

Letter 101

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth through reproof, confession, and reliance on God amidst trials.

Scripture: Psalm 40:2, Proverbs 1:7, Matthew 7:24, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Hebrews 12:13

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Repentance"

Description

James Bourne addresses the spiritual condition of the recipient, emphasizing the need for consistent living in alignment with the fear of God rather than the spirit of the world. He highlights the importance of receiving reproofs as a sign of spiritual life and growth, urging the recipient to embrace confession, prayer, and healing in the face of shortcomings. Bourne encourages seeking the Lord diligently, warning against pride and emphasizing the painful yet necessary process of spiritual refinement before a solid foundation can be laid.

Transcript

[To M. C. B.] London, 28 December 1833.

Dear Madam,

You say I have not told you what I think of your spiritual condition. I thought the whole tenor of my letter conveyed my feelings upon that subject. I cannot understand how people, in a vain and empty profession, can have such reproofs as those you allude to from the book of Proverbs. The dead cannot hear such things. But you would not be so continually reproofed upon the same point, if there were not plenty of cause; and the cause is, your walk in that respect is not consistent with the fear of God, but is quite consistent with the spirit of the world. You have borne testimony before your family that this Spirit of life has entered your heart, and they evidently perceive that you feel death written upon all created things. Hence, I judge further, that as these reproofs are the way of life, life will show itself in growth; not in being always found in the same place. The sore back dreads the rod. True teaching will appear in an increase of tenderness, and it will grow to be a very evil and bitter thing to be found abiding in the place against which the Lord is always testifying his displeasure.

What made you feel those words - "the death of all spiritual life" in my last? Was it not both the possession of that life, and the sense of the want of it? This PROVED is the new birth. "The dead know not anything." Spiritual life is a new covenant blessing, and is manifest in receiving the reproofs of instruction, "It lives

and labours under load, Though damp't, it never dies."

It especially will not let "that which is lame be turned out of the way" [Heb. xii. 13]. What do you mean by this? you will say. I mean the reproofs, which you have hinted at in every letter, for the same things. This is what I call lame in you, and my advice is, Turn not this sad evil out of the way, but let the spiritual life be found labouring under this load in confession and prayer, and do not give it up until it be healed. If this be done, this also manifests the new birth. Old things are not held fast, but denied and put off; and the Spirit of life entering makes a new creation. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." How evident this is in the shame and confusion of face we find when sin and vanity seem to bear the sway. O what fear and torment enter our souls, what darkness and perplexity! We may enter our rooms, and sit as long as we like there; but all we can think is, What fools we are! How strange it is, that while we are thus judging ourselves, the Lord most kindly comes in with some little hope or help that brings us up out of this "pit wherein is no water," and advances us one step further to believe that he has a favour towards us!

Seek not to rest in the testimony of man; you know in your heart what you are after, and you shall not be long seeking the Lord before you shall have some token from him of your spiritual integrity. If these heavenly and spiritual treasures were to be lightly come by, they would be lightly esteemed. Much independence and rubbish of all sorts must be cleared away, before the foundation of this spiritual house can be safely laid. "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil" [1 Tim. iii. 6]. Ploughing, digging, and harrowing; the chisel and mallet, and all the things by which the Lord sets forth the foundation-work, are very painful and humiliating. "Can thine heart endure?" If the Lord is your refuge when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, you will be sure to stand, because you are founded upon the Rock. That this may be your happy case, is the sincere prayer of

Your unworthy servant in the Lord, J. B.

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