

# Letter 199.

by James Bourne

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of a heart-searching work of God, avoiding presumptuous claims, and maintaining a tender and watchful heart through secret checks and prayer.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 32:8, Psalm 46:1, Proverbs 3:5, Proverbs 4:23, Jeremiah 17:10, John 4:14, 1 Peter 2:11, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Spiritual Awakening", "True Religion"

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## Description

James Bourne emphasizes the importance of the Lord searching the heart and trying the reins, leading to a deep spiritual awakening and a desire for a personal, intimate relationship with God. He warns against the dangers of a dead, presumptuous profession of faith without the genuine work of the Spirit in the heart. Bourne urges his friend to be vigilant, to seek God's guidance in secret prayer, and to heed the admonitions of God through tender checks and fears, highlighting the seriousness of true religion and the need for divine refuge and eternal life.

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## Transcript

[To E. L.] London, 17 Sep ember 1840.

My dear Friend,

I was glad to see your letter, and to find you are better in health. What you say respecting the Lord searching the heart, and trying the reins, I have well understood by painful experience; and I have no doubt you would find vanity written on all created things; a fearful alarm of danger; and but little, if anything, of your former religion would stand.

If you indeed know this heart-searching work, there are many ways in which it will appear. Did you perceive the profession of the day full of error and danger? Did that sight lead you to pray to be brought out from the darkness which had before involved your mind? Did the deep searching bring about a desire to have a secret religion between God and your soul, which an open reward might follow - namely, "All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed?" In this sharp furnace the Lord will discover to the trembling lost sinner what truth is, and where it is to be found; so it is said in Prov. iii. His two-edged piercing sword will also cut us off from the spirit of the world, and discover the death that all needless communication with it works.

It is not possible for any one to be so searched and tried as you describe, but the time when, and the manner how, this great work was wrought must be clearly known; and the revelation of Christ's mercy to a soul in such trouble must, of necessity, have such a divine light attending it, that you would be able to describe the sweetness, power, and efficacy of the wonderful grace bestowed.

My reason for naming this is that the whole dead professing church lies buried here in the ruins of the fall. They know they must describe something of trouble, and something of the blessings of God's favour in Christ; but for the want of the work of the Spirit upon their hearts, they will, with immeasurably hasty strides, step over this sweet portion of the truth, and put in a, presumptuous claim which the Lord neither owns nor honours. Hence come all those invectives against such as tremble at God's word, and yet are sensibly comforted with the Spirit's testimony that the blood of sprinkling cleanses their guilty consciences from all sin.

It is because in the course of my long profession I have met with many dangerous and presumptuous characters that I write thus, and again add that you are more exposed to danger than you can well be aware of. Do not think you know all about it; if you think so, you are already entangled in the net of error. If a fear spring up, cherish it, and see if it do not lead you tenderly to pray in secret that the Lord would be the Guide of your youth. Let secret checks not be despised as weakness, but held in great reverence as the admonitions of God. If kept tender and watchful here, you will never want a Guardian or Friend; but if this hedge be broken, the viper of error in all directions will bite you. Take heed; religion is no plaything. We shall certainly meddle to our hurt, if the Lord be not our refuge. May he direct your anxious spirit to the Fountain of eternal life, and then you will never more thirst for vanity, but will manifest yourself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth.

Your much obliged friend, J. B.

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