

Letter 89

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon emphasizes the necessity of trials for spiritual refinement and the importance of acknowledging our sins before God.

Scripture: Psalm 51:2, Jeremiah 2:2, Matthew 14:31, Romans 6:4, 1 Corinthians 15:31

Topics: "Spiritual Refinement", "Gods Justice"

Description

James Bourne, in a letter to Mrs. T. Bushey in 1835, reflects on the trials believers face, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging God's justice and righteousness in afflictions. He warns against straying from God's ways and being ensnared by the world's allurements, highlighting the necessity of ongoing refinement in the 'furnace' to purge worldly influences. Bourne shares his personal struggles with sin, doubt, and unbelief, underscoring the need for complete surrender to God's will and the continual process of dying to self to experience newness of life in Christ.

Transcript

[To Mrs. T.] Bushey, 2 August 1835.

Dear Friend,

I am truly sorry to hear of your being put into the furnace again, and also that our friend did not send me any particulars respecting your exercises under it. For my part, I am always sore broken at the sight of the rod, and very commonly think at the first that the Lord is about to bring me to final judgment. In such a case I find nothing so safe or so difficult as to acknowledge the justice and righteousness of God in thus dealing with me.

I was exceedingly struck this morning in reading Jer. ii., and with shame I could, in a measure, fall under the charge. "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Then was Israel very tender, and the world and its fashions very small; but what does the Lord say now? "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" "I brought you up" (out of the Egypt of the world) "into a plentiful country" (a land where the gospel is faithfully preached, and amongst a people that fear God); "but when ye entered, ye defiled my land" (with the spirit and fashion of this world) - "Wherefore I WILL YET PLEAD WITH YOU, saith the Lord." This further pleading is, I conceive, the continued furnace-work that the Lord sees absolutely needful for us,

that the spirit, maxims, and fashions, of this world may die in us. Without this, we should soon find that the former tenderness and tempered zeal would disappear, and we should "change our glory," or this work of God, for the veriest nonsense that man can name, for dress, for straws, for anything that is not God; and thus insidiously slide from spiritual union with Jesus Christ, "the fountain of living waters," and make up the deficiency, if possible, with "broken cisterns that can hold no water."

It is on this account that you and I are so often in the furnace; and if we say we don't know why he thus afflicts us, we may depend upon it, he will continue the furnace till we do find it out, and an honest confession comes from the heart by the power of the Spirit, under a discovery of the greatness and number of our multiplied transgressions, notwithstanding some light, some intimations, some sweet and friendly hints, such as "This is the way, walk ye in it;" all which have been shamefully slighted. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not!" How have I set before thee a way of escape in time of temptation, and yet the love of sin prevailed!

Thus, when the furnace has been heated seven times more than it was wont, I have been made in the end to acknowledge the truth of what the Lord says - "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself," in forsaking the Lord and taking up with toys? But it is our mercy that the Lord will not leave us until he has made us quite ashamed of ourselves. Then what a sweet prayer Psalm li. becomes, and how glad we are of that thorough washing by the Spirit, which is there spoken of!

May the Lord graciously visit you in this affliction, and grant that the natural sottishness and want of understanding that abound in us all, may be discovered more and more to you, and removed by the Spirit of Light and Life entering abundantly into your heart. Wise enough we all are to do evil, but to do good we have no knowledge.

I am often cast down because of the way; my sin makes it thorny, and there seems but few Scriptures more suitable than the Lord's reproof - "O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?"

Sin, in any shape, bears no other fruit than unbelief. When the Lord withdraws, I find often that the sight of my sin remains, and its demerit; I leave you to guess my feelings, with an enlightened judgment in the terrible majesty and holiness of God, and Christ out of sight. The law works wrath, and stirs up enmity, and all former tokens are hidden, and God speaks terrible words in this thick cloud. But here, when all contention gives way, I am led to bow, to stoop, to confess, to admire and agree to all his judgments, and to say no way could be so just, so kind, so tender as this, to bring down this wretched heart of mine, big with opposition in all directions, to God's way of saving sinners. And now, Lord, I have no wish, no will, no way, but thine! All this while weeping under a sense of his goodness, admiring the pains he takes that I should not be condemned with a wicked world, in the great day.

The Apostle protests "I die daily," and that by crucifixion - a long-lingering and painful death; and this is, and must be, the way spiritually with us, if we ever know the rising in newness of life. We are always calculating upon some rest here in this world. If we have been ever so near to the grave, and a respite is given us, the first thing considered is generally some little accommodation for the flesh, some toy put into the hand to amuse us, and divert us from the spiritual life and tenderness gained in the furnace.

May the Lord make and keep us more wary! I fall daily here, and am ashamed.

Yours &c. J. B.

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