

Sorrow for Sin: Part I

by Samuel Rutherford

Soul trouble is not inherently a sin, and it is possible for a justified person to be troubled for sin without indicating a lack of assurance.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23

Topics: "Sorrow For Sin", "Christ's Sacrifice"

Description

Samuel Rutherford delves into the concept of soul trouble, drawing parallels between Christ's troubled soul and the soul's anguish over sin. He emphasizes that soul trouble is not inherently sinful, especially when rooted in a deep reverence for God's love and a fear of punishment. Rutherford highlights the extreme sorrow Christ experienced due to sin, showcasing the immense value of Christ's sacrifice and the depth of his love for humanity. He refutes the notion that believers should not be troubled by sin, asserting that sanctified soul trouble is a sign of filial love and a recognition of the gravity of sin, even in the face of assurance of pardon.

Transcript

Excerpts from Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*, London 1647, pp. 19-34.

"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." John 12:27-28.

It cannot then be a sin, intrinsically and of itself, to be troubled in soul, if Christ was under soul trouble, for sins imputed to him. Hence let me stay a little on these two: First, what a troubled conscience is, and secondly, what course the troubled in soul are to take in imitation of Christ. A soul troubled for sin must either be a soul feared and perplexed for the penal displeasure, wrath and indignation of God, or for the eternal punishment of sin; or, for sin as it faileth against the love of God, or for both. In any of these three respects it is no sin to be soul-troubled for sin, upon these conditions: (1.) That the soul be free of faithless doubting of God's love. Now Christ was free of this. He could not but have a fixed, entire, and never-broken confidence of his Father's eternal love. If we have any sin in our soul trouble for sin, it's from unbelief, not from soul trouble; if there be mud and clay in the streams, it is from the banks, not from the fountain.

Or, (2.) If the soul fear the ill of punishment as the greatest ill, and as a greater than the ill of sin, there is more passion than sound light in the fear. This could not be in Christ. The aversion of the Lord's heart from

the party in whom there is sin, either by real inherence, or by free imputation, and the withdrawing of rays and irradiations, and of outflowings of divine love, is a high evil in a soul that hath anything of the nature of a son in him. Now there was as much of a son in Christ as a man's nature could be capable of. And the more of God that was in Christ, as the fullness, the boundless infinite sea of the Godhead overflowed Christ over all the banks, then for Christ to be under a cloud in regard of the outbreathings of eternal love, was in a sort most violent to Christ, as if he had been torn from himself, and therefore it behooved to be an extreme soul trouble, Christ being deprived, in a manner, of himself, and of his soul's only substantial delight and paradise. And this could not be a sin, but an act of gracious soul sorrow, that sin and hell intervened between the moon and the sun, the soul of Christ and his Lord.

The more of heaven in the soul, and the more of God, the want of God and of heaven is the greater hell. Suppose we that the whole light of the body of the sun were utterly extinct, and that the sun were turned in a body as dark as the outside of a caldron, that should be a greater loss, than if an half penny candle were deprived of light. Christ had more to lose than a world of millions of angels. Imagine a creature of as much angelic capacity as ten thousand times ten thousand thousand of angels, all contemperated in one. If this glorious angel were filled, according to his capacity, with the highest and most pure and refined glory of heaven, and again were immediately stripped naked of all this glory, and then plunged into the depth and heart of hell, and of a lake of more than hell's ordinary temper, of fire and brimstone, or suppose God should add millions of degrees of more pure and unmixed wrath and curses, this angel's soul must be more troubled than we can easily apprehend. Yet this is but a comparison below the thing. But the Lord Jesus, in whose person heaven in the highest degree was carried about with him, being thrown down from the top of so high a glory, to a sad and fearful condition, an agony and sweating of blood (God knows the cause), that shouting and tears of this low condition drew out that saddest complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", his loss must be incomparably more than all we can say in these shadows.

This showeth the cause why there is not among troubles any so grievous as the want of the presence of God, to a soul fattened and feasted with the continual marrow and fatness of the Lord's house. No such complaints read you, so bitter, so pathetic, and coming from deeper sense, than the want of the sense of Christ's love. It's broken bones and a dried-up body to David; it's bitter weeping and crying, like the chattering of a crane, to Hezekiah; it's more than strangling, and brings Job to pray he had been buried in the womb of his mother, or that he had never been born, or his mother had been always great with him. It is swooning, and the soul's departure out of the body, sickness and death, to the spouse, Song of Solomon 5:6 and 8; it's hell and distraction to Heman, Psalm 88:15. It is to Jeremiah the cursing of the messenger that brought tidings to his father that a man child was born, and a wishing that he never had being, nor life. It's death to part the lover from the beloved, and the stronger love be, the death is the more death.

But in all that we yet have said, Christ's greatest soul trouble as a Son (for that he was essentially) was in that his holy soul was saddened and made heavy even to death, for sin, as sin, and as contrary to his Father's love. The elect sinned against the Lord, not looking to him as either Lord or Father; but Christ paid full dear for sin, eyeing God as Lord, as Father. We look neither to Lord, to law, nor to love, when we sin; Christ looked to all three, when he satisfied for sin. Christ did more than pay our debts; it was a sum above price that he gave for us. It is a great question, yea out of all question, if all mankind redeemed came near to the worth, to the goodly price given for us.

So according to the sense of any happiness, so must the soul trouble for the loss of that happiness be, in due proportion. First, as we love, so is sorrow for the loss of what we love. Jacob would not have mourned

so for the loss of a servant as for his son Joseph. According to the fulness of the presence of the Godhead, so heavy was Christ's loss under desertion. Now no man enjoying God could have a more lively and vigorous sense of the enjoyed Godhead, as Christ; so his apprehension and vision of God must have been strong. The union with the Godhead, and communion of fullness of grace from the womb, must add to his natural faculties a great edge of sense; his soul and the faculties thereof were never blunted with sin. The larger the vessel be, the fullness must be the greater: When Solomon's heart was larger than the sand in the sea shore, and he was but a shadow of such a soul as was to dwell personally with the fullness of the Godhead bodily, Oh how capacious and wide must the heart of the true Solomon be? It being to contain many seas, and rivers of wisdom, love, joy, goodness, mercy, above millions of sands in millions of sea shores. What bowels of compassion and love, of meekness, gentleness, of free grace must be in him, since all thousands of elected souls sat in these bowels, and were in his heart, to die and live with him, and since in his heart was the love of God in the highest degree. God's love must make a strong impression in the heart of Christ, and the stronger, purer and more vigorous that Christ's intellectuals are, the deeper his holy thoughts and pure apprehensions were, and more steeled with fullness of grace, therefore his fruition, sense, joy, and love of God must be the more elevated above what angels and men are capable of.

Hence it must follow that Christ was plunged in an uncouth and new world of extreme sorrow, even to the death, when this strong love was eclipsed. Imagine that for one spring and summer season all the light, heat, motion, vigor, influence of life, should retire into the body of the sun and remain there, what darkness, deadness, withering, should be upon flowers, herbs, trees, mountains, valleys, beasts, birds, and all things living and moving on the earth? Then what wonder that Christ's soul was extremely troubled, his blessed sun was now down, his spring and summer gone? His Father a forsaking God was a new world to him, and I shall not believe that his complaint came from any error of judgment, or mistakes, or ungrounded jealousies of the love of God. As his Father could not at any time hate him, so neither could he at this time let out the sweet fruits of his love; the cause of the former is the nature of God, as the ground of the latter is a dispensation above the capacity of the reason of men or angels. We may then conclude that Jesus Christ's soul trouble, as it was rational and extremely penal, so also it was sinless and innocent. Seldom have we seen soul trouble sinless, but it is by accident of the way. For our passions can hardly rise in their extremity (except when God is their only object), but they go overscore. Yet soul trouble intrinsically is not a sin.

Then to be troubled for sin, though the person be fully persuaded of pardon, is neither sin, nor inconsistent with the state of a justified person. Nor is it any act of unbelief, as Antinomians falsely suppose. For (1.) to be in soul trouble for sin which cannot, to the perfect knowledge of the person troubled, eternally condemn, was in Jesus Christ, in whom there was no spot of sin. But Antinomians say, Sin remaining sin essentially, must have a condemnatory power. (2.) To abstain from sin as it offendeth against the love of God showing mercy, rather than the law of God inflicting wrath, is spiritual obedience. So also to be troubled in soul for sin committed by a justified person against so many sweet bonds of free love and grace is a sanctified and gracious sorrow and trouble of soul. (3.) To be troubled for sin, as offensive to our heavenly Father and against the sweetness of free grace and tender love, includeth no act of unbelief, nor that the justified and pardoned sinner thus troubled is not pardoned, or that he feareth eternal wrath (as Antinomians imagine), no more than a son's grief of mind for offending a tender-hearted father can infer that this grief doth conclude this son under a condition of doubting of his state of sonship, or a fearing he be disinherited. (4.) Sanctified soul trouble is a filial commotion and agony of spirit, for trampling under feet tender love, spurning and kicking against the lovely warmness of the flowings of the blood of atonement.

Such soul trouble is found in checks and love terrors or love fevers that Christ's princely head was wet with the night rain while he was kept out of his own house, and suffered to lodge in the streets, and fear that the Beloved withdraw himself, and go seek his lodging elsewhere, as Song of Solomon 5:4-5, Psalm 5:9-10, and that the Lord cover himself with a cloud and return to his place, and the influence of the rays and beams of love be suspended. This soul trouble represents sweet expressions of filial bowels, and tenderness of love to Christ.

Libertines imagine that if the hazard and fear of hell be removed, there is no more place for fear, soul trouble, or confession. Therefore they teach that there is no assurance true and right, unless it be without fear and trembling; that to call in question whether God be my dear Father after, or upon, the commission of some heinous sins (as murder, incest, etc.) doth prove a man to be under the covenant of works; that a man must be so far from being troubled for sin that he must take no notice of his sin, nor of his repentance. Yea, Dr. Crisp saith, "There was no cause why Paul" (Romans 7) "should fear sin or a body of death, because in that place Paul doth" (saith he) "personate a scrupulous spirit, and doth not speak out of his own present case, but speaks in the person of another, yet a believer. And my reason is, Paul, in respect of his own person, what became of his sin was already resolved (Romans 8:1): There is now no condemnation, etc. He knew his sins were pardoned, and that they could not hurt him."

Observe that Arminius, as also, of old, Pelagius, interpreted Romans 7 of a half renewed man, in whom sense, which inclines to venial sin, fights with reason, that so the full and perfectly renewed man might seem to be able to keep the law and be free of all mortal sin. So then there is no battle between the flesh and the Spirit in the justified man, by the Antinomian way to heaven. As the old Libertines in Calvin's time said, The flesh does the sin, not the man, for the man is under no law, and so cannot sin. But that Paul, Romans 7, speaks in the person of a scrupulous and troubled conscience, not as it's the common case of all the regenerate in whom sin dwells, is a foul and fleshly untruth. (1.) To be carnal in part, as (verse 14), to do that which we allow not, to do what we would not, and to do what we hate, is the common case, not peculiar to a troubled conscience only, but to all the saints, Galatians 5:17. (2.) Paul speaketh not of believing, as he must do if he speak only of a scrupulous and doubting conscience. But he speaketh of working (verse 15), doing (17-18), willing (15, 19). (3.) A scrupulous and troubled conscience will never grant, while he is in that doubting condition, that he does any good or that he belongs to God, as is clear, Psalm 88, 38, 77:1-4, etc. But Paul in this case granteth that he does good, hates evil, delights in the law of the Lord in the inner man, hath a desire to do good, hath a law in his mind that resisteth the motions of the flesh.

(4.) Yea, the apostle would have had no cause to fear the body of sin, or to judge himself wretched. This would be his unbelief, and there would be no ground of his fear, because he was pardoned. It would then be Paul's sin, and the sinful scrupulosity of unbelief, to say, being once justified, "Sin dwells in me," and "There is a law in my members, rebelling against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity unto the law of sin," and "I am carnal, and sold under sin," and "I do evil, even that which I hate." For all these would be lies, and speeches of unbelief: the justified man sinneth not, his heart is clean, he doth nothing against a law. But I will remember that our divines, and particularly Chemnitius, Calvin, Beza, prove against Papists that concupiscence is sin after baptism, even in the regenerate, and it is called eleven or twelve times with the name of sin, Romans 6-8. So we may use all these arguments against Libertines to prove we are, even being justified, such as can sin, and do transgress the law. Therefore we ought to confess these sins, be troubled in conscience for them, complain and sigh in our fetters, though we know that we are justified and freed from the guilt of sin and the obligation to eternal wrath.

Sin is one thing, and the obligation to eternal wrath is another thing: Antinomians confound them and so mistake grossly the nature of sin, and of the law, and of justification. Some imprudently go so far on that they teach that believers are to be troubled in heart for nothing that befalls them, either in sin or in affliction. If their meaning were that they should not doubtingly, and from the principle of unbelief, call in question their once sealed justification, we should not oppose such a tenet. But their reasons do conclude that we should no more be shaken in mind with sin than with afflictions and the punishments of sin, and that, notwithstanding of the highest provocation we are guilty of, we are always to rejoice and to feast on the consolations of Christ. Their reasons are, (1.) "Because trouble for sin ariseth from ignorance or unbelief, when believers understand not the work of God for them, the Father's everlasting decree about them, the Son's union with them and headship to them, his merits and intercession, and the Holy Spirit's inhabitation in them and his office toward them, to work all their works for them, till he make them meet for glory." (2.) "Because such trouble is troublesome to God's heart, as a friend's trouble is to his friends. But especially, because the Spirit of bondage never returns again to the justified," Romans 8:15.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/samuel-rutherford/sorrow-for-sin-part-i/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net