

Letter 190.

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the spiritual liberty that Christ bestows upon us, the precious love of Christ, and the importance of spiritual life in old age.

Scripture: Psalm 86:15, Psalm 92:14, Psalm 119:45, Galatians 2:20, 2 Timothy 2:9

Topics: "Spiritual Liberty", "Christian Freedom"

Description

James Bourne reflects on the spiritual liberty found in Christ, emphasizing Luther's words on the Epistle to the Galatians about the inestimable love of Christ who gave Himself for sinners. Bourne shares his personal experience of feeling the precious love of Christ, which removes fears and misgivings, leading to a sense of freedom and peace. Despite facing battles against the world, the flesh, and the devil, Bourne finds solace in the unbinding power of the Word of God that softens his spirit in prayer and reveals God's mercy and long-suffering. He praises the faithfulness of fellow believers like Mr. Dore, highlighting the spiritual vitality that comes from making the Lord one's refuge, bringing forth fruit even in old age.

Transcript

[To the Rev. W. Maddy.] Fittleworth, 4 August 1840.

My dear Friend,

I am happy to find the Lord gives you a little more liberty; I thought you had got to a sad length - "bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face bound about with a napkin." I know of nothing like the spiritual liberty that Christ bestows upon the poor and needy. Whom the Son makes free, are free indeed.

Luther on the Epistle to the Galatians has been my companion since I have been here. The word of God, and this, have been sweet spiritual food. Luther, writing on the words "for me" [Gal. ii. 20], begins - "Who is this me? Even I, wretched and damnable sinner, so dearly beloved of the Son of God, that he gave himself for me." This came with a sweet appropriating faith into my heart, melting my soul in contrition. Then he tells us there will be innumerable sects, devising new works, but what are all these compared to the death and blood of the Son of God, "who gave himself for me?" - "If I, being a wretch and a damned sinner, could be redeemed by any other price, what needed the Son of God to be given for me? But because there was no other price, either in heaven or in earth, but Christ the Son of God, therefore it was most necessary that he should be delivered for me. Moreover, this he did of inestimable love; for Paul saith, 'Who loved me.' Wherefore these words, 'Who loved me,' are full of faith. And he that can utter this

word me, and apply it unto himself with a true and constant faith, as Paul did, shall be it good disputer, with Paul, against the law Be it so, that the law is a heavenly doctrine, and hath its glory; yet notwithstanding it loved not me, nor gave itself for me; yea, it accuseth me, terrifieth me, and driveth me to desperation. But I have now another who hath delivered me from the terrors of the law, sin, and death, and hath brought me into liberty, the righteousness of God, and eternal life; who is called the Son of God, to whom be praise and glory for ever." He goes on to show that this is a hard lesson to learn, "that when the devil shall come to us under the colour of Christ, and shall go about to trouble us under his name, we may know him not to be Christ, but a very fiend indeed. For Christ, when he cometh, is nothing else but joy and sweetness to a trembling and broken heart." Now if these things be true, he concludes (and they are true indeed), then we are not justified by the righteousness of the law; and much less by our own righteousness.

In all this I found a clear testimony of the precious love of Christ to me. It removed all fears and misgivings, and set my feet in a large room. But oh! how soon these seasons withdraw, and I am again sent into the field of battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil! My many changes bring on the fear of death, and I get into the very places Luther describes.

But the word of God is not bound; this is my mercy. The Lord yet speaks to me by it, and often softens my spirit in prayer. I am quite surprised how quickly he returns. His mercy, patience, long-suffering, and infinite condescension often fill me with the greatest amazement.

I was very glad to hear from Mr. Dore; he is a true yoke-fellow, a good fellow-soldier, who fights hard to the last. O what a mercy to have such spiritual life in old age: How true it shows the word of God to be! How professors in general wither here, and how many vain excuses are made for them! But not so with such as make the Lord their refuge; - the promise is, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright."

Yours very faithfully, J. B.

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