

# The Awakened Sinner Urged to Immediate Consideration and Cautioned Against Delay

by Philip Doddridge

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*Philip Doddridge urges awakened sinners to urgently consider their spiritual state and warns against the dangers of delay in repentance.*

**Scripture:** James 4:14

**Topics:** "Immediate Repentance", "Spiritual Urgency"

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## Description

Philip Doddridge passionately urges sinners who have been awakened to not dismiss their convictions for the present, emphasizing the immediate need to turn to religion due to the uncertainty of the future and the immutability of God's demands. He warns against the danger of delaying repentance, highlighting the difficulty that procrastination brings to compliance with God's commands and the risk of God withdrawing His Spirit. Doddridge concludes with an exhortation against yielding to delays and a prayer for strength against the temptation to postpone applying to religion.

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## Transcript

1. Sinners, when awakened, inclined to dismiss convictions for the present.--2. An immediate regard to religion urged.--3. From the excellence and pleasure of the thing itself.--4. From the uncertainty of that future time on which sinners presume, compared with the sad consequences of being cut off in sin.--5. From the immutability of God's present demands.--6. From the tendency which delay has to make a compliance with these demands more difficult than it is at present.--7. From the danger of God's withdrawing his Spirit, compared with the dreadful case of a sinner given up by it.--8. Which probably is now the case of many.--9. Since, therefore, on the whole, whatever ever the event be, delays may prove matter of lamentation.--10. The chapter concludes with an exhortation against yielding to them; and a prayer against temptations of that kind.

1. I HOPE my last address so far awakened the convictions of my reader, as to bring him to this purpose, "that some time or other he would attend to religious considerations." But give me leave to ask, earnestly and pointedly, When shall that be? "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee," (Acts 24:25) was the language and ruin of unhappy Felix, when he trembled under the reasonings and expostulations of the apostle. The tempter presumed not to urge that he should give up all thoughts of repentance and reformation; but only that, considering the present hurry of his affairs, (as no

doubt they were many) he should defer it to another day.

The artifice succeeded; and Felix was undone. 2. Will you, render, dismiss me thus? For your own sake, and out of tender compassion to your perishing, immortal soul, I would not willingly take up with such a dismissal and excuse--no, not though you shall fix a time; though you shall determine on the next year, or month, or week, or day. I would turn upon you, with all the eagerness and tenderness of friendly importunity, and entreat you to bring the matter to an issue even now.

For if you say, "I will think on these things tomorrow," I shall have little hope; and shall conclude that all that I have hitherto urged, and all that you have read, has been offered and viewed in vain. 3. When I invite you to the care and practice of religion, it may seem strange that it should be necessary for me affectionately to plead the cause with you, in order to your immediate regard and compliance. What I am inviting you to is so noble and excellent in itself, so well worthy of the dignity of our rational nature so suitable to it, so manly and so wise, that one would imagine you should take fire, as it were, at the first hearing of it; yea, that so delightful a view should presently possess your whole soul with a kind of indignation against your-self that you pursued it no sooner.

"May I lift up my eyes and my soul to God! May I devote my-self to him! May I even now commence a friendship with him--a friendship which shall last for ever, the security, the delight, the glory of this immortal nature of mine! And shall I draw back and say, Nevertheless, let me not commence this friendship too soon: let me live at least a few weeks or a few days longer without God in the world?" Surely it would be much more reasonable to turn inward, and say, "O my soul, on what vile husks hast thou been feeding, while thy Heavenly Father has been forsaken and injured?"

Shall I desire to multiply the days of my poverty, my scandal, and my misery?" On this principle, surely an immediate return to God should in all reason be chosen, rather than to play the fool any longer, and go on a little more to displease God, and thereby starve and wound your own soul! even though your continuance in life were ever so certain, and your capacity to return to God and your duty ever so entirely in your power, now, and in every future moment, through scores of years yet to come. 4.

But who and what are you, that you should lay your account for years or for months to come? "What is your life? Is not even as a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?" (Jam. 4:14) And what is your security, or what is your peculiar warrant, that you should thus depend upon the certainty of its continuance, and that so absolutely as to venture, as it were, to pawn your soul upon it? Why, you will perhaps say, "I am young, and in all my bloom and vigor; I see hundreds about me who are more than double my age, and not a few of them who seem to think it too soon to attend to religion yet."

You view the living, and you talk thus. But I beseech you, think of the dead. Return, in your thoughts, to those graves in which you have left some of your young companions and your friends. You saw them awhile ago gay and active, warm with life, and hopes, and schemes. And some of them would have thought a friend strangely importunate that should have interrupted them in their business and their pleasures, with a solemn lecture on death and eternity. Yet they were then on the very borders of both.

You have since seen their corpses, or at least their coffins, and probably carried about with you the badges of mourning which you received at their funerals. Those once vigorous, and perhaps beautiful bodies of theirs, now lie moldering in the dust, as senseless and helpless as the most decrepit pieces of human nature which fourscore years ever brought down to it. And, what is infinitely more to be regarded, their souls, whether prepared for this great change, or thoughtless of it, have made their appearance

before God, and are at this moment fixed, either in heaven or in hell.

Now let me seriously ask you, would it be miraculous. Or would it be strange, if such an event should befall you? How are you sure that some fatal disease will not this day begin to work in your veins? How are you sure that you shall ever be capable of reading or thinking any more, if you do not attend to what you now read, and pursue the thought which is now offering itself to your mind? This sudden alteration may at least possibly happen; and if it does, it will be to you a terrible one indeed.

To be thus surprised into the presence of a forgotten God; to be torn away, at once, from a world to which your whole heart and soul has been riveted--a world which has engrossed all your thoughts and cares, all your desires and pursuits; and be fixed in a state which you never could be so far persuaded to think of, as to spend so much as one hour in serious preparation for it: how must you even shudder at the apprehension of it, and with what horror must it fill you? It seems matter of wonder that in such circumstances you are not almost distracted with the thoughts of the uncertainty of life, and are not even ready to die for fear of death.

To trifle with God any longer, after so solemn an admonition as this, would be a circumstance of additional provocation, which, after all the rest, might be fatal; nor is there any thing you can expect in such a case, but that he should cut you off immediately, and teach other thoughtless creatures, by your ruin, what a hazardous experiment they make when they act as you are acting. 5. And will you, after all, run this desperate risk? For what imaginable purpose can you do it?

Do you think the business of religion will become less necessary or more easy by your delay? You know that it will not. You know, that whatever the blessed God demands now, he will also demand twenty or thirty years hence, if you should live to see the time. God has fixed his method, in which he will pardon and accept sinners in his Gospel. And will he ever alter that method? Or if he will not, can men alter it? You like not to think of repenting and humbling yourself before God, to receive righteousness and life from his free grace in Christ; and you, above all, dislike the thought of returning to God in the ways of holy obedience.

But will he ever dispense with any of these, and publish a new Gospel, with promises of life and salvation to impenitent unbelieving sinners, if they will but call themselves Christians, and submit to a few external rites? How long do you think you might wait for such a change in the constitution of things? You know death will come upon you, and you cannot but know, in your own conscience, that a general dissolution will come upon the world long before God can thus deny himself, and contradict all his perfections and all his declarations; 6.

Or if his demands continue the same, as they assuredly will, do you think any thing which is now disagreeable to you in them, will be less disagreeable hereafter than it is at present? Shall you love to sin less, when it becomes more habitual to you, and when your conscience is yet more enfeebled and debauched? If you are running with the footmen and fainting, shall you be able "to contend with the horsemen?" (Jer. 12:5) Surely you cannot imagine it. You will not say, in any distemper which threatened your life, "I will stay till I grow a little worse, and then I will apply to a physician: I will let my disease get a little more rooting in my vitals, and then I will try what can be done to remove it."

No, it is only where the life of the soul is concerned that men think thus wildly: the life and health of the body appear too precious to be thus trifled away. 7. If, after such desperate experiments, you are ever recovered, it must be by an operation of Divine grace on your soul yet more powerful and more wonderful in proportion to the increasing inveteracy of your spiritual maladies. And can you expect that the Holy

Spirit should be more ready to assist you, in consequence of your having so shamefully trifled with him, and affronted him?

He is now, in some measure, moving on your heart. If you feel any secret relentings in it upon what you read, it is a sign that you are not yet utterly forsaken. But who can tell whether these are not the last touches he will ever give to a heart so long hardened against him? Who can tell, but God may this day "swear, in his wrath, that you shall not enter into his rest?" (Heb. 3:18) I have been telling you that you may immediately die. You own it is possible you may. And can you think of any thing more terrible?

Yes, sinner, I will tell you of one thing more dreadful than immediate death and immediate damnation. The blessed God may say, "As for that wretched creature, who has so long trifled with me and provoked me, let him still live; let him live in the midst of prosperity and plenty; let him live under the purest and the most powerful ordinances of the Gospel too; that he may abuse them to aggravate his condemnation, and die under sevenfold guilt and a sevenfold curse. I will not give him the grace to think of his ways for one serious moment more; but he shall go on from bad to worse, filling up the measure of his iniquities, till death and destruction seize him in an unexpected hour, and `wrath come upon him to the uttermost.'" (1 Thess. 2:16) 8.

You think this is an uncommon case; but I fear it is much otherwise. I fear there are few congregations where the word of God has been faith-fully preached, and where it has long been despised, especially by those whom it had once awakened, in which the eye of God does not see a number of such wretched souls; though it is impossible for us, in this mortal state, to pronounce upon the case who they are. 9. I pretend not to say how he will deal with you, O reader! whether he will immediately cut you off; or seal you up under final hardness and impenitency of heart, or whether his grace may at length awaken you to consider your ways, and return to him, even when your heart is grown yet more obdurate than it is at present.

For to his Almighty grace nothing is hard, not even to transform a rock of marble into a man or a saint. But this I will confidently say, that if you delay any longer, the time will come when you will bitterly repent of that delay, and either lament it before God in the anguish of your heart here or curse your own folly and madness in hell, yea, when will wish that, dreadful as hell is, you had rather fallen into it sooner, than have lived in the midst of so many abused mercies, to render the degree of your punishment more insupportable, and your sense of it more exquisitely tormenting. 10.

I do therefore earnestly exhort you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the worth, and, if I may so speak, by the blood of your immortal and perishing soul, that you delay not a day or an hour longer. Far from "giving sleep to your eye; or slumber to your eyelids," (Prov. 6:4) in the continued neglect of this important concern, take with you, even now, "words, and turn unto the Lord;" (Hos. 14:2) and before you quit the place where you now are, fall upon your knees in his sacred presence, and pour out your heart in such language, or at least to some such purpose as this:

A Prayer for one who is tempted to delay applying to Religion, though under some conviction of its importance.

"O thou righteous and holy Sovereign of heaven and earth! thou God, `in whose hand my breath is, and whose are all my ways!' (Dan. 5:23) I confess I have been far from glorifying thee, or conducting myself according to the intimations or the declarations of thy will. I have therefore reason to adore thy forbearance and goodness, that thou hast not long since stopped my breath, and cut me off from the land

of the living. I adore thy patience. that I have not, months and years ago, been an inhabitant of hell, where ten thousand delaying sinners are now lamenting their folly, and will be lamenting it for ever.

But, O God, how possible is it that this trifling heart of mine may at length betray me into the same ruin! and then, alas! into a ruin aggravated by all this patience and forbearance of thine! I am convinced that, sooner or later, religion must be my serious care, or I am undone. And yet my foolish heart draws back from the yoke; yet I stretch myself upon the bed of sloth, and cry out for 'a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep.' (Prov. 6:10) Thus does my corrupt heart plead for its own indulgence against the conviction of my better judgment.

What shall I say? O Lord, save me from myself! Save me from the artifices and deceitfulness of sin! Save me from the treachery of this perverse and degenerate nature of mine, and fix upon my mind what I have now been reading! "O Lord, I am not now instructed in truths which were before quite unknown. Often have I been warned of the uncertainty of life, and the great uncertainty of the day of salvation. And I have formed some light purposes, and have begun to take a few irresolute steps in my way toward a return to thee.

But, alas! I have been only, as it were, fluttering about religion, and have never fixed upon it. All my resolutions have been scattered like smoke, or dispersed like a cloudy vapor before the wind. O that thou wouldst now bring these things home to my heart, with a more powerful conviction than it hath ever yet felt? O that thou would pursue me with them, even when flee from them! If I should even grow mad enough to endeavor to escape them any more, may thy Spirit address me in the language of effectual terror, and add all the most powerful methods which thou knowest to be necessary to awaken me from this lethargy, which must otherwise be mortal!

May the sound of these things be in mine ears 'when I go out, and when I come in, when I lie down, and when I rise up!' (Deut. 6:7) And if the repose of the night and the business of the day be for a while interrupted by the impression, be it so, O God! if I may but thereby carry on my business with thee to better purpose, and at length secure a repose in thee, instead of all that terror which I now find when 'I think upon God, and I am troubled.' (Psal. 77:3) "O Lord, 'my flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.' (Psal. 119:120) I am afraid lest, even now that I have begun to think of religion, thou shouldst cut me off in this critical and important moment, before my thoughts grow to any ripeness, and blast in eternal death the first buddings and openings of it in my mind.

But O spare me, I earnestly entreat thee: for thy mercies' sake, Spare me a little longer! It may be, through thy grace I shall return. It may be, if thou continuest thy patience towards me while longer, there may be 'some better fruit produced by this cumberer of the ground.' (Luke 13:7) And may the remembrance of that long forbearance which thou hast already exercised towards me prevent my continuing to trifle with thee, and with my soul! From this day, O Lord, from this hour, from this moment, may I be able to date more lasting impressions of religion than have ever yet been made upon my heart by all that I have ever read, or all that I have heard. Amen."

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