

# The Introduction to the Work With Some General Account of Its Design

by Philip Doddridge

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*Philip Doddridge's sermon emphasizes the rarity of true religion and calls for a heartfelt engagement with spiritual matters to revive genuine faith in society.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 11:4

**Topics:** "True Religion", "Spiritual Revival"

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## Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the rarity of true religion, emphasizing the neglect and absence of it in the lives of many despite being capable of it. He expresses deep lamentation for the lack of genuine religion and the resulting calamities it brings, highlighting the need for revival and the spread of vital Christianity. Doddridge earnestly seeks to awaken readers to the importance of religion, urging them to consider the nature and significance of true faith, repentance, and salvation through Christ, aiming to guide them towards a deeper spiritual life.

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## Transcript

1.2. That true religion is very rare, appears from comparing the nature of it with the lives and characters of men around us.--3. The want of it, matter of just lamentation.--4. To remedy this evil is the design of the ensuing Treatise.--5. 6. To which, therefore, the Author earnestly bespeaks the attention of the reader, as his own heart is deeply interested in it.--7. to 12. A general plan of the Work; of which the first fifteen chapters relate chiefly to the Rise of Religion, and the remaining chapters to its Progress,--Prayer for the success of the Work.

1. WHEN we look around us with an attentive eye, and consider the characters and pursuits of men, we plainly see, that though, in the original constitution of their natures, they only, of all the creatures that dwell on the face of the earth, are capable of religion, yet many of them shamefully neglect it. And whatever different notions people may entertain of what they call religion, all must agree in owning that it is very far from being a universal thing. 2. Religion, in its most general view, is such a Sense of God in the soul, and such a conviction of our obligations to him, and of our dependence upon him, as shall engage us to make it our great care to conduct ourselves in a manner which we have reason to believe will be pleasing to him.

Now, when we have given this plain account of religion, it is by no means necessary that we should search among the savages of distant Pagan nations to find instances of those who are strangers to it.

When we view the conduct of the generality of people at home, in a Christian and Protestant nation, in a nation whose obligations to God have been singular, almost beyond those of any other people under heaven, will any one presume to say that religion has a universal reign among us?

Will any one suppose that it prevails in every life; that it reigns in every heart? Alas! the avowed infidelity, the profanation of the name and day of God, the drunkenness, the lewdness, the injustice, the falsehood, the pride, the prodigality, the base selfishness, and stupid insensibility about the spiritual and eternal interests of themselves and others, which so generally appear among us, loudly proclaim the contrary. So that one would imagine, upon this view, that thousands and tens of thousands thought the neglect, and even the contempt of religion, were a glory, rather than a reproach.

And where is the neighborhood, where is the society, where is the happy family, consisting of any considerable number, in which, on a more exact examination, we find reason to say, "religion fills even this little circle?" Where is, perhaps, a freedom from any gross and scandalous immoralities, an external decency of behavior, an attendance on the outward forms of worship in public, and, here and there, in the family; yet amidst all this, there is nothing which looks like the genuine actings of the spiritual and divine life.

There is no appearance of love to God, no reverence of his presence, no desire of his favor as the highest good: there is no cordial belief of the Gospel of salvation; no eager solicitude to escape that condemnation which we have incurred by sin; no hearty concern to secure that eternal life which Christ has purchased and secured for his people, and which he freely promises to all who will receive him. Alas! whatever the love of a friend, or even a parent can do; whatever inclination there may be to hope all things, and believe all things the most favorable, evidence to the contrary will force itself upon the mind, and extort the unwilling conclusion, that, whatever else may be amiable in this dear friend--in that favorite child--"religion dwells not in his breast." 3.

To a heart that firmly believes the Gospel, and in views persons and things the light of eternity, this is one of the most mournful considerations in the world. And indeed, to such a one, all other calamities and evils of human nature appear trifles, when compared with this--the absence of real religion, and that contrariety to it which reigns in so many thousands of mankind. Let this be cured, and all the other evils will easily be borne; nay, good will be extracted out of them.

But if this continue, it "bringeth forth fruit unto death;" (Rom. 7:5) and in consequence of it, multitudes, who stare the entertainments of an indulgent Providence with us, and are at least allied to us by the bond of the same common nature, must, in a few years, be swept away into utter destruction, and be plunged, beyond redemption, into everlasting burnings. 4. I doubt not but there are many, under the various forms of religious profession, who are not only lamenting this in public, if their office in life calls them to an opportunity of doing it; but are likewise mourning before God in secret, under a sense of this sad state of things; and who can appeal to Him that searches all hearts as to the sincerity of their desires to revive the languishing cause of vital Christianity and substantial piety.

And among the rest, the author of this treatise may with confidence say, it is this which animates him to the present attempt, in the midst of so many other cares and labors. For this he is willing to lay aside many of those curious amusements in science which might suit his own private taste, and perhaps open a way for some reputation in the learned world. For this he is willing to wave the labored ornaments of speech, that he may, if possible, descend to the capacity of the lowest part of mankind.

For this he would endeavor to convince the judgment, and to reach the heart of every reader: and, in a word, for this, without any dread of the name of an enthusiast, whoever may at random throw it out upon the occasion, he would, as it were, enter with you into your closet, from day to day; and with all plainness and freedom, as well as seriousness, would discourse to you of the great things, which he has learned from the Christian revelation, and on which he assuredly knows your everlasting happiness to depend; that, if you hitherto have lived without religion, you may be now awakened to the consideration of it, and may be instructed in its nature and importance; or that, if you are already, through Divine grace, experimentally acquainted with it, you may be assisted to make a farther progress. 5.

But he earnestly entreats this favor of you that, as it is plainly a serious business we are entering upon, you would be pleased to give him a serious and an active hearing. He entreats that these addresses, and these meditations, may be perused at leisure, and be thought over in retirement; and that you would do him and yourself the justice to believe the representations which art here made, and the warnings which are here given. to proceed from sincerity and love, from a heart that would not designedly give one moment's unnecessary pain to the meanest creature on the face of the earth, and much less to any human mind.

If he be importunate, it is because he at least imagines that there is just reason for it, and fears, lest, amidst the multitudes who are undone by the utter neglect of religion, and among those who are greatly damaged for want of a more resolute and constant attendance to it, this may be the case of some into whose hands this treatise may fall. 6. He is a barbarian, and deserves not to be called a man, who can look upon the sorrows of his fellow creatures without drawing out his soul unto them and wishing, at least, that it were in the power of his hand to help them.

Surely earth would be a heaven to that man who could go about from place to place scattering happiness wheresoever he came, though it were only the body that he were capable of relieving, and though he could impart nothing better than the happiness of a mortal life. But the happiness rises in proportion to the nature and degree of the good which he imparts. Happy, are we ready to say, were those honored servants of Christ, who, in the early days of his church, were the benevolent and sympathizing instruments of conveying miraculous healing to those whose cases seemed desperate; who poured in upon the blind and the deaf the pleasures of light and sound, and called up the dead to the flowers of action and enjoyment.

But this is an honor and happiness which it is not fit for God commonly to bestow on mortal men. Yet there have been, in every age, and blessed be his name, there still are those whom he has condescended to make his instruments in conveying nobler and more lasting blessings than these to their fellow-creatures. Death has long since veiled the eyes and stopped the ears of those who were the subjects of miraculous healing, and recovered its empire over those who were once recalled from the grave.

But the souls who are prevailed upon to receive the Gospel, live for ever. God has owned the labors of his faithful ministers in every age to produce these blessed effects; and some of them "being dead, yet speak" (Heb. 11:4) with power and success in this important cause. Wonder not then, if, living and dying I be ambitious of this honor; and if my mouth be freely opened, where I can truly say, "my heart is enlarged." (2 Cor. 6:11) 7. In forming my general plan, I have been solicitous that this little treatise might, if possible, be useful to all its readers, and contain something suitable to each.

I will therefore take the man and the Christian in a great variety of circumstances. I will first suppose myself addressing one of the vast number of thoughtless creatures who have hitherto been utterly unconcerned about religion, and will try what can be done, by all plainness and earnestness of address, to awaken him from this fatal lethargy, to a care (chap. 2), an affectionate and an immediate care about it (chap. 3). I will labor to fix a deep and awful conviction of guilt upon his conscience (chap. 4), and to strip him of his vain excuses and his flattering hopes (chap. 5).

I will read to him, O! that I could fix on his heart that sentence, that dreadful sentence, which a righteous and an Almighty God hath denounced against him as a sinner (chap. 6), and endeavor to show him in how helpless a state he lies under this condemnation, as to any capacity he has of delivering himself (chap 7). But I do not mean to leave any in so terrible a situation: I will joyfully proclaim the glad tidings of pardon and salvation by Christ Jesus our Lord, which is all the support and confidence of my own soul (chap. 8).

And then I will give some general view of the way by which this salvation is to be obtained (chap. 9); urging the sinner to accept of it as affectionately as I can (chap. 10); though not thing can be sufficiently pathetic, where, as in this matter, the life of an immortal soul is in question. 8. Too probable it is that some will, after all this, remain insensible; and therefore that their sad case may not encumber the following articles, I shall here take a solemn leave of them (chap. 11); and then shall turn and address myself as compassionately as I can, to a most contrary character; I mean, to a soul overwhelmed with a sense of the greatness of its sins, and trembling under the burden, as if there were no more hope for him in God (chap. 12).

And that nothing may be omitted which may give solid peace to the troubled spirit, I shall endeavor to guide its inquiries as to the evidences of sincere repentance and faith (chap. 13); which will be farther illustrated by a more particular view of the several branches of the Christian temper, such as may serve at once to assist the reader in judging what he is, and to show him what he should labor to be (chap. 14). This will naturally lead to a view of the need we have of the influences of the blessed Spirit to assist us in the important and difficult work of the true Christian, and of the encouragement we have to hope for such divine assistance (chap. 15).

In an humble dependence on which, I shall then enter on the consideration of several cases which often occur in the Christian life, in which particular addresses to the conscience may be requisite and useful. 9. As some peculiar difficulties and discouragements attend the first entrance on a religious course, it will here be our first care to animate the young convert against them (chap. 16). And that it may be done more effectually, I shall urge a solemn dedication of himself to God (chap. 17), to be confirmed by entering into a communion of the church, and an approach to the sacred table (chap. 18).

That these engagements may be more happily fulfilled, we shall endeavor to draw a more particular plan of that devout, regular and accurate course, which ought daily to be attended to (chap. 19). And because the idea will probably rise so much higher than what is the general practice, even of good men, we shall endeavor to persuade the reader to make the attempt, hard as it may seem (chap. 20); and shall caution him against various temptations, which might otherwise draw him aside to negligence and sin (chap.21). 10.

Happy will it be for the reader, if these exhortations and cautions be attended to with becoming regard; but as it is, alas! too probable that, notwithstanding all, the infirmities of nature will sometimes prevail, we shall consider the case of deadness and languor in religion, which often steals upon us by sensible degrees

(chap. 22); from whence there is too easy a passage to that terrible one of a return into known and deliberate sin (chap. 23). And as the one or the other of these tends in a proportionable degree to provoke the blessed God to hide his face, and his injured Spirit to withdraw, that melancholy condition will be taken into particular survey (chap. 24).

I shall then take notice also of the case of great and heavy afflictions in life (chap. 25), a discipline which the best of men have reason to expect, especially when they backslide from God and yield to their spiritual enemies. 11. Instances of this kind will, I fear, be too frequent; yet, I trust, there will be many others, whose path, like the dawning light, will "shine more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. 4:18) And therefore we shall endeavor, in the best manner we can, to assist the Christian in passing a true judgment on the growth of grace in his heart (chap. 26), as we had done before in judging of its sincerity.

And as nothing conduces more to the advancement of grace than the lively exercise of love to God, and a holy joy in him, we shall here remind the real Christian of those mercies which tend to excite that love and joy (chap. 27); and in the view of them to animate him to those vigorous efforts of usefulness in life, which so well become his character, and will have so happy an efficacy in brightening his crown (chap. 28). Supposing him to act accordingly, we shall then labor to illustrate and assist the delight with which he may look forward to the awful solemnities of death and judgment (chap. 29).

And shall close the scene by accompanying him, as it were, to the nearest confines of that dark valley through which he is to pass to glory; giving him such directions as may seem most subservient to his honoring God and adorning religion by his dying behavior (chap. 30). Nor am I without a pleasing hope, that, through the Divine blessing and grace, I may be, in some instances, so successful as to leave those triumphing in the views of judgment and eternity, and glorifying God by a truly Christian life and death, whom I found trembling in the apprehensions of future misery; or, perhaps, in a much more dangerous and miserable condition than that I mean, entirely forgetting the prospect, and sunk in the most stupid insensibility of those things, for an attendance to which the human mind was formed, and in comparison of which all the pursuits of this transitory life are emptier than wind and lighter than a feather. 12.

Such a variety of heads must, to be sure, be handled but briefly, as we intend to bring them within the bulk of a moderate volume. I shall not, therefore, discuss them as a preacher might properly do in sermons, in which the truths of religion are professedly to be explained and taught, defended and improved, in a wide variety, and long detail of propositions, arguments, objections, replies, and inferences, marshalled and numbered under their distinct generals. I shall here speak in a looser and freer manner, as a friend to a friend; just as I would do if I were to be in person admitted to a private audience by one whom I tenderly loved, and whose circumstances and character I knew to be like that which the title of one chapter or another of this treatise describes.

And when I have discoursed with him a little while, which will seldom be so long as half an hour, shall, as it were, step aside, and leave him to meditate on what he has heard, or endeavor to assist him in such fervent addresses to God as it may be proper to mingle with those meditations. In the mean time, I will here take the liberty to pray over my reader and my work, and to commend it solemnly to the Divine blessing, in token of my deep conviction of an entire dependence upon it. And I am well persuaded that sentiments like these are common, in the general, to every faithful minister to every real Christian.

A Prayer for the Success of this Work, in promoting the Rise and Progress of Religion.

"O thou great eternal Original, and Author of all created being and happiness! I adore thee, who hast made man a creature capable of religion, and hast bestowed this dignity and felicity upon our nature, that it may be taught to say, Where is God our maker? (Job 35:10) I lament that degeneracy spread over the whole human race, which has "turned our glory into shame," (Hos. 4:7) and has rendered the forgetfulness of God, unnatural as it is, so common and so universal a disease.

Holy Father, We know it is thy presence, and thy teaching alone, that can reclaim thy wandering children, can impress a sense of Divine things on the heart, and render that sense lasting and effectual. From thee proceed all good purposes and desires; and this desire, above all, of diffusing wisdom, piety, and happiness in this world. which (though sunk in such deep apostacy) thine infinite mercy has not utterly forsaken. "Thou knowest, O Lord, the hearts of the children of men;" (2 Chron. 6:30) and an upright soul, in the midst of all the censures and suspicions it may meet with, rejoices in thine intimate knowledge of its most secret sentiments and principles of action.

Thou knowest the sincerity and fervency with which thine unworthy servant desires to spread the knowledge of thy name, and the savor of thy Gospel, among all to whom this work may reach. Thou knowest that hadst thou given him an abundance of this world, it would have been, in his esteem, the noblest pleasure that abundance could have afforded to have been thine almoner in distributing thy bounties to the indigent and necessitous, and so causing the sorrowful heart to rejoice in thy goodness, dispensed through his hands.

Thou knowest, that, hadst thou given him, either by ordinary or extraordinary methods, the gift of healing, it would have been his daily delight to relieve the pains, the maladies, and the infirmities of men's bodies; to have seen the languishing countenance brightened by returning health and cheerfulness; and much more to have beheld the roving, distracted mind reduced to calmness and serenity in the exercise of its rational faculties. Yet happier, far happier wilt he think himself, in those humble circumstances in which thy providence hath placed him, if thou vouchsafe to honor these his feeble endeavors as the means of a relieving and enriching men's minds; of recovering them from the madness of a sinful state, and bringing back thy reasonable creatures to the knowledge, the service, and the enjoyment of their God; or of improving those who are already reduced.

"O may it have that blessed influence on the person, whosoever he be, that is now reading these lines, and all who may read or hear them! Let not my Lord be angry if I presume to ask, that, however weak and contemptible this work may seem in the eyes of the children of this world, and however imperfect it really be, as well as the author of it unworthy, it may nevertheless live before thee; and, through a divine power, be mighty to produce the rise and progress of religion in the minds of multitudes in distant places, and in generations yet to come!

Impute it not, O God, as a culpable ambition, if I desire that, whatever becomes of my name, about which I would not lose one thought before thee, this work, to which I am now applying myself in thy strength, may be completed and propagated far abroad: that it may reach to those that are yet unborn, and teach them thy name and thy praise, when the author has long dwelt in the dust; that so, when he shall appear before thee in the great day of final account, his joy may be increased, and his crown brightened, by numbers before unknown to each other, and to him!

But if this petition be too great to be granted to one who pretends no claim but thy sovereign grace to hope for being favored with the least, give him to be, in thine Almighty hand, the blessed instrument of

converting and saving one soul; and if it be but one, and that the weakest and meanest of those who are capable or receiving this address, it shall be most thankfully accepted as a rich recompense for all the thought and labor it may cost; and though it should be amidst a thousand disappointments with respect to others, yet it shall be the subject of immortal songs of praise to thee, O blessed God, for and by every soul whom, through the blood of Jesus and the grace of thy Spirit, thou hast saved; and everlasting honors shall be ascribed to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, by the innumerable company of angels, and by the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven. Amen."

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