

# The Careless Sinner Awakened

by Philip Doddridge

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of considering one's relationship with God and the consequences of neglecting that relationship, calling for a change in behavior to prioritize spiritual growth and development.*

**Scripture:** Job 21:14, Psalm 94:9, Matthew 9:18, Mark 10:21, Acts 17:28, Romans 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Ephesians 2:12, Titus 1:16, 1 John 3:20

**Topics:** "Spiritual Neglect", "Personal Repentance"

## Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the neglect of religion in the world, addressing those who may be neglecting their relationship with God despite not being grossly vicious, urging them to examine their hearts and consider their lack of devotion to God. He emphasizes the importance of acknowledging God's presence, agency, and perfection, as well as personal obligations to Him, highlighting the danger of neglecting religion and the impact it may have on one's future. Doddridge appeals to the conscience of the reader, urging them to awaken from their thoughtlessness and consider the consequences of continuing to neglect their spiritual life.

## Transcript

1.2. It is too supposable a case that this Treatise may come into such hands.--3. 4. Since many, not grossly vicious, fail under that character.--5. 6. A more particular illustration of this case, with an appeal to the reader, whether it be not his own.--7 to 9. Expostulation with such.--10 to 12. More particularly--From acknowledged principles relating to the Nature of God, his universal presence, agency, and perfection.--13. From a view of personal obligations to him.--14. From the danger Of this neglect, when considered in its aspect on a future state.--15. An appeal to the conscience as already convinced.--16. Transition to the subject of the next chapter. The meditation of a sinner, who, having been long thoughtless, begins to be awakened.

1. SHAMEFULLY and fatally as religion is neglected in the world, yet, blessed be God, it has some sincere disciples, children of wisdom, by whom even in this foolish and degenerate age, it "is justified:" (Matt. 9:18) who having, by Divine grace, been brought to the knowledge of God in Christ, have faithfully devoted their hearts to him, and, by a natural consequence, are devoting their lives to his service. Could I be sure this Treatise would fall into no hands but theirs, my work would be shorter, easier and more pleasant. 2.

But among the thousands that neglect religion, it is more than probable that some of my readers may be included; and I am so deeply affected with their unhappy ease, that the temper of my heart, as well as the

proper method of my subject, leads me, in the first place, to address myself to such: to apply to every one of them; and therefore to you, O reader, whoever you are, who may come under the denomination of a careless sinner. 3. Be not, I beseech you angry at the name. The physicians of souls must speak plainly, or they may murder those whom they should cure I would make no harsh and unreasonable supposition.

I would charge you with nothing more than is absolutely necessary to convince you that you are the person to whom I speak. I will not, therefore, imagine you to be a profane and abandoned profligate. I will not suppose that you allow yourself to blaspheme God, to dishonour his name by customary swearing, or grossly to violate his Sabbath, or commonly to neglect the solemnities of his public worship; I will not imagine that you have injured your neighbors, in their lives, their chastity, or their possessions, either by violence or by fraud; or that you have scandalously debased the rational nature of man, by that vile intemperance which transforms us into the worst kind of brutes, or something beneath them. 4.

In opposition to all this, I will suppose that you believe the existence and providence of God, and the truth of Christianity as a revelation from him: of which, if you have any doubt, I must desire that you would immediately seek your satisfaction elsewhere\*." I say immediately; because not to believe it, is in effect to disbelieve it; and will make your ruin equally certain, though perhaps it may leave it less aggravated than if contempt and opposition had been added to suspicion and neglect.

But supposing you to be a nominal Christian, and not a deist or a skeptic, I will also suppose your conduct among men to be not only blameless, but amiable; and that they who know you most intimately, must acknowledge that you are just and sober, humane and courteous, compassionate and liberal; yet, with all this, you may "lack that one thing" (Mark 10: 21) on which your eternal happiness depends. 5. I beseech you, reader, whoever you are, that you would now look seriously into your own heart, and ask it this one plain question; Am I truly religious?

Is the love of God the governing principle of my life? Do I walk under the sense of his presence? Do I converse with him from day to day, in the exercise of prayer and praise? And am I, on the whole, making his service my business and my delight, regarding him as my master and my father? 6. It is my present business only to address myself to the person whose conscience answers in the negative. And I would address, with equal plainness and equal freedom, to high and low, to rich and poor: to you, who, as the Scripture with a dreadful propriety expresses it, "live without God in the world!" (Eph. 2:12) and while in words and forms you "own God, deny him in your actions," (Tit. 1:16) and behave yourselves in the main, a few external ceremonies only excepted, just as you would do if you believed and were sure there is no God.

Unhappy creature, whoever you are! your own heart condemns you immediately! and how much more that "God who is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things." (I John 3:20) He is in "secret," (Matt. 6:6) as well as in and words cannot express the delight with which his children converse with him alone: but in secret you acknowledge him not: you neither pray to him, nor praise him in your retirements. Accounts, correspondences studies, may often bring you into your closet; but if nothing but devotion were to be transacted there, it would be to you quite an unfrequented place.

And thus you go on from day to day in a continual forgetfulness of God, and are as thoughtless about religion as if you had long since demonstrated to yourself that it was a mere dream. If, indeed, you are sick, you will perhaps cry to God for health in any extreme danger you will lift up your eyes and voice for deliverance but as for the pardon of sin, and the other blessings of the Gospel, you are not at all inwardly

solicitous about them; though you profess to believe that the Gospel is divine, and the blessings of it eternal.

All your thoughts, and all your hours are divided between the business and the amusements of life; and if now and then an awful providence or a serious sermon or book awakens you, it is but a few days, or it may be a few hours, and you are the same careless creature you ever were before. On the whole, you act as if you were resolved to put it to the venture, and at your own expense to make the experiment, whether the consequences of neglecting religion be indeed as terrible as its ministers and friends have represented.

Their remonstrances do indeed sometimes force themselves upon you, as (considering the age and country in which you live), it is hardly possible entirely to avoid them; but you have, it may be, found out the art of Isaiah's people, "hearing to hear, and not understand; and seeing to see, and not perceive your heart is waxed gross, your eyes are closed, and your ears heavy." (Isa. 6:9,10) Under the very ordinances of worship your thoughts "are at the ends of the earth." (Prov. 17:24) Every amusement of the imagination is welcome, if it may but lead away your mind from so insipid and so disagreeable a subject as religion.

And probably the very last time you were in a worshipping assembly, you managed just as you would have done if you had thought God knew nothing of your behavior, or as if you did not think it worth one single care whether he were pleased or displeased with it. 7. Alas! is it then come to this, with all your belief of God, and providence and Scripture, that religion is not worth a thought? That it is not worth one hour's serious consideration and reflection, "what God and Christ are, and what you yourselves are, and what you must hereafter be?"

Where then are your rational faculties? How are they employed, or rather how are they stupefied and benumbed? 8. The certainty and importance of the things of which I speak are so evident, from the principles which you yourselves grant, that one might almost set a child or an idiot to reason upon them. And yet they are neglected by those who are grown up to understanding; and perhaps some of them to such refinement of understanding that they would think themselves greatly injured if they were not to be reckoned among the politer and more learned pan of mankind. 9.

But it is not your neglect, sirs, that can destroy the being or importance of such things as these. It may indeed destroy you, but it cannot in the least affect them. Permit me, therefore, having been my-self awakened, to come to each of you, and say, as the mariners did to Jonah while asleep in the midst of a much less dangerous storm, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God." (Jonah 1:6) Do you doubt as to the reasonableness or necessity of doing it? "I will demand, and answer me;" (Job 38:3) answer me to your own conscience, as one that must, ere long, render another kind of account. 10.

You own that there is a God, and well you may, for you cannot open your eyes but you must see the evident proofs of his being, his presence, and his agency. You behold him around you in every object. You feel him within you, if I may so speak, in every vein and in every nerve. You see and you feel not only that he hath formed you with an exquisite wisdom which no mortal man could ever fully explain or comprehend, but that he is continually near you, wherever you are, and however you are employed, by day or by night; "in hint you live, and move, and have your being." (Acts 17:28) Common sense will tell you that it is not your own wisdom, and power, and attention that causes your heart to beat and your blood to circulate; that draws in and sends out that breath of life, that precarious breath of a most uncertain life, "the is in your nostrils." (Isa. 2:22) These things are done when you sleep, as well as in those waking

moments when you think not of the circulation of the blood, or of the necessity of breathing, or so much as recollect that you have a heart or lungs.

Now, what is this but the hand of God, perpetually supporting and actuating those curious machines that he has made? 11. Nor is this his care limited to you; but if you look all around you, far as your view can reach, you see it extending itself on every side: and, oh! how much farther than you can trace it! Reflect on the light and heat which the sun every where dispenses; on the air which surrounds all our globe; on the right temperature on which the life of the whole human race depends, and that of all the inferior creatures which dwell on the earth.

Think on the suitable and plentiful provisions made for man and beast; the grass, the grain, the variety of fruits, and herbs, and flowers; every thing that nourishes us, every thing that delights us, and say whether it does not speak plainly and loudly that our Almighty Maker is near, and that he is careful of us, and kind to us. And while all these things proclaim his goodness, do not they also proclaim his power? For what power has any thing comparable to that which furnishes out those gifts of royal bounty; and which, unwearied and unchanged, produces continually, from day to day, and from age to age, such astonishing and magnificent effects over the face of the whole earth, and through all the regions of heaven? 12.

It is then evident that God is present, present with you at this moment; even God your creator and preserver, God the creator and preserver of the whole visible and invisible world. And is he not present as a most observant and attentive being? "He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that planted the ear, shall not he hear? He that teaches man knowledge," that gives him his rational faculties, and pours in upon his opening mind all the light it receives by them, "shall not he know?" (Psal. 94:9,10) He who sees all the necessities of his creatures so seasonably to provide for them, shall he not see their actions too; and seeing, shall he not judge them?

Has he given us a sense and discrimination of what is good and evil, of what is true and false, of what is fair and deformed in temper and conduct; and has he himself no discernment of these things? Trifle not with your conscience, which tells you at once that he judges of it, and approves or condemns as it is decent or indecent, reasonable or unreasonable; and that the judgment which he passes is of infinite importance to all his creatures. 13. And now to apply all this to your own case; let me seriously ask you, is it a decent and reasonable thing, that this great and glorious Benefactor should be neglected by his rational creatures--by those that are capable of attaining to some knowledge of him, and presenting to him some homage?

Is it decent and reasonable that he should be forgotten and neglected by you? Are you alone, of all the works of his hands, forgotten or neglected by him? O sinner, thoughtless as you are, you cannot dare to say that, or even to think it. You need not go back to the helpless days of your infancy and childhood to convince you of the contrary. You need not, in order to this, recollect the remarkable deliverances which perhaps were wrought out for you many years ago. The repose of the last night, the refreshment and comfort you have received this day; yea, the mercies you are receiving this very moment bear witness to him; and yet you regard him not ungrateful creature that you are!

Could you have treated any human benefactor thus? Could you have borne to neglect a kind parent, or any generous friend, that had but for a few months acted the part of a parent to you; to have taken no notice of him while in his presence; to have returned him no thanks; to have had no contrivances to make some little acknowledgment for all his goodness? Human nature, bad as it is, is not fallen so low. Nay, the

brutal nature is not so low as this. Surely every domestic animal around you must shame such ingratitude.

If you do but for a few days take a little kind notice of a dog, and feed him with the refuse of your table, he will wait upon you, and love to be near you; he will be eager to follow you from place to place, and when, after a little absence you return home, will try, by a thousand fond, transported motions, to tell you how much he rejoices to see you again. Nay, brutes far less sagacious and apprehensive have some sense of our kindness, and express it after their way: as the blessed God condescends to observe, in this very view in which I mention it, "The" dull "ox knows his owner, and the" stupid "ass his master's crib." (Isa. 1: 3) What lamentable degeneracy therefore is it, that you do not know-that you, who have been numbered among God's professed people, do not and will not consider your numberless obligations to him. 14.

Surely, if you have any ingenuousness of temper, you must be ashamed and grieved in the review; but if you have not, give me leave farther to expostulate with you on this head, by setting it in something of a different light. Can you think your-self safe, while you are acting a part like this? Do you not in your conscience believe there will be a future judgment? Do you not believe there is an invisible and eternal world? As professed Christians, we all believe it; for it is no controverted point, but displayed in Scripture with so clear an evidence, that, subtle and ingenious as men are in error, they have riot yet found out a way to evade it.

And believing this, do you not see, that, while you are thus wandering from God, "destruction and misery are in your way?" (Rom. 3:16) Will this indolence and negligence of temper be any security to you? Will it guard you from death? Will it excuse you from judgment? You might much more reasonably expect that shutting your eyes would be a defence against the rage of a devouring lion; or that looking another way should secure your body from being pierced by a bullet or a sword; When God speaks of the extravagant folly of some thoughtless creatures who would hearken to no admonition now he adds, in a very awful manner, "In the latter day they shall consider it perfectly." (Jer. 23:20) And is not this applicable to you?

Must you not sooner or later be brought to think of these things, whether you wilt or not! And in the mean time do you not certainly know that timely and serious reflection upon them is, through divine grace, the only way to prevent your ruin! 15. Yes, sinner, I need not multiply words on a subject like this. Your conscience is already inwardly convinced, though your pride maybe unwilling to own it. And to prove it, let me ask you one question more: Would you, upon any terms and considerations whatever, come to a resolution absolutely to dismiss all farther thought of religion, and all care about it, from this day and hour, and to abide the consequences of that neglect?

I believe hardly any man living would be bold enough to determine upon this. I believe most of my readers would be ready to tremble at the thought of it. 16. But if it be necessary to take these things into consideration at all, it is necessary to do it quickly; for life itself is not so very long nor so certain, that a wise man should risk much upon its continuance. And I hope to convince you when I have another hearing, that it is necessary to do it immediately, and that next to the madness of resolving you will not think of religion at all, is that of saying you will think of it hereafter. In the meantime, pause art the hints which have been already given, and they will prepare you to receive what is to be added on that head.

The Meditation of a Sinner who was once thoughtless, but begins to be awakened.

"Awake, O my forgetful soul, awake from these wandering dreams. Turn thee from this chase of vanity, and for a little while be persuaded, by all these considerations, to look forward, and to look upward, at least for a few moments. Sufficient are the hours and days given to the labors and amusements of life.

Grudge not a short allotment of minutes, to view thyself and thine own more immediate concerns: to reflect who and what thou art, how it comes to pass that thou art here, and what thou must quickly be!

"It is indeed as thou hast seen it now represented. O my soul! thou art the creature of God, formed and furnished by him, and lodged in a body which he provided, and which he supports; a body in which he intends thee only a transitory abode. O! think how soon this 'tabernacle' must be 'dissolved,' (2 Cor. 5:1) and thou must 'return to God.' (Eccl. 12:7) And shall He, the One, Infinite, Eternal, Ever-blessed, and Ever-glorious Being, shall He be least of all regarded by thee?

Wilt thou live and die with this character, saying, by every action of every day, unto God, 'Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways?' (Job 21:14) The morning, the day, the evening, the night, every period of time has its excuses for this neglect. But O! my soul, what will these excuses appear when examined by his penetrating eye! They may delude me, but they cannot impose upon him. "O thou injured, neglected, provoked Benefactor! when I think but for a moment or two of all thy greatness and of all thy goodness, I am astonished at this insensibility which has prevailed in my heart, and even still prevails; I 'blush and am confounded to lift up my face before thee.' (Ezra 9:6) On the most transient review, I 'see that I have played the fool,' that 'I have erred exceedingly.' (1 Sam. 26:21) And yet this stupid heart of mine would make its having neglected thee so long a reason for going on to neglect thee.

I own it might justly be expected, that, with regard to thee, every one of thy rational creatures should be all duty and love; that each heart should be full of a sense of thy presence; and that a care to please thee should swallow up every other care. Yet thou 'hast not been in all my thoughts;' (Psa. 10:4) and religion, the end and glory of my nature, has been so strangely overlooked, that I have hardly ever seriously asked my own heart what it is. I know, if matters rest here, I perish; yet I feel in my perverse nature a secret indisposition to pursue these thoughts; a proneness, if not entirely to dismiss them, yet to lay them aside side for the present.

My mind is perplexed and divided; but I am sure, thou, who madest me, knowest what is best for me. I therefore beseech thee that thou wilt, 'for thy name's sake, lead me and guide me.' (Psa. 31:3) Let me not delay till it is for ever too late. 'Pluck me as a brand out of the burning!' (Amos 4:11) O break this fatal enchantment that holds down my affection to objects which my judgment comparatively despises! and let me, at length, come into so happy a state of mind that I may not be afraid to think of thee and of myself, and may not be tempted to wish that thou hadst not made me, or that thou couldst for ever forget me; that it may not be my best hope, to perish like the brutes.

"If what I shall farther read here be agreeable to truth and reason, if it be calculated to promote my happiness, and is to be regarded as an intimation of thy will and pleasure to me, O God, let me hear and obey! Let the words of thy servant, when pleading thy cause, be like goads to pierce into my mind! and let me rather feel, and smart, than die! Let them be 'as nails fastened in a sure place;' (Eccl. 12:4) that whatever mysteries as yet unknown, or whatever difficulties there be in religion, if it be necessary, I may not finally neglect it; and that, if it be expedient to attend immediately to it, I may no longer delay that attendance!

And, O! let thy grace teach me the lesson I am so slow to learn and conquer that strong opposition which I feel in my heart against the very thought of it! Hear these broken cries, for the sake of thy Son, who has taught and saved many a creature as untractable as I, and can 'out of stones raise up children unto Abraham!' (Matt. 3:9) Amen."

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