

Letter 51

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon 'Letter 51' highlights the transformative power of affliction and the necessity of a godly walk in spiritual life.

Scripture: Ezekiel 20:17

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Faithfulness"

Description

James Bourne shares his personal journey of affliction and redemption, emphasizing the importance of heeding warnings and staying faithful in spiritual teachings. He reflects on the mercy of God in purging away pride and vanity through trials, leading to hope of becoming a vessel for God's use. Bourne urges the young to be vigilant in their spiritual walk, to listen to God's admonitions, and to maintain godly fear and a tender conscience, as seen in Ezekiel's experiences.

Transcript

[To a young Friend.] London, April 18, 1833.

My dear young Friend,

I must acknowledge "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, for before I was afflicted I went astray." I was very intender in my early profession, and therefore am anxious to warn the young of the rocks on which I struck.

If you read Ezek. xx., I think verses 5, 6, 7, and part of 8, will point out much of what has been my case. Yet such has been the mercy of God towards me as is described in the 9th verse. This deeply impressed my mind, and humbled me in the dust, and makes me to bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him. He would not suffer me to pollute his Name, and therefore put me into many repeated and hot furnaces, that the dross of pride and vanity might be purged away; and has given me a measure of hope that he will make me a vessel meet for the Master's use. On my first entrance into a profession, I sat under a ministry which took but little notice of our outward walk. It was left a good deal to turn upon this hinge - that the teaching of the Spirit will direct us in all our outward proceedings; gain but the favour of God, and all other things will find their right course. This is true, but not all the truth that should be declared; else why did the Saviour and all the Apostles say so much upon the subject of our whole outward walk? I had many sweet intimations of God's love, and many secret admonitions and warnings about things I seldom heard of from the pulpit. At first through that tenderness which the Lord kindly gave

me, I seemed to listen to them, and the milk and honey were often given to me, and all things went on well; but the idols of Egypt, and the many snares which were privily laid for my feet, entangled me, and I perceived a cloud hung over my spirit, and a measure of despondency took place, and I could not but cry, "My leanness, my leanness! Woe unto me." And then came this question, Why am I thus? Where is the milk and the honey? And upon an honest inquiry sprang up the conviction, that as the Lord declares by Ezekiel, I polluted his sabbaths, my walk rendered them unprofitable, and I despised his judgments; for though executed even before my eyes in the church, I feared not my own case. But the 17th verse of the same chapter seems exactly the truth to me - "Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness." Such has been my untoward perverseness and ignorance, that nothing but the mighty power of God could have stopped me from ruin. I must add, that from the 33rd verse to the end of the 37th my ease is set forth, and the 38th is descriptive of the corruptions of my heart, at the sight of which I often tremble; but the 43rd and 44th are so true to the work of God in my own soul, that I cannot but rejoice in hope.

From what I have written, I would have you understand the caution I am anxious to give you respecting this early part of your spiritual teaching. Suspect anything like a lowering cloud hanging over your head; and if the milk and honey are stayed, enter minutely into the cause - pass not over it; and "Ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done, saith the Lord" [Ezek. xiv. 23]. In your separation from your godly friends and the ministry, you will find it hard labour to maintain spiritual life; and I would recommend you to attend very particularly to Paul's advice to Timothy, that you may not come home with your locks shorn, but that your profiting may appear, and your labour not be in vain in the Lord. "Let the word of God dwell in you richly" - "Exercise thyself unto godliness" - "Keep that which is committed into thy trust" (namely, godly fear in a tender conscience). Listen to the secret checks I speak of, and brow-beat them not, and so shall your profiting appear. Grace be with thee. Amen.

If it is well with you, remember me in your prayers, and write me word how you go on.

Yours &c. J. B.

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