

# Sorrow for Sin: Part II

by Samuel Rutherford

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*A justified person can experience sorrow for sin, but it is not a sign of a lack of faith or spiritual assurance, and it is a natural response to the revelation of God's free love and forgiveness.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 32:3

**Topics:** "Justification", "Sanctification"

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## Description

Samuel Rutherford preaches about the doctrine of soul trouble for sin in the justified person, emphasizing that doubts and unbelief should not trouble the soul once justified and pardoned, as it misjudges the Lord's saving grace. He discusses the distinction between the habit of unbelief and love jealousies, highlighting that doubts can coexist with a soul possessing the life of God. Rutherford also addresses the ebb and flow of faith in believers, showcasing that even strong acts of faith can fluctuate, but the spirit of adoption ensures freedom from eternal wrath. He refutes the notion that trouble for sin is a sign of being under a covenant of works, asserting that gospel mourning is a result of understanding the foulness of sin through the law and the grace of the gospel.

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## Transcript

But I crave to clear our doctrine touching soul trouble for sin in the justified person. Assertion 1. No doubting, no perplexity of unbelief, de jure, ought to perplex the soul once justified and pardoned. (1.) Because the patent and writs of an unchangeable purpose to save the elect, and the subscribed and resolved-upon act of atonement and free redemption in Christ, standeth uncanceled and firm, being once received by faith; the justified soul ought not so to be troubled for sin as to misjudge the Lord's past work of saving grace. (2.) Because the believer, once justified, is to believe remission of sins, and a paid ransom. If now he should believe the writs, once signed, were canceled again, he were obliged to believe things contradictory. (3.) To believe that the Lord is changed, and off and on, in his free love and eternal purposes, is a great slandering of the Almighty. (4.) The church acknowledgeth such misjudging of God to be the soul's infirmity, Psalm 77:10.

Assertion 2. (1.) Yet, de facto, David, a man according to God's heart, fell in an old fever, a fit of the disease of the Spirit of bondage, Psalm 32:3-4: When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. So the church in Asaph's words, Psalm 77:2, 7: My sore ran in the night, and ceased not. Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be merciful no more? Then faith and doubting both may as well

be in a soul possessing the life of God, as health and sickness in one body, at sundry times. And it is no argument at all of no spiritual assurance, and of a soul under the law or covenant of works, to doubt; as sickness argueth life, no dead corpse is capable of sickness or blindness. These are infirmities that neighbor with life; thus doubting with sorrow, because the poor soul cannot, in that exigency, believe, is of kin to the life of God. The life of Jesus in the soul hath infirmities kindly to it, as some diseases are hereditary to such a family. (2.) The habit or state of unbelief is one thing, and doubtings and love jealousies is another thing. Our love to Christ is sickly, crazy, and full of jealousies and suspicions. Temptations make false reports of Christ, and we easily believe them. But jealousies argue love, and the strongest of loves, even marriage love. (3.) The morning dawning of light, is light; the first springing of the child in the belly, is a motion of life; the least warmings of Christ's breathings, is the heart of life. When the pulse of Christ new-framed in the soul moveth most weakly, the new birth is not dead; the very swoonings of the love of Christ cannot be incident to a buried man.

(4.) The disciples' prayer, Lord increase our faith, Christ's praying that the faith of the saints, when they are winnowed, may not fail, and the exhortation to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, prove the saint's faith may be at a stand, and may stagger and slide. (5) The various condition of the saints, now it's full moon, again no moonlight at all, but a dark eclipse, evidenceth this truth. The believer hath flowings of strong acts of faith, joy, and love, supernatural passions of grace arising to an high springtide, above the banks and ordinary coasts, and again a low-ground ebb. The condition in ebbings and flowings, in full manifestations and divine raptures of another world, when the wind bloweth right from heaven, and the breath of Jesus Christ's mouth, and of sad absence, runneth through the Song of Solomon, the book of the Psalms, the book of Job, as threads through a web of silk, and veins that are the strings and spouts carrying blood through all the body, less or more.

Assertion 3. The justified soul, once pardoned, receiveth never the spirit of bondage, to fear again eternal wrath. That is, this spirit in the intention of the habit such as was at the first conversion, when there was not a grain of faith, doth never return, nor is it consistent with the Spirit of adoption. Yet happily it may be a question, if a convert brought in with much sweetness and quietness of spirit, if he fall in some heinous sin like the adultery and murder by David, have not greater vexation of spirit than at his first conversion, but more supernatural.

But yet this must stand as a condemned error, which Libertines do hold, "that frequency or length of holy duties, or trouble of conscience for neglect thereof, are all signs of one under a covenant of works." This is but a turning of faith into wantonness, whereas faith, of all graces, moveth with lowest sails. For faith is not a lofty and crying, but a soft-moving and humble, grace. For then David's being moved, and his heart smiting him, at the rending of King Saul's garment, should be under a covenant of works, and so not a man according to God's own heart, for a smitten heart is a troubled soul. And then David ought not to have been troubled in soul for sin, for his sins were then pardoned; nor could the Spirit of the Lord so highly commend Josiah's heart-melting trouble at the reading and hearing of the law, nor Christ own the tears and soul trouble of the woman, as coming from no other spring but much love to Christ, because many sins were pardoned.

Nor can it be said that we are to be less troubled for sin than the saints of old were, because our justification is more perfect, and the blood of Christ had less power to purge the conscience and to satisfy the demands of the law before it was shed, than now. Indeed, the law was a severer pedagogue to awe the saints, then in regard of the outward dispensation of ceremonies and legal strictness, keeping men as malefactors in close prison till Christ should come. But imputation of Christ's righteousness, and

blessedness in the pardon of sin, and so freedom from soul trouble for eternal wrath, and the law's demanding the conscience to pay what debts none were able to pay but the surety only, was one and the same to them and to us. Who dare say that the believing Jews died under the curse of the law, Deuteronomy 27:26? For so they must perish eternally, Galatians 3:10. Then there must be none redeemed under the Old Testament, nor any justified, contrary to express Scriptures. As they were blessed, in that their transgression was forgiven, and their sin covered, and that the Lord imputed no iniquity to them, our blessedness is the same, and Christ as he was made a curse for them, so for us. David, Abraham, and all the fathers under the law, were justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith, as we are, Romans 4:23. Then the law could crave them no harder than us, and they were no more justified by works than we are. The law did urge the Jews harder than us (1.) in regard of the Mosaical burden of ceremonies and bloody sacrifices, that pointed out their guiltiness, except they should flee to Christ, (2.) in regard of God's dispensation of the severer punishing of law transgression, and that with temporary punishments, and rewarding obedience with external prosperity, and (3.) in urging this doctrine more hardly upon the people to cause them not rest on the letter of the law, but seek to the promised Messiah, in whom only was their righteousness: as young heirs and minors are kept under tutors while their nonage expire. But who dare say that the saints under the Old Testament were to trust to the merit of their own works, or seek righteousness in themselves, more than we? Yea, they believing in the Messiah to come, were no more under the law and the dominion of sin, than we are, but under grace, and pardoned, and saved by faith, as we are.

Josiah's tenderness of heart, David's smiting of heart, the woman's weeping, even to the washing of Christ's feet with tears, Peter's weeping bitterly for the denying of his Lord: these woundings were gospel affections, and commotions of love issuing from the Spirit of adoption, of love, grace, and nothing but the turtle dove's love sorrow. These soul commotions were not, as Antinomians imagine, from "demands of law to pay what justice may demand of the self-condemned sinner"; such an obligation to eternal wrath is no chain which can tie the sons of adoption, who are washed, justified, pardoned. And yet if the justified and pardoned say they have no sin, and so no reason to complain under their fetters, and to sigh as captives in prison, as Paul doth, Romans 7:24, nor cause to mourn for indwelling of sin, they are liars and strangers to their own heart, and do sleep in deep security, as if sin were so fully removed both in guilt and blot, as if tears for sin as sin should argue the mourning party to be in the condition of those who weep in hell, or that they were no more obliged to weep, but only to exercise joy, comfort, and perpetuated acts of solace and rejoicing, as if Christ had, in the threshold of glory, already with his own hand wiped all tears from their eyes.

Saltmarsh saith in a dangerous medicine for wounded souls, "Where there is no law," (as there is none in or over the justified soul) "there is no transgression, and where there is no transgression, there is no trouble for sin, all trouble arising from the obligation of the law, which demandeth a satisfaction of the soul for the breach of it, and such satisfaction as the soul knows it cannot give, and thereby remains unquiet, like a debtor that hath nothing to pay, and the law, too, being naturally in the soul, as the apostle saith, the conscience accusing or else excusing. It is no marvel that such souls should be troubled for sin and unpacified, the law having such a party and engagement already within them, which must needs work strongly upon the spirits of such as are but faintly and weakly enlightened, and not furnished with gospel enough to answer the indictments, the convictions, the terrors, the curses which the law brings."

I can see no reason why any should affirm that "the law is naturally as a party in the soul," either of the regenerate and justified, or of those who are out of Christ. (1.) For the law's engaging, by accusing and

condemning, is not naturally in any son of Adam, because there is a sleeping conscience, both dumb and silent, naturally in the soul. And if there be any challenging and accusing in the Gentile conscience, Romans 2, as stirring is opposed to a silent and dumb conscience that speaketh nothing, so the law-accusing is not naturally in the soul. A spirit above nature (I do not mean the Spirit of regeneration) must work with the law, else both the law and sin lie dead in the soul. The very law of nature lieth as a dead letter, and stirreth not, except some wind blow more or less on the soul, Romans 7:8-9. (2.) That the law wakeneth any sinner, and maketh the drunken and mad sinner see himself in the sea, and sailing down the river to the chambers of death, that he may but be occasioned to cast an eye on shore, on Jesus Christ, and wish a landing on Christ, is a mercy that no man can father on nature, or on himself. (3.) All sense of a sinful condition, to any purpose, is a work above nature, though it be not ever a fruit of regeneration. (4.) It's true, "Christ teacheth a man's soul, through the shining of gospel light, to answer all the indictments of the law, in regard that Christ the Ransomer stops the law's mouth with blood," else the sinner can make but a poor and faint advocacy for himself. Yet this cannot be made in the conscience without some soul trouble for sin.

Another Antinomian saith, "God's people need more joys after sins than after afflictions, because they are more cast down by them. And therefore God useth sins as means by which he leads in his joys, in this world; and also in the world to come, their sins shall yield them great joys. Indeed, in some respects they shall joy most at the last day who have sinned least; but in other respects, they have most joy who have sinned most." It's strange that God's people "need more joy after sin than after affliction," and that in "some respect they have most joy who have sinned most." Sure, this is accidental to sin: this joy is not for sin, but it's a joy of loving much because much is forgiven. Forgiveness is an act of free grace; sin is no work of grace. Sin grieves the heart of God, "as a friend's trouble is trouble to a friend." The believer is made the friend of God, John 15:15, and it must be cursed joy that lay in the womb of that which is most against the heart of Christ, such as all sin is. Yea, to be more troubled in soul for sins than for afflictions smelleth of a heart that keeps correspondence with the heart and bowels of Christ, who wept more for Jerusalem's sins than for his own afflictions and cross. There is no rational way to raise and heighten the price and worth of the soul-Redeemer of sinners, and the weight of infinite love, so much as to make the sinner know how deep a hell he was plunged in, when the bone acheth exceedingly. For that the gospel tongue of the Physician Christ should lick the rotten blood of the soul's wound, speaketh more than imaginable free love. Nor do we say that gospel mourning is wrought by the law's threatenings; then it were servile sorrow. But it's wrought by the doctrine of the law discovering the foulness and sinfulness of sin, and by the doctrine of the gospel, the spirit of the gospel shining in both; otherwise, sounds, breathings, letters of either law or gospel, except the breathings of heaven shine on them and animate them, can do no good.

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