

# The Use of Desertions - the Reprobate

by Samuel Rutherford

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*Christ's absence has a nourishing virtue, giving sap to humility, and putting an edge on hunger, and furnishing a fair field to faith to put forth itself.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 11:28, John 6:37, Romans 3:22, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:29, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 2:12, 1 Peter 1:6

**Topics:** "Sanctification Process", "Divine Sovereignty"

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## Description

Samuel Rutherford delves into the topic of desertions, likening them to a fallow land gathering sap for a better crop, highlighting the special use of Christ's absence in nurturing humility, hunger, and faith, and emphasizing the challenge of sanctification and mortification of lusts in Christianity. He also addresses the concept of reprobates and their access to Christ, explaining God's sovereign free-will in justice, the command for reprobates to believe in Christ despite not being saved, and the distinction between relying on Christ and believing He died for them personally.

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## Transcript

Desertions, their Use -- The Reprobate and How the Gospel affects their Responsibility

Dear Brother,--

The constant and daily observing of God's going along side with you, in His coming, going, ebbing, flowing, embracing and kissing, darkening and striking, gives me (a witless and useless observer of the Lord's way and working) a heavy stroke. Could I keep sight of Him, and know when I am lacking, and carry myself as becomes me in that condition, I would bless my case.

But 1. For desertions. I think they are like a lean and weak land lying fallow for some years, until it gathers sap for a better crop. It is possible to gather gold, where it may be had, with moonlight. Oh, if I could but creep one foot, or half a foot, nearer in to Jesus, in such a dark night as that when He is away, I should think it an happy absence!

2. If I knew that the Beloved were only gone away for trial and further humiliation\*\*, and not smoked out of the house with new provocations, I would forgive desertions and hold my peace at His absence. But Christ's bought absence (that I bought with my sin), is two running boils at once, one upon each side; and what side then can I lie on?

3. I know that, as night and shadows are good for flowers, and moonlight and dews are better than a continual sun, so is Christ's absence of special use, and that it has some nourishing virtue in it, and gives sap to humility, and puts an edge on hunger, and furnishes a fair field to faith to put forth itself, and to exercise its fingers in gripping what it does not see.

4. It is mercy's wonder, and grace's wonder, that Christ will lend a piece of the lodging, and a back-chamber beside Himself, to our lusts; and that He and such swine should keep house together in our soul.\*\* For, suppose they curl up and make themselves small when Christ comes in, and seem to lie as dead under His feet, yet they often break out again; and a foot of the Old Man, or a leg or arm nailed to Christ's cross, loosens the nail, and breaks out again! And yet Christ, beside this unruly and misfit neighbour, can still be making heaven in the saints, one way or other. May I not say, "Lord Jesus, what are You doing here?" Yet here He must be. But I will not lose my feet to go on into this depth and wonder; for free mercy and infinite merits took a lodging to Christ and us beside such a loathsome guest as sin.

5. Sanctification and mortification of our lusts are the hardest part of Christianity. It is in a manner, as natural to us to leap when we see the New Jerusalem, as to laugh when we are tickled: joy is not under command, or at our nod, when Christ kisses. But oh, how many of us would have Christ divided into two halves, that we might take the half of Him only! We take the Saviour, Jesus, and Salvation: but "Lord" is a cumbersome word, and to obey and work out our own salvation \*\*, and to perfect holiness, is the cumbersome and stormy north side of Christ, and that which we shun and avoid.

6. For your question, the access that reprobates have to Christ (which is none at all, for to the Father in Christ neither can they, nor will they come, because Christ died not for them; and yet, by law, God and justice overtakes them), I say, first, there are with you more worthy and learned than I am, Messrs. Dickson, Blair, and Hamilton, who can more fully satisfy you.

But I shall speak in brief what I think of it in these assertions. First, All God's justice toward man and angels flows from an act of absolute sovereign free-will of God, who is our Creator and Potter, and we are but clay\*\*; for if He had forbidden to eat of the rest of the trees of the garden of Eden, and commanded Adam to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, that command no doubt had been as just as this,--"Eat of all the trees, but not at all of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil."

The reason is, because His will is before His justice, by order of nature; and what is His will is His justice. And He does not will things outside of Himself because they are just. God can not, God need not seek after sanctity, holiness, or righteousness from things outside of Himself, and so not from the actions of men or angels. This is because His will is essentially holy and just, and the prime rule of holiness and justice, just as fire is naturally light, and flows upward, and the earth is heavy, and falls downward.

The second assertion, then, that God says to reprobates, "Believe in Christ (who has not died for your salvation), and you shall be saved," is just and right; because His eternal and essentially just will has so enacted and decreed. Suppose natural reason speak against this, this is the deep and special mystery of the Gospel. God has commanded, hard and fast, all the reprobates of the visible church to believe this promise, "He that believes shall be saved:"\*\* and yet, in God's decree and secret intention, there is no salvation at all decreed and intended to reprobates.

And yet the command of God, being derived from His sovereign free-will, is most just, as is said in the first assertion. Third assertion: The righteous Lord has right over the reprobates and all reasonable creatures that violate His commandments. This is easy. Fourth assertion: The faith that God requires of reprobates,

is, that they rely upon Christ, as despairing of their own righteousness, leaning wholly, and withal humbly, as weary and laden, upon Christ, as on the resting-stone laid in Zion \*\*.

But He seeks not that, without being weary of their sin, they rely upon Christ, as mankind's Saviour; for to rely on Christ, and not to be weary of sin, is presumption, not faith. Faith is ever neighbour to a contrite spirit; and it is impossible that faith can be where there is not a cast-down and contrite heart, in some measure, for sin. Now it is certain, that God commands no man to presume. Fifth assertion: Then reprobates are not absolutely obliged to believe that Christ died for them in particular.

For, in truth, neither reprobates nor others are obliged to believe a lie; only, they are obliged to believe that Christ died for them, if they be first weary\*\*, burdened, sin-sick, and condemned in their own consciences, and stricken dead and killed with the Law's sentence, and have indeed embraced Him as offered; which is a second and subsequent act of faith, following after a coming to Him and a closing with Him. Sixth assertion: Reprobates are not formally guilty of contempt of God, and misbelief, because they apply not Christ and the promises of the Gospel to themselves in particular; for so they should be guilty because they believe not a lie, which God never obliged them to believe.

Seventh assertion: Justice has a right to punish reprobates, because out of pride of heart, confiding in their own righteousness, they rely not upon Christ as a Saviour of all them that come to Him. This God may justly oblige them unto, because in Adam they had perfect ability to do; and men are guilty because they love their own inability, and rest upon themselves, and refuse to deny their own righteousness, and to take them to Christ, in whom there is righteousness for wearied sinners.

Eighth assertion: It is one thing to rely, lean, and rest upon Christ, in humility and weariness of spirit, and denying our own righteousness, believing Him to be the only righteousness of wearied sinners; and it is another thing to believe that Christ died for me, John, Thomas, Anna, upon an intention and decree to save us by name. For, 1st, The first goes first, the latter is always after in due order; 2ndly, The first is faith, the second is a fruit of faith; and, 3rdly, The first obliges reprobates and all men in the visible church, the latter obliges only the weary and laden, and so only the elect and effectually called of God.

Ninth assertion: It is a useless order; "I know not if Christ died for me, John, Thomas, Anna, by name; and, therefore, I dare not rely on Him." The reason is, because it is not faith to believe God's intention and decree of election at the first, before you are wearied of sin. Look first to your intention and soul. If you find sin a burden, and can and do rest, under that burden, upon Christ; if this be once, now come and believe in particular, or rather apply according to your experience (for, in my judgment, it is a fruit of belief, not belief), and feeling the goodwill, intention, and gracious purpose of God concerning your salvation.

Hence, because there is malice in reprobates, and contempt of Christ, guilty they are, and justice has law against them, and (which is the mystery) they cannot come up to Christ, because He died not for them. But their sin is, that they love their inability to come to Christ; and he who loves his chains, deserves his chains. And thus in short. Remember my bonds.

Yours in his sweet Lord Jesus,

S.R.

Aberdeen, Sept. 7. 1637.

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