

A  
Practical Discourse  
AGAINST  
EXTORTION,

From EZEKIEL XXII, 12.

Delivered at

A  
LECTURE

In the South Parish in ANDOVER,

January 1, 1777.

By JONATHAN FRENCH, A. M.  
Pastor of said Parish. K

---

Published at the Desire of the Hearers.

---

BOSTON, NEW-ENGLAND  
PRINTED BY T. AND J. FLEET, 1777.

A

## Practical Discourse, &amp;c.



E Z E K I E L 22. 12.

— Thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD.

**T**HE Author of mankind hath seen fit to give us such social capacities, and form us for a constitution, under which we are so necessarily dependent on one another, that no one can act against the interest of his community without endangering his own happiness. He hath laid us under the strongest obligations, by the mutual ties of the benefit of society and our own good, to observe the strictest rules of benevolence, justice, and every public virtue. And that we might not be at a loss to know what is our duty to one another, he hath mercifully given us this plain rule, and fixed the standard in every man's own breast, *whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*. And to enforce this, he hath added the severest threatenings against it's violators, and every possible encouragement for it's observers, so that no one, unless he is under the prevailing influence of an exceedingly

exceedingly depraved, wicked heart—and is actuated by a *detestably* covetous, selfish disposition, can plead ignorance of what is right in his common dealings with mankind. And yet how common is it for men, both to their own, and to the detriment of the public, to leap the bounds prescribed them by this divine law of nature and revelation?—This was remarkably the case with the Israelites——. After the death of King Solomon, under whose reign, never were a people, perhaps, more united and happy, Rehoboam succeeded to the throne—. Under him the people soon grew uneasy, complained of their heavy burdens, and a universal murmur arose, throughout the kingdom—. Petitions were preferred to the King, but were answered with no other than those irritating, afflictive expressions, *my father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions* Upon this the people grew desperate, and cried out, *what portion have we in David? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse every man to your tents, O Israel and now David see to thine own house.* Every tribe, Judah and Benjamin excepted, unanimously revolted from him. Distressing wars immediately commenced between the ten tribes of Israel on the one side, and the two houses of Judah, and Benjamin on the other. God made them instruments of punishment to each other, because neither served him. *The Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, because they hardened their necks, and would not believe in the Lord their God* And all was a dismal scene of wars, and judgments upon the land. till both Judah and Jerusalem, were so weakened, and destroyed as to become an easy prey to foreign powers, and the Babylonians made a compleat conquest over them. In the time of their  
 captivity,

captivity, while they suffered the most cruel servitude, and were groaning under the burdens imposed on them by their new masters, they murmured against GOD, and grew exceedingly vicious among themselves. The cry of their iniquities reached the heavens, and the Lord sent his Servant, Ezekiel, to reprove them for their sins—. With all the zeal, boldness and faithfulness of a Prophet, he lifted up his voice like a trumpet, and pathetically exclaimed against the sins of Jerusalem, sparing no order of men, as all were verily guilty. Their Princes, and Rulers were exceedingly cruel and oppressive—they even threw off the natural ties of kindred, *set light by father, and mother, oppressed the stranger, and vexed the fatherless, and the widow*, to promote their own honor, wealth and dominion. Their chief men, who ought to have done every thing they could to promote virtue and religion among the people, cast off the fear of the Lord, despised holy things, and became the sad examples of lewdness, and abomination—. Next to these, he lashes the vices of the Priests, for they in Jerusalem were culpable as well as others *her Priests, saith God, have violated my law, and profaned my holy things, they have put no difference between the holy and profane—and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them — And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar* These, and many other sins, prevailed in Jerusalem, which raised the anger, and indignation of the Lord against them. But it is commonly the case in all declensions, perhaps, in every period of the world, that some one sin is more general, and prevalent than any other, at that time.—If we attend to the chapter, in which the text is inserted, we shall find this to have been the case with the Jews—Their predominant sin, which

which the Prophet charges upon every order of men among them, as their circumstances afforded them the opportunity to practise it, seems to have been, *Extortion*, or internal oppression. Which was the more inexcusable in them, as they, at the same time, were complaining of oppression from their enemies— But so inconsistent is mankind, that the very things they esteem most grievous in others, they frequently practise themselves. So it was with Jerusalem. Her Princes, Rulers, Judges and great men, were like wolves devouring their prey, destroying the people to increase their own wealth.—The prophets prophesied for gain, and stripped the people of their riches, at the same time they neglected their souls— yea, saith the Prophet, *they have devoured souls, have taken the treasure and precious things, and made her (Jerusalem) many widows in the midst thereof—* Which they did,” says that learned Expolitor, Mr. Hutt, “one while, by raising persecutions, cutting “off husbands from their wives, another while, and “which agrees most with the place, persuading, “encouraging, and bewitching Zedekiah, and the “Princes, and People, to hold out the war, and run “all hazards and extremities of that siege, which “filled Jerusalem with dead husbands, and forlorn “widows.” *And the people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully.* Forgetting this eternal rule of right, *love thy neighbour as thyself*, they devoured one another, with an insatiable thirst for gain. So that, upon supposition, there might be some individuals, who kept themselves free from their reigning sins, yet, to every order of men among them, taken collectively, the words of our text might suitably apply;—*thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD.*

To draw a parallel between the sins and circumstances of the Jews and our own, is not my intention. The heavy Judgments, with which we are visited, and that cry of extortion, and oppression, which rings through the land, assimilates us in some degree at least.

And now, seeing Almighty God, notwithstanding our exceeding ingratitude, and unthankfulness toward him, hath given us this day to see the beginning of a New-Year, can we do better then to turn aside from our secular affairs, and employ a few moments in reflecting upon the increasing, predominant evil, with which we have closed the last?— O may we humble ourselves before God, and devoutly pray for a speedy reformation, that by his sovran, rich grace, we may begin, and end this year in a better manner than we have done the preceeding.

In order to illustrate the subject, and as much as possible to accomodate it to the present purpose, it will be convenient for us, in the first place, to consider the import of the word, *Extortion*

Secondly, to make some remarks upon the origin of this evil.

Thirdly, to consider something of its evil nature, and hurtful tendency.

First, let us consider the import of the word, *Extortion*, made use of in the text.

In our language, it is not in all cases, exactly of the same signification with the word *oppression*, tho' they are both frequently used in the same sense. *Oppression*, is a more general term, and is rather applied to authority, and signifies various *kinds* of injustice, such as *unrighteous laws*,—*iniquitous taxes*—*infringments*  
B
of

of liberty, and the rights of conscience—and all such impositions as are inimical to society, and contrary to the natural laws of justice, and equity. But the word *Extortion*, seems rather limited to the actions of individuals, and is applied to those more private advantages, which men take of the necessities of others, in their common dealings, especially in cases of *buying*, and *selling*—but notwithstanding there may be this difference in strictness, yet by common usage, they are both frequently applied to the same purposes, and sometimes bear the same sense in scripture, *lev* 25. 14. *If thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbours hand, ye shall not oppress one another*

Secondly, let us make some remarks upon the origin of this evil

This evil in strictness no doubt takes its rise from the grand source of all other sins, the depravity of the human heart. This is the root of all our moral calamities. *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?*

But notwithstanding all our sinful actions spring from the same source yet they are not all alike. As in the branches of a tree, some take their more immediate rise out of others, and make a very different appearance, tho' all are nourished by the same stock, so many sins, take their rise out of others, and put on different appearances, and yet are all fed by the same original fountain. To instance in covetousness, and prodigality, sins as unlike as sins can be, these spring more immediately from different lusts, or inclinations, and yet both are nourished from the same corrupt fountain, a depraved heart

Extortion

Extortion seems to be the progeny of an amazing avaricious *lust* after worldly gain. For an inordinate desire after the world, may as properly be called a lust, as any sin of which mankind may be guilty—. And so it is denominated in the holy scriptures hence says the Apostle James, when speaking of such, *ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God* Extortion therefore we may conceive, arises from an insatiable, avaricious desire of gain, a lust which seduces men into a train of oppressive actions, and unjust, and iniquitous practices, to increase their own private interests, and betrays a mind, almost too contracted, mean, and base to be called human.

Thirdly, let us consider something of the evil nature, and hurtful tendency of Extortion.

To give an adequate idea of the evil nature or to paint the hurtful tendency of this *detestable* practice, language would be insufficient, and the power of description fail To hint at a few things only, which are plain and obvious to every impartial observer, is all I shall attempt

1 Extortion is a breach of the natural laws of justice and equity, for these all require, that in every species of dealing with mankind, we should become mutually advantageous to each other. But the tendency of extortion is to advance a man's own private interest, and bring poverty, and distress upon others He who takes advantage of the necessity of his neighbour, diminishing *h's* interest to increase *his own*, by not rendering an equivalent for what



he receives, is a violator of the laws of justice and equity. And the man whose impartial conscience cannot answer in the affirmative to this simple question, in every instance of trade, *have I done, as I would be done by?* must plead guilty.

2 Extortion is a violation of the laws of mercy, kindness, and benevolence. These all require us to extend our pity and compassion to our fellow creatures. But the Extortioner exercises none of these—His heart, his eyes, his hands, and every faculty of love, and mercy are shut against the distresses and wants of others; and his ears deaf to all their complaints—He matters not how great a diminution others sustain in their wealth, and happiness, if he can but secure his own—Lost to every social virtue, he puts off the man, and assumes rather the character of some voracious animal, who, to satiate his own greediness, would devour all around him. Extortion, in a special manner, is very unmerciful, and distressing to the poor—“The want of the outward necessities of life is a sore calamity, and what mercy requires us not only to commiserate, but to do all that is in our power to relieve”—The poor are of this denomination—their circumstances call for our pity and compassion—But what does the Extortioner? Instead of affording relief, he adds to their miseries, and wants. Yea, further, is not Extortion, in a great measure, the cause of their misery? Does it not bring the distressing calamity of pinching want upon thousands, who otherwise might have been strangers to such deep affliction forever! What a shocking reflection doth this afford! What complacency can the Extortioner take in his unjust gain, while many, from whom he has extorted it, and who were intitled to his  
mercy

mercy and compassion, may be now groaning and dying for want? At least it is not owing to his benevolence if they are not. How contrary is this to the rules of the benevolent Gospel, which teacheth us not to be anxious for the meat that perisheth, but to abound in good works, and in the grace of liberality? especially to extend mercy to the poor—for he that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord—And saith the Psalmist, *blessed is he who considereth the poor.* -

3 Extortion is a breach of the natural laws of society. For it is not only cruel and unjust treatment of individuals, but is exceedingly detrimental to the community, by weakening society, and endangering the state. The strongest bond of society is mutual interest. But to this, Extortion is diametrically opposed. Sinister motives are always opposed to the public good, but these are the principles which bias the soul, and influence the conduct of Extortioners. And as Extortion increases, the public interest is lessened, as all supplies become proportionably dearer. But besides this it creates jealousies, excites feuds, and animosities, destroys mutual confidence, and becomes the bane of that public union in which chiefly the strength of a State consists.

4 The Extortioner is a foe to himself, for by acting against the community, so far as his influence, and importance extend, so far he endangers his own happiness, by destroying *that* on which the protection of his person and property depends. So that in *one* view an Extortioner is as much a foe to the public and himself, as an enemy appearing in open arms, and in some sense more so; for while the  
other

other shows his intention, he is a more secret enemy knowing out the bowels under the mask of a friend; and therefore ought as much to be opposed.

5. The Extortioner is not only a foe to himself, his neighbour, and his country, but to his GOD. For he, who is such a friend of the world, is the enemy of GOD. He makes the world his God, and forsakes the fountain of living waters. Thus saith the text, *thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God*. But further, Extortioners may be said to forget God, in their violating several of his particular commands. For instance, their conduct is a breach of the sixth command, for that requires every lawful endeavour to preserve the lives of others as well as of our own. But they would destroy life, by distressing the poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless. "The curses of many ready to perish come upon them."

They violate the eighth command, which requires us to promote the wealth or outward estate of others. But they unrighteously take it from them, invert the command of the Apostle, and look every man on his own things, but not on the things of others.

Once more, they are transgressors of the tenth command, which forbids every species of covetousness, and manifest an unreasonable, avaricious desire after the wealth of others. Their covetous hearts knowing no bounds, like the horse-leach continually cry give, give. They are like greedy animals which can never have enough — They all look to their own way, every one for his gain — They covet greedily all the day long — yea also, as in the language of the prophet,  
they

*they enlarge their desire as hell, and as death, and cannot be satisfied.* Consequently, they are exposed to the displeasure, and judgments of God here, and to his wrath, and eternal indignation hereafter, for no Extortioneer shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So that let us view *extortion* in what light we please, we shall find it detestable in it's nature, and dreadful in it's consequences.

Thus we have considered something of the evil nature, and hurtful tendency of the sin of extortion, that foe to God and man, which has invaded the land, and with merciless, unrelenting fury, threatens destruction all around!

Internal oppression was not peculiar to the Jews—Mankind, under like circumstances, are generally the same—When opportunities have favored it, *others* have discovered the same disposition, and run into similar extremes, even the more enlightened age of the world, and the highest professing people not excepted, as the present times are a melancholy witness! This destroying evil has pervaded our borders, and it's increasing rapacity has become exceedingly calamitous! The threatening aspect calls upon every friend of God, of justice, mercy, and benevolence to arise, and exert every social faculty to stop it's progress—The voice of God, more especially, calls upon the ministers of Christ, in some measure, as Moses did upon the children of Israel, when they had made themselves naked with their idolatrous sins; *who is on the Lord's side? gird on every man his spiritual sword, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his sin, and pull down the iniquity that has sprung up among us.*

Christ's

Christ's ministers are set as centinels upon Jerusalem's walls, and are under indispensable obligations to warn the wicked of their danger. The solemn charge to Ezekiel, was in these words: *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness—he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.*—Son of man, I do send thee unto the house of Israel, for they have transgressed against me—And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words,—nor be dismayed at their looks—I do send thee—and thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.—The' Christ's ministers are not now commissioned in this extraordinary manner, yet their obligations to be faithful are as solemn, and as binding, as in the prophetic days.

Having this sufficient warrant, I shall endeavour, by the assistance of *him*, whose cause I am now pleading, to deliver my soul, and whether you will hear or forbear, plainly, and I hope faithfully, apply the subject. May the *fear* of GOD ever keep me from *that fear* of man, which *bringeth a snare*. And may that text be ever written upon my heart as with the point of a diamond. *Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully.*

From what has been said, we can be at no loss for the primary causes of the reigning sin of extortion at the present day. It obviously springs from

from that *love of money which is the root of all evil*—*which while some covet after they err from the faith, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.* That greediness of gain,—that insatiable lust after the world which induced *Iscaiot* to betray his Lord and Master, is no doubt an inducement with some to betray their country—and as it were, to sell their God.

But let us make some inquiry into the more external or secondary causes of this evil, which has occasioned such loud complaints; and which threatens us, at this critical period, with internal destruction.

The complaints in the country are chiefly levelled against the merchants, in the maritime towns,—that they have taken advantage of the times and laid extravagant prices on almost every article, which the necessities of the people have compelled them to purchase—. The country perceiving this, and knowing the trading towns could no more subsist without the produce of the lands, than they themselves without the wares of the merchant, immediately raised the price of almost every necessary of life, carried into the markets, as high as the general demand would admit them. This has occasioned an increase of extravagance on each side, till the conduct of both has become exceedingly oppressive. Taking matters as it were by the gross, and these will no doubt be acknowledged, as the more ostensible causes of the present extortion; if we judge of things according to the general complaints. But if we more critically examine the matter, we shall perhaps find, that this evil is not effected by any one cause alone, but by a number of accidental causes combined together—. May not these be the causes?

I shall not presume to be judge in the matter, or pretend to determine positively what are the causes, but only hint at some things by way of inquiry. Have not the scarcity of wares, and want of employ induced a number to become adventurers in foreign trade, the hazard now being extremely great, and the few comparatively who return with good voyages, have raised insurances so very high, besides all extra expences in manning and fitting out, & which every one knows must be much greater than before the war, that honest trading merchants have been necessitated to advance the prices of goods obtained at such a risk, and with such costs? Not to mention the losses they have sustained since the war, by the stagnation of trade, and otherwise, are not these reasons sufficient to justify them? The honest second hand dealer may be obliged to advance upon the prices of his goods, as his suppliers advance upon him, and yet compared with other times, and with other things in the present times his interest may really sink rather than gain. Now ought we not in justice to make great allowances for these things?

But have not others, who have sustained no such losses, nor run any such hazards, taken advantage of these things, and extorted in their demands for every article they had to dispose of, merely for the sake of private gain?

Are there not some, who, seeing the circumstances of the times gave them the opportunity, that peoples necessities would compel them to purchase at almost any rate, have not had virtue enough to withstand the temptation, but deaf to the voice of justice, reason and conscience, and dead to the feelings of benevolence and humanity, have carried their extortion to the greatest possible length!

Are

Are there not some others, who had large stocks on hand, for which some might be deeply indebted to merchants abroad, and had it not been for the present unhappy war, before this day might have entered the list of Bankrupts, who have extorted upon their goods, that they might enable themselves to purchase the West-India produce which has been wanted so plentifully into our ports, that they might keep the trade in their own hands, purposely to obtain what advances they pleased ?

Again, is it not a fact well known to many in the trading towns, that when foreigners have wished a trade with us, and offered their commodities for sale in our ports, at reasonable prices, that some of the larger trading merchants have purchased their whole cargoes, giving not only more than they need to have done, but even more than was demanded, with a view to keep up the value of the goods they had on hand ? So much have some valued their own interest above the good of the public

Are not such monopolizings and forestallings as these, the crime of Extortion of the blackest hue !

But if we revert our thoughts to the country, shall we not find the same avaricious disposition equally prevailing in most places, in proportion to the trade carried on, and as the circumstances of people give them an opportunity ? Does it not seem as if the whole country was contaminated with a spirit of selfishness ? Is there any other difference between the Merchant and the Farmer in this respect, than what arises from their different circumstances ? Altho' the merchants might have been first in this iniquity, yet have not the country people eagerly followed ; till both have become jealous of each other,



and seem as if resolved, in some instances, to outdo in Extortion!— From an impartial inquiry into these affairs, does it not appear probable, at least, that from such causes combined this destructive evil takes it's rise? And yet, how ready is every one to excuse himself from blame, and cast the fault upon others?—When perhaps, the greater part, if not all who are any ways concerned in trade, whether in Town or Country, are either in a greater or less degree promoters of this internal oppression, in addition to our other calamities. Does not the text therefore seem pertinent to our present circumstances, and apply as well to the Farmer, as to the Merchant, *thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by Extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God.*

Let us next consider who are the more immediate sufferers by this internal oppression. But this is easily discerned—. Neither the Merchant nor the Farmer, as individuals, for these are apparently gainers—and those who are employed in public business, many of them at least, the poor *soldiers* excepted, may find ways and means by their Salaries, Perquisites, or otherwise, to add as much to their private interests as to balance their own losses, if not more. None of these therefore are so sensibly affected by it, as others but all who depend alone upon fixed salaries, or their own private incomes, having no concern in trade, &c are immediate and heavy sufferers. Their interests are every day sinking, and their properties falling by the hand of extortion. In a word, every class of men, those in public employ or some trade or other excepted, are suffering under the iron hand of merciless *internal* Oppression. But the distresses of the *Poor* especially must be inexpressibly great. I do not mean of every  
kind

kind however, some of these doubtless know how to make advantage of the times, as well as other men, and for ought we know, may have as great a hand in Extortion, according to the sphere in which they act. It is with them, no doubt, as with some in higher rank, money never flowed in upon them so fast before in life — But what, my Friends, must become of the *Aged and Infirm*, the *Widow* and the *Orphan*? What will become of thousands, who before these difficulties were but one remove from pinching want? What can they subsist on now? Will not their complaints reach the Heavens, and bring down the judgments of God still heavier upon us? O where are those bowels of mercy, and compassion, which all the ties of nature, humanity, and religion bind us to exercise toward our fellow-creatures? Are we dead to every tender feeling, and benevolent affection? Are we sinking into that hardened state of the Jews, *when oppression was allowed up the needy, and made the poor of the land to fail*? Have we not reason to say with the Prophet, *we look for judgment, but there is none, for salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions are multiplied—, and our sins testify against us—.* *In transgressing and lying against the Lord, departing from the truth, speaking oppression and revolt— Judgment is turned away backward, justice standeth afar off; truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.*

While the Merchant complains of the Farmer, and the Farmer of the Merchant, are not both enriching themselves with the spoils of the poor? — But the Merchant perhaps will plead, that notwithstanding he has greatly advanced the prices of his wares, yet considering the circumstances of the times, the loss of trade, &c. he is not upon the whole a gainer by his traffick—. The Farmer may likewise plead, that the

the wares of the Merchant have risen more in proportion to former prices than the produce of the Farm, therefore notwithstanding the high demands he makes for all *his* vendible articles, yet upon the whole he is not a gainer——. Now if this be a fact, that both have enhanced the prices of your commodities, and yet neither gain any thing by it, you must be the more inexcusable still. for if this be the case, then you must certainly extort for the sake of oppression, even without a temptation! But this supposition will not readily be granted, therefore admitting that neither increase your real, or personal estates, by your present trade, yet it is presumed you still retain your interests by grinding the face of the poor. So that view the matter in what light you please, you cannot exculpate yourselves from blame. What a melancholy case is this? Will not these words of the Prophet apply to us, *the Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people — for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of Hosts. Are we not the generation, the wise man speaks of, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men?*

These are some of the evils that individuals suffer by the present Extortion—but if we consider it in a more public view, how greatly does it injure, and endanger the community? It affects the public in these several ways.

1. It discourages, and makes uneasy all those, who are oppressed, and has a natural tendency to create divisions, and destroy that harmony and union, in which the strength and happiness of societies greatly consist.

2. It

2. It enhances the prices of almost every Article; necessary for the public supply—for which there is now the greatest demand, and consequently, *amazingly* increases the public debt—. And here, if I mistake not, the Extortioner is a sinner against himself, for to discharge the load he must in time, at least refund a share of his unrighteous gain.

3 These things occasion the Emission of such floods of Paper-Currency, as necessarily depreciates its own value, and so much the more involves the public in difficulty. So that in fact, Extortion most rapidly increases the debt, depreciates the Currency, and sinks the credit of the public, and consequently is the greatest impolicy. And unless a speedy stop can be put to its progress, by some means or other, it will soon bring inevitable ruin upon the public, and render the increasing burthens of thousands quite intolerable! But where then is our boasted love for our country? Where our *patriotism*, and pretended zeal for the public good? Have not these been tipped about from tongue to tongue? Was all this feigned? or was it a dream or mere delusion? or was it a cloak to hide a spirit as selfish as ———— *man*? Were indifferent beings to view our conduct, what would they think of us? Were the false colourings, with which men paint their actions to be wiped off, and the mask fairly taken away, would not the high pretensions of *patriotism*, and zeal for the public good, of multitudes appear to be little more than ambition and hypocrisy? Instead of love and zeal for our country, would not craft, avarice, and self interest immediately be thrown to view? Instead of honesty, purity of heart, and benevolence, should we not see partiality, corruption, infidelity, and Extortion of the vilest kind, stalking thro' the land?

But

But if we consider the matter in a more religious view, how calamitous and threatening is the present aspect of the times? Can there be a more certain evidence of the decay of religion, and the increase of impiety, than the present internal oppression? It looks, in short, as if God had in some degree forsaken us. It is certain, so far as this iniquity prevails, we have forsaken him. The Almighty detests this abomination, and considers it as a reproach against himself: for *he that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his maker: but he that honoreth him, hath mercy on the poor.* Have we not reason to tremble at the threatenings once denounced against Jerusalem for like sins? *Cast a mount about her, saith the Lord of hosts, this is the city to be visited, she is wholly oppression in the midst of her. As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness. violence and spoil is heard in her, before me continually is grief and wounds. Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.* Jerusalem would not hear the voice of the Lord and that great city, once the glory of the world, is no more! O that we might be wise enough to shun the rocks, which others have split against, lest we share the same fate!— But what can the Extortioner expect? Nay, what can he pray for? Let his professions be what they may, to be consistent with himself, his prayer, if ever he does pray, must be something like this.

“ O thou, Sovran Lord of the universe, accept  
 “ of a tribute of thanks from thy *professing, worthy*  
 “ *servant*, who rejoices, that thou hast permitted  
 “ those public calamities, which have given so happy  
 “ an opportunity for the exercise of my unbounded,  
 “ avaricious lusts. I congratulate myself at what I  
 “ have already accumulated by extorting from others  
 “ May

" May my merchandize still prosper, or my husbandry increase but may *scarcity* and *wint* still be the fate of my country, and more and more abound. May the time speedily come, when I shall be able to *buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes*. May all my countrymen be brought low, and I be made Lord over them — O satiate my ambitious, avaricious desires, which are all as unbounded as the Ocean—and give me, if possible to live always but if this may not be granted, tho' I cannot bear the thought of ever dying, and deprecate the horrible idea of parting with my possessions, yet when I can enjoy my earthly paradise no longer, then give me the largest portion in the paradise above."

How shocking to a pious mind would it be, to hear a man in earnest, address his maker thus ' yet I dare appeal to the Extortioner's own conscience, if he has any, if this does not correspond with his real desires ? The essence of prayer consists in the real desires of the heart. Let a man express what he will in words, his real prayer is only what he wishes.

But are Merchants, Traders, and Farmers the only set of men concerned in our internal oppression ? At the time when the Prophet addressed the Jews in the text, every order of men among them, each in their own way, whether Priests, Rulers, or People, apparently acted from sinister motives, and were promoters of their own calamities, by oppression. Some individuals indeed might have had the fear of God before them but this number compared

D

with

with the whole was doubtless small. but taken collectively, every order among them either in a greater or less degree were culpable. *From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one was given to covetousness.*

But is this the case with every denomination among us? are we all gone out of the way? Has a selfish, ambitious, avaricious spirit diffused its baneful influences thro' our land? Do the clergy grow inattentive to the vices of men, and less zealous for the Lord of hosts? have they sufficiently sounded the alarm and as loudly exclaimed against our own sins as the sins of others? have they been as watchful against internal oppression, which is the greater evil, as against oppression from abroad? *Do they daub with untempered mortar, healing the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, saying peace, peace, when there is no peace?—and do the people love to have it so? Are our rulers tinged with the same disposition? Are our Politicians bending their wits, and racking their inventions, to exalt themselves? Are our Statesmen practising every species of State-Craft, to promote self interest and self honour?—* Have appointments, both in the civil and military departments, been under the influence of sinister views?—has the promotion of Friends and Connection been more attended to, than the public good?—Have many disgraced their Country, and the office they sustained, while others, who would have done honour to both, have been wholly neglected? Are those, who are employed in public business, too much actuated by the same spirit? *In a word are avarice, ambition, and selfishness, combined*

bined together, become the governing Principle of the Times? I mean only to put individuals upon self inquiry. I mean not to cast the least reflection upon any order of men whatever nor would I willingly say a word to stir up any groundless surmises. For I revere the true Patriot, the Friend to his Country, and the Liberator of mankind: but detest the man, called by whatever name, 'who owes his greatness to his country's ruin' But altho' I mean not to charge this crime of Extortion and Oppression upon every man, yet does not the complexion of the times urge us to these inquiries? If these things be true of us, what a *deplorable* situation are we in! Our circumstances urgently request a mournful tear, from every pitying eye, over ourselves, and our Country! Without a speedy reformation, how soon will the lamentation, of our all benevolent Savior over Jerusalem, with a little variation, apply to us! *O New-England, New-England, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.*

But let us search our own hearts; examine our own practices; and apply the subject more closely to ourselves. Have we not *followed the multitude to do evil*, and greedily gained of our neighbours by Extortion, distressing individuals, and damaging the public? I would not be understood to suggest that the people are worse here, than in other places: I have no reason to think they are. Nor would I have a word, said in this discourse, understood as intended to



convey the least personal complaint, my Hearers, against you—justice and gratitude require the contrary, having experienced much of your kindness and liberality, ever since I have had the happiness to live among you: a grateful sense of which, may I always retain upon my heart.

But, my Friends, does not extortion abound here as well as in other places? Who can say, I have washed my hands in Innocence, and am free from this sin of the times? Have we not more or less of the same disposition in each of our hearts? I presume not to clear myself, tho' God has indeed, in his wise and *merciful* Providence, placed me in a situation, where I am not tried with the temptation to exercise it. But should the case ever be otherwise, I humbly pray, and I ask your prayers for me, that I may be kept from so great an evil. If *we* are concerned in this abhorred sin, let us now pause a moment, and reflect what an awful thing it is for us to bring such guilt upon ourselves, and upon the land!—Let me intreat you by every bowel of mercy, and benevolent passion, to consider what you do!—This life, with all its most pleasurable enjoyments, is but a vapour and gain, greedily gotten by extortion, is but a treasure of guilt and misery to accompany you into the eternal world! Will you take so much pains, and seeming pleasure in *that* which must cost you the keenest, and most bitter repentance in this life, or else produce a great degree of guilt and anguish to torture you in a world to come! For *the Lord hath spoken it, and will not go back;—nor covetous—nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of GOD.*

But

But you will plead perhaps, that the Merchants began first, and therefore you are not to blame. But will this excuse you? So Eve was first in the transgression, but did that excuse Adam, who willingly followed? Will you like him, follow others in iniquity, and plunge yourselves into the same guilt and misery, and then as he did cast all the blame on others? rather than virtuously stand alone? Perhaps, self-interest has so biased, and prejudiced your minds, that you do not discern this evil in yourselves, tho' you may see it in others. And some may argue, that as they are obliged to pay exorbitant prices for what they purchase, there is no iniquity in asking the like for what they sell. But while there are more purchasers than venders, this way of reasoning must be forever unjust. And if it made as much against your present interest as it does for it, would you not readily see it? Let us suppose a case. What if the public authority should encourage the extravagant demands of the Merchants, and at the same time, force your commodities from you at the former usual prices? would you not see the injustice of this? would you suffer it? would not every mouth be filled with the cry of oppression? and every exertion be made to suppress it? Equal injustice is now practised by the Merchant and Farmer both, and yet you do not feel it, or, if sensible of it, do not reform.

One peculiar aggravation attends this sin. If those who are guilty of it, should at last be so happy, as to find repentance and forgiveness, yet from it's very nature, it will not admit of restitution. How cutting the reflection of a *penitent* just going into eternity,

eternity, that he cannot right the injuries of the multitude he has wronged by his extortion !

But however willing we are to excuse ourselves from blame, do we not see this sin in others, and professedly abhor it ? Are we not then in danger of being numbered with those the Apostle speaks of, *who knowing the judgments of GOD, that they who commit such things are worthy of punishment, and yet do the same ?*

But you will say perhaps, we are not insensible of the evil, we acknowledge we have been faulty, —but here we are——. How shall we go back ? or by what means shall we stop it's course ? What will it avail for one to attempt it alone ? His conduct will not influence the whole. The consequence of the attempt, would be his *own* ruin, without effecting any good. Each one may therefore say, it is not my duty to make the trial. If others would reform, so would I—. This is as much as to say, when a sin is become general, it is no sin in an individual to practise it, or that it is no sin to *follow a multitude to do evil*. But what says our blessed Savior ? *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* And he that does not comparatively even hate every worldly comfort, and is willing to forego them *all* for the sake of his duty to God, and his fellow creatures, cannot be Christ's disciple. The meaning is, that whenever our Duty and temporal Interest become competitors, the latter must give way to the former. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own Soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange*

*exchange for his Soul?* The benevolent Jesus gave up even life itself to redeem us. And yet we are unwilling to give up a little of our worldly interest to redeem our brethren and country from distress. But we *must* deny ourselves. The voice of reason and conscience, revelation and justice, the cries of the poor, and groans of our bleeding Country all require it! And now, my Friends, you have an opportunity to try your virtue. On the one hand, you have temporal interest strongly inviting you to comply with the Exorbitancy of the times, on the other, duty to God, compassion for the poor, regard for justice, and love for your country, all urging you to desist. And now which will you do? Still follow after the *mammon of unrighteousness*, forsake your God, devour the poor, and destroy your country, or nobly display your virtue, by every exertion, to suppress extortion, and put a stop to the increasing calamities in the land? And even reduce yourselves to that state of poverty and want, which many, either do or will suffer, whom you may have oppressed, rather than violate your duty or deal unjustly with your fellow men. Or, regardless of all these benevolent motives, will you like the young man in the gospel, *go away sorrowful?*

But the question still returns, tho' we are all sensible of the evil, yet how shall a reformation be effected? What can one do alone? It may be replied, if you are all sensible of this, you are not alone. Unite therefore in your exertions, fixing it in your minds, that there must be a reformation, or else we are an undone people. *For all the law, saith the Apo<sup>st</sup>le, is fulfilled in one word, even this, Thou shalt love*

*love thy neighbour as thy self* But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. But do you say, it is a *difficult thing* to bring about a reformation? and ask how it shall be effected? Let me ask how you came into this way? Did you find *that* a *difficult* thing? Have not many taken pains to find out the highest pitch of exorbitancy, lest they should not have an equal hand in it? Are there not many to their shame, and remorse of their own consciences, were they not *seared as with a hot iron*, who have hoarded up their goods, and withheld supplies even from the necessitous, purposely to extort upon them!—Were half the pains taken, and desires manifested to effect a reformation, would it not be done? Inquire therefore how this extortion arose, and go back the same way.

But you will say perhaps, the evil is now become general, and consequently a stop cannot be put to it, unless the whole are agreed.

It is become too general, we grant, and therefore the more calamitous! But how came this to be so? Was it not produced by the influence of individuals? All public sins become general in the same way.—A total declension never took place in an instant. These evils begin first with a few individuals—and by their influence diffuse themselves, and become general by degrees.—So it is with reformation: they have always began with individuals. If a reformation was not to commence, without the concurrent voice of the community, we might despair of it forever. If there is any such thing as reasoning from  
Analogy;

Analogy, we can in this way have no reason ever to expect it. To reform a community is for individuals to begin, and act with all the influence they have. "Such is our state," as one observes, "that each individual has a proportion of influence on some neighbour at least; he on another, and so on, as in a river the following drop urges that which is before; and every one through the whole length of the stream, has the like influence. We know not what individuals may do. We are not at liberty to lie dormant until we can at once influence the whole. We must begin with the weight we have. Should the little springs neglected to flow till a general agreement should take place, the torrent that now bears down all before it, would never be formed. These mighty floods have their rise in single drops from the rocks, which uniting creep along till they meet with another combination so small that it might be absorbed by the traveller's foot. These unite, proceed and enlarge 'till mountains tremble at their sound! Let us receive instruction from the stream." You know not therefore what you may do till you make the experiment. If you would exert yourselves, unite, combine, exclaim against the abhorred evil, and manifest your detestation of it by your own example, who can tell what effect it might have? Should you, with a single eye to the honor of God, the happiness of your fellow-creatures, and good of your country, nobly resolve by divine grace to lose all, suffer every thing, and even become beggars, rather than follow the multitude in sin, who knows but thro' your influence a general reformation might take place? And what a glorious thing would that be! You would no doubt be the happier for it to

all eternity! Should you be unsuccessful in the attempt, yet still remember it is inexpressibly better to be singularly virtuous, than fashionably vile, and infinitely more glorious to stand alone in a good cause with a conscience *unspotted from the world*, than to follow the current of vice, with numberless millions for our companions. The testimony of a good conscience in death, will be infinitely preferable to thousands of worlds like this. It will be but a poor consolation in the regions of despair, that we did but follow the multitude. As the damned are no doubt tormentors of one another, so the more companions there in misery the greater will be the sufferings. Dives in Hell deprecated his brethren's coming there, no doubt, lest his own misery should be increased. Be entreated then to take this matter into your serious consideration, as we must all answer for our conduct at the bar of GOD another day!

It is said, the public Authority have taken the matter under their considerations. What will be the result of their deliberations and debates upon it we know not.\* Perhaps they will effect more, than  
by

\* Since the above discourse was delivered, the General Court have passed an act, regulating all capital articles of trade, and produce of the country, which, tho' it cannot alter the disposition of the people, yet if strictly observed, must put a check upon the ruinous avarice, and extortion of the times — It affords us a melancholy reflection, that our degeneracy has become so exceedingly great, within the space of two years, as to require such an extraordinary measure! Nothing but dire necessity, we may presume, would induce the Court to make the attempt.

The operation of this act will, perhaps, for the present, affect the private interest of some individuals. But notwithstanding  
this,

by many is expected. It doubtless behooves them, I speak with freedom, and boldness, to mark out the peoples duty by their own Example And does it not equally become the Ministers of the Gospel, Merchants, Traders, Farmers, and every other denomination of men, to rouse up, and exert themselves to the utmost, in their particular spheres, to stop the growing evil, which threatens destruction to our country? But whatever others may do, let us resolve, thro' Christ, whatever may be the consequence, that we *will serve the Lord* Let whatever will await us here, let us thro' the Redeemer secure an interest in a *better country, even an heavenly one.*

But perhaps all that has been said will have little or no effect. Our public virtue and true concern for our country may be so weak, our affections and charity so cold; and our temptations, and passion for the world so strong and urgent, that after all the warnings we have had, we shall still perhaps continue

this, whoever considers the difficulty of framing such a bill, and at the same time, the absolute necessity of it, under our present circumstances, if a friend to justice, his neighbour, and his country, can he do less than exert himself to the utmost to carry it into execution? As few exceptions perhaps can be taken against it, as against any bill of such a nature, that might be formed.

Can the generous soul, the christian, the friend of man, and lover of his country, be so destitute of public virtue, so selfish, contracted, and unjust, as to see his neighbour devoured, the poor of the land fail, and his country sink in ruin, rather than forego a little of his own private interest to prevent such amazing calamities! Charity forbids the thought! —



in the same course, as did the Jews, till involved in compleat destruction!

But *whether you will hear, or forbear, God commands his Ministers to cry aloud, and not spare to show his people their transgressions.* I am commissioned in the service of Christ; and ye are witnesses, that I am sworn to be faithful. Therefore, while I have a finger to write, or tongue to speak, *Christ Jesus strengthening me, I will speak, declare, and bear testimony against the abominations of the land.*

I therefore again urge your attention to this important affair. The cause I am pleading is the cause of GOD, and my country, the cause of the poor and oppressed. I am this day an advocate for the poor, the widow, and the fatherless. My heart akes for the distressed! I tremble for my Country! and for all of you, my Hearers, who are involved in the general guilt! O my dearly beloved flock, for whose souls I am to watch, as one that must give an account, be intreated, by the tender mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ, to come out from among the sins, and abominations of the times, of every denomination. Methinks, the voice of God to you is, *come out, my people, from among them, and be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. Come out from among them,—be no longer partaker of their sins, lest ye be partaker of their plagues!* I therefore again beseech your attention to this matter: and urge you, by every bond of christianity, equity and justice—by every tender feeling of humanity, and compassion for the poor, and by every tie of love and friendship to your country to desist  
from

from extortion, and oppression of every kind! Let the expressive threatening and encouraging language of the sacred scriptures, deter you from this evil;—*For he that by unjust gain increaseth his substance, shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.—Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house,—that he may be delivered from the power of evil.—He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, shall surely come to want.—For the oppression of the poor, and the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord.—And I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless.—But he that despiseth the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ear from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing of evil. He shall dwell on high. his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks, bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure.*

I would once more urge your most speedy and vigorous efforts to suppress the growing calamity, from a consideration of the goodness, and mercy of God toward us thro' the course of the last year, as we would wish for a more happy one in the ensuing. The favor of God hath been extended towards us in numberless instances. Have we not been carried thro' another calamitous year, and still live to praise him, while thousands, who lived the last New-Year's Day are no more! What is the language of divine goodness in this? Is it not expressed in these words of our Savior? *This is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you.* But where is our love if we bite and devour

devour one another? Great and important events are before us, which, as some imagine, will in a great measure determine our public controversy, either for or against us before the year closes, upon which we have this day entered. Who of us may live to see it, God alone knows! O let us suffer the things then, which have been suggested, deeply to impress, and affect our minds, as we would hope for the smiles of Providence upon us, and our land. O may every one, who has a heart to pray, most devoutly solicit the throne of grace, that God, for Christ's sake, would pour out a spirit of reformation upon us, and upon our land. For, according to all human probabilities, unless this takes place, we are a devoted, undone people! Should the time come, in which we shall all see it, then I trust you will be witnesses for me, that in this particular, I am free from the blood of my Country, and of your Souls.

A M E N.

---