

What Is Duty Faith And Is It Biblical?

Introduction

We need to start this study by defining the term “duty faith”. Duty faith is the teaching that it is the duty or obligation towards God of the natural man (unregenerated person) **to believe** unto eternal salvation, even if it is impossible for him to do so in his spiritually dead condition. Or to put it another way, it is the duty of the unsaved sinner to fully trust in Christ as Savior and to believe what God declares in Scripture about how sinful mankind is and how holy God is and that only the sinless Savior – the Lord Jesus Christ – could ever be a suitable sacrifice for the sins against God committed by guilty ungodly sinners.

Both John Newton in 1770 and Arthur w. Pink in 1936 presented reasoning from Scripture to support the doctrine of “duty faith”. Their writings on this subject also lend great support to the precept that “Gospel preaching” is a **means** utilized of God in Salvation. I would like to note at this point that many people who go by the name of “Primitive Baptist” do NOT agree with Gospel preaching being a **means** God uses to bring unsaved sinners to Christ and they have come up with a system of theology that attempts to justify their position, a position that is often referred to as “hyper” Calvinism. [Click here](#) for more information about the doctrinal problems of Primitive Baptists.

The following section is from a letter by John Newton in 1770

The Lord Jesus was the great Preacher of free grace, “who spoke as never man spoke”; and His ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared that none would come unto Him, unless drawn and taught of God—John 6:44-46. And yet He often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be His, might perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal—John 6:27, Luke 13:24-27, John 12:35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not of His disciples—but to the multitude. The Apostles copied from their Lord—they taught that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that “it is not of him that wills or of him that runs—but of God who shows mercy”; yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that before they had given evident signs that they were pricked in the heart as Acts 2:21) to “repent” and turn from their vanities to the living God—Acts 3:19, 14:15, 17:30.

Peter’s advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point—for though he perceived him to be “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of

iniquity," (Acts 8:23) he exhorted him "to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven." (Acts 8:22). **It may be presumed that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our readers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the Apostle's example.**

You have been told that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary; and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered that **we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect His power (i.e. the Lord's almighty power) would accompany our word.**

The vision of Ezekiel in chapter 37, may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel ministry. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the Prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" **Our response, like that of the Prophet's is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord, "O Lord, You know, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for You to raise them unto life; therefore we renounce our own reasonings, and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at Your bidding, as if they were alive,** and say, O you dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is Yours, and to You be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the Prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived—but the word was spoken to them considered as dry and dead.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope He often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the Gospel being declared in their hearing; but He who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave them condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which He often effects the purposes of His grace; **though none of the means of grace by which He ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of His Spirit.**

Should we admit that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally — for when we invite the weary and heavy laden to come to Christ, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent and do their first works"; yes, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to His kingdom and glory" — in each of

these cases we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the Word to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our endeavors can have no more effect in these instances than if we were to say to a dead body “arise, and walk.” **For an exertion of Divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than the breaking of a hard heart; and only He who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.**

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways; they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for lack of power—but for lack of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning until night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes.

They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord alone can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel promises, to seek to Him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do for them that which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said “him who comes unto Me, I will never cast out.”

Perhaps it will not be easily proved that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner’s salvation from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavor to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of Scriptures constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of “consistency” may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our usefulness. **We need not wish to be more “consistent” than the inspired writers, nor be afraid of speaking as they have spoken before us!** We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers by nice reasonings on the nature of human liberty, and the Divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions are better avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects until we arrive in the world of Light.

In the meantime, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If, when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favors you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge,

and fills your heart with His constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amuse you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your affections yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, John Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, which I recommend to your attentive consideration. – *John Newton, 1770*

The next section was written by Arthur Pink in 1936 as a commentary on John Newton's letter in support of the doctrine of "duty faith"

In his unregenerate state, fallen and depraved man is so completely the slave of sin and the captive of Satan, that he is altogether unable to deliver himself or take one step toward that deliverance; yes, his heart is so corrupt and his mind so at enmity against God, that he has no desire to be brought out of darkness into His marvelous light. Not until the Holy Spirit performs a miracle of grace upon the soul, does its possessor have any spiritual appetite or aspirations; and that miracle He performs only in those for whom Christ died — for God's elect.

Now if we resort to human reasoning it will logically follow that it is quite useless to exhort the unregenerate to turn unto God or come unto Christ; yes, to exhort those who are utterly incompetent to respond, will appear to be most inconsistent and the height of absurdity. But, my reader, the things of God cannot be encompassed by human reason, and the moment we attempt to measure them by the line of our "logic," we open the door for Satan to deceive by his subtleties. He will tell us that if the Lord our God is one Lord — then He cannot be a plurality of Persons; and that if we hold to three Divine Persons — we are most "inconsistent" in affirming the unity of God. Satan will tell us that if God is Love then He will never banish any of His creatures to everlasting woe; and that if we hold to eternal punishment of the wicked we are altogether "inconsistent" in believing in the Divine benevolence.

What, then are we to do? This: repudiate all reasoning [of the kind of human reasoning of the carnal mind] upon spiritual things as utterly worthless, and believe with the simplicity of a child whatever God's Word teaches! The Apostles held firmly the revealed truth of a glorious and victorious Messiah, and they could not "harmonize" with that fact a humiliated Messiah that would be crucified — the two things appeared to be altogether "inconsistent" and contradictory. But to them Christ said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). That, my reader, should be a lasting warning to us of the utter inadequacy of human logic and philosophizing upon Divine things!

We must turn from the vain reasonings of the Unitarian, and while holding fast to the Unity of the Divine nature, we must also believe there are three co-

equal Persons in the Godhead. We must turn from the vain reasonings of the Universalist, and while holding fast to the love of God, we must also believe in the eternal punishment of His enemies. And why? Because Holy Scripture teaches both!

In like manner, **we must turn from the vain reasonings of the hyper-Calvinist, and while holding fast to the total depravity and the spiritual inability of the natural man — we must also believe in his moral responsibility and accountability to God.** It is the bounden duty of God's servants to tell the unregenerate that the reason why they cannot repent evangelically — is because their hearts are so wedded to their lusts; that the reason why they cannot come to Christ — is because their sins have fettered and chained them; that the reason why they hate the Light — is because they love the darkness. But so far from this excusing them — it only adds to their guilt! That so far from rendering them objects of pity — it exposes them as doubly deserving of damnation!

It is the preacher's business to show wherein spiritual inability consists — not in the lack of soul faculties — but in the absence of any love for Him who is infinitely lovely. Far be it from us to extenuate [attempt to lessen the magnitude or seriousness of] the wicked unbelief of the unregenerate!

What the Lord does [with our Gospel preaching], is none of our business. The commission He has given His servants is to preach the Gospel to every creature, and they certainly have not fully obeyed, until they bid their hearers "Repent — and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Whom God quickens, is His own affair; ours is to faithfully warn the unsaved, to show wherein their sins consists (enmity against God), to bid them to throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, to call upon them to repent (Acts 17:30), to proclaim the One who receives all who come to Him in faith.

It is because the natural man possesses the same faculties of soul as does the regenerate that he is an accountable creature, responsible to use them for God instead of against Him. - *Arthur W. Pink, 1936*

SOURCE: http://www.gracegems.org/Pink2/duty_faith.htm

"And even not coming to Christ, and believing in Him in this spiritual 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 lack of both will and power" (John Gill, 1735, "The Cause of God and Truth," p. 87).
