

Letter 102

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, holiness, and spiritual maturity in living a life pleasing to God.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 Peter 2:2, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Sanctification"

Description

James Bourne reflects on the slow progress of renewing the inward man and the struggle to live a holy life in Christ, acknowledging personal shortcomings and the need for continual renewal. He encourages believers to lay aside malice and hypocrisy, desiring spiritual growth through the Word of God, and to show forth the praises of God by abstaining from worldly ways. Bourne emphasizes the importance of pulling down strongholds that exalt self over Christ, and the necessity of self-debasement to exalt Christ in all things, despite personal failings and opposition.

Transcript

[To Mr. Nunn.] London, 10 January 1836.

Dear Friend,

How deep and mysterious are the ways by which the Lord makes these earthen vessels meet for the Master's use It is said, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day;" but you and I know, in some measure by sad experience, how slowly this old man perishes, as well as the slow progress of the new plan, in the daily renewing. How many days pass that have not this renewing in them, to my shame be it spoken! When I read such things I am quite abashed, and begin to ponder whether I rightly know anything.

I believe your faith has been manifested to be true, by its standing the fiery trial, and will, in due time, "be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The words of the Apostle [1 Pet. i.] here impress my mind, that if I attain to this conquest in Christ Jesus, I must, as an obedient child, no longer fashion myself according to my former lusts, but as he which hath called me, by this holy calling, and hath manifested his love to me, is holy, so must I be "holy in all manner of conversation." This again cuts me down clean to the root, nor can I tell how to abide this scrutiny. "O wretched man that I am I Who shall deliver me?" Will Christ appear for me? I do, in some measure, feel it encouraging, that the Apostle shows there is hope for those who "pass the time of their sojourning here in fear " - not a hope that this continual labyrinth of fear can be removed by our legal righteousness, or that any vain attempts of ours

can ever deliver us from the wretched bondage that a vain conversation brings us into - but a hope in "the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." "All flesh," and fleshly means of attaining spiritual ends, " is as grass - and " all the glory of man," the glorious outside of vain pretensions, " is as the flower of grass." These we see, and clearly understand by the Spirit's teaching, wither and fade away when most wanted. But that which you have lately passed through will endure, because the word of the Lord hath spoken it; and I desire to be a partaker of the same hope.

The Apostle adds [chap. ii.], as a further test of the genuineness of the work (if we have indeed been made partakers of this heavenly treasure), "Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby " - if ye have indeed already proved and " tasted that the Lord is gracious." Here, again, I feel my fears arise; everything I read is so high, so holy, so heavenly, I seem to know nothing yet as I ought to know; but in this my ignorance, there is an inconceivable desire to. be coming to Christ, the living stone. Though disallowed of men in general, Christ is my soul's desire. But when the Apostle says, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house," I can see that you are in this case, and have been well instructed of late in this heavenly art of building, but I, alas, like Nehemiah's men upon the wall, am driven away; the enemy often comes and defeats me, and that which I supposed I had built up, seems presently pulled down again. Your spiritual sacrifices, I see, are acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ; but, alas, I perceive that the Chief corner stone is hidden by much rubbish, by reason of which, through unbelief, the wall remains broken down.

"Unto you that believe he is precious." How sweetly do I see in these words what the Lord has done for you! "A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;" (but O what a sweet constraining power is now laid upon you!) "that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Abstain from everything that wars against this life of God in the soul, and let your conversation be honest in the world, as well as in the church. Here again I fall, and am ashamed, when this plummet is put to my conscience, to see how crooked and out of the way my soul appears; how infinitely short. O my dear friend, pray for me, for I read that our good works are to be seen by others, that they may "glorify God in the day of visitation".

When it has pleased the Lord that we obtain what the Scripture calls "a good degree," there seems this necessity put upon us, that our weapons become mighty to the pulling down of those strong-holds that Satan has formerly kept and maintained in our souls. All high things, that exalt us, and not Christ; all wrong spirits, that exalt folly, not Christ; that exalt self-pleadings, self-power, self-vindication against all that is reasonable, are parts of those strongholds which must be pulled clown, that Christ may be exalted in word, in spirit, in conversation, in all things. Here again I fall. You in these afflictions have found this self-debasing place. I feel the necessity (as an example) of keeping there. I see the beauty and desirableness of these things, but am far from them. Opposition on all hands disheartens, and, like Mephibosheth, I am lame of both feet.

May the Lord help you, and put it in your heart to pray for me.

Yours &c. J. B.

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