

Letter 138.

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon 'Letter 138' highlights the necessity of communion with God and the spiritual growth that comes through affliction and humility.

Scripture: Psalm 34:19, Proverbs 3:5, 2 Corinthians 4:8, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Pastoral Ministry", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

James Bourne, in a letter to a friend, emphasizes the importance of enduring tribulations as a pastor after God's own heart, highlighting the necessity of experiencing sorrow and distress to deepen one's communion with the Lord. He stresses the significance of humility, gentleness, and faithfulness in teaching and living out the truth of Jesus Christ, warning against the dangers of fleshly religion and doctrinal errors that can lead to separation from Christ. Bourne shares his own struggles and experiences of darkness, emphasizing the need for continual reliance on God's light and mercy in times of trouble.

Transcript

[To the Rev. B. G.] London, 18 January 1838.

My dear Friend,

I have been greatly comforted and encouraged by your letter, and do sincerely sympathize with you in all your tribulations, knowing that without them you cannot be a pastor after God's own heart. How sad a thing it is to have a religion that knows nothing of communion with the Lord! How dead and sapless a church becomes that is without the continual changes incident to the poor and afflicted people of God! If you and I were left in darkness, and no distress on account of it, how soon we should lose sight of the truth!

All that is good will ever be found like so many links in one chain; conflicts, sorrows, fears, and dismay, with many cries, terminating in conquest, through the blood of the Lamb. "Ye now therefore have sorrow;" but, "your sorrow shall be turned into joy." You will be brought oftentimes into lower places still than any you have hitherto known, for the express purpose of teaching the people the necessity of these humbling lessons, and their use. For self must come down, and the Lord Jesus Christ alone be exalted. All religion short of this is only fleshly, and will not endure the hour of temptation, which always comes when least expected or guarded against.

These humbling lessons keep us from presumption and boldness in the flesh, and teach us gentleness toward the tempted, considering ourselves as liable to the same. When we have attained to the power of the truth and the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, through much affliction this also makes us fearful of allowing anything contrary to the truth to be admitted; so tender are we made of the word of God. A little error (as it may appear at the beginning) ends in complete separation from Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life."

My heart's desire is that the Lord would discover to you more and more of the way of salvation, and that your little flock, together with your own soul, may be the chiefest object of your care, and that many prayers may be made to the Lord for wisdom and faithfulness. It is no small charge, if you have but two or three souls to instruct.

I should have found means to have written sooner, but I also have been in much darkness; yet the Lord has proved a light unto me, and I have not been utterly confounded. Jer. xiv. sets forth my case. "Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish." They came to the pits and found no water of life; they returned with their vessels empty, ashamed and confounded. The ground was chapt, and there was no rain to soften it. Yet even here I often called to mind his former lovingkindnesses, and acknowledged with many confessions my backslidings were many; and so were my pleadings. "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land," so as for me almost to forget how long since the last visit; "and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for the night." Though I found these pleadings by the power of God effectual, yet I also found much reproof. "They have not refrained their feet." Here, like Jacob, with many confessions and pleadings, I could not let the Lord go except he blessed me; and my eyes were opened to see his tender regard and watchful care set; forth all through the word, and this satisfied me of his great mercy. I am therefore constrained with much melting of heart to bless and praise the Lord Jesus Christ for his marvellous saving benefits.

Poor Mr. Draper is no more. His end was peace; very solid, like an old father in the church. With many kind wishes and prayers for you and Mrs. G., and the friends at large, I remain, my dear friend,

Yours affectionately, J. B.

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