

Letter 98

by James Bourne

True communion with God leads to spiritual growth, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of His righteousness.

Scripture: Genesis 28:16, Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 65:5, Isaiah 30:20, Jeremiah 12:1, 2 Corinthians 7:11

Topics: "Divine Discipline", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

James Bourne preaches to Mr. T. O. about the importance of experiencing God's judgments and discipline, which reveal the hidden sins and inventions of our hearts. Through this communion with God, we are led to acknowledge His righteousness and sovereignty, even in times of fear and trembling. Bourne encourages embracing God's discipline as a means to grow in grace, knowledge, and spiritual maturity, despite the struggles and terrors that may accompany it.

Transcript

[To Mr. T. O.] London, 30 October 1835.

My dear Friend in the common path of tribulation,

My heart was much broken when I heard the few words you spoke; and when you read that part of the word of God, it plainly showed me where you were. The judgments of God are a great deep. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is he." Though there be some measure of credit given to this, yet we are found in great haste, crying, "Bring my soul out of prison," long before we have learnt the lessons God has designed we should learn; and especially to acknowledge from heartfelt experience that the Lord is righteous altogether when he talks with us of judgment. Then it is that he tries our reins, and shows us what our delights are; and in this severe scrutiny (which is none other than communion with God), many inventions of our own are discovered, which we never before suspected, and many promised delights; as it was with Solomon when he gat him "men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, and that of all sorts," nor could he say all this was vanity, till the candle of the Lord shone in the innermost parts of his belly; then he cried "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." [Deut. xxxii. 4; Jer. xii. 1-3; Eccl. i. and ii.]

This is laying "judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet," the sight of which proves our hearts so crooked that our souls are filled with dismay, and the terrors of death get hold upon us, make us "go softly," like Hezekiah; and it is God's design that they should have this effect. That strange scripture

which we all in turn must understand, will no doubt be fulfilled in you - "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O GOD OF OUR SALVATION!" [Psalm lxxv. 5.] But as the destruction comes first, our fears run high lest it should be final; and this also is God's design, that it may break our rampant spirit, and show us feelingly what the sentence of death is, that hangs over us. O how we bow and stoop, beg and cry, if so be there may be hope; we sit solitary, and all created things are hung in sackcloth; we believe there is but a step between us and death - temporal, spiritual, and eternal. O what a struggle have I found here! What terrors in the night! Fearfulness and trembling have got hold upon me, and I have been ready to conclude that the Lord had forgotten to be gracious, and that he would be favourable no more.

This, my dear friend, I found to be communion with God. My ears were by these judgments opened to discipline, and many things confessed and forsaken which would have been quite overlooked, if I had not thus been brought to his bar. Do not you find, as I have found, more tenderness in our life and walk under this discipline, than ever before? "Behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation" (spiritual indignation against your sins), "yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" [2 Cor. vii. 11.]

This was the cause why I felt such true sympathy for you, being persuaded that the Lord has thoughts of good, and not of evil towards you, to give you an expected end. May the Lord give you a fervent desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of him. Though it be through much tribulation I know the issue will be "a wealthy place," better than the wealth of this world. When Jacob was in your case, he cried, "How dreadful is this place!" He was threatened by his brother, and turned out into the wide world; and not knowing what would become of him, in weariness he lay down to sleep, making a stone his pillow; but though so dreadful, he presently found - " This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

O may the Lord be pleased to grant you grace so to profit by the present dispensation, that however dreadful it may be in your apprehension, it may yet prove, eventually, none other than the house of God and gate of heaven to you!

Yours &c. J. B.

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