

Hope

by William Cowper

William Cowper's sermon emphasizes the vital role of hope as a divine gift that transforms despair into joy and purpose in life.

Scripture: Psalm 42:11, Psalm 71:14, Psalm 147:11, Proverbs 10:28, Lamentations 3:24, Romans 5:5, Romans 15:13, Hebrews 6:19, 1 Peter 1:21

Topics: "Faith And Hope", "Redemption Through Christ"

Description

William Cowper preaches about the transformative power of hope in the face of despair and the importance of genuine faith in God's mercy and grace. He contrasts the emptiness of worldly pleasures and false hopes with the lasting joy and freedom found in a sincere relationship with God. Cowper emphasizes the need to acknowledge our sins, seek redemption through Christ, and live a life guided by God's truth and love, even in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Transcript

HOPE.

....Doceas iter, et sacra ostia pandas.--Virg. Aen. 6.

Ask what is human life--the sage replies,
With disappointment lowering in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive false good,
A scene of fancied bliss and heartfelt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair.
The poor, inured to drudgery and distress,

Act without aim, think little, and feel less,
And nowhere, but in feign'd Arcadian scenes,
Taste happiness, or know what pleasure means.
Riches are pass'd away from hand to hand,
As fortune, vice, or folly may command;
As in a dance the pair that take the lead
Turn downward, and the lowest pair succeed,
So shifting and so various is the plan
By which Heaven rules the mix'd affairs of man;
Vicissitude wheels round the motley crowd,
The rich grow poor, the poor become purse-proud;
Business is labour, and man's weakness such,
Pleasure is labour too, and tires us much,
The very sense of it foregoes its use,
By repetition pall'd, by age obtuse.
Youth lost in dissipation we deplore,
Through life's sad remnant, what no sighs restore;
Our years, a fruitless race without a prize,
Too many, yet too few to make us wise.
Dangling his cane about, and taking snuff,
Lothario cries, What philosophic stuff--
O querulous and weak!--whose useless brain
Once thought of nothing, and now thinks in vain;
Whose eye reverted weeps o'er all the past,
Whose prospect shews thee a disheartening waste;
Would age in thee resign his wintry reign,
And youth invigorate that frame again,

Renew'd desire would grace with other speech
Joys always prized, when placed within our reach.
For lift thy palsied head, shake off the gloom
That overhangs the borders of thy tomb,
See nature gay, as when she first began
With smiles alluring her admirer man;
She spreads the morning over eastern hills,
Earth glitters with the drops the night distils;
The sun, obedient, at her call appears
To fling his glories o'er the robe she wears;
Banks clothed with flowers, groves fill'd with sprightly sounds,
The yellow tilth, green meads, rocks, rising grounds,
Streams, edged with osiers, fattening every field
Where'er they flow, now seen, and now conceal'd;
From the blue rim, where skies and mountains meet,
Down to the very turf beneath thy feet,
Ten thousand charms, that only fools despise,
Or pride can look at with indifferent eyes,
All speak one language, all with one sweet voice
Cry to her universal realm, Rejoice!
Man feels the spur of passions and desires,
And she gives largely more than he requires;
Not that, his hours devoted all to care,
Hollow-eyed abstinence, and lean despair,
The wretch may pine, while to his smell, taste, sight,
She holds a paradise of rich delight;
But gently to rebuke his awkward fear,

To prove that what she gives she gives sincere,
To banish hesitation, and proclaim
His happiness her dear, her only aim.
'Tis grave philosophy's absurdest dream,
That Heaven's intentions are not what they seem,
That only shadows are dispensed below,
And earth has no reality but woe.
Thus things terrestrial wear a different hue,
As youth or age persuades; and neither true.
So, Flora's wreath through colour'd crystal seen,
The rose or lily appears blue or green,
But still the imputed tints are those alone
The medium represents, and not their own.
To rise at noon, sit slipshod and undress'd,
To read the news, or fiddle, as seems best,
Till half the world comes rattling at his door,
To fill the dull vacuity till four;
And, just when evening turns the blue vault gray,
To spend two hours in dressing for the day;
To make the sun a bauble without use,
Save for the fruits his heavenly beams produce;
Quite to forget, or deem it worth no thought,
Who bids him shine, or if he shine or not;
Through mere necessity to close his eyes
Just when the larks and when the shepherds rise;
Is such a life, so tediously the same,
So void of all utility or aim,

That poor Jonquil, with almost every breath,
Sighs for his exit, vulgarly called death:
For he, with all his follies, has a mind
Not yet so blank, or fashionably blind,
But now and then perhaps a feeble ray
Of distant wisdom shoots across his way;
By which he reads, that life without a plan,
As useless as the moment it began,
Serves merely as a soil for discontent
To thrive in; an encumbrance ere half spent.
Oh! weariness beyond what asses feel,
That tread the circuit of the cistern wheel;
A dull rotation, never at a stay,
Yesterday's face twin image of to-day;
While conversation, an exhausted stock,
Grows drowsy as the clicking of a clock.
No need, he cries, of gravity stuff'd out
With academic dignity devout,
To read wise lectures, vanity the text:
Proclaim the remedy, ye learned, next;
For truth self-evident, with pomp impress'd,
Is vanity surpassing all the rest.
That remedy, not hid in deeps profound,
Yet seldom sought where only to be found,
While passion turns aside from its due scope
The inquirer's aim, that remedy is Hope.
Life is his gift, from whom whate'er life needs,

With every good and perfect gift, proceeds;
Bestow'd on man, like all that we partake,
Royally, freely, for his bounty's sake;
Transient indeed, as is the fleeting hour,
And yet the seed of an immortal flower;
Design'd, in honour of his endless love,
To fill with fragrance his abode above;
No trifle, howsoever short it seem,
And, howsoever shadowy, no dream;
Its value, what no thought can ascertain,
Nor all an angel's eloquence explain.
Men deal with life as children with their play,
Who first misuse, then cast their toys away;
Live to no sober purpose, and contend
That their Creator had no serious end.
When God and man stand opposite in view,
Man's disappointment must, of course, ensue.
The just Creator condescends to write,
In beams of inextinguishable light,
His names of wisdom, goodness, power, and love,
On all that blooms below, or shines above;
To catch the wandering notice of mankind,
And teach the world, if not perversely blind,
His gracious attributes, and prove the share
His offspring hold in his paternal care.
If, led from earthly things to things divine,
His creature thwart not his august design,

Then praise is heard instead of reasoning pride,
And captious cavil and complaint subside.
Nature, employ'd in her allotted place,
Is handmaid to the purposes of grace;
By good vouchsafed makes known superior good,
And bliss not seen by blessings understood:
That bliss, reveal'd in Scripture, with a glow
Bright as the covenant-insuring bow,
Fires all his feelings with a noble scorn
Of sensual evil, and thus Hope is born.
Hope sets the stamp of vanity on all
That men have deem'd substantial since the fall,
Yet has the wondrous virtue to educe
From emptiness itself a real use;
And while she takes, as at a father's hand,
What health and sober appetite demand,
From fading good derives, with chemic art,
That lasting happiness, a thankful heart.
Hope, with uplifted foot, set free from earth,
Pants for the place of her ethereal birth,
On steady wings sails through the immense abyss,
Plucks amaranthine joys from bowers of bliss,
And crowns the soul, while yet a mourner here,
With wreaths like those triumphant spirits wear.
Hope, as an anchor, firm and sure, holds fast
The Christian vessel, and defies the blast.
Hope! nothing else can nourish and secure

His new-born virtues, and preserve him pure.
Hope! let the wretch, once conscious of the joy,
Whom now despairing agonies destroy,
Speak, for he can, and none so well as he,
What treasures centre, what delights, in thee.
Had he the gems, the spices, and the land,
That boasts the treasure, all at his command;
The fragrant grove, the inestimable mine,
Were light, when weigh'd against one smile of thine.
Though clasp'd and cradled in his nurse's arms,
He shines with all a cherub's artless charms,
Man is the genuine offspring of revolt,
Stubborn and sturdy, a wild ass's colt;
His passions, like the watery stores that sleep
Beneath the smiling surface of the deep,
Wait but the lashes of a wintry storm,
To frown and roar, and shake his feeble form.
From infancy through childhood's giddy maze,
Froward at school, and fretful in his plays,
The puny tyrant burns to subjugate
The free republic of the whip-gig state.
If one, his equal in athletic frame,
Or, more provoking still, of nobler name,
Dare step across his arbitrary views,
An Iliad, only not in verse, ensues:
The little Greeks look trembling at the scales,
Till the best tongue or heaviest hand prevails.

Now see him launch'd into the world at large;
If priest, supinely droning o'er his charge,
Their fleece his pillow, and his weekly drawl,
Though short, too long, the price he pays for all.
If lawyer, loud whatever cause he plead,
But proudest of the worst, if that succeed.
Perhaps a grave physician, gathering fees,
Punctually paid for lengthening out disease;
No Cotton, whose humanity sheds rays,
That make superior skill his second praise.
If arms engage him, he devotes to sport
His date of life so likely to be short;
A soldier may be anything, if brave,
So may a tradesman, if not quite a knave.
Such stuff the world is made of; and mankind
To passion, interest, pleasure, whim, resign'd,
Insist on, as if each were his own pope,
Forgiveness, and the privilege of hope;
But conscience, in some awful silent hour,
When captivating lusts have lost their power,
Perhaps when sickness, or some fearful dream,
Reminds him of religion, hated theme!
Starts from the down, on which she lately slept,
And tells of laws despised, at least not kept;
Shews with a pointing finger, but no noise,
A pale procession of past sinful joys,
All witnesses of blessings foully scorn'd,

And life abused, and not to be suborn'd.
Mark these, she says; these, summon'd from afar,
Begin their march to meet thee at the bar;
There find a Judge inexorably just,
And perish there, as all presumption must.
Peace be to those (such peace as earth can give)
Who live in pleasure, dead e'en while they live;
Born capable indeed of heavenly truth;
But down to latest age, from earliest youth,
Their mind a wilderness through want of care,
The plough of wisdom never entering there.
Peace (if insensibility may claim
A right to the meek honours of her name)
To men of pedigree, their noble race.
Emulous always of the nearest place
To any throne, except the throne of grace.
Let cottagers and unenlighten'd swains
Revere the laws they dream that Heaven ordains;
Resort on Sundays to the house of prayer,
And ask, and fancy they find, blessings there.
Themselves, perhaps, when weary they retreat
To enjoy cool nature in a country seat,
To exchange the centre of a thousand trades,
For clumps, and lawns, and temples, and cascades,
May now and then their velvet cushions take,
And seem to pray for good example sake;
Judging, in charity no doubt, the town

Pious enough, and having need of none.
Kind souls! to teach their tenantry to prize
What they themselves, without remorse, despise:
Nor hope have they, nor fear, of aught to come,
As well for them had prophecy been dumb;
They could have held the conduct they pursue,
Had Paul of Tarsus lived and died a Jew;
And truth, proposed to reasoners wise as they,
Is a pearl cast--completely cast away.
They die.--Death lends them, pleased, and as in sport,
All the grim honours of his ghastly court.
Far other paintings grace the chamber now,
Where late we saw the mimic landscape glow:
The busy heralds hang the sable scene
With mournful 'scutcheons, and dim lamps between;
Proclaim their titles to the crowd around,
But they that wore them move not at the sound;
The coronet, placed idly at their head,
Adds nothing now to the degraded dead,
And e'en the star, that glitters on the bier,
Can only say--Nobility lies here.
Peace to all such--'twere pity to offend,
By useless censure, whom we cannot mend,
Life without hope can close but in despair,
'Twas there we found them, and must leave them there.
As when two pilgrims in a forest stray,
Both may be lost, yet each in his own way;

So fares it with the multitudes beguiled
In vain opinion's waste and dangerous wild;
Ten thousand rove the brakes and thorns among,
Some eastward, and some westward, and all wrong.
But here, alas! the fatal difference lies,
Each man's belief is right in his own eyes;
And he that blames what they have blindly chose,
Incurs resentment for the love he shews.
Say, botanist, within whose province fall
The cedar and the hyssop on the wall,
Of all that deck the lanes, the fields, the bowers,
What parts the kindred tribes of weeds and flowers?
Sweet scent, or lovely form, or both combined,
Distinguish every cultivated kind;
The want of both denotes a meaner breed,
And Chloe from her garland picks the weed.
Thus hopes of every sort, whatever sect
Esteem them, sow them, rear them, and protect,
If wild in nature, and not duly found,
Gethsemane! in thy dear hallow'd ground,
That cannot bear the blaze of Scripture light,
Nor cheer the spirit, nor refresh the sight,
Nor animate the soul to Christian deeds,
(Oh cast them from thee!) are weeds, arrant weeds.
Ethelred's house, the centre of six ways,
Diverging each from each, like equal rays,
Himself as bountiful as April rains,

Lord paramount of the surrounding plains,
Would give relief of bed and board to none,
But guests that sought it in the appointed One;
And they might enter at his open door,
E'en till his spacious hall would hold no more.
He sent a servant forth by every road,
To sound his horn and publish it abroad,
That all might mark--knight, menial, high, and low--
An ordinance it concern'd them much to know.
If, after all, some headstrong, hardy lout
Would disobey, though sure to be shut out,
Could he with reason murmur at his case,
Himself sole author of his own disgrace?
No! the decree was just and without flaw;
And he that made had right to make the law;
His sovereign power and pleasure unrestrain'd,
The wrong was his who wrongfully complain'd.
Yet half mankind maintain a churlish strife
With him the Donor of eternal life,
Because the deed, by which his love confirms
The largess he bestows, prescribes the terms.
Compliance with his will your lot insures,
Accept it only, and the boon is yours.
And sure it is as kind to smile and give,
As with a frown to say, Do this, and live.
Love is not pedlar's trumpery, bought and sold;
He will give freely, or he will withhold;

His soul abhors a mercenary thought,
And him as deeply who abhors it not;
He stipulates indeed, but merely this,
That man will freely take an unbought bliss,
Will trust him for a faithful, generous part,
Nor set a price upon a willing heart.
Of all the ways that seem to promise fair,
To place you where his saints his presence share,
This only can; for this plain cause, express'd
In terms as plain--himself has shut the rest.
But oh the strife, the bickering, and debate,
The tidings of unpurchased heaven create!
The flirtd fan, the bridle, and the toss,
All speakers, yet all language at a loss.
From stucco'd walls smart arguments rebound;
And beaux, adepts in everything profound,
Die of disdain, or whistle off the sound.
Such is the clamour of rooks, daws, and kites,
The explosion of the levell'd tube excites.
Where mouldering abbey walls o'erhang the glade,
And oaks coeval spread a mournful shade,
The screaming nations, hovering in mid air,
Loudly resent the stranger's freedom there,
And seem to warn him never to repeat
His bold intrusion on their dark retreat.
Adieu, Vinosà cries, ere yet he sips
The purple bumper trembling at his lips,

Adieu to all morality! if grace
Make works a vain ingredient in the case.
The Christian hope is--Waiter, draw the cork--
If I mistake not--Blockhead! with a fork!
Without good works, whatever some may boast,
Mere folly and delusion--Sir, your toast.
My firm persuasion is, at least sometimes,
That Heaven will weigh man's virtues and his crimes
With nice attention in a righteous scale,
And save or damn as these or those prevail.
I plant my foot upon this ground of trust,
And silence every fear with--God is just.
But if perchance, on some dull, drizzling day,
A thought intrude, that says, or seems to say,
If thus the important cause is to be tried,
Suppose the beam should dip on the wrong side;
I soon recover from these needless frights,
And--God is merciful--sets all to rights.
Thus between justice, as my prime support,
And mercy, fled to as the last resort,
I glide and steal along with heaven in view,
And,--pardon me, the bottle stands with you.
I never will believe, the Colonel cries,
The sanguinary schemes that some devise,
Who make the good Creator, on their plan,
A being of less equity than man.
If appetite, or what divines call lust,

Which men comply with, e'en because they must,
Be punish'd with perdition, who is pure?
Then theirs, no doubt, as well as mine, is sure.
If sentence of eternal pain belong
To every sudden slip and transient wrong,
Then Heaven enjoins the fallible and frail
A hopeless task, and damns them if they fail.
My creed (whatever some creed-makers mean
By Athanasian nonsense, or Nicene),
My creed is, he is safe that does his best,
And death's a doom sufficient for the rest.
Right, says an ensign; and for aught I see,
Your faith and mine substantially agree;
The best of every man's performance here
Is to discharge the duties of his sphere.
A lawyer's dealings should be just and fair,
Honesty shines with great advantage there.
Fasting and prayer sit well upon a priest,
A decent caution and reserve at least.
A soldier's best is courage in the field,
With nothing here that wants to be conceal'd;
Manly deportment, gallant, easy, gay;
A hand as liberal as the light of day.
The soldier thus endow'd, who never shrinks,
Nor closets up his thoughts, whate'er he thinks,
Who scorns to do an injury by stealth,
Must go to heaven--and I must drink his health.

Sir Smug, he cries (for lowest at the board,
Just made fifth chaplain of his patron lord,
His shoulders witnessing by many a shrug,
How much his feelings suffer'd, sat Sir Smug),
Your office is to winnow false from true;
Come, prophet, drink, and tell us, What think you?
Sighing and smiling as he takes his glass,
Which they that woo preferment rarely pass,
Fallible man, the church-bred youth replies,
Is still found fallible, however wise;
And differing judgments serve but to declare,
That truth lies somewhere, if we knew but where.
Of all it ever was my lot to read,
Of critics now alive or long since dead,
The book of all the world that charm'd me most
Was,--well-a-day, the title-page was lost;
The writer well remarks, a heart that knows
To take with gratitude what Heaven bestows,
With prudence always ready at our call,
To guide our use of it, is all in all.
Doubtless it is. To which, of my own store,
I superadd a few essentials more;
But these, excuse the liberty I take,
I wave just now, for conversation's sake.
Spoke like an oracle, they all exclaim,
And add Right Reverend to Smug's honour'd name.
And yet our lot is given us in a land

Where busy arts are never at a stand;
Where science points her telescopic eye,
Familiar with the wonders of the sky;
Where bold inquiry, diving out of sight,
Brings many a precious pearl of truth to light;
Where nought eludes the persevering quest,
That fashion, taste, or luxury suggest.
But above all, in her own light array'd,
See Mercy's grand apocalypse display'd!
The sacred book no longer suffers wrong,
Bound in the fetters of an unknown tongue;
But speaks with plainness art could never mend,
What simplest minds can soonest comprehend.
God gives the word, the preachers throng around,
Live from his lips, and spread the glorious sound:
That sound bespeaks salvation on her way,
The trumpet of a life-restoring day;
'Tis heard where England's eastern glory shines,
And in the gulfs of her Cornubian mines.
And still it spreads. See Germany send forth
Her sons^[1] to pour it on the farthest north:
Fired with a zeal peculiar, they defy
The rage and rigour of a polar sky,
And plant successfully sweet Sharon's rose
On icy plains, and in eternal snows.
O blest within the inclosure of your rocks,
Not herds have ye to boast, nor bleating flocks;

Nor fertilizing streams your fields divide,
That shew, reversed, the villas on their side;
No groves have ye; no cheerful sound of bird,
Or voice of turtle in your land is heard;
Nor grateful eglantine regales the smell
Of those that walk at evening where ye dwell;
But Winter, arm'd with terrors here unknown,
Sits absolute on his unshaken throne;
Piles up his stores amidst the frozen waste,
And bids the mountains he has built stand fast;
Beckons the legions of his storms away
From happier scenes, to make your land a prey;
Proclaims the soil a conquest he has won,
And scorns to share it with the distant sun.
--Yet truth is yours, remote, unenvied isle!
And peace the genuine offspring of her smile;
The pride of letter'd ignorance that binds
In chains of error our accomplish'd minds,
That decks, with all the splendour of the true,
A false religion, is unknown to you.
Nature indeed vouchsafes for our delight
The sweet vicissitudes of day and night:
Soft airs and genial moisture feed and cheer
Field, fruit, and flower, and every creature here;
But brighter beams than his who fires the skies
Have risen at length on your admiring eyes,
That shoot into your darkest caves the day,

From which our nicer optics turn away.
Here see the encouragement grace gives to vice,
The dire effect of mercy without price!
What were they? what some fools are made by art,
They were by nature, atheists, head and heart.
The gross idolatry blind heathens teach
Was too refined for them, beyond their reach.
Not e'en the glorious sun, though men revere
The monarch most that seldom will appear,
And though his beams, that quicken where they shine,
May claim some right to be esteem'd divine,
Not e'en the sun, desirable as rare,
Could bend one knee, engage one votary there;
They were, what base credulity believes
True Christians are, dissemblers, drunkards, thieves.
The full-gorged savage, at his nauseous feast,
Spent half the darkness, and snored out the rest,
Was one, whom justice, on an equal plan,
Denouncing death upon the sins of man,
Might almost have indulged with an escape,
Chargeable only with a human shape.
What are they now?--Morality may spare
Her grave concern, her kind suspicions there;
The wretch who once sang wildly, danced, and laugh'd,
And suck'd in dizzy madness with his draught,
Has wept a silent flood, reversed his ways,
Is sober, meek, benevolent, and prays,

Feeds sparingly, communicates his store,
Abhors the craft he boasted of before,
And he that stole has learn'd to steal no more.
Well spake the prophet, Let the desert sing,
Where sprang the thorn, the spiry fir shall spring,
And where unsightly and rank thistles grew,
Shall grow the myrtle and luxuriant yew.
Go now, and with important tone demand
On what foundation virtue is to stand,
If self-exalting claims be turn'd adrift,
And grace be grace indeed, and life a gift;
The poor reclaim'd inhabitant, his eyes
Glistening at once with pity and surprise,
Amazed that shadows should obscure the sight
Of one, whose birth was in a land of light,
Shall answer, Hope, sweet Hope, has set me free,
And made all pleasures else mere dross to me.
These, amidst scenes as waste as if denied
The common care that waits on all beside,
Wild as if nature there, void of all good,
Play'd only gambols in a frantic mood
(Yet charge not heavenly skill with having plann'd
A plaything world, unworthy of his hand),
Can see his love, though secret evil lurks
In all we touch, stamp'd plainly on his works;
Deem life a blessing with its numerous woes,
Nor spurn away a gift a God bestows.

Hard task indeed o'er arctic seas to roam!
Is hope exotic? grows it not at home?
Yes, but an object, bright as orient morn,
May press the eye too closely to be borne;
A distant virtue we can all confess,
It hurts our pride, and moves our envy, less.
Leuconomus (beneath well-sounding Greek
I slur a name a poet must not speak)
Stood pilloried on infamy's high stage,
And bore the pelting scorn of half an age,
The very butt of slander, and the blot
For every dart that malice ever shot.
The man that mention'd him at once dismiss'd
All mercy from his lips, and sneer'd and hiss'd;
His crimes were such as Sodom never knew,
And perjury stood up to swear all true;
His aim was mischief, and his zeal pretence,
His speech rebellion against common sense;
A knave, when tried on honesty's plain rule;
And when by that of reason, a mere fool;
The world's best comfort was, his doom was pass'd;
Die when he might, he must be damn'd at last.
Now, Truth, perform thine office; waft aside
The curtain drawn by prejudice and pride,
Reveal (the man is dead) to wondering eyes
This more than monster in his proper guise.
He loved the world that hated him: the tear

That dropp'd upon his Bible was sincere;
Assail'd by scandal and the tongue of strife,
His only answer was a blameless life;
And he that forged, and he that threw the dart,
Had each a brother's interest in his heart.
Paul's love of Christ, and steadiness unbribed,
Were copied close in him and well transcribed.
He followed Paul; his zeal a kindred flame,
His apostolic charity the same.
Like him, cross'd cheerfully tempestuous seas,
Forsaking country, kindred, friends, and ease;
Like him he labour'd, and like him content
To bear, it, suffer'd shame where'er he went.
Blush, calumny! and write upon his tomb,
If honest eulogy can spare thee room,
Thy deep repentance of thy thousand lies,
Which, aim'd at him, have pierced the offended skies;
And say, Blot out my sin, confess'd, deplored,
Against thine image, in thy saint, O Lord!
No blinder bigot, I maintain it still,
Than he who must have pleasure, come what will;
He laughs, whatever weapon Truth may draw,
And deems her sharp artillery mere straw;
Scripture indeed is plain; but God and he
On Scripture ground are sure to disagree;
Some wiser rule must each him how to live,
Than this his Maker has seen fit to give;

Supple and flexible as Indian cane,
To take the bend his appetites ordain;
Contrived to suit frail nature's crazy case,
And reconcile his lusts with saving grace.
By this, with nice precision of design,
He draws upon life's map a zig-zag line,
That shews how far 'tis safe to follow sin,
And where his danger and God's wrath begin.
By this he forms, as pleased he sports along,
His well-poised estimate of right and wrong;
And finds the modish manners of the day,
Though loose, as harmless as an infant's play.
Build by whatever plan caprice decrees,
With what materials, on what ground you please,
Your hope shall stand unblamed, perhaps admired,
If not that hope the Scripture has required.
The strange conceits, vain projects, and wild dreams,
With which hypocrisy for ever teems
(Though other follies strike the public eye,
And raise a laugh), pass unmolested by;
But if, unblameable in word and thought,
A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,
To storm the citadels they build in air,
And smite the untemper'd wall; 'tis death to spare.
To sweep away all refuges of lies,

And place, instead of quirks themselves devise,
Lama sabachthani before their eyes;
To prove that without Christ all gain is loss,
All hope despair, that stands not on his cross;
Except the few his God may have impress'd,
A tenfold frenzy seizes all the rest.
Throughout mankind, the Christian kind at least,
There dwells a consciousness in every breast,
That folly ends where genuine hope begins,
And he that finds his heaven must lose his sins.
Nature opposes, with her utmost force,
This riving stroke, this ultimate divorce,
And, while Religion seems to be her view,
Hates with a deep sincerity the true:
For this, of all that ever influenced man,
Since Abel worshipp'd, or the world began,
This only spares no lust, admits no plea,
But makes him, if at all, completely free;
Sounds forth the signal, as she mounts her car,
Of an eternal, universal war;
Rejects all treaty, penetrates all wiles,
Scorns with the same indifference frowns and smiles;
Drives through the realms of sin, where riot reels,
And grinds his crown beneath her burning wheels!
Hence all that is in man, pride, passion, art,
Powers of the mind, and feelings of the heart,
Insensible of Truth's almighty charms,

Starts at her first approach, and sounds to arms!
While Bigotry, with well-dissembled fears,
His eyes shut fast, his fingers in his ears,
Mighty to parry and push by God's Word
With senseless noise, his argument the sword,
Pretends a zeal for godliness and grace,
And spits abhorrence in the Christian's face.
Parent of Hope, immortal Truth! make known
Thy deathless wreaths and triumphs all thine own.
The silent progress of thy power is such,
Thy means so feeble, and despised so much,
That few believe the wonders thou hast wrought,
And none can teach them but whom thou hast taught.
Oh see me sworn to serve thee, and command
A painter's skill into a poet's hand!
That, while I trembling trace a work divine,
Fancy may stand aloof from the design,
And light and shade, and every stroke, be thine.
If ever thou hast felt another's pain,
If ever when he sigh'd hast sigh'd again,
If ever on thy eyelid stood the tear
That pity had engender'd, drop one here.
This man was happy--had the world's good word,
And with it every joy it can afford;
Friendship and love seem'd tenderly at strife,
Which most should sweeten his untroubled life;
Politely learn'd, and of a gentle race,

Good breeding and good sense gave all a grace,
And whether at the toilet of the fair
He laugh'd and trifled, made him welcome there,
Or, if in masculine debate he shared,
Ensured him mute attention and regard.
Alas! how changed! Expressive of his mind,
His eyes are sunk, arms folded, head reclined;
Those awful syllables, hell, death, and sin,
Though whisper'd, plainly tell what works within;
That conscience there performs her proper part,
And writes a doomsday sentence on his heart!
Forsaking and forsaken of all friends,
He now perceives where earthly pleasure ends;
Hard task! for one who lately knew no care,
And harder still as learnt beneath despair!
His hours no longer pass unmark'd away,
A dark importance saddens every day;
He hears the notice of the clock, perplex'd,
And cries, Perhaps eternity strikes next!
Sweet music is no longer music here,
And laughter sounds like madness in his ear:
His grief the world of all her power disarms;
Wine has no taste, and beauty has no charms:
God's holy Word, once trivial in his view,
Now by the voice of his experience true,
Seems, as it is, the fountain whence alone
Must spring that hope he pants to make his own.

Now let the bright reverse be known abroad;
Say man's a worm, and power belongs to God.
As when a felon, whom his country's laws
Have justly doom'd for some atrocious cause,
Expects in darkness and heart-chilling fears,
The shameful close of all his misspent years;
If chance, on heavy pinions slowly borne,
A tempest usher in the dreaded morn,
Upon his dungeon walls the lightning play,
The thunder seems to summon him away;
The warder at the door his key applies,
Shoots back the bolt, and all his courage dies:
If then, just then, all thoughts of mercy lost,
When Hope, long lingering, at last yields the ghost,
The sound of pardon pierce his startled ear,
He drops at once his fetters and his fear;
A transport glows in all he looks and speaks,
And the first thankful tears bedew his cheeks.
Joy, far superior joy, that much outweighs
The comfort of a few poor added days,
Invades, possesses, and o'erwhelms the soul
Of him, whom Hope has with a touch made whole.
'Tis heaven, all heaven, descending on the wings
Of the glad legions of the King of kings;
'Tis more--'tis God diffused through every part,
'Tis God himself triumphant in his heart.
O welcome now the sun's once hated light,

His noonday beams were never half so bright.
Not kindred minds alone are call'd to employ
Their hours, their days, in listening to his joy;
Unconscious nature, all that he surveys,
Rocks, groves, and streams must join him in his praise.
These are thy glorious works, eternal Truth,
The scoff of wither'd age and beardless youth;
These move the censure and the illiberal grin
Of fools that hate thee and delight in sin:
But these shall last when night has quench'd the pole,
And heav'n is all departed as a scroll.
And when, as justice has long since decreed,
This earth shall blaze, and a new world succeed,
Then these thy glorious works, and they who share
That hope which can alone exclude despair,
Shall live exempt from weakness and decay,
The brightest wonders of an endless day.
Happy the bard (if that fair name belong
To him that blends no fable with his song)
Whose lines, uniting, by an honest art,
The faithful monitor's and poet's part,
Seek to delight, that they may mend mankind,
And, while they captivate, inform the mind:
Still happier, if he till a thankful soil,
And fruit reward his honourable toil:
But happier far, who comfort those that wait
To hear plain truth at Judah's hallow'd gate:

Their language simple, as their manners meek,
No shining ornaments have they to seek;
Nor labour they, nor time, nor talents, waste,
In sorting flowers to suit a fickle taste;
But, while they speak the wisdom of the skies,
Which art can only darken and disguise,
The abundant harvest, recompence divine,
Repays their work--the gleanings only mine.

[1] The Moravian missionaries in Greenland.--See Krantz.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-cowper/hope/>

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