

Letter 86

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our lost condition, fearing God, and seeking His mercy through prayer and spiritual vigilance.

Scripture: John 9:39

Topics: "True Repentance", "Victory Over Sin"

Description

James Bourne addresses the letters of M and J. G., expressing concern over their lack of understanding of their lost condition and the fear of God. He urges them to consider the seriousness of their spiritual state and the need for true repentance and victory over sin. Bourne emphasizes the importance of seeking God's mercy with sincerity and not being content with a superficial knowledge of religion. He encourages them to avoid returning to old sinful ways and to seek a deeper, genuine relationship with God.

Transcript

[To M, and J. G.] London, 4 July 1835.

My dear Friends,

Your first letter gives me an account of many things, and especially that my friend is not aware of the real lost condition of a poor creature that God takes in hand. It is true that in experience you know nothing as yet of the judgments of God; if you did, your trembling hand would not so lightly express your ignorance; nor would you, under a feeling sense of your fearless condition, so lightly have written that you were destitute of the fear of God. O how soon do we lose the little light we have been favoured with, if we turn again to the "beggary elements!" [Gal. iv. 9]. May you and I duly consider these words, "If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Those who are in that darkness cannot comprehend it, for they think they have light, and do not consider the Lord's words, "Because ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth" [John ix. 39-41].

You write upon the subject of religion, but not once tell me the nature of your exercises, nor whether the things which once afflicted you are removed, and how; nor do you describe any victory obtained over the world, the flesh, and the devil, in all your affairs. If you have not the fear of God, how can you know what can be had by fighting under the banner of Christ, the Captain of our salvation? How comes it that this Captain of your salvation (as you write) does not at times, in his terrible majesty, make you tremble? Is it because, as you say, you have not the fear of God?

If I might be allowed to judge, I fear you have not been ploughing with God's heifer since last winter; but perhaps, through the violence of Satan's temptations, you have sought for a cessation of arms, and have desired to rest upon your oars, and have sent over to the enemy some conditions of a truce. If so, no wonder you cannot pray, as you say; this is the most effectual way of stopping all spiritual intercourse. Is there yet a small remaining fear of your danger, or can you boldly assert you are satisfied with this line of things, and see no beauty nor truth in that way which is so narrow as to forbid all communion with what the Church of England calls "false doctrine, heresy, and schism?"

It is neither obstinacy nor temper that leads me to point out your danger and mine, but a sheer feeling sense of God's holiness and my sinfulness, that does not suffer me to trifle; but through trembling apprehensions of God's dealing with me in wrath, leads me not to consider any inconvenience I may put myself to, and leaves nothing in me or about me, but "God be merciful to me a sinner." This cry from the heart will bring about something worth receiving from God, as well as hearing about; and such as are in earnest seeking for these things will be greatly encouraged to find some who have obtained this desire of their hearts, namely, MERCY.

And now, my other dear friend, why do you, too, write that you know nothing of these things, when the very next words are, "I have indeed an awful sense of the wrath of God against sin;" and you add that, notwithstanding your dread of his anger, you can sometimes hope in his mercy? Yet all this is nothing! O my dear friend, you either darken counsel by a crooked walk, or you suffer great loss for the want of a spiritual ministry, which I also fear I do not sufficiently value.

Both your letters are distressingly general; no soul-trouble explained; no spiritual labour unfolded, no encouragement fairly stated; no difficulty shown, nor the way of escape that the Lord makes for his people; but a general history of religion, such as the professing church has no end of. God forbid that you should again be cordially joined to your old idols; nor can I believe that you will be let alone. If you belong to God, you will find, as you have found, that he will not be at a loss for means to bring you both to a pure language.

You say "when I feel weak in myself, then I feel he is strong." I must say when I feel weak, I doubt his strength too, and am so weak as to fear I am quite given up, and that the Lord will never appear. I cannot make up so good a creed as you can. I perceive head-knowledge and heart-experience will often differ, because we dread everything in the furnace, and the face of Christ is hid; but bold presumption fears nothing, and knows everything, and believes everything, and has no doubt but God will be sure to help, and that whenever we call. May the Lord condescend to instruct you both, and keep you alive in the midst of all your threatened dangers!

Your unworthy servant in the Lord, J. B.

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