

W  
S924p  
1822



422  
*Strong*

THE PESTILENCE,  
A Punishment for Public Sins.

---

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE MIDDLE DUTCH CHURCH, NOV. 17, 1822,

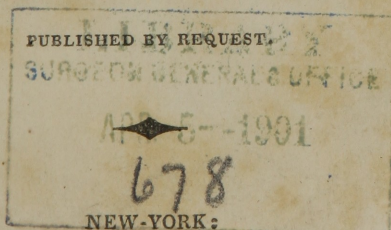
AFTER THE

Cessation of the Yellow Fever,

WHICH PREVAILED IN NEW-YORK IN 1822.

BY PASCHAL N. STRONG, A. M.

One of the Collegiate Ministers of the Reformed Dutch Church in New-York.



PUBLISHED BY H. SAGE, 208 BROADWAY.

.....  
1822.

W  
S924P  
1822  
c.1

\$1  $\frac{37}{11}$

*This discourse was prepared for the pulpit, without the most remote idea of its ever being issued from the press. To gratify, however, the earnest and repeated solicitations of his friends, and to correct the many gross misrepresentations made by others of the sentiments he advanced, the author has consented to its publication. The following notes are, to the best of his recollection, the ipsissima verba delivered at the time. Although written with much haste, during a week of almost incessant interruption, it was not deemed fair that the discourse should be altered in any respect whatever. Under these circumstances, it is now submitted to an impartial public.*



## SERMON.



LEVITICUS xxvi. 23, 24.

“ If ye will not be reformed by me, by these things, but will walk contrary unto me ; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.”

As this is the first occasion on which, in the providence of God, I am permitted to address you, since the recent calamity that has befallen our city, I should feel myself wanting in my duty to my Master and to you, did I not offer you some remarks suited to the circumstances under which we now officially meet. On the last Sabbath, such of the congregation as were then in the city, had presented to them truths worthy of their most serious attention, and which I trust will not easily be erased from their remembrance ; but as I know that there is a disposition in too many to forget God's judgments, as I know that our late calamity is already forgotten by multitudes in our city, and as the most serious among us cannot meditate too patiently and too deeply upon the “ strange works ” of our God, it surely can be neither unseasonable nor unprofitable to spend another hour in reviewing our recent visitation ; and although I may have been anticipated in some of the remarks that I may suggest, yet the truth is apt to produce a deeper and more abiding impression, from being enforced by frequent

repetition, and from being presented in a variety of aspects to the mind.

The words of the text, which I have selected as applicable to my purpose, were addressed originally by God himself to the nation of the Jews, his own covenant people. The chapter from which they are taken contains a general enforcement of the laws which God gave to Israel by Moses, by promises of rewards in case of obedience, and by terrible denunciations of vengeance in case of disobedience. The phraseology of the text is so plain, that it requires no illustration. It is addressed, as you must observe, to a *community*; and the very obvious, but the highly important lesson it teaches, is simply this: that *if men do not grow better under the afflictive visitations of God's providence, they shall infallibly be punished yet more severely for their sins.* "If ye will not be reformed by me, by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." So the nation of the Jews have found it in their sad experience, and they are to us, at this very hour, living witnesses of the faithfulness of God to his threatenings.

Without then detaining you upon the words of the text itself, I at once assume the principle it contains as the basis of my discourse, and as peculiarly applicable to our present circumstances, and proceed to consider the *peculiar form*, the *probable causes*, and the *Divine purpose* of our recent calamity, and the *awful danger* to which as a city we are subject, if we are "not reformed by these things."



It must at once be very evident, that upon a topic like this, there is no place to "prophesy unto you smooth things;" that when called "to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and unto Israel his sin," the faithful minister of God must deal plainly and honestly and fearlessly with the consciences of those to whom he speaks; and that he can lay no flattering unction to the hearts of his hearers. It is indeed always far more pleasant to the preacher and to the hearer to dwell upon the tender mercies and blessings of God; to exhibit the compassions of his grace; to commend Christians for their diligence, and zeal, and good works; to strengthen the feeble and support the desponding; in short, to be "a son of consolation," rather than "a son of thunder." But there are times and seasons, (and the present occasion peculiarly is one,) in which to flatter men is to destroy them, and not to expose their transgressions is to cherish and strengthen them. Oh! how utterly unfit for his duty, and how utterly unworthy of his station, is that ambassador of Christ, who is afraid of displeasing men; and how unthankful and unsanctified would *you* manifest yourselves to be as *hearers*, if you should count us to be your enemies, because we tell you the truth! You know, and I this night remember our commission, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; for they are most rebellious."

Feeling, therefore, in the place where I stand, that I have nothing to do with the criticisms of men; that I am called to speak, not in my own name, but in the name of Him who is my Master, and will be *your* Judge and *mine*, I would endeavour faithfully and affectionately to perform the duty before me, and to answer with all plainness the question, “What meaneth the late visitation of God’s providence? Why is it that our city has been thus afflicted?”

I stop not for a moment, to show, that our recent affliction has been a *judgment*, and a *judgment* immediately *from God*. This truth has already been sufficiently established in your hearing,\* and it is therefore unnecessary to spend your time in any formal vindication of the certainty of a particular providence mingling itself in *all* the affairs of men, and directing all things to the purposes of his own glory.

When that day shall come that “evil” shall be “in a city,” and “*the Lord* hath not done it,” then this Bible shall be trampled under foot as a volume of lies, and atheism shall hurl the Omnipotent from his throne.

I. The first thing to which we proposed to advert is the *peculiar form* of the late judgment of God, or if you please, the especial circumstances accompanying it. We mention this first, because it is of no ordinary importance to be distinctly reviewed, and cor-

\* The reference is to the discourses previously delivered by the author’s colleagues.

rectly understood, inasmuch as the *form* of his judgments is, generally speaking, the key, the clew to open and unravel the *sins* for which the judgment has been sent. God generally punishes men in kind. He repays them in their own coin. There is always some analogy or correspondence between the sin and the judgment. Sometimes "God's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known." We cannot sometimes discover why he afflicts us; and perhaps in most of his dispensations he has some reasons known only to himself. But there are visitations in which his hand is *clearly* marked, and cannot be mistaken; where "the man of wisdom" can trace his footsteps, and hear his voice, and *understand the meaning of the rod*. Now, the judgment which God sent upon us was not the sword, nor famine—but the *pestilence*; precisely that kind of judgment in which the *immediate* hand of God in sending it, in spreading it, in mitigating it, and removing it, is more conspicuously displayed than in any other of his judgments: and hence David, when the three judgments, the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, were proposed for his mournful selection, chose the pestilence, and thus expressed his reason for it: "*Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord.*" He selected *this* judgment, because therein the hand of *man* was not visible; men were not the *immediate* authors of his calamity; but here he knew that *God himself directly* afflicted him; here he could see nothing but God—even the God whose judgments are always righteous, but who, "like as a Father pitieth his children, pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame, and remem-

bereth that we are dust." God then was pleased to send upon our city the pestilence—a pestilence highly contagious, voracious in its thirst for prey, rapid in its work of death, dreadfully malignant—spreading from person to person, from house to house, from street to street—scattering dismay and horror as it approached, causing all to flee before it, excepting such as were *compelled* to remain, and those who would foolishly tempt the providence of God, and many of whom have paid for their temerity by the forfeiture of their lives. It commenced its ravages at a season of the year uncommonly early, and upon a spot heretofore deemed peculiarly healthy, and where none could anticipate its appearance. It travelled along the very healthiest and fairest sections of our city, defying all the expedients of health-officers, and the skill of our ablest physicians. It stripped our wharves of their shipping, and left the mart of business of this proud and splendid port naked, empty, desolate. It silenced the busy hum of commerce. It turned the key upon your counting-houses, and closed up your stores. It drove the merchants from their exchange. It deprived of employment thousands of industrious workmen. It subjected all to many inconveniences and privations. It emptied the most elegant dwellings of their rich proprietors. Along our gay walks of fashionable life, nothing was to be heard, save the solitary and reverberating tread of some anxious watchman upon his lonely and dreary round. It completely depopulated one-third of this great and mighty city; so that in this infected region, where our population is the most dense, and in which the sinews of our commercial strength most abound, the city was literally “desolate, without in-

habitant, and the houses without man." Where before all was life and gayety and business, was nothing but a solemn stillness, a wide-spread and spreading desolation, resembling the awful stillness and desolation of the grave! It closed up the sanctuaries of the living God, and made our Sabbaths silent; and in a large proportion of our churches, (some of them the oldest in the city,) the voice of the preacher was not to be heard, nor the congregation of the righteous to be seen. And in those parts of the city which were spared, all was a continued scene of confusion, anxiety, and alarm.

Now, brethren, wherefore was all this? why has this evil come upon us? How is it, that such wrath has gone out against this city from the Lord? Surely "He doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men." Surely it is not without cause that he hath sent the pestilence; for, if we had not *deserved* it, and deserved it *most richly*, it had never been here. Let the infidels of New-York prate as they please about their second causes, or rather about *chance*: let the thoughtless thousands in our streets, that have *already* forgotten the judgment of God, and the God of judgment, go on in their career of folly and of blasphemy: let men dispute as they will, whether this pestilence is of foreign or of domestic origin—we envy not their wisdom nor their mirth. And although unquestionably God is pleased to work by second causes; and although we would by no means deem these unworthy of consideration and discussion in the proper place—yet *here*, in the *sanctuary* of the God of righteousness and of grace, we would look directly to Him, who "numbers the hairs of our

heads," and without whom "a sparrow cannot fall to the ground."

II. In endeavouring to enumerate some of the *probable causes* of this judgment, we make no pretensions to any infallibility of opinion. We think, however, that it is by no means difficult to discover sins enough which have had their share in contributing to this evil. Although every individual has his own personal sins, for which he is responsible, and for which he individually may suffer, (and the sins of individuals combined, form the great mass of iniquity for which God is angry with us,) yet, let it be remembered, that in our remarks on this head, we are speaking of our sins as a *city*, as a *community*, as a *people*; and upon this part of our discourse, you will excuse our plainness if we shall endeavour to speak so that we may not be misunderstood. It is, comparatively, of very little consequence to dwell in *general remarks* about our sinfulness, if we sincerely wish for reformation, unless we realize the *particular sins* of which we are guilty before God. To specify these, is an *odious* and *unpopular*, but still a *necessary* and *salutary* task.

1. The first particular that we name, is one on which, no doubt, we shall be anticipated by many—perhaps by some in this very congregation: I mean, *the public contempt which this city, as such, has affixed to God's Sabbath, to God's ministry, to God's ordinances*. I pretend not to offer one single remark as to the nature of the measures pursued to obtain that highly desirable end, the better observance of the Lord's day; but this *broad fact* you know, that those well-

*intended* measures were defeated;—that in a public meeting the sanctification of the Sabbath of God was voted down; his authority and his ministers were insulted; and thousands of our citizens did publicly declare, “We will act as *we* please,” on the day of which God hath said, “Remember it, to keep it holy.” Now, brethren, we have not the least hesitation in pronouncing this to be one of the sins of New-York, for which she has this season been scourged; and for her conduct on that occasion, she has had a glorious commentary in her closed sanctuaries and her silent Sabbaths!—and, instead of celebrating the Sabbath of the God of grace, she has had week after week, and month after month, to keep the Sabbath of the God of judgment! So far as concerns the desolated portion of our city, it has been something like the Sabbath that sinners will have in hell. The first day of the week will return, and return, and return; but no Sabbath comes—no sanctuary is open—no messenger of peace is seen, no voice of mercy is heard—no ordinances of grace welcome their approach: every thing around is desolation and death!

But, brethren, we have something farther to add upon this point. We know that there are many very wise in their own conceit, though very foolish and impious in the sight of God, who are ready to sneer whenever this is named as a cause of our recent calamity: but we affirm, that the conduct of too many of our citizens, *during this very season*, shows how little they regard the authority of God in relation to his positive institutions. To say nothing respecting the continued violation of the Lord’s day during the past

season, *previous* to the commencement of our distress, what are we to think, what must any reflecting man think, of the wanton profanation of the Sabbath by many of our merchants, when leaving their city habitations and retiring to a neighbouring village! I wish not to be censorious, nor uncharitable, nor personal in my remarks; but their conduct on the occasion to which I refer, proves most clearly how very little regard too many among them habitually cherish for the authority and the Sabbath of God. God's hand was stretched out upon the city, among other reasons, for its violation of the Sabbath, and in a *most visible manner upon its mercantile interests*; and that *at such a time* when, smarting under his rod, in the very teeth of his judgments, some of our merchants should have under their employ two hundred hammers, in erecting temporary buildings, in the broad daylight of God's Sabbath, is a public wanton profanation of his name, that nothing can justify, and because of which the city deserves to suffer. Is it to be wondered at, that our Sabbaths in the district they had left, were *silent*, when, instead of trusting his providence even for one single day, and that his own most holy day, they thus sinned in the very face of heaven, and chose rather to profane his Sabbath, than lose the profits of the succeeding day! "Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary," is the statute of the living God; and if we do not obey it, God will take from us our Sabbaths and our sanctuaries. Brethren, you may lose your fortunes acquired after patient toil; you may be reduced from affluence, and honour, and peace, to poverty and contempt; our city may have all the channels of its wealth and commercial glory stopped or



diverted ; sickness and death may prevail among us ; the famine, and the sword, and the pestilence, may come upon us ; but all this is nothing, when compared with that judgment of God which would remove from us his candlestick, would deprive us of the means of grace, and shut out from us the light of heavenly hope and peace. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God as to *temporal* judgments ; but wo, wo to that community that makes light of his solemn ordinances, that tramples under feet his Sabbaths, and becomes hardened by his mercies and his judgments ! “ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”

2. The second particular that I name, but on which I shall dwell only a moment, is, *the inordinate appetite for gain* which has pervaded almost all classes of the community. The God of heaven has shown this season, how he can blast the god whom so many thousands in our city worship—I mean, Mammon. Merchants, mechanics, and tradesmen, have too generally been striving with each other who can most rapidly acquire fortunes, without much regard to the manner in which they obtained them. Very few have honoured God as they ought with their substance. Look at the form of God’s late judgment. The pestilence was sent upon the theatre of our commercial life : it covered the *business-part* of our city : it touched the very heart’s core of our commercial wealth. Now, my hearers, if I had no other

evidence, this alone would be to my mind conclusive proof, that something is radically wrong in the system of business pervading this city. And remember too, that this visitation came at a season when the expectations of great profits in trade were peculiarly flattering; when unusual calculations of gain were about to be realized; when unprecedented quantities of merchandise were ready to be disposed of. And just as the market was about to open, down from heaven comes the dreadful pestilence upon this very scene of business, shuts up your stores, and scatters you all abroad. Now, brethren, if ever the finger of God's providence pointed to any one thing, it did and does most clearly to this. There has been, beyond all doubt, a deep-rooted, wide-spread system of iniquity, of deception and fraud, pervading the mercantile operations of this community. When I say *mercantile*, I mean not simply our merchants, strictly so called, but most operations in which buying and selling are concerned. Our city is notorious for its money-making spirit: every thing must be sacrificed to this. For it, men will lie, and cheat, and swear falsely, without any remorse. Oh! could the walls of our *Custom-house* speak, what, what would be the mass of perjury, and blasphemy, and infamy, that would be disclosed! Our merchants know something of it; God knows it altogether. *His* eye is there; and he hath seen the perjurers day after day profaning his Bible and his authority; and you have seen this season, that he knows how to avenge the profanation of his name.

3. Our third item, on which we cannot dilate, is, that *love of pleasure*, that *spirit of dissipation*, that *gene-*

*ral profligacy of morals*, to which our city has been addicted. In adverting to the form of the judgment, we cannot but observe, that our walks of fashionable life have been deserted; and for many weeks the attendants of the ball-room, the billiard-table, the gambling house, and the Theatre, were compelled to leave their respective places of resort. I am no enemy to lawful indulgences. I have no objection that persons of wealth and rank in the community should distinguish themselves from others by their equipage, their table, and their dress. But, assuredly, any one must have perceived, that a spirit of rivalry in gay dissipation, in splendour of style, in the luxury of the table, in extravagance of dress, has pervaded most thoroughly our fashionable world. Now, God has shown how easily he can dispossess such of their elegant mansions; how he can deprive the sons and daughters of frivolity and gayety of their usual sources of amusement, and make them satisfied (if *satisfied* they ever can be) with any accommodations, provided they are safe from the pestilence. It is not long since God gave these devotees of pleasure a serious rebuke in the destruction of our Theatre. But it would seem that this spirit of folly grows among us, in spite of any and every correction, and that men *will* indulge themselves, no matter how sorely they may be afflicted. What, I pray you, are we to think of the state of society among us, when, at the very moment that God's pestilence was the heaviest upon us, we are credibly told in one of our public gazettes, that the non-appearance of a celebrated comedian upon our stage, in consequence of our calamity, had cast as much gloom over the city as the fever itself? What are we to think of the state of

morals among us, when, on the evening of the very day set apart by our constituted authorities as "a day of humiliation and prayer" for all classes of the community, the doors of the Theatre are thrown open, to invite our citizens to drown their gloom in dissipation and revelry? For our part, *we* never expected any thing better from the *Theatre*; but, as we so often hear it lauded as "a school of morality," and that a well-regulated stage is a benefit to society, one might have supposed, that after our civil magistrates had requested all to abstain from improper gratifications on that day, they might, *at least in complaisance to them*, have furnished us *for once* a lesson of common decency, and not have shown their disregard of every thing moral as well as serious. But farther, must we not conclude that the spirit of dissipation is deeply rooted among us, when we find at this very time, when our inhabitants are called more solemnly than ever they were before, to consider their ways, and humble themselves before God—when his awful judgment is scarcely lifted up from us—the Theatre, that school of Satan, that nursery for hell, is overflowing, night after night, with our citizens, to witness the mimicries of an actor, whom God Almighty has sent here, at this very time, in his wrath, as a man better qualified, by all accounts, than any other in the world to dissipate every serious reflection, and harden men in folly and sin? If *such* be our spirit as a community, have we not *deserved* God's chastisements? Can we not find in this *thirst after dissipation*, a fruitful cause of our late calamity? Shall not God be avenged on such a city?

4. There has been, and there is, in this city, a *spirit of political feeling at war with the authority of God*; and this we name, as another of our public sins that has provoked the judgments of God. In his word, he hath laid down certain characteristics which ought to belong to public magistrates, and certain principles which ought always to govern men in their choice of public rulers. These characteristics have not been sought for, nor have these principles been complied with as they ought in this city. And in this respect, *men of all parties*, no matter what are their names, are guilty. It is needless to go far back for proof of the assertion. If the candidate is of *their* party, if he has been *regularly nominated*, if he chimes with *their* political sentiments, it is enough: he must be supported at every hazard. Brethren, I care not a rush under what political banner a man may be arrayed: so long as he acts under the fear of God—so long as he subjects his political relations and movements to the authority of God—so long as he seeks to promote the election of men who honour and fear God,—so long I honour him as a patriot indeed. But, when we find in our city, men, and Christian men too, men of high consideration and influence, maintaining, and publicly abetting the election of an infidel in preference to a Christian; when we find elevated to some of the highest offices in the state, men who fear not God, but blaspheme his religion, and disregard even common morality,—what, I ask, has become of the *authority of God* on the consciences of men, in the discharge of their political duties? Does it not show, that there is among us as a community, a mass of *political* guilt, that deserves the chastisement of heaven?

But, brethren, it is time to hasten to another *branch* of this head of our discourse. We have been advertising to some classes of sins with which our city, as such, is chargeable, and because of which we believe God has recently scourged us. In the sins we have specified, we have reason to affirm that all are concerned, professing Christians as well as mere "men of the world," among us. Yes, how many are there of those who name the name of Christ, who have not kept their garments unspotted from the flesh, but have been found more or less chargeable with one or other, or all of the sins that we have specified! the disregard of God's ordinances, the inordinate thirst after gain, the excessive love of pleasure, or the spirit of political depravity!—How few, indeed, are they who have kept their "consciences void of offence towards God and towards man!"

The point, however, to which we more particularly refer, is the sinfulness of the church of God among us. It is evident, from the *form* of the judgment, that the *church* has been concerned, has had *her* share in bringing on this visitation, and that as it respects *both ministers and people*. We who statedly attend upon the sanctuary, and who profess to love and honour the Lord Jesus, may be apt to flatter ourselves that we have had very little, if any, concern in causing the late pestilence. But herein we greatly deceive ourselves; and if we cherish any such presumption, we give a miserable evidence of our christianity. God's people ought to be the first to humble themselves in his presence, and to examine diligently why He hath dealt thus with our city. It is *his church* and *her welfare* that he especially regards,

even in those judgments that affect only "the world." But here the church has suffered also.

We regret that our time is so far elapsed, that we cannot dwell, as we had intended, upon the leading sins with which the church of Christ in this city is chargeable. We must, therefore, confine the few remarks that we have to make, more especially to that section of the church in this city to which we immediately belong.

And, if we are not greatly mistaken, it is among the transgressions of which *we* are guilty, that *we have not valued nor improved the ordinances of grace as we ought; that there is in our churches too much of the spirit of form, and too little of the power of godliness.* Notwithstanding all the serious attention that may have been generally manifested in the house of God, we have not placed that high esteem which became us upon his word and ordinances. Our spiritual mercies have been abundant indeed; but God was pleased to deprive us for a while of our usual privileges; and he has shown you, that if you do not diligently improve his Sabbaths and his sanctuaries, he can easily remove his candlestick from you, or at least for a season withdraw its light. If many in our congregation will at times prefer to remain at home, or to roam abroad upon the Sabbath, as too many of them do, God can give such their full desires, by closing up his sanctuaries altogether.

We remark again, that *the churches of God in this city, and our own among the number, have not at the present day that zeal for Christ's pure truth, that love for his*

*old-fashioned gospel, they once had.* Many of those whom I address this evening, are the descendants of men who were valiant for the truth, and who would hold no fellowship with error of any description, however specious in name. To tamper with the word of God—to abandon, by way of *compromise*, any of the doctrines of the gospel—was, in their opinion, to promote the cause of heresy, and destroy the interests of the church. The Synod of Dort forms an honourable memorial of *their* tenacious adherence to the truth; and furnishes a pattern worthy of *your* imitation, in “contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.”\* They contended not merely for the doctrines which are called *essential*, but for those which are called *non-essential*; that is, for those which tend to glorify God, and beautify his church here on the earth. They wished not only that men should be saved, but that the God who saved them should be honoured in this world in their salvation. They prayed and laboured, not merely that a church of ransomed sinners should be gathered unto Jesus Christ, but that “the King’s daughter should be all-glorious within; that her clothing should be of wrought gold; that she should be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work; and that all her garments should smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces.” But how is it now?

\* Arminius, whose doctrines were condemned in this Synod, declared, a little before his death, (as he stated in his *last will*,) that the great object he had in view, in all his theological and ministerial labours, was to unite in one community, cemented by the bonds of fraternal charity, Christians of all sects and of all denominations, (Papists excepted,) *whatever their religious sentiments might be*. How near many of those who call themselves *orthodox*, in some churches in this city, are approximating to this spirit, is left for the reader to determine.



Have you at this day that zeal for God, and for the purity of his church, that inextinguishable hatred of error, and that devoted attachment to the *whole truth* of the gospel, which you ought to have? Have we not in this city synagogues of every description, Socinian, Universalist, Arminian, &c.? and if in these a popular preacher is to be heard, who may deny the creed of your fathers, and sneer at whatever enters into the life and glory of the gospel, are there not too many to be found, who will abandon their seats at home, and run to gratify their curiosity, at the risk of imbibing fatal poison? How many are there who “will not endure sound doctrine; but, after their own lusts, heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and thus turn away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables?” Has there not flowed in upon this city, from the eastern section of our country, a flood of error, which, under the semblance of great benevolence in endeavouring to unite the various classes of Christians, has been gradually undermining the bulwarks of the truth—a new divinity that would supplant the old gospel—a new system of making Christians, that would supersede the plan of God’s regenerating grace—a system of *feeling* which places very little, if any, value upon the *peculiar doctrines* of Christ, and has very little, if any, connexion with *sound, substantial, and well-informed piety*? Have not the advocates of this system established themselves in many parts of the land? Have they not made inroads upon our own church; and is it not to be feared, that too many of our people have not guarded as they ought against the poison of their creed, and the seeming liberality of their conduct? Is it not true, that, in some missionary

transactions during the past year in this city, there has been manifested by many members of our own "Reformed" church, a spirit of unwarrantable compromise with this "disinterested" system of "benevolence" and "union," which, if allowed to gain the ascendancy among us, we may bid farewell to our Reformed Zion? Is it not too true, that neither our ministers nor our people have co-operated, as became them, in endeavours to advance the prosperity of the church? Is there not, in consequence of listening to the cant of the day, a disposition in too many, altogether to abandon our independent interests as a separate section of the church of Christ, and join with any denomination that might better subserve their individual views? Have we acted, or do we now act, with that unity, that wisdom, that zeal, that efficiency, which are necessary to our increase and prosperity? Are things, brethren, as they should be with our churches? Let us search diligently into these things. Let us look at "the signs of the times." For "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

We did propose, at the commencement of our discourse, to consider not merely the *peculiar form* and the *probable causes* of the late calamity, but also the *design of God* in thus afflicting us, and the *awful danger* we incur, if we are not reformed by his visitations. The two first topics we have disposed of. As to the two last, our hour being spent, we must dismiss them in a word. We remark then,

III. That the *great and gracious design of God* in the punishment we have received, is our *reformation*—the public amelioration of our principles and habits. We should grow better under these dealings of his hand. We should learn wisdom from the rod. We have seen our sins: let us forsake them. We have suffered chastisement: let it tend to our profit. Wherein we have done wickedly as a community, let us do so no more. “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes: cease to do evil; learn to do well.” The voice of God to this city is not to be mistaken. “Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem! lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.” Let, then, every individual look to himself. Let every family look to itself. Let every church look to itself. Let all seek to diminish the amount of public guilt, by deep humiliation, by unfeigned repentance, by new obedience, by living nearer to God, and doing more for his glory than heretofore has been done. It is greatly to be feared that our recent visitation has *not* been *sanctified*; that many of our citizens have grown hardened under this judgment, and are now more ready than ever, to plunge into dissipation and folly. God forbid it!—for,

IV. *If we are not reformed by these things, we shall be yet more awfully punished.* Dreadful as has been the past calamity, more dreadful calamities will be at hand. Our city has been most highly favoured—as highly as any city upon the earth;—but, “if we will walk contrary unto God, he will walk contrary unto us, and will punish us yet seven times for our sins.”

He will take from us our prosperity, and send not merely temporal afflictions, but spiritual judgments. He will take from us his gospel, his truth, his ministry, his Sabbath, his ordinances, altogether. Let us then tremble! Let us not shut our eyes against a sense of our guilt and our danger. Let us not harden our hearts through the deceitfulness of sin; but let us confess and forsake our transgressions. Let us amend our ways and our doings; and cast ourselves upon Him who is ready to forgive, and abundantly able to save. In wrath, he hath remembered mercy. "He hath not yet dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." "Come then, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn and he will heal us; he hath smitten and he will bind us up." "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein."



