it in obedience to Providence, but number it among the trials of life, which it will require a larger proportion of grace to bear well.

For be assured, that, as affairs and interests multiply, cares and duties will certainly increase, and probably disappointments and sorrows will increase in an equal proportion. 8. On the whole, learn, by divine grace, to die to the present world: to look upon it as a low state of being, which God never intended for the final and complete happiness, or the supreme care of any one of his children: a world, where something is indeed to be enjoyed, but chiefly from himself; where a great deal is to be borne with patience and resignation; and where some important duties are to be performed, and a course of discipline to be passed through, by which you are to be formed for a better state, to which, as a Christian,

you are near, and to which God will call you, perhaps on a sudden, but undoubtedly, if you hold on your way, in the fittest time and the most convenient manner.

Refer, therefore, all this to him. Let your hopes and fears, your expectations and desires, with regard to this world, be kept as low as possible; and all your thoughts be united, as much as may be, in this one centre: what is it that God would, in present have you to be: and what is that method of conduct by which you may most effectually please and glorify him.

The Young Convert's Prayer for Divine Protection against the Danger of these Snares.

"Blessed God! in the midst of ten thousand snares and dangers, which surround me from without and from within, permit me to look up unto thee with my humble entreaty, that thou wouldst `deliver me from them that rise up against me,' (Psa. 59:1) and that `thine eyes may be upon me for good.' (Jer. 24:6) When sloth and indolence are ready to seize me, awaken me from that idle dream, with lively and affectionate views of that invisible and eternal world to which I am tending! Remind me of what infinite importance it is, that I diligently improve those transient moments which thou hast allotted me as the time of my preparation for it.

"When sinners entice me, may I not consent! (Prov. 1:10) May holy converse with God give me a disrelish for the converse of those who are strangers to thee, and who would separate my soul from thee! May I `honor them that fear the Lord,' (Psa. 15:4) and walking with such wise and holy men, may I find I am daily advancing in wisdom and holiness! (Prov. 13:20) Quicken me, O Lord! by their means; that by me thou mayest also quicken others! Make me the happy instrument of enkindling and animating the flame of divine love in their breasts; and may it catch from heart to heart, and grow every moment in its progress!

"Guard me, O Lord! from the love of sensual pleasure! May I seriously remember, `that to be carnally-minded is death!' (Rom. 8:6) May it please thee, therefore, to purify and refine my soul by the influence of thine Holy Spirit, that I may always shun unlawful gratifications more solicitously than others pursue them; and that those indulgences of animal nature which thou hast allowed, and which the constitution of things renders necessary, may be soberly and moderately used!

May I still remember the superior dignity of my spiritual and intelligent nature, and may the pleasures of the man and the Christian be sought as my noblest happiness! May my soul rise on the wings of holy contemplation to the regions of invisible glory; and may I be endeavoring to form myself, under the influences of divine grace, for the entertainments of those angelic spirits that live in thy presence in a happy incapacity of those gross delights by which spirits dwelling in flesh are so often ensnared, and in which they so often lose the memory of their high original, and of those noble hopes which alone are proportionable to it!

"Give me, O Lord! to know the station in which thou hast fixed me, and steadily to pursue the duties of it! But deliver me from those excessive cares of this world, which would so engross my time and my thoughts, that `the one thing needful' should be forgotten! May my desires after worldly possessions be moderated, by considering their uncertain and unsatisfying nature; and, while others are laying up treasures on earth, may I be `rich towards God!' (Luke 12:21) May I never be too busy to attend to those great affairs which lie between thee and my soul; never be so engrossed with the concerns of time, as to neglect the interests of eternity!

May I pass through earth with my heart and hopes set upon heaven, and feel the attractive influence stronger and stronger as I approach still nearer and nearer to that desirable centre; till the happy moment

come, when every earthly object shall disappear from my view, and the shining glories of the heavenly world shall fill my improved and strengthened sight, which shall then be cheered with that which would now overwhelm me! Amen."

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