

Letter 88

by James Bourne

In 'Letter 88', James Bourne emphasizes the importance of applying God's promises through a living faith and the support of community amidst spiritual struggles.

Scripture: John 15:16, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Sovereign Grace", "Spiritual Struggle"

Description

James Bourne emphasizes the importance of clinging to the teachings of Luther and Calvin, highlighting the need for the powerful application of the written word by the Spirit to the wounded conscience. He reflects on his own struggles with fear and sin, finding comfort in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Bourne encourages his friend, Mr. Nunn, to rely on Jesus' aid and to trust in His sovereignty and grace, acknowledging the need for patience and faith in times of trial.

Transcript

[To Mr. Nunn.] Bushey, 24 July 1835.

My dear Friend,

Yesterday a person belonging to this house read some of my letters, and told me that he thought I had had some teaching, but could not find out to what sect I belonged. He could see, he said, that I had a great deal of constitutional melancholy, which runs through the whole of them, and he wondered I did not take the promises more. I confessed that, by the grace of God, I adhered chiefly to Luther and Calvin, and many more such men whom the Lord had owned, and considered that the dissenters, as a body, were, for the most part, equally with the church-people, a dead carcass; trusting in the written word, without the powerful application of it by the Spirit to the wounded conscience. This I said to see what he would make of it, and he immediately replied, How limited in your views! Are there none in all these that are right? I replied, Out of these lumps of dead clay the Lord chooses his elect, and the rest he leaves to trust to promises unapplied. I cannot argue, I said, but I find the Lord is a God of judgment as well as of mercy; dead professors take such promises as seem to suit the flesh, and leave out many that strike hard at the old man within; for instance, the Lord promises to take vengeance of our inventions; this is to be forgotten; and while "peace and safety" is all that is looked for, alas! "sudden destruction cometh." So we parted.

Early this morning I awoke full of fears, and very poorly. I started up, and began to ponder over my miserable condition; what a grievous sinner I was, and how surrounded with such sorrows as would be

most fearful in my dying moments; and something said, Don't you think your poor friend Mr. Nunn has as many and as sore conflicts as you have, and more too? This consideration brought me to some acknowledgment, and I began to forget myself and to ponder over your lingering trial, and the need of the perpetual exercise of patience, and how hard this is when we are in the dark. I then thought on what I had written to Mr. R., and the same words came with inexpressible sweetness to my heart, as if spoken to you

"Cheer up, ye travelling souls,

On Jesus' aid rely!"

This removed all my sorrow, and my eyes full of weeping admired the riches of his grace and mercy manifested to you and me. I then believed, with all my heart,

"He sees us when we see not him,

And always hears our cry."

At once the fear of death and destruction was removed, and a sensible drawing nigh, with holy familiarity and self-abasement, took place; and my prayers went up for you, and all afflicted people.

I found this better than the letter of a promise to be taken with a withered hand. I had rather have the hand of faith restored, and then, under the influence of that divine power, it will stretch forth and lay hold on eternal life. This is a substance; the other a thing of nought. My poor friend here would rank himself as a limb of that dead carcass. "Such were some of you; but ye are washed" - "Who made thee to differ? And what hast thou, that thou didst not receive?" So I found it in the night, and could not but adore the riches of his sovereign grace; for I never felt it so free before, nor myself less likely to have such a visit as I then found. And let me repeat what was so sweet in my cast-down situation - Cheer up, poor sinner, "ON JESUS' AID RELY." This was the precious part; there seemed in the words such a sweet invitation to come, and I found in him ALL that I wanted. I had no wishes or wants left unsatisfied, and this made me weep with many mixed feelings of shame at myself, and acknowledgments of his great condescension. Thus I find the standard of the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted up, when the enemy comes in with a flood of despair.

I felt the truth in a certain sense of my poor friend's remark, that I had a great deal of melancholy, only I call it unbelief at the sight of my awful corruptions; and I think if he could see spiritually what is in his heart, he would have more melancholy than he has now. But the whole-hearted want no Physician - those who are sick, and have many fears, want speedy remedies.

O may you and I, and the rest of our little body, with our pastor at the head of us, make it more and more manifest that the Lord has chosen us out of a dead, professing world, and through the Spirit bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

Yours &c. J. B.

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