

Letter 96

by James Bourne

The Refiner's work is a process of purification and refinement that leads to desperation and fear, but ultimately results in the Lord's search, provision, and restoration of His sheep.

Scripture: Psalm 23:2, Psalm 34:18, Ezekiel 34:5, Amos 3:12, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Gods Refining", "Restoration Process"

Description

James Bourne reflects on the slow and steady work of God in our lives, contrasting it with our impatience and haste. He describes the refining process God takes us through, revealing our impurities and leading us to a place of desperation and realization of our sinfulness. Despite our shortcomings, God promises to search for and restore His lost sheep, feeding them with both the waters of life and affliction to humble their proud hearts.

Transcript

[To C. G.] London, 11 October 1835.

Dear Friend,

I cannot help remarking how slowly and steadily the work of God (in general) goes on, in opposition to that haste which is seen in the flesh. Our time is always ready, and we think we discover many things, especially when the natural passions are excited upon spiritual objects. We believe all things, we hope all things, and feel such softness upon our spirits, that we think our loving hearts can never rise up against God, let him do what he will. We think we see the very way he means to lead us, and are quite armed, as we suppose, for the battle; that the Lord has so taken us out of the world, that neither the laugh, nor the scorn, nor the kindness which is offered, shall move us from the zeal we feel for the Lord of Hosts.

But now comes the Refiner, and by due degrees makes manifest that all this is not pure gold; and the discovery sinks us amain. Our zeal abates; our spiritual strength withers; and we begin to perceive we are not so near heaven's gate as we supposed, but that the gates of hell have compassed us about; and we find ourselves in a path very different from that which we in our wisdom had chalked out. The Refiner still pursues his work, till there seems almost nothing left - "as the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear" [Amos iii. 12]; and we sink into desperate apprehensions of the danger to which sin has reduced us, so as to become a prey to every evil beast.

But the Lord will both search his sheep and seek them out, in this tremendous cloudy and dark day, and will "feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the rivers" - signifying both the waters of life and the waters of affliction. These shall be good feeding pastures, though thus mingled with gall; for by sanctified afflictions our proud hearts are brought low. Do not be disheartened; "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away" (by temptation), "and will bind up that which was broken" (in judgment), "and will strengthen that which was sick" (spiritually). Only take good heed that you do not tread down these good pastures, nor foul the waters with your feet. [Ezek. xxxiv. 5-19.]

Yours &c. J. B.

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