

Letter 117

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking the Lord and obeying God rather than man, and the need to cleave to Christ with a single-hearted devotion.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 14:27, Matthew 6:6, James 1:5, James 4:8

Topics: "Godly Fear", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

James Bourne emphasizes the importance of godly fear as a fountain of life and light to guide one's steps, urging Mrs. H(arley) to seek after and prize it. He acknowledges his own struggles with sorrow, darkness, and distractions from the enemy, highlighting the need for hope and compassion from the Lord to press on. Bourne stresses the necessity of coming forth by the power of the Spirit from worldly vanities and love, cautioning against divided hearts and the sway of worldly influences. He encourages seeking the Lord in secret, obeying God rather than man, and cherishing the whispers of the Spirit above outward comforts.

Transcript

London, 14 December 1826.

Dear Mrs. H(arley).,

The godly fear that I so strongly recommended in my last letter I would now also press you exceedingly to seek after and prize. It will prove "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death," and will be such a light to your steps that you shall not stumble. It is necessary, in your situation, to retain much authority; which, as I said in conversation, and now say in writing, cannot be duly established but by the fear of God. This will stamp a dignity upon both your words and actions, and make you exceedingly tender in not doing anything that may offend the Lord; it will also keep you uniform in your outward walk in your family, not all levity and trifling one hour, and all religion the next

How shall such an unprofitable servant as myself presume to counsel you? Often full of sorrow and darkness, I see not my own way, and sometimes fear I have lost it altogether, under sudden darts of the enemy that bring me almost to distraction. Yet the Lord, in great mercy and compassion, visits me with some hope, in the strength of which I press on; but I find that religion is a coming forth by the power of the Spirit from the vanities and love of the world; and if this part of the work be slow, so will our light be dim, our conduct and ways moveable, and all our paths filled with much confusion. Be "wise as serpents," but "harmless as doves," This can only be attained to by much secret seeking the Lord. Enter into thy closet

and heart; let that cry of the heart be heard, and then the open reward shall be seen.

No doubt you are aware, in secret before God, how far your heart is set upon seeking the Lord; and whether the world, the love of your family, or the fear of man, in some measure, directly or indirectly, sways you. According as these things preponderate, so will be your spiritual adversity or prosperity. The eyes of the Lord are open upon all our ways, and he gives to every man accordingly.

I hope the Lord will keep you very tender of his honour. Tempt not the Lord, lest he depart, and you should not be able to bring him back again into your heart. Cherish most tenderly every secret whisper of the Spirit, and grieve him not for the sake of any outward accommodation or comfort. Ought we not to obey God rather than man? [Acts iv. 19.] What need you have of wisdom from above, both as to the manner and matter of the obedience to be yielded to man; for much is to be done and won by gentleness in the fear of God and prayer. Especially remember you have nine watching all your movements, who will judge every step you take. The same circumstance has been to me a greater source of sorrow than most of my domestic concerns. I cannot always clear myself, nor explain to those about me the secret exercises of the heart; the heart-rending acknowledgments that are made before God, and the deep self-abasement I find for all my family sins and blunders. I know of no remedy but Christ, and no safety but in cleaving to him with all the heart. He will have nothing to do with divided hearts; never let such suppose that they shall obtain anything of the Lord.

Yours &c. J. B.

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