

1873

Mr. *STRONG*'s

S E R M O N.

The Reasons and Design of public Punishments;

A

S E R M O N,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE PEOPLE WHO WERE COLLECTED TO THE

E X E C U T I O N

OF

M O S E S D U N B A R,

Who was condemned for HIGH TREASON against the STATE
of CONNECTICUT, and executed MARCH 19th, A. D. 1777.

By NATHAN STRONG,

Pastor of the first CHURCH in HARTFORD.

Bloody and deceitful Men shall not live out half their Days.

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The Reasons and Design of public Punishments.

I T I M O T H Y, v. 20.

*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also
may fear.*

THE occasion of our being collected to worship God is one of the most solemn that can be conceived. This day is appointed to close the life of an unhappy person, who is condemned for conspiring against his country and all its privileges. He hath been judged by men in righteousness, the sentence of death pronounced, the day of execution come; an event indeed awful, and affecting to every mind of humanity or religion. Though justice to our country and reverence for its laws, forbids any thing that would impede a full execution of them; there is room for prayer to ALMIGHTY GOD that this days business may be blessed for our good, and that the unhappy criminal may receive the forgiveness of his sins from God, though he cannot have forgiveness from the State, consistent with public safety.

For reasons, we must in charity hope, honest to himself, he refuses to be present at this solemnity; my discourse therefore will not be calculated, as hath been usual on such occasions, for a dying creature who is to appear immediately before the GREAT
JUDGE:

JUDGE : but to assist my hearers in making an improvement of the event, for their own benefit.

THE text from which I discourse, is a direction of the apostle Paul to Timothy, for executing his ministerial power with dignity ; and for conducting the punishments that should be inflicted on offenders, in such manner, that all might derive benefit from them. Them, who sin so as to make punishment necessary, rebuke before all, that others may be deterred when they see the danger of transgression---the infamy and misery in which the disobedient are finally involved.

THIS sacred precept, though written originally to direct the church in its proceedings against offenders, may be applied with equal propriety to civil government. Several reasons for the punishment of transgression are the same, both in the church of CHRIST, and in the civil state ; and there are the same reasons that it should be publicly inflicted---that others may fear and be guarded against temptation. If all men had faith in the perfections and government of JEHOVAH, and loved him with christian affection, there would be no disposition to do unreasonable things ; no other principles of obedience, would be necessary to maintain good order, holiness and virtue. That all men have not faith, are not disposed to live peaceably and justly, we know from the word of God, and from daily experience---Such is the degeneracy of human nature, that we need every motive which can be adduced in favor of virtue---every principle and passion of the soul, must be skilfully addressed to promote an habitual abhorrence of these things, which the LORD hateth on account of their unreasonableness---of the dishonor they bring on his laws and government---and the damage done to mankind.

THE event which calls us together is an awful and affecting demonstration, of the danger of sin---a warning to hold our passions and appetites in constant subjection to reason---to cultivate fixed prin-

principles of honesty, justice and benevolence--to be conscientiously strict in obeying the laws of God, and our country.

PERMIT me to consider the following points.

THE reasons why it is necessary sin should be publicly rebuked and punished by civil government.----The infamy and misery which the wicked bring on themselves in this world, by transgressing the good laws of God and man.----The importance of being constantly guarded, lest inadvertently we plunge into destruction.

I AM first to consider some reasons, why it is necessary that sin should be publicly punished by civil government. The most important are, the glory of God---the safety of mankind---and that others may be deterred from wickedness by the example.---Each of these considerations warrant the severity of human laws against iniquity.

NATURAL religion and christianity require us visibly to exalt and glorify the MOST HIGH by all possible means. This duty is equally incumbent on individuals, and on public societies; for both are preserved by his providence, and under solemn obligations in their proper character to dignify his name and government, reverence his laws, and exert their whole influence for the support of virtue. In the holy scriptures, God often addresses civil societies in their national character---reproves their vices---points out their danger---and promises public blessings as a reward of visible morality, and of care to celebrate the honor of his name, and obedience to his laws.

GOVERNMENT is a divine institution, equally designed to encourage those virtues God commands; as to support the temporal interests of mankind. The particular mode is left to be determined by human wisdom; but the institution is divine.

RULERS and judges of nations are called the ministers of God,
for

for good unto men ; and if ministers of GOD ALMIGHTY, certainly bound to consult his visible glory. How can nations, their rulers and laws pay any respect unto the DEITY, unless they encourage morality, and publicly punish the iniquities he hath prohibited ? Is it not a part of national holiness to frown on visible sin, and chastise the transactions, which dishonor him by whom States are preserved or destroyed ? Doth not gratitude to the glorious preserver of empires direct, that the ungodly and unrighteous should be punished, and the friends of religion, good order and their country protected by its power. I have sometimes heard the idea of national obligations to promote God's visible honor derided ; but if it is not thus, can conceive of no reasons why mankind are addressed, warned, threatned and encouraged in that character.

THE safety of mankind, is a second reason, why sin should be punished by the power of the State.

THE law of self-preservation implanted in the mind by its creator, many times obliges societies to exercise severity for their own defence. All men are sinful, and some so horridly wicked ---so much influenced by covetousness, envy and malice---so destitute of honesty and justice, humanity and benevolence---so cruel to their neighbours and their country, as not to hesitate at any thing which will promote a temporary interest of their own, whatever misery may be brought thereby on others. Every wicked person is an enemy to God and man---inclined to gratify himself at the expence of their rights, prerogatives and existence. Every sinful disposition---all the practices of iniquity, in their nature imply danger to mankind---are pointed against the peace, privileges, and dearest interests of the world ; so that self-preservation, were there no other reasons, should induce States to discourage sin by punishment.

WERE there time for a particular enquiry, it might easily be
made

made evident that the dispositions, passions and practices, which are denominated sinful, are in their nature hostile to ALMIGHTY God, and to existence generally. Hence the safety of mankind requires, that punishment should be inflicted on those, who will not be restrained by mildness from injuring their fellow-men. Is it not reasonable-- is it not just, that those who have not the fear of God, who are not restrained by their own consciences, should be obliged by punishment to consider sin immediately dangerous to themselves? Is it not proper that those, who by their actions shew a fixed design against society---a desire to involve it in the most awful calamities, death or what is worse, the torments of slavery; should be cut off from the earth, and thereby prevented an opportunity of executing the intended mischief. The revealed law of God warrants this proceeding, and enjoins on civil states the preservation of their interests, liberties and existence, when it cannot be done otherwise, by cutting off the offenders from among men. If there were need of justifying the divine law, it might easily be done from the experience of ages and history of the whole world. Human nature hath always been found such---that where law and government so far lost their energy, as not to be able to punish offenders; a numerous swarm of unjust persons, murderers, assassins and tyrants have immediately appeared to indulge their lust and satiate their cruelty in the blood of innocence. This leads us to

A THIRD reason, why punishment should be publicly inflicted on the wicked---that others may see and fear. This principle hath mighty influence in preserving that regularity, good order, honesty and justice which subsists among mankind. I do not wish to calumniate human nature, or represent it more wicked, than it really is; but is it not probable---is it not certain, that if the restraint of fear were wholly taken off the world would exhibit a scene of confusion, of cruelty, of hellish wickedness unparelled by all descriptions that have been given. Have we not, my christ-

rian hearers, often felt ourselves restrained by this principle ? Should we not have done many more evil things, had not fear of men's indignation prevented ? Sometimes we have feared the loss of reputation---sometimes of interest---sometimes the more awful punishments inflicted by public justice. Even those who generally appear to be honest, well-meaning persons, are at certain times so much influenced by passion and appetite; that they would commit horrid evils, were they not restrained by fear of the consequences. For this reason it hath always been esteemed proper, that punishments should be inflicted in the most public manner possible---they are a warning, a solemn lecture to all who see and hear them, and speak with the greatest energy, "*watch* "*and pray, lest ye enter into temptation,*" and commit those evils which men must punish in this world for their own safety, and GOD ALMIGHTY is the other for the glory of his justice.

WE will proceed to the second branch of discourse. The infamy and misery which the wicked bring on themselves in this world, by transgressing the good laws of God and man.

EVERY violation of the divine law, and the righteous laws of society is a moral evil---an abuse of reason; and is intimately connected with such natural evils and miseries, as are dreadful to be endured. Were we to be influenced by no motives but the peace and happiness of this world, we ought to be holy and virtuous in all our conduct---temperate in our indulgencies---just, honest, faithful and benevolent in all connections with individuals and our country. All kinds of transgression, which can be mentioned, draw after them a horrid train of miseries, sufficient to terrify the boldest mind, when they are realized and felt. Iniquity hath often a gaudy covering, which glitters at a distance and deceives the unwary into an opinion real happiness is there --- walk with it---embrace it---bring it home to the bosom, and it is death. Sin is only another name for misery. So God's holy word hath warned us, so experience hath taught from the beginning of days, yet

yet *fools indeed!* we seek its indulgencies, and court its gains, at the expence of life. The apostle mentions three principal idols, to which the wicked sacrifice, *sensuality, covetousness* and *ambition*. Their votaries, instead of finding the expected happiness, plunge themselves into *misery, loss* and *infamy*.

WHAT be the natural consequences of indulging the animal affections and appetites, in wantonness and sensuality? Do they not produce pain and woe---a crazy body, loaded with ill-humours, tormented with anxiety, and thick sown with the seeds of death---a constitution bending over the grave at an untimely age by the weight of iniquity. What be the fruits of falsehood, fraud, injustice and cruelty? Should they be secreted from mankind in general, which is impossible to be done any considerable time; yet they deprive the mind of that peace and serenity, which is better than life---they create a guilty accuser within, from which it is impossible to flee: and when detected by the world, character and the confidence of others is forever lost.

WHEREVER the guilty person goes, he is esteemed dangerous---in whatever character he acts, contemptible---in whatever business engaged, jealousy watches him, detects his baseness, and should he chance to do an honest action, brands it with a false construction. Every one judges him designing some mischief, plotting some base, unrighteous advantage to himself, by the spoil of his neighbours, and destruction of his country. How awful the situation! to be esteemed an enemy to mankind, and treated with that mortifying cautiousness, which is used when dealing with one esteemed to be a dishonest and wicked person.

This infamy, and ill opinion which we are obliged to entertain of the person, who deals in fraud, injustice and cruelty, is an evil greatly to be dreaded---to be cut off from the confidence of mankind, excluded the social delights of virtue, and justly marked out an enemy to our neighbours and our country is bitter as death.

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THE unhappiness is still more encreased by a consciousness, which every such person must have unless given up by God to singular impenitence, that he merits all the odium thrown upon him. *The feelings of guilt are a death to the mind.* Cain described them truly, "*every one that findeth me, shall slay me.*" Whatever be the crime, there is something of this nature in all guilty feelings.

THESE consequences, loss of health, of reputation, of the friendship of mankind, of sacred social pleasures, of public confidence, of peace in our minds, naturally flow from indulging the appetites, and violating the just laws of God and our country. Are they not sufficient to deter every person from meddling with the mysteries of iniquity; and *the greater half* of its danger remains yet untold. Frequently it arrests life cuts short the time of probation and introduces to the just condemnation of God. *The Almighty shall bring the wicked down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.* Vengeance cannot sleep---they are either destroyed by the immediate act of God, to glorify his name and vindicate his justice; or men are reduced to the horrid necessity of cutting them off from the earth, for their own preservation. When those crimes are committed, which strike at public life, the sacred law of self-preservation commands the guilty name to be erased from among the people.

THOUGH only a few crimes are made capital by the laws of the land, we should esteem every sin tending to the same awful fate---vices through all their gradations are intimately connected --- Such as knowingly indulge themselves in smaller faults, have reason to fear the habit of iniquity will grow irresistible---that God will permit them to do some great evil, which the justice of men must punish in the last and most awful manner. How many, who have come to an untimely end by the hand of public justice, in the last moments of their shame, have lamented the beginnings of vice, and dated their destruction from guilty practices

tices common among men---they began the fatal race no more wicked than their coteremporaries, but were permitted by God to indulge a sinful heart, and execute purposes which end in the most public infamy and death. The present days business is a warning to all, to such particularly as indulge themselves in known sin, to break off iniquity by repentance; lest God ALMIGHTY should determine in anger to withdraw his restraint, and leave them to commit those atrocious deeds which public justice must avenge.

SUFFER me in the *third place*, to say a few words on the importance of being *constantly* guarded against sin.

WE have briefly viewed the horrid calamities transgressors bring on themselves by sinful indulgence---the loss of every desirable blessing, and many times of life itself. Will not he who is wise be guarded against temptation? As we regard ourselves; as we regard every thing that can be dear to a rational being, we should take every step with caution, and rush into no course without previous examination whether or not it be forbidden.

Two reasons require us to keep a constant guard---there are many tempters ready to throw in the fatal insinuation, when danger is least suspected---and our own sinful passions are easily enkindled.

FIRST. None are free from the influence of seducing spirits, who watch with infernal art to catch the unguarded moment---the chosen opportunity of destroying. From those who resist satan will flee; but the incautious and secure he will follow with temptation, until their infamy and destruction is sealed. Added to the influence of evil spirits, there is the designing policy of wicked men, who take pleasure in propagating calamity and seducing the unwary into the paths of destruction.

UNGODLY men, who mean to destroy, frequently make their approaches with an appearance of much friendship, and *betray us*
to

to death with a kiss, as Judas did the Son of God. On happening into the company of those, who profess veneration ; but remotely insinuate against the good laws of God or men, we should immediately set a double guard---dwell on the danger---and not give up a single moment to carelessness, for a moment may be fatal. *Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation,* is a most excellent maxim for preservation, and singularly necessary in a day of public calamity, when the State is in so critical a situation, that the dishonesty and bad example of a few persons may shake its foundation.

THE depraved principles and passions of human nature, which are easily excited, is a *second reason* why we should be constantly guarded against sin.

OUR passions, like the most combustible matter, may instantaneously kindle at the touch of a single spark---our appetites which are hushed into moderation one hour, may the next be fierce and victorious over reason, interest, duty, and every sacred obligation. Danger carried in our own breasts, is doubly great. There is no moment, in which a wise person who knows himself will say, I am safe from falling by the corruption of my own nature.

“ Say not, my brethren, when ye are tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. For every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” O how awful the death ! both of body and spirit -language looses its energy in describing things so awful. Glory to God ! who is able to deliver---Let us pray him to save us from the temptation of our own hearts---to give us christian repentance, love and faith in his Son, that our sins may be forgiven---that by the energy of his good spirit he would enable us to purify ourselves, even as he is pure,

I WILL

I WILL conclude with some observations suggested by the occasion of the day.

1st. It learns us to love and revere our country, to obey its laws, to devote ourselves to its service, and abhor every practice which hath any tendency to increase the public calamities. Had the unhappy person who is soon to be executed done this ; he might now have been prosperous, beloved and respected---as fair a candidate for long life, as any person in this great assembly. Now he is covered with infamy, bound in chains, surrounded with the instruments of horror and *death*. From his fate let us learn the danger of encouraging a traterous disposition, and secretly attempting practices against our country ; the mercy of men cannot pardon them, for darkness will not cover them, hell will not hide them. Our country, its privileges and laws are sacred---they guard our peace, our interest and lives---being enacted in a public manner, with the free consent of the people, they become *ordinances of God* ; and the transgressor offends against *Heaven and earth*. Our liberties and free constitution, are the patrimony which GOD ALMIGHTY hath given to every individual in the community ; and is not that a cruel sinner who would defraud his brethren of Heaven's sacred and invaluable gift ? and this may be done many ways---by open force and private artifice---not only by throwing off the mask and joining our enemies in the face of day ; but by fomenting internal division ; by insinuations against those who stand foremost in the civil and military departments ; by destroying public credit ; by impeding good government and the measures of defence ; by violating our own laws enacted for the most salutary purposes ; by every kind of dishonesty, fraud and injustice, which dissolves that harmony which is the beauty and strength of society.

It is unhappy that so many are insensible of the veneration and punctual obedience due to the laws of the land. That people are not far from destruction, who disobey the public acts of their
own

own government--who endeavor artfully to elude the institutions of their own legislature--who think themselves better judges of safety, and the means of preservation than the collected wisdom of the whole---who are generally become so avaricious as to prefer the smallest interests of their own, to the most capital and sacred interests of the State. A nation generally of this complexion, are the most miserable on earth, are prepared for destruction and deserve all its horrors--destruction not only by a foreign enemy, but by themselves, by the hands of their brethren. I ardently wish there were no appearance of this nature among us. It is known, and cannot be secreted; that many prefer a *sordid gain* to the salvation of their *country*, and would *damn an empire to share a penny*. I would not confine the charge of avarice to any particular character or class of men; for such as till the field, and those who barter the commodities of nations are equally infected. Let such persons whatever their character may be in life; or however sacred or safe they may esteem themselves, be warned by the proceedings of this day and do no more so wickedly. Their principles are the same, and their practices almost as dangerous, as those which condemned the unhappy person who must die this day. The particular way in which a wicked man betrays his country, is but a circumstance; the design of his heart, and the horrid effects of his practices, furnish a true rule to determine his guilt. Is there not reason to think, that those who knowingly injure the State by fraud, avarice and oppression, would plunge their swords into its bowels, if they had courage to face danger? Those people have reason to fear, that a righteous God provoked by their dishonesty, will leave them to be tempted, and commit those political sins which must be punished by the halter and the gallows. My brethren, let us learn to love and venerate our country, to obey the laws, honor the constitution, and despise all those who are wickedly undermining the privileges of mankind.

Let us be prepared to bleed in defence of our selves, our friends
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and families, should it be the will of God to call us thereto. We profess to be christians; Can a christian, can one who imitates the temper and manners of the Son of God, with servitude and the horrors of slavery to any creature on earth? Love to mankind, their happiness and liberties, is essential to the religion of Jesus. He died to purchase present and future liberty for men; and we cannot with any propriety call ourselves after his name, unless we are benevolent, love the peace and happiness of others, and promote their good by all honesty and justice.

2dly. THE melancholy spectacle which is soon to be exhibited, hath drawn together a vast concourse of people, who are doubtless influenced by various motives to be spectators of so awful a scene. Some by true seriousness, and many to gratify a vain curiosity. Curiosity is but a poor motive for collecting on such an occasion---the person who can go and look on death, merely to gratify an idle humour, is destitute both of humanity and piety.

SUCH awful exhibitions are designed that others may see and fear.---Go not to that place of horror with elevated spirits, and gay hearts, for death is there! justice and judgment are there! the power of government, displayed in its most awful form, is there.

ONE reason why it is necessary the unhappy person should thus die, is that others may be fortified against temptation by the spectacle of horror, and the bitter consequences of transgression. When you look thereon, learn the venerableness of the state and of civil government---the sacred nature of those laws made to protect liberty and property, and our obligations to obedience---learn that sin is punished by infamy, distress and death---that the man who injures his country, and will not be restrained by considerations of duty, justice and gratitude, must be cut off from the earth that others may be safe---remember that lesser sins, though they are not made capital by the laws of the State, lead directly towards the same untimely end.

ABOVE all things, learn that we must all die. Though we may hope to escape the same circumstances and manner of death; the change in one form or another is certain. Realize the importance of being prepared to leave the world---how it feels to be within a few minutes of eternity! of the bar of God! of the solemn sentence which determines a state of happiness or misery forever!

WITH regard to the dying criminal, while you acquiesce in the necessity of his fate, give him your prayers. Though public safety forbids him pardon from the State, he may be pardoned by GOD ALMIGHTY. As christians, forgive him---let not an idea that he hath sinned against the country, keep alive the passions of hatred and revenge.

REMEMBER the instruction of CHRIST, *forgive our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us---forgive your enemies, and pray for those who use you wickedly*---commend his spirit to the mercy of God, and the SAVIOUR of men's souls.

GOD grant, that the awful scene may do us good---confirm us in holiness and virtue, in the love of God and our country---that it may guard us against temptation, and make us careful to live in all good conscience towards God and men---that we may finally lay down these tabernacles of flesh in peace, trusting in the SAVIOUR's merits, and be received to the holy presence of God.

TO HIM WHO RULES ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PLEASURE AND WISDOM, WHO SAVES THE WORLD BY HIS BLOOD, AND SANCTIFIES THE UNGODLY, BE PRAISE, GLORY AND DOMINION FOREVER AND EVER, A M E N.

