

Letter 140.

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God earnestly, confessing sins, and relying on His mercy amidst spiritual struggles.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Proverbs 28:13, Ecclesiastes 10:18, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Repentance"

Description

James Bourne addresses Mrs. K. in a letter, discussing the struggles of feeling distant from God due to a guilty conscience and spiritual slothfulness. He emphasizes the importance of honest self-reflection and surrendering to God's mercy, acknowledging the deceitfulness of the heart and the need for genuine confession and forsaking of sins. Bourne encourages seeking God wholeheartedly, warning against idolizing self and the consequences of neglecting spiritual matters, while expressing confidence in God's faithfulness to forgive and show mercy to those who truly repent.

Transcript

London, February 1838.

Dear Mrs. K.,

I was glad to hear from you, and if the Lord shall enable me, I will endeavour to tell you what I think of myself when exercised as you describe.

First, the darkness you complain of does not so trouble you as to keep you from sloth, therefore it is not a very heavy burden: moreover, you say you abide in it; this is dangerous. It is said, in Jer. xxx., that the Lord "heard a voice of trembling, of fear and not of peace;" but he does not hear this from you - not much of it; I therefore do not wonder that you feel as if you had none of the Spirit. If you had the Spirit sensibly, you would not remain in the dark place you speak of.

The inward trouble you feel, I believe and always find with myself, is the lashing of a guilty conscience for our sluggish spirit, and for letting ourselves be more busied in the things of time and sense than in seeking to be saved. I find God is jealous, and resents this, and makes me to know that "by much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through" [Ecc. x. 18]. By such a spirit we lay ourselves in the way of temptation, and Satan has but little difficulty with those who are so often and so long at a distance from the Lord. I have felt my situation so fearful on these occasions as for

some time to think myself past recovery; but that thought has been so sore and so terrible, that it has made me (while the painful fear lasted) cry out, "Search me, O God, and know my heart;" yet even there I feel the deceit of my heart, for when the Lord really begins his searching work, I flinch, and cry, Anything, Lord, but this; this is more than I can bear. But when brought to a real sense of my desperate condition, all these futile and idle excuses are lost in the fearful agony of my soul; I make no further bargains nor inquiries into the way and means that the Lord pleases to use, but am forced to come to a short cut, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Do thou choose the way, and spare not for my much crying.

This is honest work, and all short of it will leave us loitering.

The desire of such sluggish ones, Solomon says, obtains nothing, and its natural effect is always a slavish fear of death, for we are conscious we are but half-hearted in the things of God; everything is left in uncertainty, and we cannot see nor understand when good comes. No doubt the idol is self in some shape or other; and as we are indifferent in temporal things, as to the order and exactness of them, so spiritually we leave our soul's concerns without a purified conscience, and when thus left unclean nothing but confusion ensues.

Do you indeed seek most earnestly to obtain the mercy of God? If you do, I have no doubt but he will be as good as his word; but the heart is deceitful, and you do not know how many things take both the time and the attention which God claims in your conscience; or else you know it, but make no confession. The Scripture says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy."

I believe the Lord has given you some intimation of his mercy, but there seen such hindrances at present that you may expect the rod to hasten your feet, and yet not more haste than good speed. I am firmly persuaded that if you give yourself wholly to these things, your profiting will appear.

Yours &c. J. B.

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