

# Letter 187.

by James Bourne

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*James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the importance of choosing the narrow path of faith, enduring afflictions, and relying on God's mercy for eternal hope.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 31:14, Psalm 62:5, Isaiah 43:2, Malachi 3:3, Matthew 7:14, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 12:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, James 4:4

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Sanctification"

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## Description

James Bourne, in a letter to Mrs. T., reflects on the narrow path to life and the tendency of worldly things to lead to death. He expresses his fear of being unprepared spiritually and emphasizes the importance of experiencing the Lord's presence, love, and kindness. Bourne acknowledges his struggles with the spirit of the world and the need for sobriety and watchfulness. He finds solace in unceasing prayer and committing himself and his family into God's hands, marveling at the mercy of Jesus Christ. Bourne highlights the necessity of being sanctified by the Lord amidst the allure of worldly fashion and self-confidence, ultimately desiring God's approval above all else.

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## Transcript

[To Mrs. T.] Fittleworth, 26 July 1840.

Dear Cousin,

Wherever I am I feel that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life;" and everything that transpires has a tendency to work death. I have been all my life long too much widening this narrow way, and am even now convicted of the same in all directions. This is the watchword, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction," and this you know is very contrary to a gay spirit. My illness has frightened me. I cannot endure the thought of being a foolish virgin, nor of my lamp being put out in obscure darkness. The little I know of the Lord's presence, love, and kindness, is so precious that it is dearer to me than life itself; and I am anxious to have the enjoyment of these in my latter hours. The spirit of the world, wherever it is found, is contrary to all this; it eats as a canker and leaves no life behind. Mr. T's repeated conflicts show me the necessity of sobriety and watchfulness; and I hope neither he nor I shall be enticed away from the secret teaching of the Holy Spirit, for this will be one part of it, "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." I feel it a sore thing to grieve the Spirit, and nothing does it more effectually than walking in two spirits, if I may so speak; one always ready for the truth and the people of God, and another for all sorts that walk in the flesh.

I have many cares and many fears respecting my large family, and they increase as I come nearer to the end. I am very dark as to the right mode of proceeding, but I find the most efficacious way is unceasing prayer. Everything seems to wind up with me into so narrow a compass, that I have no friend left, no hope, no help; and I begin, I think, to perceive that this is a mercy from the Lord. The flesh recoils, and when I am shut up in darkness I think my case different from that of any other of God's people; but this is my infirmity, and I am greatly ashamed of it. When the Lord softens my spirit, I repent in dust and ashes, and feel it is of his mercies I am not consumed. I then can, and do, commit myself and my family wholly and entirely into his hands, and wonder at the strange and marvellous mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he will at all plead my cause, and give so wretched a sinner such a sweet hope of eternal life. This brings me clean out of the world, clothes me, and puts me in my right mind; and all things are right. Here I am loosed from the bands of my stiff-neck and the iron sinew that binds me, and the Lord rules and reigns in my heart and affections.

These are the changes I am continually subject to, but which I sometimes hope the Lord sanctifies. How few believe the report, or show any anxiety to profit by it! Fashion in all its various shapes beguiles the spirit, and Paul's words are forgotten, who tells us that he rejoiced in his weakness while it was profitable for the church of God. Hence we see authority taken not by the sensibly weak, but by such as think themselves strong; strong in self-confidence, not in the Spirit. This sometimes lasts a good while, yet the day comes when the Lord shows who is weak and who is strong. The furnace shows what is gold and what is stubble. These things make me dread to lose sight of the resting place that the Lord has appointed; for he only shall abide whom God approves. I therefore do most exceedingly desire that my sentence may come forth from him, and neither from the world, nor the dearest well-wisher we have upon earth.

I hope you will accept my best wishes, and tell Mr. T. I trust the Lord will never suffer his faithfulness to fail towards either of us, but remember us in our low estate.

Your affectionate Cousin, J. B.

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