Edwards lived in a period in which British philosophy was characterized by the rise of “virtue ethics.” He sought to apply virtue not just abstractly, as in *The Nature of True Virtue*, but as a category to lived aspects of human experience, both internal and external. This application extended even—perhaps especially—to human interaction in the sphere of economics, business, and commerce. Edwards did not oppose an individual making a fair profit on the commodities, goods, and services he offered, but—and here is where the role of virtue enters in—the end that all such transactions should have in view, and to which they should be subordinated, is the public or common good. As historian Mark Valeri points out,

Edwards criticized theological or ethical assertions that contradicted orthodox Christian teaching and he devoted much of his writing to exegesis of the Bible with interpretive strategies that resisted many contemporary moral assumptions. Moreover, he often preached against market behaviors. He set the organic obligations of Christian virtue against self-motivated economic activity, warning his people against using supply and demand as the only criteria for determining their prices. Edwards can be described as a republican social theorist with an egalitarian and communal ethic at odds with the market.¹

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as Valeri shows, New England views on economic practice were coming into alignment with those of the mother country. As imperial connections increased, policies and practices such as debt litigation, interest rates, market pricing, and the benefit of individual gain were asserted by religious leaders and merchants alike. It was in this climate, in which economic challenges such as devalued currency, speculation, and uncertainty played a role, that Edwards applied
the importance of the exercise of virtue. He did not reject the market, but he did seek to “humanize” it.²

Edwards had often lectured his parishioners on their hard business practices, but this sermon may be his most extensive treatment on the nature of a specific practice, that of extortion, which, as he defines it under the first head, consists in taking special advantage of someone else’s need to make them pay or trade for a commodity or service unwillingly and at an exorbitant rate. Related to the problematic practice of usury, this sermon addresses fair pricing as a matter of Christian social ethics.

Since it is willingness to pay for a service or commodity, however dearly, that is at issue, extortion is distinct from robbery or fraud, which are different sorts of unjust transactions. Extortion takes place with the knowledge of both parties, to the loss of one and gain of another. For Edwards, the problem is “unreasonable gain.” But how to determine what that is? As was his wont, Edwards first lays down what are not good rules to determine what is a reasonable gain: it is not, first and foremost, buying as cheaply and selling as dearly as one can. Reflecting his hierarchical perspective (and the bias of his class), Edwards prohibits the poor from taking advantage of the rich on the principle that the rich can afford it, and discourages the notion that all should be “on a level.” Other negative definitions of reasonable gain are that the cost of something should be proportional to the labor, risk, and pains that it took to produce it; that some products ought to have the same price at all times; and that a “common price” should be a “universal price.” Rules that humans should live by in determining a reasonable profit include trading so that not only their own benefit is realized, dealing in such a way that the public good is not injured, setting prices that reflect current market values, and, above all, following the Golden Rule: doing to others as we would have them do unto us.
Edwards then offers several Motives to discourage his listeners from extortionary transactions. First, such behavior simply does not become Christians. It is not necessary to resort to it in order to obtain what we need for our subsistence. We must bear in mind that judgment day is coming, and we will be held accountable for following a “course of dishonest gain.”

Edwards was distinctive in the way he thought about how business dealings and essential human freedom of the will interrelate in a free market economy. Not only moral virtue but the liberty of individuals was at stake in business transactions. For Edwards, eroding the freedom of market participants through extortion or fraud destroyed essential elements of human relationship.

* * * * *

The manuscript is sixteen duodecimo-sized leaves of mixed paper, including one leaf made from a discarded letter. The sermon is composed of two preaching units, with the second beginning on the tenth leaf. Edward dated the booklet “Jan. 1746, 7,” and later inscribed the Redemption symbol in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.
THE SIN OF EXTORTION

Ezekiel 22:12.

Thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbors by extortion.

We read of breaches of every one of the commandments in this catalogue of Jerusalem’s sins.

SUBJECT.
The sin of extortion.

I. Show what is the nature of this, or wherein it consists.
II. Offer some motives to dissuade from it.
III. Give some directions.

I. Show what this sin of extortion is, and wherein it consists.

Definition. [Extortion] is a man’s taking some special advantage he has over his neighbor, to induce him to yield that of his substance to him for his unreasonable gain, which otherwise his neighbor is unwilling for.

He that is guilty of extortion, improves some special advantage he has over his neighbor, to gain of him. Their advantage may be of various kinds, viz., his neighbor’s necessity, or taking advantage of his poverty. Such have many necessities. Others, therefore, have great and manifold advantages over them. The poor are under great disadvantages to defend themselves.

A man may have a particular advantage over his neighbors, to gain of him through his necessity, though he is not poor. Though his necessities are not so many, yet he may be under a particular necessity.

The rich may extort from the rich; yea, the poor may extort from the rich. Men that are not poor, are dependent in many things on their neighbors;
[they] have many particular necessities. 'Tis unreasonable talk in any to say, “Such and such are rich men, {therefore they have no need}.”

A man may have a special advantage over another to gain of him, not only through extreme necessity, but through some special need he stands in {to the other person}. Yea, a man may have an advantage in his hands over another unreasonably to gain, not only from a particular or singular necessity, whereby one person in particular is distinguished {from another}, but a general necessity {arising from a} scarcity.

There are many of the commodities of life, are necessary for mankind: food, raiment, habitation, [and] fuel. If a man improves such an advantage {over another} unreasonably, {then} it is extortion.

Again, a man may have a special advantage {over another}, not only through his necessities, but through some extraordinary desire he sees his neighbor has. [This] gives him equal advantage to gain {of him}, as if he had real great need {of something}, though it should only be [an] imaginary need.

Again, a man may have advantage {over another}, through some dependence his neighbor has upon him, by his having advantage much to hurt another, [as to] improve his neighbor’s fear of him.

Rich and great {men} commonly have many others in dependence on them.‘ Rich men may bring others into dependence by monopoly, as it is called. A person may have others in dependence on him, by his being alone possessed of some kind of commodity providentially. So likewise, others that are not rich, may bring others {into a dependence}, and even the rich into a dependence, by an agreement among themselves to act as one in disposing of a particular necessary commodity that they have taken home to themselves. And [they] may improve this advantage.

When men improve these or any other particular advantages they have over their neighbors, to induce to yield to him of his substance for his unreasonable gain, which otherwise he is unwilling for, it is extortion.
There are ways of men's improving special advantage unreasonably to get their substance from them, that are very sinful, but are not the sin of extortion. A man that is stronger than another, may bind him, {and steal his goods from him}. This is robbery, but not properly the sin of extortion. Or a man may have a special advantage {over another} privately, to take {his possessions, that is} not properly extortion. In extortion, the special advantage is improved by him that has it, to induce his neighbor himself to yield, or give up to him his substance.

But yet I would further observe, that if a person may improve a special advantage he has over his neighbor, to induce him to yield of his substance to him for his unreasonable gain, which yet may not properly be the sin of extortion, {but consists in} the advantage of his knowledge and another's ignorance: this is very sinful, the sin of fraud and overreaching, but not properly extortion, because the person, through his ignorance and deceit, may be very free and willing, {so that} there is no constraint. {This is} fraud, but not extorting anything against his will.

In order to the sin's being extortion, a man must improve the advantage {he has over another}, to induce him to yield {of his substance}, when otherwise it is against his will. [He] yields with reluctance. The hurt, real or imaginary, that he is exposed to suffer, which his neighbor improves as his advantage, is the only thing that brings him to consent, so that it is as it were a constraint: he yields to it against his free will, or against that which otherwise is his will, [or] with reluctance.

And I would observe once more, that a man may improve some special advantage {he has over another}, to induce his neighbor to yield of his substance to him, which otherwise would be against his will, and yet not be guilty of extortion, provided that the substance which he by this means induces him to yield to him, ben't his unreasonable gain. Some men, through
covetousness, are not willing to give a reasonable price. It must therefore be for a man’s own unreasonable gain that he improves [it].

So that all the parts of the forementioned definition must be taken together, in order to a man’s being properly guilty of the sin of extortion: a man’s taking some special advantage he has over his neighbor, to induce him to yield of his substance for his unreasonable gain, which otherwise his neighbor is unwilling for. This is a sin that men may be guilty of, both in buying and in selling.

But the main thing wherein the difficulty lies of applying this definition to particular cases, so as to know what individual acts are extortion, and what not, lies in resolving this question, viz., What is an unreasonable gain?’ Or, when may the gain that a person takes advantage to make of his neighbor in his dealings with him, be said to be unreasonable?

I shall say something to this inquiry with a special regard to men’s mutual commerce or dealing one with another, in buying and selling.

And here, in the

First place, I would observe in some instances, what are not good rules to go by in judging of this matter.

Second. I would lay down some general rules by which this matter is to be determined.

First. [I would observe in some instances, what are not good rules to go by in judging of this matter.]

1. ‘Tis certainly no good rule, that men may buy as cheap and sell as dear as they can, if there would be no such thing as oppression or extortion in dealing at all.

[Equity and fairness would be] but empty names, and it would be absurd for any to say that what is to be sold, is worth so much. There could be no exercise of conscience at all. [Commerce would be] a thing wherein reason and
rules would truly have no place; and though this be very commonly followed and made a rule of, yet such persons are greatly to be condemned.

2. 'Tis not a good rule, that men that are comparatively poor, may get what they can in their dealings with the rich.

3. 'Tis no rule, that men are bound to go by that in their dealings with their neighbors, [that] they must dispose of what they have in terms proportionably easy with those on which they came by 'em.

A man may have a great estate given him, may be descended of rich ancestors, have a great inheritance. [He] may have much given into his hands by divine providence, by a peculiar blessing on his labors. [So it was with] Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, [and] Solomon. Prov. 10:15, "[The rich man's wealth is his strong city]."

But to make this a rule, would [be] in effect to make riches no advantage to a man, {so as to make them} not his own possession. This rule would in effect make all things common, destroy all distinction among men of rich and poor. 'Tis not agreeable to the design of God, in the constitution of the world, that all men should be on a level. 'Tis best for human society, that some should be richer than others.

Indeed, there is reason and argument in {Scripture for the rich}, to oblige 'em to extraordinary liberality, {and} to be much more than others in deeds of charity; but not to put themselves out of a capacity thus [to] abound [in liberality], when God hath given them [much]. He that has' some talents, should improve 'em {in deeds of charity}, but not to put his talents out of his hands. The Apostle gave direction to rich men, {that they should be} "willing to communicate." I Tim. 6:17-18, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." But not to put away their riches, to cease to be rich. Nor,
4. Is it a rule, that the price of what persons do for others, should always be in proportion to the labors and trouble or expense of what they do, and risk they run in it.

David and Solomon might lawfully have a greater reward {for their labors} than,¹⁰ in proportion, [others for their efforts]. Nehemiah had a much greater reward {than others}. Neh. 5:14 to the end:

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work. Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people.

But yet he greatly condescended, {and} exercised great liberality to the people.

These things show, that 'tis agreeable to the design of him that constituted the world, as doubly 'tis for the benefit of human society, that the reward of services {should be} in some proportion to the honorableness {of their services} and the degree in which they are beneficial. So when God endows men with extraordinary abilities for those services that are eminently
for the benefit of mankind; as much as any other advantage—if a man had much
greater strength—[or] as much as if God in his providence gave him ground
that was extraordinarily fruitful.

Again, on the other hand, persons may be at very great labor and expense, [but their reward should still be in some proportion to the
honorableness and benefit of their services].

5. Nor is it a rule, that commodities of the same intrinsic qualities, ought to have an equal price at all times, that they should not be held
higher in a time of scarcity than at other times.

Commodities of the same qualities are really more valuable [at
different times], on two accounts:

[(1)] They are more hardly\(^{11}\) obtained, with greater labor and difficulty
take one person with another.

Though the extraordinary labor\(^{12}\) and trouble of a particular person,
that he had providentially brought on him, {is required}, yet {the commodity
is not more valuable in} general, because {he is} connected with it—[the
value is] not connected with the person, but the commodity.

[(2)] And then, they are of great service to those that have ‘em, as they free ‘em from a great calamity.

Scarcity is a calamity that God in his providence brings on the public
society; and if men that are possessed {of goods} should let them go at a
very low price, it would not relieve the public: it might deliver some
particular persons, and make it lighter with them, but it would bring it
heavier on others.

The scarcity of things is what governs more than any one particular
thing, in the nature of the commodities of life. ‘Tis not because water is
not as useful as wine, [or] iron [not] as useful as gold.
Therefore, persons may justly {sell their goods} at a dearer price in a
time of scarcity, provided they observe such rules and bounds as shall be
mentioned afterwards.

6. Nor is the common price an universal rule without exception.

In many countries, {the common price is} fixed by the civil magistrate:
{and this is} a good rule. And when it is not so {that the price is fixed},
it may perhaps more generally be followed {as a rule}, because {the price},
though not {fixed by} magistrates, yet as it is a price that is current, and
seems to obtain by general consent, it may be looked upon as the agreement of
the public society; and when the circumstances are so, that there is nothing
visible but that, that there is a kind of implicit agreement of the society
in it.

But sometimes it is apparently otherwise: sometimes, the common price
is evidently very much in the command of one particular man. As in the wares
that are sold by merchants: some one rich merchant {may set the common price
for a commodity}. And in the necessities of life, {the common price is set}
sometimes by a multitude’s banding together.

And sometimes the occasion of raising the price to a very great height,
comes evidently at first through some particular advantage that some take of
the wants of poor men. An unreasonable and covetous master {taking
advantage}, shall set the price {of a necessity}; and if he does evil, then
the next that follows him does evil; and if another follows him, seeing the
manner in which he does it, {he} also does evil. So that there being a great
multitude that willingly fall in {with setting a price}, don’t at once make
it reasonable. We are forbidden to “follow a multitude to do evil,” Ex. 23:2.
It may be evidently owing to an extraordinary sundriness in the multitude,
that it came to that.

When it is thus, it is ordinarily visible. A good, discrete view of the
state and circumstances of the affair will enable ‘em to discern.
I come now, in the

Second place, to lay down some general rules, by which this matter is to be determined.

1. One rule ever to be attended, is that we should not knowingly and designedly trade, so that our own benefit only should be promoted by it, or so that the bargain that we make should apparently be only for our profit, but to the loss of him that we deal with.

Whenever any man improves any special advantage he has over his neighbor, as some dependence his neighbor has upon him, or power he has over him, or fear that his neighbor has upon him, to induce his neighbor so to deal with him in buying or selling, that the bargain shall be wholly for his gain, but his neighbor’s manifest loss: this is extortion.

But this rule that has now been mentioned, though it be a rule always to be attended, and be a good rule so far as it extends; yet it is not so extensive as to cut off all extortion in dealing. It is universally true, that men ought not to deal so with their neighbors, that the bargain should be apparently for their own gain, and their neighbor’s loss. But [it] is not universally true, that those bargains which are for the benefit of both parties, are just. A man may be guilty of extortion in making a bargain with his neighbor under necessity, so that it may be for his neighbor’s benefit to take what he offers him at his own price, rather than go without it, and suffer the extreme inconvenience that will come upon him without it; and yet, he may be guilty of extortion in demanding such a price of him. It may be to a man’s benefit, that is sick and ready to die for want a particular remedy, {to pay a high price for the remedy, rather than to die}.

So that there are some further rules necessary in order to cut off all kinds of extortion. And therefore, I would observe,

2. That another rule universally to be attended is this, viz., that we should never deal in such a manner as tends to the injury of public society.
When men take such advantages they have, either by the general necessity or otherwise, to raise commodities to such a price, that although it be much for the gain of particular persons; yet such practices are contrary to the interests of public society in general, such gain is unreasonable gain, because it is inconsistent with the great and fundamental laws and rules that God has given us, whereby to regulate our conduct towards our neighbors. It is contrary to that great command, that is the sum of all the duties of the second table of the Law, of loving our neighbor as ourselves. 'Tis contrary to the great end of all public society: and that is the public good. God has made man a sociable creature, with such a nature, and in such circumstances, as necessarily leads him to society; {he} can’t live alone. But God’s end in thus ordering {public society}, is the general good.

God has appointed that men should unite themselves one to another in public societies, for that end, that their general good might be promoted. This God has made the end of all society; and therefore, all exercises and improvements that are made of society, should be conformed to this great end of society. Buying and selling is one exercise of society, {and so should be conformed to that great end of promoting the general good}.

‘Tis one of those improvements of human society that are much for the benefit of mankind, when duly and properly managed; one way whereby mankind do greatly help and serve one another. ‘Tis so ordered that no one man can have of himself, independently, all those outward good things that he needs; and ‘tis a great mercy to mankind that there is such a way {appointed of God}.

But then certainly, the exercise and improvement of human society should not be so managed as, instead of benefiting, to hurt society, and so as to become not beneficial but mischievous to society. That which is a mercy of God to mankind, ought not to be so improved as to {be hurtful}.
All men, in all their dealings with their neighbors, should consider themselves as members of the public society, united thereto as the members of the body are united {to the head}. Every member of the body, wherein it has to do with other members, should have respect to the good of the body.

When once a particular member comes to seek its own separate good to the hurt of the body in general, it therein in effect cuts itself off from the body; {it} don’t consider itself as a member {of the body}, don’t act as belonging to a system.

Such men as do not {consider themselves as part of the public society}, are unworthy to be of the body. {They} become not useful members, but diseased and hurtful ones, that are a nuisance, and deserve to be cut off; as ‘tis with the members of the natural body. Such as in the exercise of society, and in the improvement they make of their union with the public society, won’t seek the benefit of the society, deserve not to receive the benefit of the public society. Men ought to pray for the public good {of the society}; but what hypocrisy will it be, {if they don’t seek the good of that society}.

The public good is a thing of vastly greater importance than our own private, temporal interest, and therefore ought in all cases to be sought much more; and we should never advance ourselves and our own separate interest on the ruins of the public interest.

That men ought not to enrich themselves to the straitening of the public, is evident by Is. 5:8, “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!” And the same is evident by Prov. 11:26, “He that withholdeth corn, [the people shall curse him].”

Therefore, whenever men in their dealings seek their own private gains, in such a manner and measure as apparently tends to the injury of the public society, then his gains are unreasonable gains.
Men’s raising the price of commodities to a very great height, is very often much to the hurt of public society, in many respects. When men will take particular opportunities and advantages which they see to raise the price of what they do, or what they have to dispose of, much beyond the price which commodities in general do bear—though there be nothing special in providence with relation to that commodity, affording just reason why it should be raised beyond such proportion—it tends very much to the hurt of public society in general, to throw things into confusion. It tends to excite and provoke others also to raise the price of their commodities or labors, to relieve themselves, when otherwise there would be no need of it; and so by causing sudden changes in the prices of what is bought and sold, all things are kept unsettled. Many doors are opened for those that are ill-disposed to injure others, and a great many will unavoidably suffer great injury: for in such cases, it will be impossible to keep all things on a due balance; but there will be so much uncertainty and unsettledness with regard to the supposed value of things, that the most conscientious persons will necessarily be greatly at a loss.

And besides men’s thus, through a greedy and covetous spirit, striving to their utmost to strain up the price of commodities and labor, and so doing what tends in the end needlessly to raise the price of commodities in general, issues in the great depreciating of the public medium of trade: and that is public loss. The public loses what is thus lost in the value of the medium of trade; and so men, from a greedy spirit, advance their private interest on the great loss and damage of the public society.

And besides, it tends greatly to distress the poorer part of the society.

And many other ways might be mentioned, whereby men’s greediness in the great prices they set on their labors or commodities, tends to the hurt of public society. But whenever it is apparently so, the gain men make by such
prices, is unreasonable gain. And this is an universal rule that is never to be departed from, and a rule by which other subordinate rules is to be regulated. The common price of commodities, is not to be regarded as a rule. Whenever there is a visible inconsistence with this, when there is no visible ground to conclude that that which is the common price of any commodity comes to be established by that which was [not] naturally the consent of public society, induced to it by the providence of God, and be not apparent, {or} beyond its due proportion, {or} considering the scarcity {of it}, etc., and so no reason on this or any other account to suppose that it will tend to the hurt of society for the common price to be followed: then it may be followed, but otherwise not.

There may, in many cases, be difficulty in applying this general rule. But in most cases, an honest heart and sure care [and] respect to the commands of God, and aim at the public good, a disposition not only to look at our own things but also {on the things of others}, and to bear other’s burthens with them, together with serious consideration and an impartial view of the state of things, without the prevalence of a selfish and greedy spirit, will be sufficient to direct us in the application of this rule.

3. It is generally a good rule, that the price of any commodity or service may bear a proportion to the current price of things in general, when there is nothing special appertaining [to] that particular commodity to cause a difference,

[‘Tis] not always according to the price of that particular commodity, because, as I have observed, [the price can change with circumstances]. But {the price of any commodity or service, may be} according to the price of things in general. If the price of the commodities of life in general are very much raised, though there may be great reason to suppose that it was owing to an unreasonable greediness {in men}, yet it may be lawful to {raise the price} in proportion, so that really [he] is only still to have as much
as he used to have. ‘Tis no rising at all; [he] has but just so much of the commodities of life for his reward as before. When [the price of the] commodities of life in general is raised, the medium of trade is proportionably sunk. And when this is done, though it be unjustly done, and to be owing to the vicious {nature of men}; yet it don’t follow that innocent persons should punish themselves, by going less {in their pricing} for the sake of others, that have done the public injury. And therefore, this may be followed as a rule in ordinary cases: that persons may raise {the price of their commodities or services} in proportion {to the current price of things in general}, when there is nothing special with relation to that commodity.

4. That great rule of righteousness, of doing to others {as you have them do to you}, would be of great use in this affair, if men would seriously and impartially use and apply it.

Men that sell to others, have also occasion to buy of others.

I come now to the II. [Second] thing proposed in discoursing on this subject, which was to offer some motives to dissuade from this.

First. Consider how ill a greedy gaining of our neighbors by extortion becomes Christians.

Second. There is no need of our taking such courses as those, to obtain those temporal good things we stand in need of.

I Pet. 3:13, “who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” Prov. 10:9, “[He that] walketh uprightly walketh surely.”16 Prov. 28:20, “[A] faithful man shall abound with blessings.”

Third. The time is coming, when we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Fourth. Consider that there is a curse that usually goes along with dishonest gain, that causes it to do the person that has it no good, but great hurt.
Prov. 13:11, “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished.” Jer. 17:12, "As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.”

III. Directions.

First. Beware of a covetous, greedy spirit.

Matt. 6:19, etc., “lay not up treasure on earth, [where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also].” John 6:27, “Labor not for the meat [which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed].”

Don’t trust in worldly gains and possessions as your portion. Job 31:24, etc., “If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoice because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; if I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.” Ps. 52:5-7, “God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.” And 62:9-10, “Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity. Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.”
Don’t aspire after great things of a worldly nature. Prov. 15:16, “Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.” [V.] 27, “He that is guilty of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.” Prov. 23:4-5, “Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. [. . .] for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.” [Ch.] 28:20, “he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.” [V.] 22, “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.”

Second. Seek a spirit of trust in God, and dependence on his promises.

Third. Seek a charitable and merciful and public spirit.

Fourth. Let your care be more to dispose of what you have, so as to do good with it, than to get a great deal.

Luke 16:9, “make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

[This is the] way to prosper. Prov. 13:9-10, “The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.” Ps. 112, “Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth forever.”

Making a good use of what you have, will be the way to be preserved. [This will have a] tendency in itself to keep you in such a temper of mind, a temper of love.
Notes


3 The paper on which this portion of the sermon is written is made of a discarded letter (WJEO 32, Letter B60), which reads:

Brookf June 23d 1746
Rev’d S
I Rec’d yours directed to my Spouse & have paid the Charge of the Girls bringing up here & send the overplus w’th is 34/ am sending the Negroes away hope they will come safe I am S’ your Assured Friend & Serv’t
Joseph Dwight

4 MS: “him.”

5 MS: “he would not be willing for.”

6 MS: “things.”

7 MS: “what may be is an unreasonable Gain.”

8 MS: “either by.”

9 MS: “have.”

10 MS: “then.”

11 I.e., difficultly.

12 MS: “Labour extraordinary Labour.”

13 MS: “& others if.”

14 The second preaching unit begins at this point. In the MS, JE repeated the scripture text and the subject.

15 MS: “every.”

16 For a sermon on a related theme, see Walking Righteously, Speaking Uprightly (no. 843), on Is. 33:19-20, from Oct. 1746.

17 MS cites v. 12.

18 MS cites ch. 3.

19 JE does not indicate how much of Ps. 112 he intended to quote; vv. 1-3, quoted here, best fit with the topic at hand.