

Letter 46

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's mercy and living a life that encourages others during times of affliction.

Scripture: Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:16, James 4:10, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Repentance"

Description

James Bourne writes a heartfelt letter to his cousin, encouraging her to find strength and growth in the midst of afflictions by depending more on God and seeking a deeper understanding of His word. He reflects on his own shortcomings and the need for spiritual wisdom in navigating difficult paths, emphasizing the importance of repentance, humility, and self-loathing as ways to draw closer to God. Bourne also expresses a desire to share his experiences with others and walk in a manner that does not cause others to stumble, highlighting the unity of the Spirit and the transformative power of true faith.

Transcript

[To M. B.] Tunbridge, August 1832.

My dear Cousin,

I was exceedingly glad to see your letter, which has drawn out many petitions for you; and I sincerely hope that your present complicated afflictions of mind and body may be sanctified to you, so as to produce a more stedfast and lively walk with God, a fuller dependence upon him, and a more tender view of his displeasure, displayed throughout the whole of his word, against his people. For in many things I exceedingly fail, and reproach myself. It flashes in my face, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" The apostle says "Our conversation is in heaven." Is mine? Because of these deficiencies under the sunshine of gospel light, I am often sickly, and fall into spiritual sleep; and in this sleep the furnace is preparing, and is sometimes made severely hot before I am aware; then it comes like a flash of lightning, What have I been about? How I have loitered by the way! How I have left off to be sober and watchful! This furnace is always prepared for such triflers, and I am continually caught before I see the snare. Now I think that perhaps there is more spiritual wisdom necessary in these dark and painful paths, than when all things seem straight; perhaps there is more to be learnt, more good to be had, in the former than in the latter, if we are led by the Spirit of God rightly to improve the sad dispensations that bring on a hot furnace. I find the first and best thing that can be done is at once to fall down and cry for mercy, confessing that our sin has procured it. If we can feel that God is kind in thus stopping us and

purging us, nothing sweetens the affliction more; and if we can find a listening ear, he has often much to say to us under these doleful dispensations. Therefore, at such a time, if it be possible, be much alone; cease not from watchfulness and prayer; keep constantly begging instruction - first repentance and humiliation for the sad cause that brings us low, and then much self-loathing to think that he will take such sweet advantage of our calamity and sin as to make them profitable to us, and will not leave us until he says, "Friend, come up higher." But all this is not done in a noise and bustle. It is called in Scripture God's "secret place " [see Ezek. vii. 22].

There is still a further lesson to learn, wherein I have always been anxious to be instructed. Am I a nonentity in the church of God? Is this gracious dispensation come upon me for myself alone? O Lord, if it be for the good of thy poor, tried, afflicted people, give me time, talents, and power, to tell to others what thou hast done for my soul, that I may, by the help of thy Holy Spirit, rightly instruct and encourage such of thy desponding flock as fall in my way; for I, of all men most miserable and most weak, have been surprised with the lovingkindness and tender mercy of our God in Christ Jesus. There is still something further - that I should not only receive this precious salvation, and declare it, and comfort others by it, but be found so walking as not to stumble those whom I counsel, nor grieve those who hear that I prevail with God. As I have "received Christ Jesus the Lord," so must I learn "to walk in him" in godly simplicity and transparency. This will preserve the unity of the Spirit. It is repeatedly and wonderfully set forth in the word. Let us remember that true faith, as Hart says

"Takes the whole Gospel, not a part,

And holds the fear of God."

I would have you remember that the Lord will try his people. Perhaps pride about the present matter, or some other more secret thing, must have a blow, and the Lord saw that this would inflict the wound in the right place, where the gangrene wanted letting out.

"Our good Physician heals our wounds

With tenderness and skill."

There seems a great stir amongst our strangers. I shall be truly glad if Mr. C. J. comes out on the right side of the Slough of Despond. I hope he will take no hasty steps to settle his matters. Let me counsel you, while in the neighbourhood, to visit Mrs. L. and Mrs. N., and see if you can find spiritual intercourse; and let me hear of your matron-like walk; and excuse me if I add a Scripture which you will wish neither to wipe out nor disannul - "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." This is their profiting by your walk. Watch while you are visiting, and remember an idle life is a sensual one, delighting too much in the accommodations afforded. Stop every thief or highwayman that would plunder you, by being determined not to dwindle into gossip. If you are spiritually minded on your visit, you will find it life and peace; but if this be interrupted by light and trifling conversation, life and peace will go. "Let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel" - not only at times, but "Be instant, in season and out of season." Tell them if they wish to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the flesh must be put off, mortified, and crucified. Independence must be laid at the Saviour's feet, and all must become beggars, who long to partake of the royal bounty of heaven.

May the good Lord instruct you in all things unto his heavenly kingdom, is the prayer of

Your affectionate cousin, J. B.

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