

Letter 78

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon 'Letter 78' calls believers to endure trials and seek true guidance from the Holy Spirit in their faith journey.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 5:24, 1 Timothy 1:16, 2 Timothy 1:13, 2 Timothy 3:1

Topics: "Faith And Endurance", "Overcoming Sin"

Description

James Bourne, in a sermon to M. J. and C. G. in London on April 26, 1835, addresses the challenges they face, emphasizing the necessity of enduring difficulties to obtain the prize. He warns against holding onto idols or secret sins, as seen in the story of the young man who chose worldly possessions over Christ. Bourne urges them to hold fast to faith and a good conscience, reminding them of the importance of enduring hardships as good soldiers for the incorruptible crown.

Transcript

[To M. J., and C. G.] London, 26 April 1835.

My dear Friends,

I have lately heard of you, and can truly feel for you under the difficulties you are surrounded with; yet I see nowhere in God's word that you can obtain the prize without them. Human contrivances and human prudence have destroyed thousands. Many are the devices of man's heart, and many are the schemes by which he seeks to elude the cross; it is long before he quite understands, NO CROSS - NO CROWN.

The young man in the gospel would give up everything but one thing - that being touched, he manifestly chose hell instead of Christ. We all have our tender points - our beloved Isaacs, or idols of some sort, which are allowed for a while to be embraced; but the time comes with us all, called in Scripture "a certain day," when the Lord will judge us in righteousness, and discover what are the secret devices of our hearts, and what our affections are really set upon.

Your sister cannot forget in so short a time the despairing convictions she laboured under, and what the Lord by his Spirit then dictated upon her heart. She then saw in a measure the difference between truth and error, between possession and profession, and was enabled to give up all for Christ. Then she found a door of hope, which will presently close if trifled with. From her late conflicts and conquests she ought to be a pattern to the rest of you, "holding faith and a good conscience," which some, not doing, "have made

shipwreck." But I would rather hope that she may hold fast that good thing which appeared committed to her by the Holy Ghost in her late affliction; for there are many who turn away. But learn to endure hardness as good soldiers, and mind that you strive lawfully for the incorruptible crown; and the Lord give you understanding in all things. [1 Tim. i. 16-19; 2 Tim. i. 13, and ii. 7.]

I feel you have put upon me a most important task, for who am I, that I should counsel you? I am but weakness itself, and surrounded with all the difficulties and dangers that you are. I am ready to say, Do I make straight paths for my feet? Do I not turn that which is lame out of the way, but really get it healed by the blood of Christ? Do I walk as an example to my family, and a comfort to the Church of God? I ought duly to weigh these things, or it may be said, "Physician, heal thyself" - or learn first to take the beam out of thine own eye, before thou canst see clearly to take the mote out of another's eye. If this be neglected, "Thou hypocrite" is the dreadful denunciation. Therefore I feel it a matter of great weight to take upon me to instruct others. Yet if it please God to make use of one so mean and ignorant, he can even by such an instrument warn you that "perilous times shall come" - that both men and women shall turn away from the power of godliness, though they retain the form----"led away with divers lusts," "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Perhaps the time is hastening when we shall not endure sound doctrine, but after our own lust heap to ourselves teachers, having itching ears, and shall turn away our ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables. Now if you are of God, you will be spiritually watchful, and seek to make full proof of the truth; if not, this battle will not be to your honour, nor will you, like the apostle, finish your course with joy, nor find that crown of righteousness which the righteous Judge will in that day give "unto all them that love his appearing." [2 Tim. iii. 1-7; and iv. 1-8]. I find it hard work to be faithful, yet the Lord instructs me with a strong hand, and keeps me trembling at his judgments, both for myself and others, especially for you who are in such slippery places.

I quite understood your former letter, and this, and was grieved to see in them so much that is of the flesh, and not the Spirit's teaching. You ought by no means to walk after my counsel, unless the Spirit of God convince you of the truth of it. If your proceedings are only because you are bidden to do or to say anything, this has not the power of God in it to back it; therefore, when fortitude is most wanted, there will be none, and your good intentions, not being from the Lord, will easily be given up. If you are led of the Spirit, light, more or less, will come to discover what is truth, and where you are. In this teaching the fountain of the deep of your nature's evil would also be discovered, and your free will would sicken and die; and your concern would be so pressing, that you would forget all other things whatsoever but this - "God be merciful to me a sinner." Your natural feelings are greatly excited, and the flesh makes a desperate claim; but God is a jealous God, and they that are his must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, and must both live and walk in the Spirit, and not have so much fleshly religion as you have set forth in your last letter. We must not deceive ourselves; if we sow to the flesh in walking after another's counsel without knowing why, we shall "of the flesh reap corruption." Therefore take heed, and make God your counsellor, and in this way sow to the Spirit, and you shall "of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Do not be weary of this teaching, for that would manifest all your profession to be of the flesh. It is no small thing to be saved; many run in this race, and but one obtains the prize. [Gal. v. 24, 6-9; Cor. ix. 24.].

Do not imagine I am not acquainted with your cases; I trust the Lord has condescended in some measure to show me that if salvation is come to your house, all your fleshly goodness and fleshly obedience will be burnt up in the furnace, and this will, by little and little, bring you to speak a purer language; but if you cannot discover my drift, I fear it is because the Spirit of God has not enlightened you to see how spiritual true religion is. May the Lord impress your minds with this, that transparency and godly simplicity, and no

hiding of anything, are true tokens of the Spirit's teaching; and all short of this is human contrivance, which will not prosper. How can any counsel, if the principal half of the matter is hidden? The Lord will manifest his displeasure on this account, if you are his; if not, you will soon be weary of any intercourse with me.

Yours in the Lord, J. B.

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