

Some Testimonies Concerning Duty Faith

What have other Calvinists¹ said about duty faith?

Arthur Pink:

It is the binding obligation of those claiming to be called of God to preach, to exhort unbelievers and believers, realising that it rests entirely in the hands of a sovereign God to make [it] effectual... [The preacher] has no right whatever to pick and choose: his business is to 'declare *all* the counsel of God', and as Luke 24:47 and Acts 20:21 show, part of that 'counsel' is to call upon men to repent. If the ungodly are not pointedly and authoritatively called unto repentance of their sins and belief of the gospel, and if on the contrary they are only told that they are unable so to do, then they are encouraged in their impenitency and unbelief. If the gospel [preacher] gives such a disproportionate presentation of the truth that the unconverted are made to feel they are more to be pitied than blamed for their spiritual impotency, then their responsibility is undermined and their conscience is lulled to sleep. To the objection that to call upon the unregenerate to turn from the world and come to Christ is to inculcate creature-ability and to feed self-righteousness, we ask, Were Christ and his Spirit-taught apostles ignorant of this danger? Was it left for the 18th and 19th centuries to make such a discovery? Were men so mightily used of God as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and C.H. Spurgeon wrong, when, in promiscuously exhorting all their hearers to flee from the wrath to come, they followed the example of John the Baptist and the Son of God?²

Matthew Henry, commenting on Psalm 2, said: 'To welcome Jesus Christ and to submit to him... is the great *duty* of the Christian religion; it is that which is required of all... Our *duty* to Christ is

¹ Some may dispute the Calvinism of some of the following – but surely not all of them?

² Murray: *Pink* pp232-233, emphasis Pink's. Unless otherwise specified, in this series of extracts the emphasis is mine.

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here expressed’.

Fuller concluded his comments on Psalm 2:11-12 thus: ‘The result is, unconverted sinners are commanded to believe in Christ for salvation; therefore believing in Christ for salvation is their *duty*’. Moving immediately on to Isaiah 55:1-7, linking it with ‘repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Acts 20:21), he said:

The encouragements held up to induce a compliance with this *duty* are the freeness, the substantial nature, the durability, the certainty, and the rich abundance of those blessings which as many as repent and believe the gospel shall receive. The whole passage is exceedingly explicit, as to the *duty* of the unconverted; neither is it possible to evade the force of it by any just or fair method of interpretation.³

Robert S. Candlish directed men to ‘take a right view of the *duty* of believing. It is not using a great liberty to believe on the name of Jesus’.⁴

Spurgeon spoke of ‘a certain body of Ultra-Calvinists’ who ‘caricature the word of God’, by preaching sovereign grace, but ‘who are doing ten thousand times more harm than good, because they don’t preach’ human responsibility. Such men, he said, vilify ‘those of us who teach that it is the *duty* of man to repent and believe’. As to his own position, Spurgeon certainly made good his claim that he preached duty faith:

It is mine... to exhort the sinner to come to Christ; it is the Holy Spirit’s work to enforce the exhortation, and draw the sinner to Christ... Fly to Christ, and find mercy... I believe some of our hearers expect to feel an electric shock, or something of that kind, before they are saved. The gospel says simply: ‘Believe’. That they will not understand. They think there is to be something so mysterious about it. They can’t make out what it is; but they are going to wait for it and then believe. Well, you will wait till doomsday... Your position is this – you are a sinner, lost, ruined; you cannot help yourself. Scripture says: ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners’. Your immediate business, your instantaneous *duty* is to cast yourself on that simple promise, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Fuller: *Worthy in Works* p157.

⁴ Candlish Vol.2 p59.

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Again:

It is the *duty* of every man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is every man's solemn *duty* to trust Christ, not because of anything that man is, or is not, but because he is commanded to do it.

Yet again:

The only reason why you do not believe in Christ is because you will not... It is a gross lie to say that God is responsible for your damnation. If [you persist in unbelief and thus] your soul shall perish, it shall perish as a suicide; for you will have ruined yourself... You will see written in lines of fire: 'You knew your *duty*, but you did it not!' and when you cry for mercy this shall be God's answer: 'I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no man regarded it; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes'.

And once more:

The faith here intended [1 John 5:1] is the *duty* of all men... It can never be less than man's *duty* to believe the truth; that Jesus is the Christ is the truth, and it is the *duty* of every man to believe it. I understand here by 'believing', confidence in Christ, and it is surely the *duty* of men to confide in that which is worthy of confidence, and that Jesus Christ is worthy of the confidence of all men is certain, it is therefore the *duty* of men to confide in him. Inasmuch as the gospel command, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved', is addressed by divine authority to every creature, it is the *duty* of every man so to do... I know there are some who will deny this, and deny it upon the ground that man has not the spiritual ability to believe in Jesus, to which I reply that it is altogether an error to imagine that the measure of the sinner's moral ability is the measure of his *duty*... The command of Christ stands... and when he commands all men everywhere to repent, they are bound to repent... In every case it is man's *duty* to do what God bids him.⁵

Indeed, Spurgeon, far from apologising for duty faith, extolled God's mercy to sinners in establishing the principle: 'Faith in Christ... is a commanded *duty* as well as a blessed privilege, and what a mercy it is that it is a *duty*'. Why?

⁵ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.4 p341; see also p344; Vol.5 p79; see also p247; Vol.6 p107; *Metropolitan* Vol.9 pp357-358; Vol.17 pp136-137; see also Vol.15 p626; Vol.20 pp125-127.

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Because there never can be any question but that a man has a right to do his *duty*. Now on the ground that God commands me to believe, I have a right to believe, be I who I may. The gospel is sent to every creature. Well, I belong to that tribe; I am one of the every creatures, and that gospel commands me to believe, and I do it. I cannot have done wrong in doing it for I was commanded to do so. I cannot be wrong in obeying a command of God. Now it is a command of God given to every creature that he should believe on Jesus Christ whom God has sent. This is your warrant, sinner, and a blessed warrant it is, for it is one which hell cannot gainsay, and which heaven cannot withdraw. You need not be looking within to look for the misty warrants of your experience... to get some dull and insufficient warrants for your confidence in Christ. You may believe Christ because he tells you to do so. That is a sure ground to stand on, and one which admits of no doubt.⁶

J.L.Dagg:

Reason teaches that it is the *duty* of men, as sinners, to repent of their sins... But the *duty* of repentance is not left to be inferred from the common sense of mankind... When the gospel began to be preached, its first proclamation was, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. In all the ministry of the gospel, this is the first *duty* required of men. Without it, not a step can be taken in the way of return to God; and, without it, there is no possibility of obtaining the divine favour... In close connection with repentance for sin, the word of God enjoins the *duty* of believing in Christ... Both the *duties* relate to men as sinners, and without the performance of them, escape from the penalty of sin is impossible.⁷

William B.Sprague: 'All will admit that it is the *duty* of a sinner to repent without delay'.⁸

Alvan Hyde: 'Christ and his apostles... in their preaching... inculcated repentance and submission to God, as the immediate *duty* of sinners'.⁹

The Sum of Saving Knowledge: 'Everyone who hears the gospel

⁶ Spurgeon: *New and Metropolitan* Vol.7 p110.

⁷ Dagg pp139-140,175.

⁸ Sprague p179. I wish Sprague had been right; not all do admit the truth of what he said.

⁹ Sprague p55 in the Appendix to Sprague's book. Hyde also emphasised 'duty'.

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must make conscience of the *duty* of lively faith in Christ; the weak believer must not think it presumption to do what is commanded... indeed, the most impenitent, profane, and wicked person must not thrust out himself, or be thrust out by others, from orderly aiming at this *duty*, how desperate soever his condition seems to be'.¹⁰

Simon Ash, James Nalton and Joseph Church: 'Seeking of Christ is the soul's *duty*'.¹¹

The Helvetic Canons number XIX:

Likewise the external call itself, which is made by the preaching of the gospel, is on the part of God also, who calls, earnest and sincere. For in his word he unfolds earnestly and most truly, not, indeed, his secret intention respecting the salvation or destruction of each individual, but what belongs to our *duty*, and what remains for us if we do or neglect this *duty*... God always attains that which he intends in his will, even the demonstration of *duty*, and following this, either the salvation of the elect who do their *duty*, or the inexcusableness of the rest who neglect the *duty* set before them.¹²

William Gouge:

The *duty* which the [writer of Heb. 2:1] presses upon himself and others, as a matter of necessity, is to 'give earnest heed to the things which they had heard'. Hereby he means the gospel... he calls upon them to give heed thereto... and [he] intends more than a bare hearing... This being applied to God's word, is opposed to all manner of slighting it, whether by contempt or neglect of it. He that despises the word of the Lord... and they that turn away their ears from the truth... and they that make light of the offer of grace (Matt. 22:4-5)... do all of them that which is contrary to this *duty*; they do not give such heed to the word as is here required. The *duty* here intended is a serious, firm, and fixed setting of the mind upon that which we hear; a bowing and bending of the will to yield unto it; an applying of the heart to it; a placing of the affections upon it; and bringing the whole man into a holy conformity to it. Thus it comprises knowledge of the word, faith therein, obedience thereto, and all other due respect that may [in] any way concern it.¹³

¹⁰ *The Sum* p336.

¹¹ Preface to Sibbes: *Heavenly in Works* Vol.6 p416.

¹² Hodge p661.

¹³ Gouge p91.

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Later, Gouge spoke about ‘coming to God’, which, as he explained, is the seeking of salvation by faith in Christ. Of this he said: ‘This *duty* is enjoined to raise up in us a desire of salvation, and an expectation thereof’.¹⁴

Giles Firmin: ‘It is the *duty* of all the sons and daughters of Adam, who hear the gospel preached, and Christ offered to them, to believe in [or, on], or receive Christ, whether they be prepared or not prepared’.¹⁵

James Durham, on Isaiah 53:1: ‘The *duty* that lies on people to whom the Lord sends the gospel, or this report concerning Christ... that it lies on all who hear the gospel, to believe the report that it brings concerning Christ, and by faith to receive him... The complaint [of the prophet] is for the neglect of the *duty* they were called to... They, to whom Christ is offered in the gospel, are called to believe; it is their *duty* to do it; thus, believing, in all that hear this gospel, is necessary, by necessity of command’.¹⁶

William Kiffin: Although it is ‘certain no man can, without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, either repent or believe; yet it will not therefore follow, that lack of repentance and unbelief are no sins; if these be sins, then the contrary must be their *duty*’.¹⁷

Thomas Boston:

Before a sinner will come to Christ by believing, he must be an awakened, convinced, sensible sinner; pricked in his heart with a sense of sin and misery; made to groan under his burden, to despair of relief from the law, himself, or any other creature, and to desire and thirst after Christ and his righteousness... These things also are required of the sinner in point of *duty*.¹⁸

¹⁴ Gouge p527.

¹⁵ Hulse p16.

¹⁶ Durham p11.

¹⁷ Naylor pp149-150.

¹⁸ Boston: *Marrow* pp141-142. Yes, Boston spoke of the ‘sensible sinner’: ‘Before a sinner will come to Christ by believing, he must be... an awakened, convinced, sensible sinner’, and so on. Yes, only sensible sinners will come to Christ. But as Boston said, ‘these things also are required of the sinner’ – the sinner, not only the sensible sinner – ‘in point of duty’. A sinner must be sensible before he comes to Christ, *but not before he is commanded or required to come*. Even those who opposed the Marrow men in Scotland still ‘held to an obligation to believe in

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David Clarkson: ‘It is the great concern of sinners, and their *duty* too, to come unto Christ, to seek him’.¹⁹

Owen declared that God’s ministers must:

Command and invite all to repent and believe... And when they make proffers and tenders in the name of God to all, they do not say to all, ‘It is the purpose and intention of God that you should believe’, (who gave them any such power [or right]?) but, that it is his command, which makes it their *duty* to do what is required of them... The external offer is such as from which every man may conclude his own *duty*; [but from which] none [may conclude] God’s purpose, which yet may be known upon performance of his *duty*... This offer is neither vain nor fruitless, being declarative of their *duty*, and of what is acceptable to God if it be performed as it ought to be, even as it is required.²⁰

Owen also asked:

When the apostle beseeches us to be “reconciled unto God”, I would know whether it be not a part of our *duty* to yield obedience to the apostle’s exhortation? If not, his exhortation is frivolous and vain; [but] if [we do have to yield obedience to it], then to be reconciled unto God is a part of our *duty*.²¹

What is more, Owen was not interested in proving merely that God will forgive sinners if they believe. Of course he will, but that was not the point Owen was making here. Far from it! Rather, as he bluntly stated:

[Christ is] by the command of God laid upon all men to whom the word comes’ (Macleod p166).

¹⁹ Clarkson: *Invitation* in *Works* Vol.2 p37. I have, with great reluctance, omitted Clarkson: *Faith* in *Works* Vol.1 pp89-91,96-97,132. Although in this work he said some excellent things on the duty of faith, I would have to digress too far into preparationism to deal with Clarkson’s references to ‘the sensible sinner’, and his going beyond Scripture in the matter, where he was not as guarded as Boston above. Even so, Clarkson was clear; there is ‘the general command to believe’. Having spoken of ‘the misery of unbelievers’, Clarkson spoke of ‘exhortation. This should excite sinners’ – not only sensible sinners – ‘to mind this duty... Believing [is] the duty... To believe is... a duty’.

²⁰ Owen: *Death* in *Works* Vol.10 pp300-301; see also pp404-410.

²¹ Owen: *Display* in *Works* Vol.10 p102. See also Fuller: *Worthy* in *Works* p161.

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We ought to believe; it is our *duty* so to do... but we scarce think it our *duty* to believe the forgiveness of our sins. It is well, it may be, we think, with them that can do it; but we think it [is] not their fault who do not. Such persons may be pitied, but, as we suppose, not justly blamed.

Obviously, argued Owen, this is wrong, for:

What can be required to make anything a *duty* unto us that is wanting in this matter? for... what [God] declares, it is our *duty* to believe, or we frustrate the end of his revelation... We are expressly commanded to believe, and that upon the highest promises and under the greatest penalties. This command is that which makes believing... a *duty*. Faith is a grace, as it is freely wrought in us by the Holy Ghost... but as it is commanded, it is a *duty*. And these commands... are several ways expressed, by invitations, exhortations, propositions; which all have in them the nature of commands, which take up a great part of the books of the New Testament.²²

Owen again:

The terms of the gospel are of two sorts: (1) Such as are proposed unto us; (2) Such as thereon are required of us. Those proposed unto us include the whole mystery of the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God. Those of the latter sort are faith, repentance, and new obedience.²³

²² Owen: *Psalm 130* in *Works* Vol.6 p504. When Owen wrote: Saving faith '*is not required of us*, cannot be acted by us, but on a supposition of the work and effect of the law in the conviction of sin, by giving the knowledge of it, a sense of its guilt, and the state of the sinner on the account thereof', he was answering the question: 'What is necessary to be found in us before our believing?' 'Conviction of sin is a necessary antecedent unto justifying faith... [It] is required unto believing', he said, and spoke of 'the necessity of this conviction previous unto believing' (Owen: *Justification* in *Works* Vol.5 pp74-76, emphasis mine). In my forthcoming book on the law, I will examine the idea of conviction by the law, but, leaving that aside, Owen was saying a sinner must be convicted before he believes. In this he was right. A sinner must be convicted before he *will* or *can* believe, but not before he is *commanded* to believe. Owen freely offered Christ to all sorts of sinners (see, for instance, Owen: *Psalm 130* in *Works* Vol.6 pp521-523): 'We invite... all men as sinners'; as sinners, please note, not as *convicted* sinners.

²³ Owen: *Hebrews* Vol.4 Part 2 p359, commenting on Heb. 12:25-27.

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In short: 'To believe in [Christ], to believe on his name, is that signal especial *duty* which is now required of us'.²⁴

Owen thought highly of William Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest*. Though 'I have written several folios', he said, 'there is more divinity in [Guthrie's small volume] than in them all'.²⁵ High praise indeed! In the light of this, it is most interesting to discover what Guthrie wrote on *The Duty of Closing with God's Plan of Saving Sinners by Christ Jesus*. If men would secure their state, Guthrie declared, they must immediately 'with all diligence, personally and heartily... accept of and close with God's device of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, held out in the gospel... [because] it is the necessary *duty* of those who would be in favour with God and secure their souls'. Guthrie explained 'what is... required of those who perform this *duty*, [and] what are the qualifications and properties of this *duty*, if rightly managed, [and] what are the... consequences of it, if it is performed aright'. He observed that sin has cut man off from 'God's favour', put him under God's 'curse and wrath', and made him powerless 'to regain the Lord's friendship', but the Lord has sent his Son to die 'for the sins of the elect, and to restore in them his image', and to bring them to glory.

Furthermore:

He has made open proclamation... that whosoever will lay aside all thoughts of saving themselves... and will agree heartily to be saved by Christ Jesus, they... shall be saved. So then, to close with God's device of saving sinners by Christ Jesus, is to quit and renounce all thoughts of help or salvation by our own righteousness, and to agree to this way which God has found out [that is, planned and revealed]; it is to value and highly esteem Christ Jesus as the treasure... to enrich poor sinners; and with the heart to believe this record... it is to approve this plan and acquiesce in it, as the only way to true happiness; it is to point towards this Mediator, as God holds him out in the gospel, with a desire to lay the stress of our whole state upon him. This is that which is called faith or believing, the 'receiving of Christ', or 'believing on his name' (John 1:12). This is that 'believing on the Lord Jesus Christ', commanded to the jailer... (Acts 16:31)... This is supposed in all those ordinary actings of faith to which promises are annexed in the Scripture...

²⁴ Owen: *Declaration in Works* Vol.1 p126.

²⁵ W.Grant in the Preface to Guthrie.

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This is the *duty* of those who would be saved... this is the necessary *duty* of all such as would be in favour with God and secure their souls... This closing with God's device, or believing in Christ, is commanded everywhere in Scripture by the Lord as the condition of the new covenant, giving right and title to all the spiritual blessings of the same... This is commanded... (Isa. 55:1... Matt. 11:28... 1 John 3:23). This is enough to prove it a *duty* incumbent. But further, it is such a *duty* as only gives right and title to a sonship; for only they who receive him are privileged to be sons... (John 1:12)... It [is seen] to be the necessary *duty* of all... it is a necessary *duty* lying upon us... it is a most necessary *duty* thus to close with Christ Jesus, as the blessed relief appointed for sinners.

Further:

It appears of how great consequence this *duty* of believing is, by which a man closes with Christ Jesus, whom the Father has sealed and given for a covenant to the people... God [has]... sovereignly commanded men so to close with him in and through Christ... and has commanded me, as I shall be answerable at the great day, to close with him in Christ, [with the consequence that] I dare not disobey, nor inquire into the reasons of his contrivance and commands, but must comply with the command... [and] not... 'frustrate the grace of God' (Gal. 2:21), and in a manner disappoint the gospel, and falsify the record which God has borne of his Son... (1 John 5:10-11), and so 'make God a liar', and add that rebellion to all my former transgressions.²⁶

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Reader, this is but a thimbleful dipped from an ocean of such material. Countless Calvinists down the years have commanded unregenerate sinners to repent and believe, telling them it is their immediate duty so to do. And how! Even though it seems foolish to exhort dead sinners to do anything, these preachers have commanded such to trust Christ. If our preaching is not marked by a sense of foolishness, it cannot be the gospel we preach (1 Cor. 1:18,21), nor are we preaching. The truth is, we are to tell sinners that though the gospel command does not imply their power, it most definitely spells out their responsibility. In other words, the sinners to whom we preach must be told that they are obliged to

²⁶ Guthrie pp132-137,162,164-165.

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believe, even though they cannot believe by their own ability. And what is this but obliged faith? In other words, duty faith! Saving faith in Christ is the duty of all men. This is what so many Calvinists have asserted, and still do assert, because it is a vital part of preaching the gospel.

Thus, by denying duty faith, Ella is out-of-step with a great many Calvinists. This in itself does not mean he is wrong, but it needs to be recognised. The testimony of so many Calvinistic preachers asserting that all sinners have a duty to come to Christ, to repent of their sins and believe in him, and who certainly let their hearers know it, cannot be ignored. And it shows the wrongness of the claim that duty faith cannot be a part of a Calvinistic preacher's armoury. Look again at the insistence upon the duty of all sinners to trust Christ, as seen in the above. And, I assure you reader, it is but a tiny fraction of the material which could be cited.

Far more important, by denying duty faith, Ella is out-of-step with Scripture. And this is fatal to his case.

Sadly, with the rise of hyper-Calvinism in the early 1700s,²⁷ the seed of the denial of duty faith was sown, and we are reaping yet. But under preaching which stresses duty faith, sinners are confronted with their immediate, urgent duty to trust Christ, their duty to welcome him, to believe in him for salvation, to turn to him, to seek, desire and thirst after him and his righteousness, to have a living faith in him. Duty faith is a mighty sword in the preacher's hand, put there by God himself. As the preacher wields the blade, he cuts away the sinner's excuses, pressing him, forcing him to the clinching point: The Lord demands saving faith of me,

²⁷ In fact, some of the statements of some of the preachers pre-1700 smacked of hyper-Calvinism; they were answered. Determined to keep my book in bounds, take just one example – Goodwin's reply to the denial of duty faith. Teaching that 'though faith be... above all our abilities, yet God commands us to use our utmost endeavours to believe, and it is our duty so to do', Goodwin answered those who misuse Eph. 2:8 to avoid duty faith. He had in mind, not only those who tell sinners 'as good [as] sit still', or 'do nothing else but... stand and wait' because 'God must do all', but also the sinners themselves who are hindered from believing because 'they are discouraged and disheartened from all endeavours' by such teaching (Goodwin pp546-563).

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and demands it now.

And there is something else. By the preaching of duty faith, not only is the sinner *driven* to Christ, he is *drawn* to him; that is, not only does the preacher *confront* the hardened sinner with his unbelief, but he also *encourages* the hesitant sinner to come to faith: Not only do I have the *duty* to trust Christ, I have the *right* to trust him; the fact that God commands me to believe, constitutes my warrant for believing; I need not be afraid to come, for God has commanded me to come. Those who deny duty faith stifle this encouragement, leaving the anxious sinner to flounder in a slough of uncertainty. Instead of looking to God's command and promise, and thus looking directly to Christ, he is left looking at himself to see if he is sensible.

Preachers who are not hampered by hyper-Calvinistic views can – or ought to – make earnest and urgent appeals,²⁸ calls, invitations and commands to sinners. On the basis of duty faith it can be done; it has been done. Sadly, it is done too little these days. So many preachers – mistakenly thinking they must safeguard their Reformed credentials, or else not seeing that a full-blooded Calvinism includes the free offer – stop short of preaching the gospel as it should be preached; the curse of *unwitting* or unconscious hyper-Calvinism is plaguing churches and preachers in this generation. When it comes to it, I fear that many a Reformed preacher is not preaching in such a way that his hearers are made to feel it is their immediate duty to trust Christ, though the preacher would profess vehemently he holds to the doctrine. In principle, he is persuaded of duty faith; in practice, he does not preach it. Oh! he informs his hearers of the necessity of faith, describes for them the benefits of faith, tells them it is faith alone which saves, warns them that they will perish if they do not believe, and so on. *But this is not preaching the gospel.* The preacher has to confront sinners with their immediate responsibility of trusting Christ, directly encourage them to trust him, and appeal to them to do so now! The sinner must not be allowed to feel he is just one in a crowd listening to a lecture on

²⁸ Such as 2 Cor. 5:20. We must not allow Arminians to high-jack and distort the biblical practice.

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the gospel, that he can take it or leave it.²⁹ He needs eye-contact from a Nathan in the pulpit: ‘You are the man!’ (2 Sam. 12:7). Dying sinners lie as a heavy burden upon us, my brothers. If we do not preach the gospel properly, we shall have to answer to God for it.³⁰

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I wish I had more space to set out the biblical details and proofs of what I have been saying, but I have to forbear. May I just indicate what I would have liked to develop? The Bible reveals the principles of duty faith and requires us to preach it. What are the scriptural arguments for it? Why is it the duty of all sinners savingly to trust Christ and spiritually repent of their sins? I suggest five reasons. They are:

First, and foremost, it is the duty of sinners to believe savingly, because God has commanded sinners to do so. The same goes for repentance. What is more, God commands all sinners as sinners to believe and repent; he does not command sensible sinners only.

Second, it is the duty of sinners to believe savingly, because unbelief is scripturally defined as a sin. What is the connection between the two? Just this: Unbelief cannot be a sin unless faith is a duty.

Third, the immediate cause of damnation is unbelief; therefore belief must be a duty. The sinner must be responsible for not believing, having failed to meet his obligation to believe, otherwise he could not be condemned for not believing in Christ.

Fourth, saving faith is a duty because faith is defined in terms of obedience. Since obedience implies a command, to believe must be the sinner’s duty.

Fifth, faith is a duty because faith is essential for salvation. God requires men to believe before they are saved. Hence it is their duty.

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²⁹ Or wait until he knows he is sensible.

³⁰ Reader, I assure you, I do not exclude myself from the above. I will return to the point in chapter 9.

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The alternative to duty faith, of course, is appalling; it must be faced. If God does not require sinners to believe, he must be indifferent to their unbelief; it cannot be of any consequence to him whether or not men believe. If God does not demand faith of sinners, faith must be optional. Is it? Certainly not! It is obligatory. Men are held responsible and counted guilty before God if they do not believe; it is sin (John 16:8-9), and they are condemned for it: 'He who does not believe is condemned already'. Why? 'Because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God' (John 3:18). 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:15-16). See also 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.³¹

Unbelief is laid at the sinner's door: '*You* do not believe... *You* are not willing to come to me that you may have life... *You* do not have the love of God in you... *You* do not receive me... But if [since] *you* do not believe [Moses'] writings, how will *you* believe my words?' (John 5:38-47). So said Christ.³² God, as I have explained, does not do the believing for the sinner; the sinner has to believe. And when the sinner refuses to believe, it is *he* who is the unbeliever. He will never be able to lay the charge anywhere

³¹ I have already quoted Berridge, commenting on Acts 16:31. Here is a fuller extract: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith, as wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, is a grace of the Spirit; but as commanded in the word, it is a duty – a duty of high rank; and help may be had for its performance; and an utter failure in this duty is certain damnation. Yet men look upon unbelief as a misfortune, rather than a crime; as a sad disease, rather than a damning sin. Thus the conscience is not duly affected with its guilt; and men do not labour, as they ought, to be rid of unbelief. They complain of it, as a burden; but do not feel and lament it as the top sin that seals [their] damnation' (Berridge pp175-176). On Mark 5:36: 'Only believe. Faith, as wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, is a grace; but, as commanded, is a duty. Yet few consider it as a duty; and hence their conscience is not burdened with guilt for the non-performance of it; but consider unbelief, though the only damning sin, as their misfortune, rather than their crime... Believing is commanded' (Berridge p170). See also Owen: *Discourse in Works* Vol.3 pp289-291.

³² How often Christ made the charge (John 3:12; 6:36,64; 8:45-46; 10:25-26,38, for example).

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else but on himself alone. Certainly he will never be able to blame God's sovereignty.³³

As White put it:

When a man pleads, 'I would believe, if I could', he is deceiving himself. It would be nearer the truth to say, 'I could believe if I would'. The fact is he does not want to believe, is not willing to accept salvation on such terms as it is offered in the Bible. He does not believe there is a God who so freely receives sinners; thus he makes God a liar, 'because he believes not the record that God has given of his Son' (1 John 5:10). What the sinner calls his inability to believe, God calls his guilt (John 3:18). Unbelief is wilful wickedness, a deliberate refusal to receive the testimony of God himself. It counts the ever-blessed God unworthy of credence. The man who says, 'I cannot believe!' must be met by the Lord's own words, 'You *will* not'.³⁴ He has not yet reached the *cannot*; the *will* not is the real and present barrier. Depend upon it, what Christ said to Jerusalem of old, he will say to every one to whom the offer of salvation has been made [and who refuses it] – 'I would, but *you* would not'.³⁵

I recall a cartoon, many years ago. A schoolmaster, cane in hand, was towering above a truculent youth. 'Wilberforce', the master

³³ Gill: 'Not coming to Christ, and believing in him, in [a] spiritual [that is, saving] manner, when he is revealed in the external ministry of the word, as God's way of salvation, is criminal and blameworthy, notwithstanding men's want of both will and power, since this does not arise from any decree of God, but from the corruption of nature through sin' (Gill: *Cause* p87). Robert Murray M'Cheyne: 'Think of the causes in yourselves, O unconverted souls! Be sure of this, that you will only have yourselves to blame if you awake in hell. You will not be able to plead God's secret decrees... you will be speechless. If you die, it is because you *will* die; and if you *will* die, then you must die' (Bonar: *M'Cheyne* p248, emphasis his).

³⁴ The point is elegantly illustrated in Matt. 21:27. When Christ asked the chief priests and elders about John the Baptist's authority, they said: 'We do not know', 'we *cannot* tell', when they really meant: 'We *will not* say', 'we *don't want* to say'. Christ, knowing this, replied: '*Neither will* I tell you [the answer to your question]'.

³⁵ White pp39-40, emphasis his. None of this goes against Christ's words: 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... No one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father' (John 6:44,65).

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was saying, ‘some blame your genes; some blame your upbringing; some blame your environment; but I blame *you!*’

Faith is not optional; hence it must be every sinner’s duty. A preacher must never let his hearers think it is anything else. If sinners try to excuse themselves by pleading unbelief or inability, he must bluntly tell them they condemn themselves out of their own mouth, and add to their condemnation. And this is made infinitely worse because they are refusing the most gracious invitation, the most generous offer, they will ever receive.³⁶

So much for duty faith. Now for the second question.

³⁶ Take, for example, Clarkson. When dealing with this matter, he patiently answered the sinner’s objections, but did not leave it there. He went on to what he called ‘uses’. He had two: Reproof and exhortation (Clarkson: *Invitation in Works* Vol.2 pp79ff).