

Letter 195.

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of godly fear and the assurance of salvation for those who seek God earnestly.

Scripture: Psalm 85:9, Isaiah 30:7, Luke 19:10, 1 Corinthians 2:3, 1 Corinthians 2:9

Topics: "Godly Fear", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

James Bourne preaches about the profound effects of godly fear, leading to heart searching, unceasing prayer, and a deep sense of contrition and repentance. He emphasizes the importance of drawing near to the Lord with humility and trembling, experiencing the abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness found in God's salvation. Bourne highlights the power of the Spirit's work in humbling the soul, preventing pride, and exalting the wisdom and power of God, ultimately revealing the hidden wisdom and heavenly blessings prepared for those who love Him.

Transcript

[To Mrs. Tims.] Fittleworth, 10 August 1840,

My dear Friend,

I wrote to you the other day upon the subject of godly fear. I must now write something more upon its most sweet effects; and my desire is that you and the friends may gain in the account what I have found, for it will be greater riches than all the world can boast of. I have been greatly cast down, and, as the Apostle says, "pressed out of measure;" and this, by the mercy of God, was the cause of much heart searching and unceasing prayer. Here I believe the Spirit helped my infirmities; and in reading Psalm lxxxv. I was led in sweet meditation to make a pause at these words - "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land." My heart both broke and expanded under the influence of this godly fear, and the word "surely" encouraged me to draw nigh, till the glory of his grace and mercy abounded in my heart, and I could apply the beginning of the Psalm, "Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land; thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob; thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin." What tears of contrition, and what power to draw nigh to the Lord I found under the influence of this godly fear, because I perceived the Lord had taken away all his wrath, and had turned himself from the fierceness of his anger, and comforted me. Here I found the sweet effects of what I wrote in my last "Wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee." Those words kept sounding in my heart - "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him;" and led me to be very watchful and tender that I might not quench the Spirit, nor

grieve him to depart. My heart was continually going up to the Lord, and the more earnest I seemed the more the enemy filled my mind with foolish and vain thoughts; but, by the mercy of God, I found that "in vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird;" for he kept his fear so alive in my heart. that the more I felt confused with the empty vanity, the more was I led to cry for help. I had a most weighty object before me, namely, the light of the Lord's countenance to be gained, and this godly fear to be greatly cherished.

Under many changes and some very cutting fears, I was then led to meditate on 1 Cor. ii., which begins, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." O how sweetly this entered my heart, and showed me that the sensible weakness and trembling I found under my present trouble was no token of God's displeasure, but the contrary. I perceived it to be the Spirit's work, for it led me to cry mightily to Jesus Christ. I also perceived that the Spirit accompanied all this weakness and trembling with divine power upon my heart, and upon the hearts of those that heard me. God takes this humbling way that no flesh may glory. Godly fear keeps the soul from poisonous pride; "the wisdom of men" is here brought low, and "the power of God" exalted.

But how shall I tell you of the heavenly power conveyed to my soul in the verses which follow, the brokenness of heart and deep humiliation before God, while I wanted words to set forth the riches of his grace? "Mercy and truth" did indeed meet together, "righteousness and peace" kissed each other; truth sprung out of the earth, and righteousness looked down from heaven, and said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." How shall I sufficiently set this before you? The Apostle calls it "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom," which none of this world know anything about. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." How sweetly the Spirit applied that word us to me, and made my cup run over! The Apostle also shows that this conveys to us, "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given us of God." Here again I had a heavenly testimony of the true teaching; for by the heavenly power the Apostle speaks of, I was more than sure of all that the Lord had wrought in my heart.

This is the salvation that is "nigh them that fear him." The living principle of the fear of God becomes a fountain of life to our drooping spirits, and makes us depart from the snares of death. The fruits and effects of this godly fear are often little understood by us, even when we are under the most powerful influences of it. You will ask, How so? Because of the great weakness and trembling fear we feel. We judge these sweet tokens to be black marks, although there are no promises in the word of God to any other. May the Lord encourage us to press through the crowd of objections that carnal reason and fleshly wisdom make, and learn from happy experience to believe that "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land."

Tell poor dear W. B. not to be disheartened; hard as his case may be it cannot be worse than mine. Tell him to remember the greatness and power of the Saviour, who is able to save to the uttermost; and tell him if possible not to look to himself, a bad sinner, but to look only unto Christ, who came to save sinners, not good people. Who knows but the secret dread he feels may prove to be "Jacob's trouble?" There is none like it, either so bad or so great, or of the same kind; but if so, "he shall be saved out of it" [Jer. xxx. 7]. He cannot go beyond LOST, and if lost, he cannot help himself; but the Saviour came "to seek and to save that which was lost," and none else. This is the place where salvation meets a poor sinner; cannot he hope so? Is there not a secret thought that peradventure it may prove so? Then tell him not to suffer the

enemy to brow-beat that thought.

Your affectionate friend, J. B.

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