

Letter 194.

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of cultivating godly fear, which is a watchful and lively spirit that enters into every part of our spiritual warfare, leading to humility, spiritual liberty, and a deeper walk with Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 25:14, Proverbs 1:7, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Godly Fear"

Description

James Bourne writes to Mrs. Tims Fittleworth about the struggles and victories in his spiritual journey, emphasizing the importance of godly fear in discerning between the convictions of the Spirit and the accusations of the devil. He acknowledges the ongoing battle between the old and new natures within him, highlighting the need for the grace of God to prevail. Bourne finds comfort in the fear of God, which leads him to humility, spiritual liberty, and a deeper reliance on Christ as his Counselor and Savior.

Transcript

[To Mrs. Tims Fittleworth, 8 August 1840.

My dear Friend,

We are told to bear no burdens on the Sabbath day, but in this I fail; I am generally burdened with many things, and am so today; yet I think the Lord has not given me over unto death, and am anxiously watching to see whether he will be as good as his word, "Wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee."

I am often surprised to see the wonderful effects of the true fear of God. How this active, watchful, lively spirit enters into every part of my warfare, and gives such a turn to all that carnal reason asserts as I cannot describe. It goes quite contrary to the will of the flesh, and to what the world calls necessary pride. It makes a way for such only as are deeply humbled, and well taught to know that the eyes of the Lord are upon all our ways, and that he will "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." Therefore we are admonished to take heed to the movements of this heavenly grace of godly fear.

When my mind is bewildered I begin to fear something is out of order, and seek to be alone to ponder my way. In this state many things are presented to me, some very terrible and weighty; and by reason of the clouds and darkness that surround me, I cannot clearly discern the difference between the convictions of the Spirit and the accusations of the devil. This godly fear teaches me not to parley with the devil, but to come to Christ as my Counsellor to plead my cause. It does not suffer my memory to pass by the reproofs

of conscience, nor does it let me amuse myself with trifles to blunt the edge of them; but leads me to watch for a clean and clear issue in the blood of Christ, which alone leaves a savour upon the spirit, and makes me understand what spiritual liberty means. This again cherishes godly fear, and greatly encourages the growth of humility, in which I am taught to bear many things my natural pride and foolish self-consequence spurns at.

I cannot tell you how evidently I find the workings of the two natures. The old man is still alive and in his full vigour, and would often lord it over me, but for this godly fear actuating the new principle; hence arises a terrible confusion at times, and nothing but the arm of Omnipotence, in the behalf of the weak, timid, trembling, new man, could ever cause him to prevail. My feeling this often makes me (when the victory is gained by the blood of the cross) to cry out, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory." Then this grace of godly fear appears again in great vigour, which causes me to walk still more cautiously. I perceive it makes me often to tremble, and is always attended with a sense of great weakness. I become afraid of everything, and sometimes think I shall through weakness be betrayed altogether into the hands of the enemy and fail at last; but here I am often surprised by finding myself nearer to Christ than I thought. How so? Because he says, "Let the weak say I am strong." The word of God begins to open itself sweetly in behalf of all such weak ones; my ears and heart open; and I find there is no end of compassion shown to the helpless, while the fat and the strong are left. Thus the fear of God proves "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death;" and as Hart says:

"The fear of the Lord forbids us to yield,

It sharpens our sword and strengthens our shield."

I have been much tossed about in my mind since I left you, but the Lord having put the rich treasure of his fear into my heart, I have not been left destitute; his visitations preserve my spirit from utterly sinking. It is in the dispensations I have lately been under that I learn the truth, value, and reality, of those things of which you have often heard me speak. I wish to believe at all times the things that I utter, and am sure I do, when I am alive to all the terrors and tremblings which many call bondage, but to which I hope the Lord will keep me alive to the last, because I find nothing else extorts a cry to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have never yet had a battle without a victory; therefore by should I complain? I know the truth and certainty of those words, "More than conquerors through him that loved us." There is no death nor shame in seeking him; "Your heart shall live that seek God."

I often think of our little meetings at Hertford; I am sure the Lord was with us by the blessing of godly fear in my own heart.

Yours affectionately, J. B.

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