

Letter 83

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon 'Letter 83' explores the necessity of discernment between the true and dead church and the transformative power of God's grace through suffering and humility.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 66:2, Luke 12:49, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 2:7, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "True Church", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

James Bourne, in a letter to Mr. M., encourages him to discern between the dead professing church and the true church of God, emphasizing the necessity of feeling the inefficiency of worldly pleasures and the desire for spiritual truth. Bourne reminds Mr. M. that judgment often precedes mercy, and there is a process of breaking down before building up in the Christian journey. He urges Mr. M. not to be discouraged by a lack of immediate peace or assurance of salvation, but to focus on humility, contrition, and trembling at God's word. Bourne highlights the importance of enduring hardships, preferring God's honor over personal reputation, and the gradual work of grace in a believer's heart.

Transcript

[To Mr. M.] London, 14 June 1835.

Dear unknown Friend,

I am glad to see your letter to Mr. G., and that it has pleased God to give you some discernment between the dead professing church, and the true church of God. I cannot but hope the Spirit of God has made you to feel the inefficiency of the one and the desirableness of the other; for the gay professors of the present day are not denied any of the pleasures and fashions of this world, and if you in your measure are dead to these through the fear of death and a broken law, to such the Gospel is sent. You must not be disheartened because you find not abiding peace. "I am come to bring fire on earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled" Judgment most commonly precedes mercy, and there is pulling down before building up, and breaking the clods and ploughing before sowing. None of these things are pleasant spiritually though both safe and necessary. The Lord will sooner or later turn us to destruction, before he bids us to return and live; and in the beginning of our profession we are not at all aware what this turning to destruction means. It is anything but abiding peace.

Be not discouraged if the assurance of salvation does not come about according to your notions of it; nor think that your safety consists in attaining to high things at once. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

The despondency you speak of is to create a feeling sense of your weakness, and train you not for high things, but for small things; to hear the truth from a child; to think it a wonder of wonders if the Lord should condescend to visit you in ever so little a way by the ministry of a poor despised man. The furnace has been the means that has brought me down in many ways from my heights, and the furnace must still be heated and prepared to keep me down, and so it must be with you, if you are saved; by this you will get to know what is meant by "enduring hardness as a good soldier." In this low place you will prefer the honour of God to your own, which is hard work, for we value nothing and nobody so much as ourselves; and nothing can reduce this mighty self so much as the true efficacious and powerful grace of God. The great and mysterious work of grace in a sinner's heart is not wrought in a day, there is so much to be pulled down, put off, denied and crucified; and the Lord can do nothing but with broken hearts.

O may the Spirit of God quicken you! I hope you will be able by the grace of God to abide by the word in this time of persecution and disgrace. Christ "made himself of no reputation." Can you find power from on high to give up your reputation? Or will the love of this present evil world in a profession entice you to betray him? Do not think that I wish in any way to judge my unknown friend, or can do so - no, by no means; yet we read such words as these left as a caution to us - "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" [2 Kings viii. 13.] If we suspect our hearts we are more likely to seek the Lord for strength to hold out in the hour of temptation.

May the Lord greatly enlighten and comfort you, and discover to you more and more the safety and sweetness of that salvation which is treasured up in Christ for all afflicted consciences.

From your unworthy servant in the Lord, J. B.

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