

Letter 67

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon 'Letter 67' explores the themes of suffering, faith, and the unity of believers in Christ's love and grace.

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Proverbs 3:5, John 17:3, Ephesians 4:22, Hebrews 4:15

Topics: "Faith And Doubt", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

James Bourne, in a letter to Mrs. Burrell, reflects on the struggles and fears of the afflicted people of God, who often question their faith and God's faithfulness in times of trial. He emphasizes the comfort found in Christ's role as a merciful High Priest and the need to fully trust in Him despite doubts. Bourne acknowledges his own weaknesses and the constant battle between faith and fear, urging for complete surrender and reliance on God's grace. He marvels at the unity believers have in Christ and the transformative power of God's discipline and teaching through afflictions, leading to a deeper understanding of spiritual growth and oneness with God.

Transcript

[To Mrs. Burrell,] Woodham Mortimer, 9 October 1834.

Dear Friend,

You have been often upon my mind during the past summer, and I cannot help including you with myself and many more amongst us, as in the number of that "poor and afflicted people" which the Lord will leave in Zion. The Lord, as a Sovereign, keeps some of them continually under the sentence of death temporal, so that there often seems but a step between them and it; and this (as I know full well) excites ten thousand fears and reasonings, which we cannot assuage. It is true we read, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me;" but there is often a secret fear, Will it be so with me?

With all my heart I believe it, when by faith I perceive that Christ was in all things made like unto his brethren, "that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people." Then the scene brightens, and hope springs up, an anchor of the soul, and removes the slavish tormenting fears that bore me down before. And now I feel another grief; for as soon as the cloud returns, I begin to suspect the faithfulness of that Friend who has dealt so tenderly with me at all times. How this discovers the weakness of my heart, and how frail I am!

This day I have been greatly ashamed before God in meditating on these words, and feeling an interest in them - "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he bare them and carried them all the days of old;" and after all this, to suspect! I may call it an heart-rending sight. I dare not excuse myself and say, I have no power to do otherwise; no; I can only say, O Lord, have mercy on my sin! And the more I plead against myself, the more he pleads for me. Is not this enough to break your heart and mine? Consider, that as "he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."

"Venture on him, venture wholly,

Let no other trust intrude."

The prayer of Christ (John xvii.) has been so sweet to me this day as to make me feel myself a fool indeed; I cannot write to you as I ought. My heart is full of the wonders of God's grace. O how sweetly do I see the brightness of the eternal Son of God, described in Heb. i., harmonise with the wonders of his grace in that prayer! It is indeed life eternal to "know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Jesus said, "I have manifested thy Name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world." "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine; and all mine are thine, and thine are mine." When the Spirit witnesses these things upon our hearts, how self debasing! Mysterious words! Nothing but that faith, which is of the operation of the Spirit, can give credit to a personal interest in such divine and heavenly things. "All mine are thine, and thine are mine!" and I included here! I could not see to read on for tears of consolation and hope.

O how this humbles, though it enlarges my heart in the sincerest desires of love for all the afflicted people of God; as the Lord says "that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." O sweet union! "And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one." Then the last three verses close the divine and heavenly union. I know not how to leave off, I am made so sweetly to receive the testimony of the Spirit that I am here included. But what secret shame I feel, and cannot forgive myself, under this sense of the favour of God, when I call to mind my unfruitful life; how light and vain and idle I have been! I beg for that discretion and prudence spoken of in Proverbs, for natural prudence fails when most wanted.

And now in a moment I revert back to my acquaintance with - and - , and the vain profession we walked in, and how hardly I then thought they dealt with me. But now I see that they were the rod the Lord made use of to humble me to hear our present ministry, under which he has been further pleased to open my ears to discipline, and I have been taught by the Spirit the necessity of the daily cross, and to put off the old man. By this ministry, under the kind hand of God, that faithful sentinel, the fear of God, has continually preserved me from plunging away from the sweet unity spoken of in this letter; and many more mercies which I have not room to write, have come through that teaching with which I have been so kindly favoured of God. I think I shall bless him to all eternity for all the rods, crosses, and afflictions that bring to so glorious an issue - "I IN THEM, AND THOU IN ME; THAT THEY MAY BE MADE PERFECT IN ONE."

Yours in the Lord, J. B.

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