

Letter 132.

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of heeding God's counsel, genuine repentance, and maintaining spiritual integrity to avoid unhappiness and spiritual peril.

Scripture: Psalm 81:8, Proverbs 24:16, Jeremiah 9:1, Hosea 6:4, Luke 7:31

Topics: "Spiritual Integrity", "Heartfelt Repentance"

Description

James Bourne addresses a person struggling with inconsistency in their conduct, emphasizing the importance of heeding God's counsel and cherishing His presence. He points out the consequences of neglecting deep convictions and failing to bear spiritual fruits. Bourne urges the individual to forsake sins, seek the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and manifest spiritual integrity by turning away from wrongdoing. Through references to biblical characters like Mary and teachings from Jeremiah, he encourages a heartfelt repentance and a watchful spirit to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

[To one whose conduct was inconsistent.] London, 10 October 1837.

Dear __,

I have read carefully your account, and perceive you have set forth many things that are well worth our mutual attention.

That part wherein you write, "I did not find the fruits and effects equal to the power," shows the chief source of your unhappiness and difficulties. It appears that your deep convictions and heart-searchings had not their due effect. Hence the sad things which have followed in your life and walk. "Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee; O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me. There shall no strange God be in thee, neither shalt thou worship any strange God." But God's people would not hearken, so he gave them up to their own lusts; and they walked not in his counsel, but in their own. [Psa. lxxxi. 8-16.] And we easily see the effect of this; God turns all their counsel into foolishness. It is evident that your want of attention, and your not cherishing the good things you have had, and revering the sweet presence and power of God, is the cause of the dreadful perplexities in which you have been continually entangled. "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and like the early dew it passeth away." The Lord has hewed you by the prophets. He has desired fruits, not sacrifice; but you have dealt very treacherously. [Hos. vi. 4-7.]

You write that these words were applied to your conscience, - " Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." But I think you ought to consider the whole scope of that account [Luke vii. 3i-50] and of the character of Mary, and see whether she returned continually to folly, as you confess you have done. Herein you differ from her.

These words you also claim - "Fear not, little flock." But let me ask you, if this little flock walk more like goats than sheep, will there not be room for fear? This is the part you seem to overlook.

You then mention something which is absolutely necessary to be done, namely asking for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. But can it be a right honest asking, if we walk counter to the good counsel given by the minister, and the elders of the church? What you say is true in part, "He that confesseth his sins" - but I add, he manifests his spiritual integrity when he forsakes them; and then only "finds mercy." The forsaking part you forget.

My dear friend, your unbelieving fears and doubts, as you write, are excited by your heart departing from the Lord, and returning so quickly to the old place. May the Lord give you help and grace "to leap over a wall" which is too high for flesh and blood. Let me entreat you to turn to Jeremiah, and join with him and me, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" and make my escape from the evil within; for we "proceed from evil to evil." Our tongues have been as arrows shot forth, speaking deceit; our hearts lie in wait to trip up our neighbour. "Shall I not visit you for these things? saith the Lord; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?;" [Jer. ix. 1-9.] Yes, verily; I believe it because I have found it so to my shame and sorrow; and I know that he will make us remember "the wormwood and the gall," and by repeated afflictions and furnace-work, will keep us in remembrance, and humble our souls. In this painful path I have often waded, and have found some of the severest things overtake and surprise me; yet the Lord did not utterly forsake me.

May the Lord give you a tender spirit of watchfulness, that you may not so grieve the Holy Spirit as to cause him to remove your candlestick (as it is called) out of your heart, and that for being a reproach in many things, and you not to find him any more to your dying day. Such things have been seen and suffered, as a warning to others.

Your faithful and affectionate friend, J. B.

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