

Letter 62

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a true fear of God, which leads to a deeper understanding of His character and a desire to obey His will.

Scripture: Psalm 23:1, Psalm 27:9, Psalm 51:8, Psalm 51:17, Psalm 77:10, Psalm 89:7, 1 Corinthians 13:7, Philippians 2:3, Philippians 2:12, Hebrews 12:6

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Sanctification Process"

Description

James Bourne, in a letter to Mr. Nunn in Maidstone, August 1834, expresses his struggles with doubts about his own honesty and the fear of darkness at the end, yet finds comfort in the embrace of the Lord during spiritual conflicts. He reflects on the deep fear of God, the war against sin, and the need for brokenness to hear joy and gladness. Bourne emphasizes the importance of true filial fear, the sanctification process through trials, and the necessity of having conversations aligned with heaven. He concludes with a focus on divine charity, humility, and the burden for the church amidst afflictions.

Transcript

[To Mr. Nunn.] Maidstone, August 1834.

My dear Friend,

I was very glad to see a letter from you, written in your own hand, and especially for the contents, which encourage me still to press on, though greatly cast down, fearing that there is not in me that real honesty that I find in others, and that when the end comes all will be darkness. "This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

I have had some tossing nights here, with sharp spiritual conflicts; but if the road to the park, and the park itself, could speak, they would bear witness to some of the most endearing embraces that can be. The Lord has indeed kept me, and has been "the strength of my life," but I soon came again to this petition, "Hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger." This also again returns (even while I write) with great sweetness and power - "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" - "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

You and I can testify that the true fear of God is no light thing, that the Lord has declared war against the sin of our nature, and that when he takes vengeance of our inventions, it cannot be without many broken

bones. This furnishes us with petitions agreeable to his revealed will in Christ Jesus - "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice;" and we know that one word, or one look, will do it. Thus we learn to "sing of mercy and judgment," and to "rejoice with trembling" - not with slavish fear, but with true filial fear; and as you say, we pray that what he shows in these deep places may be graven on our hearts as long as we live; that sin may appear exceeding sinful, and that the Lord may always appear Most Holy; and that there may be no independence of God. Even such a sentence as this makes me blush - "We have our conversation in heaven." This is often lightly passed over, but I am ashamed because my conscience tells me how far otherwise it often is; and this is the real cause of darkness and distance at a throne of grace. It is often through a sanctified furnace, very sharp, we are brought to a proper understanding.

My letter (which you have seen) to our poor friends at is all I know of the truth; if there be another Gospel, then I have yet to be made acquainted with it. Real affection in the Lord made me write what I did; I found the situation in which God had placed me in our church rendered it needful in my conscience to counsel, and my spirit was enlarged and comforted in it. My prayer still is, that the Lord would give a right understanding in all things, especially in that precious unity of the Spirit, which can feel "Who is offended, and I burn not?" Charity divine endures all things, and will never fail. In all the reproofs I have had, whether intended for reproofs or not, whether true or false, I have found my happiness has been in taking the lowest place. Divine charity feels no disgrace at being put down, but says, "Behold, I am vile." The Lord Jesus Christ, when his judgment was taken away, opened not his mouth. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." If the Lord does not by his Spirit in great condescension dictate what I write, I know not how I could find his sweet presence as I do, to help my infirmities; for I think I cannot tell when I have written a letter and have not found encouragement in it.

The afflictions of our church make me thoughtful. I hope I have not written with an untempered zeal; through grace I perceive much soberness upon my spirit. My end is much in view, and my fears run high; and it is out of the abundance of these changes my heart is kept anxious both for myself and the church of God. We seem now in a peculiar state, and I often feel for our pastor. I hope he is in a measure reaping the fruits of his labour. We ought to bear him on our minds much.

Yours &c. J. B.

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