No. 1.

God our hope in the day of evil.

Sermons of Converse Francis
Minister of the town - 1818-1842

Sept 19, 1819
O thou who art the source of light and wisdom, we thank thee for all our privileges as men as ye have been called to the glorious liberty of the children of God, that we are constituted moral, spiritual agents, and that we are required to use the graces which thou hast given us in the discovery of truth and in learning thy will. Help us, Lord, to be active, diligent, earnest in the task of our moral improvement. May we acknowledge the word of life as our supreme authority, stand as the Author and Finisher of our faith. May we stand fast in the liberty, with which thou hast made us free, and never be afraid to desert the Rock of our salvation. We would desire ever to be sensible of fidelity to the source of those who bath redeemed us, and may the faith in which He leads us be the track of our faith. Assist us, O God, to consecrate ourselves to thee, and finally receive us to thyself in glory through

E.C. cowd.
let thy blessing descend on this true society; may the influences of the good spirit come down upon it as the dew of He; as the dew that descends. May the members of this society be animated with the maintenance of their privileges; strengthen their hand; encourage their hearts; may they persevere unto the end in the good work with which they have begun; keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, may they stand fast in the liberty wherewith one mind strong together for the faith of the Gos.
them to that world, where no tears shall be shed.

Surely, my friends, we see enough every day to admonish us that we are but strangers and pilgrims here on earth. We are hurried in rapid succession up the stage of life. Each has his moment, then is gone forever from human sight. The child in the midst of joy and animation, the man whose head is covered with grey hairs, they who are strong and in the vigour of health, they who are wasting away in the desolation of age, disease, sink alike into the silence of the grave. These are lessons which the living should lay to heart, and should be taught to remember that though, perhaps, they now rejoice in the sunshine of prosperity, yet the day of darkness may come upon them unawares. If we take such notice of the warnings of God’s providence, we shall find that many solid and lasting advantages will result from attending to the various circumstances of human misery that surround us.
No. 1.

Jeremiah chap. 17. v. 17.

"Thou art my hope in the day of evil."

The various conditions in which men are placed in this life, require a difference in motives and rules of conduct. No single direction, no one mode of action will answer for every moral exigency. This variety of situations may arise either from our own habits of thinking and acting, or from change in our external circumstances. We are sometimes to be allured by hope, and sometimes urged by fear. You would give the same advice, present the same motives to the hardened and the timorous man of virtue, to the affluent and elevated soul to the poor and humble, at least with respect to many of their duties. One precept is fitted to oppose the influence of the passions, and another to stimulate sluggish inactivity. The practice of duty may be recommended to us sometimes because it will promote our own hap...
...and sometimes because it will make those happy, who are endeared to us by the relations of life. It is one of the excellences of our religion, that it is adapted to all the variety of conditions, which are incident to humanity, and that it prescribes directly, or points out indirectly, rules of conduct in all the accidents of fortune and helps to virtue in every moral emergency. It is true, we may be placed in situations exposed to trials, for which we find in the instructions of religion no particular and explicit direction, but we may not imagine that we are left without a guide: for we can and ought to, in any case of doubt, to discover from the nature of the precepts and from the general principles of Christianity, what our duty is, and how it may be practiced. Especially should we be grateful that our religion is truly a friend in times of need, and gives the heart consolation and serenity in the deepest afflictions. He who has given it that place on his affections which it truly claims, has every thing to hope; for the bright beams can penetrate the darkest clouds, that overshadow the path of life; and let it be remembered that while it consoles, it invigorates; and that it not only gives to virtue her sweetest comfort, but animates her to fresh actions of increased energy. The influence of religion indeed silent and gradual, extends over the whole of life, and forms the character to virtue and fits us for happiness, while we are frequently insensible of the progress. We are so constituted as to be very powerfully affected only by what is extraordinary, and it is when the world wears a dark and stormy look, when the heart is vacant, restless, and gloomy, that we feel particularly the pleasures of duty, faithfully discharged, and feel the true value of Christian hopes.

It must then be of importance for us to know 1. what habits and dispositions are necessary for the enjoyment of this consolation, and 2. what we should make of it as a support and encouragement.

1. If then we would secure the felicity of this "hope in the day of evil," we must previously form that character and establish those habits, which will enable us to appropriate the consolations of religion. Let us not imagine that we may enjoy, while we can, the sensible and transient pleasures of once, and when the day of suffering..."
comes, leave our lament, and all the affec-
tions and affections, which his service has made
him too, has constantly cherished, and hasten to
find protection in the cheerful confidence of
pity. There is no magic power, which will
still round the slave of passion, and of vicious
pleasure, just when he wishes, that serenity and
peace, which so powerfully allay the bitterness
of affliction. As well might you expect to
pass instantaneously from the desolation of
winter to the smile of summer, from the
gloominess of night to the bright beam of
day. It is not enough to desire the joys
of virtue, we must deserve them. It seems
to be a law of our nature, a condition of hu-
manity, that we should proceed to high attain-
ments by gradual advances. He who has become
a model of Christian excellence, will probably
beable as he traces back the path he has taken
to discover, how in different occasions and from
different sources, he has added new strength to
his love of duty, and new vigour to his good reso-
lutions; he will remember that every step not
only made another easier, but placed him on
higher ground, till his love of goodness and at-
tachment to his religious duties became de
goat, and he would not conceive it impossible
to find delight in the fallacious dreams of irreal
pleasure. Such is indeed the Christian precept—
“grow in grace.” On the other hand, the man, who
has attained a dreadful preeminence in guilt, finds
to be well that there was a time, when he was not
have shuddered at crimes, which now constitute his work
employment. He began perhaps by leaving the mark
and definite line of rectitude, and hazarded actions
of a doubtful character. He ventured to touch the
shroud which hanged over the brink of the precipi-
tice, and perished in the abyss below. With his
innocence he has lost his reason for virtuous enjoy-
ments and cannot recall it at pleasure. It is true
the examples are not very common of eminent
goodness or eminent guilt; but the same genera-
al remark applies with more or less force to the di-
ferent degrees in which virtue and vice are in-
termixed. Affliction. The servant of men feels the
shock of strong affliction, but his own base passions
and vicious affections allow him not the privilege of
the solace, that would assuage the pain.

2. Again. In order to enjoy the contents of reli-
gious hope, we must entertain correct views of
our discipline of the Mind, by which it is di-
rected. We need scarcely be astonished that
those feelings, which constitute a large part of our happiness or misery, are much affected by our habits of thinking, and the associations we form with certain objects. Much of our pleasure, in the intercourse with the world, depends upon judging by correct principles. It is this less true with respect to our relation, as moral beings, to the Deity. He, who considers God as a capricious being, or this life merely as a scene of alternate suffering and enjoyment, without any object, will find little to console him when the world wears a dark and dreary crown. For him there is no prospect seen beam to tide, the clouds with a golden hue. It is only when we regard our Heavenly Father as our Heavenly Friend, and our present existence as a state of constant discipline and probation, a state in which we have time and opportunity to subdue bad passions, to give virtue new strength, and vigour, and activity, and to fit ourselves for the world of bliss, that we can find in our suffering a scene of improvement, and a hope, preparation for the rest that belongs to the people of God. The prospect of a heavenly reward cannot but move the heart, and animate the heart of every one, who has to struggle with affliction, and reflect that character is made better and happiness ensured at the same time. We bless the goodness of Him who has summoned us to the contest. There is, however, a mistake on this subject, perhaps not unimportant. We may mistake the natural effects of misfortune and the unavoidable trials incident to humanity. Such is the wise constitution of things, really established by Heaven, that vice must end in woe, and pain. But the absolute holiness of the human soul, who has revolted in the pleasures of false indulgence, till nothing more the better story of disease and anguish, cannot suppose that this is the condition, which may close the confidant of religious hope. Every man, says the Apostles, is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts and passions; and the delicious fruits of a bad life should awaken the sufferer to a sense of his need of repentance. But the man of habitual integrity is liable to trials of a different kind. He may be obliged to encounter the storms and tempests of the world, or the suffer.
...of fortune. His virtue may be misconstrued into unyielding obstinacy, or foolish affectation; he may feel the rude hand of rough mishance, and it is then that he finds with assurance to the sweet reflection that his God is "his hope in the day of evil."

Our next enquiry is, what use we should apply to the consolatory encouragements of our religion.

1. In this view, we must naturally think of the support virtue may receive, and of the various good purposes may derive from the sublime and blissful views, which the religion of Jesus offers to us. If we suffer, because we dare to do our duty, we should be encouraged to think for ourselves, and to cherish the reflection, that we please in the sight, of our Benefactor, and that the troubles of the heart, but enable us to continue with fearless perseverance, in what we have well begun. If we have to taste the bitterness which so often mingle in the portion of life, if we are summoned to bear the loss of friends or other sources of happiness, and find by experience, that the pleasures of a good conscience, and the estimation of Christian life have done us triumphant, over the stormy sea of trouble, we certainly should never break our union with a friend, who was most kind and active, and most we need assistance; but adhere with a close embrace and most ardent affection, as will, to the principles of rectitude. We are influenced by other encouragements to action, than our own good deeds. Passions, our own noble and base affections. These are external circumstances, which sometimes determine in a small degree our course of conduct. Many would willingly perhaps obey the precepts of Christianity, were they not connected with men among religion would be an offensive singularity. Many are so\r\n\r\nafraid of shame, have too much short sighted selfishness, or too much love of ease, to aim at the elevated standard of Christian virtue. To be the humble follower of Him, "who went about doing good," ought expose them to the most contempt: to be the bold defender of pure principles of religion in its simplicity, ought to draw upon them the indignation of the world. The conduct of a family and overbearing men.

It may be very convenient to be without that sternness of principle, which would lead its followers to contests like these. But this need not and foolish excuse for neglecting duty and giving up the cause of virtue, is admirably re-
fated by the encouragements of religion. It holds out these animating views, which take
from persecution and adversity all their terror.
Let the Christian remember that if his religion
sometimes involves him in troubles, it makes
them the means of his improvement, enables him
to resist them with efficacy, and make them
means of improvement. It calls him to the
field of battle; it provides him with arms of
heavenly temper, which will ensure him victory
but makes his victory the source of new energy
of of higher confidence, which will fit him for
still more noble conquests. It is not enough
that the trials and labours of life beteone with Chris-
tian fortitude; we should be able to count them
again; to find in them the sources of moral
improvement, of progressive preparation
for eternal bliss.

2. There is another important use, to which
the trials of life may be applied. They may
enable us to fix our affections more strongly on
amiable character of our religion. It is indeed
to be wished that Christianity more consider-
of ten and more generally, as an interesting and
engaging system, as something which has not
very much to do with the heart, as well as
the head. The successive exertions of superior
and industrious talents have only developed
the resources of evidence, on which our religion
may rely, with a confidence fearless of defeat.
On no subject, however, has so much been said
to well (Infidelity has been driven from the grounds
of argument, to take refuge, as its last resort,
in unanswerable malapropisms.) It has been well observed
that all the diligence of investigation can only
acquire the self-sufficient, which the pride, the soph-
sition, the discovery of mankind have erected, and
the weakness of our faith: but the citadel itself
is founded on a rock, the gates of hell cannot get
and against it; its master builder is God. It is not enough, although it be the sacred duty
of every man who has it in his power, to under-
stand and value justly the grounds on which Chris-
tianity is received. Its high embodiment, and real
blessings should excite the finest feelings of
love and gratitude. It has a spirit which we
are to imbibe, it is to make us better men on
better citizens, happier in our social relations,
and happier in ourselves; and surely all this
claims our best affections. But, perhaps noth-
ing wills more naturally or more intrinsically
handle a love for our religion, and earnest exertions.
plain, that life is not an uninterrupted scene of enjoyment. The moments of discon-
tent are generally more really than the acknowledgments of gratitude. We are too willing to
imagine, that we have more than our share
of trouble; and that what we suffer brings
more justly to some one else. But let him
who is exposed to the severest trial, remember
that he has the best opportunities of improve-
ment; and that the more the difficulties
in his moral probation are increased, the richer
will be the fruits of persevering patience, and
submissive patience. Even self-interest may not
times induce us to be pleased with the path of life,
which we are destined to tread, although it is not
and theory; for it may be that there is no way
in which we can be made better, so well as by
countering affliction; and never is no one has rea-
son to admire at that which will reclaim him for
vice, and strengthen his virtue. Constant prosperity
might be no friend to our moral progress; and
though it be no necessary consequence, that we
should be vicious, because we spend not the story
of adversity; yet it may be feared, that if our re-
newed enjoyment were never disturbed, the active
flowers of the mind, and the good
affections of the heart might become weak and unstable. Many a virtuous habit might never have been formed, and many a pious disposition never excited, had we not been raised from the dumber of inaction by the call of affliction. We should, perhaps, never be sensible to what a high degree of energetic resolution, or of the elevated standard of effortment, to which our characters, as moral beings destined for eternity, may be raised, were we permitted always to rest in ease and security. The lightning which rives the earth, may discover the rich mine, which lies beneath the surface. In the hour of adversity may call into powerful exercise those noble qualities and pious affections, which otherwise might never have existed, or have remained unimproved. 

We may learn too from this subject, not to consider this world as an object, which shall engross our best thoughts or interest our warmest feelings. The want of proportion between virtue and happiness, and vice and misery, in this life, has often been considered an argument for a future state of rewards and punishments. Upon the observation ofhuman life, furnishes evidence of a better condition of being, the day of our death, shall be blessed in them. December 1816.
Religion is very far from requiring us to dwell
ourselves to a life of mourning & sadness, viewing
every object only in the dark & gloomy side, distrac-
thtng the kindness of Him who rules all things
for the best. But, by so, it surely is well for us
to dwell on those affecting proofs of the frailty
of our nature, wch may tend to guard us against the
seductive pleasures of the world, than used by
the taint of adversity to patience, resignation, &
fortitude under the trying visitations of amidst the
unseen events of Providence; & picture us for
the end & consummation of every thing connected
with earth. If these things spread the shade
of melancholy over the soul, let us remember
it is a purifying melancholy: The medicine may be
painful, but its effects are most salutary, & toler-
table: for it unites the extravagance of desire, humbles the vanity of our hearts, & painfult
ly convinces us, as the Son of David well expresses
it, that pride over me ts made for man. It
will make us hearts set right the earth's source
At home Sept. 19th. 1819. Afternoon.