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Ten Arguments Against Duty Faith

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It is popular in modern evangelical circles to preach that it is the duty of all men to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. This teaching spawns numerous errors and is so widespread that to question it results in faithful men having their characters and ministry blackened. However, every fashion has its day and we look forward to the time when our brothers and sisters in Christ turn their back on the mongrel gospel of duty faith and return once again to the true gospel of free and sovereign grace in Jesus Christ.

Here are ten arguments with which to rattle and pierce the empty barrel of duty faith.

1. Christ did not teach duty faith

All who examine the Lord's own ministry will quickly see that the greatest preacher who ever lived did not preach duty faith. Indeed, our Lord was very careful to properly distinguish between those who were labouring under sin, heavy laden with guilt, sick, hungry, thirsty and seeking spiritual rest, and those who were self-righteous or simply curious. To the former the Lord lovingly applied the gospel of free grace, while the latter were sent to the law of Moses.

By making this distinction our Lord showed that He did not make faith the duty of all men and women. On the contrary, when a lawyer stood up to and asked "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Lord's reply was "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Luke 10:26). When the rich young ruler came running to Jesus, asking for eternal life (Mark 10:17), the Lord did not impose on him a duty to exercise faith. Christ again turned him to the law and its proper use; the breaking up of self-righteousness pride and rendering men guilty before God.

This approach of the Master is sufficient proof that Christ did not make His gospel the rule of men's duty. Modern duty faith preachers are failing in their duty to preach the gospel as Christ preached the gospel. If faith rather than law is made the duty of all men then faith is not properly presented to sinners, nor is the law properly applied to the self-righteous. Consequently, those who misrepresent faith and misapply the law are the true antinomians.

2. Duty faith flips on its head the Father's plan of salvation

If the unconverted are told it is their duty to believe in Christ then it is as sure as telling them it is their duty to make themselves alive in Christ, their duty to regenerate themselves, their duty to make themselves new creations in Christ and their duty to walk in that faith which it is their duty, apparently, to possess and exercise.

This is quite contrary to the way and means of grace. A child cannot walk before he is born and a man cannot believe before he is born again. Faith is a gift bestowed upon sinners, not a duty imposed upon the self-righteous who see no need of Christ. Believing is the fruit of faith, not the instigator of faith. Duty faith turns salvation on its head by breaking into the divinely appointed model of the new birth; hearing, receiving and believing. Duty faith preachers need a good argument to overthrow the New Testament precedent for preaching provided by Christ and his apostles (Luke 10:21,22; Romans 10:20).

3. Duty faith wrests the work of regeneration from the Holy Spirit

Requiring faith from unbelievers will not receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit. It is God the Holy Spirit alone who effects the change in a sinner's heart by which a spiritual obedience of faith can be prosecuted. To put it bluntly, within the covenant of grace it is the Holy Spirit's duty to give faith to those for whom Christ died. It is not everyman's duty to appropriate this task to himself.

We suspect that a duty faith preacher would be offended if upon arriving at church one Lord's day morning he found some upstart already preaching in his pulpit. Yet they see no similarity in their doctrine dispossessing the Holy Ghost of his office. It is the glory of God to bestow free grace upon a sinner and elicit new life and genuine evangelical obedience. No believer at conversion every thanks God for enabling him to do his duty.

The Holy Spirit will never honour a doctrine that relieves Him of His role or robs Him of His glory. Duty faith will not bring a single individual to proper faith in Christ. It is a blurring doctrine that disrupts the knowledge of the truth. It raises up man's imagined ability and erodes the doctrine of the Spirit's vital energy (1 Peter 1:22).

4. Duty faith encourages false assurance

Turning to the content of the duty faith call we may ask what is it that all men are duty bound to believe? If they are duty bound to believe that Christ died for them then they must also believe that Christ died for all men since all men have this duty. They are therefore duty bound to believe a lie. If they are duty bound to believe that "all who come believing will be accepted by God" then that is no lie, but it is not the same as believing in Christ, or trusting the Lord for salvation. Simply believing that "all who

come believing will be accepted" is not the same as being saved. The Devil knows and believes that to be true but the Devil is not saved.

Duty faith preachers are being disingenuous to their hearers when they tell them they will be saved if they believe. Every Arminian preaches this gospel. They make the work of believing the ground of hope and the assurance of eternal life. This is works salvation and makes spiritual new life conditional upon the unregenerate man's obedience to a set procedure that is nothing to do with evangelical repentance and faith.

Nevertheless, countless numbers of church goers today fully expect to go to heaven, not upon the merits of Christ's blood and righteousness, but upon the merits of their believing and the promise of duty faith preachers that upon their belief sins are forgiven and eternal destinies assured.

5. Duty faith builds its requirements upon the will of man

Scripture categorically states that salvation is not based upon man's will but God's mercy (Romans 9:16). Many duty faith preachers will tacitly agree with this and yet do so with complete disregard for the implicit contradiction in their system. It is not simply the case that the unregenerate will not believe it is that they cannot believe (John 12:37,40).

Duty faith preaching appeals to the will of man and then judges and condemns him for not doing what he should to be saved. However, the true gospel comes to those who cannot believe except the grace of God comes to them first. There is all the difference in the world in these two platforms for preaching. Luke clearly pronounces against the duty faith approach to preaching when he declares, "I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (Acts 13:41).

6. Duty faith confuses goats with sheep

It is not the Christian preacher's responsibility to goad goats but to feed sheep. The gospel is good news to lost sheep. It is spiritual food to the spiritually hungry, pure spiritual water to the spiritually thirsty, new life to the spiritually dead. On the other hand it is foolish and offensive to the infidel and unregenerate. Despite all the protestations of duty faith preachers for a gospel of common grace, in truth the message of the gospel comes to some as the savour of death unto death.

Duty faith mixes law and gospel. It brings goats who are under the law under the gospel with no scriptural warrant, and sheep who are under the gospel under the law with, again, no scriptural warrant. Christian ministers will be better advised to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel with a view to being obedient to the Lord's command to Peter (John 21:16,17).

Feeding the Lord's sheep is not accomplished by enforcing the duty of all men upon them but by preaching the power of Christ in them. Challenging

duty faith preachers of his own day William Huntington once said, "Do as you are bid; feed the sheep, feed the lambs; the goats will never believe the gospel, though they may believe your doctrine".

7. Duty faith is an ‘uncertain sound’

Duty faith preachers speak with a forked tongue, confusing and confounding what is clear in scripture. The result is an uncertain sound, a mix of law and gospel, natural obligation and evangelical obedience that speaks to no one in particular and answers nothing but the preacher’s own desire for trophy-converts. Again, Huntington rejected this double-speak saying,

The voice of the chief shepherd is directed to the sheep: I have other sheep, which are not of this fold, and they shall hear my voice. My sheep hear my voice, and follow me: But, as for the law, the voice of that is directed to the unconverted. Now we know, that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law.

But you frustrate the grace of God on the one hand, and are partial in the law on the other; for you set the law before the believer, as his only rule of life and conduct; and the gospel is set before the unconverted, as their only rule of duty. The carnal man has got an evangelical rule, and the heir of promise has got a legal one; the life-giving commandment is palmed upon the congregation of the dead, and the ministration of death is saddled on the children of the resurrection; the believers are all sent to Moses and the unconverted are sent to Jesus; Moses is to have the legitimate sons, and Christ is to have the bastards.

Today in many evangelical churches people are lamenting the cold and insipid attitude that prevails even amongst professing believers. Perhaps the problem lies as much in the pulpit as the pew. Perhaps the rallying cry that once rang clear from free grace pulpits is lost in the cacophony of uncertain sound. Should we therefore be surprised when few seem prepared for spiritual battle? (1 Corinthians 14:8).

8. Duty faith mars the glory of free grace

Free grace in Christ is a thing of beauty. Paul speaks of ‘the glorious gospel of Christ’ with good cause. The covenant of grace, the saving purpose of the Sovereign God in its conception, in its execution and in its accomplishment is a thing of wonder and majesty. Duty faith instead of honouring the glory of the gospel brings it down to the level of man, his desires and his abilities.

Faith is not a dead man’s duty. It is a living man’s treasure. It is the ring on the finger of the prodigal, a mark of sonship, a glorious gift of grace. Faith offers an excellent sacrifice, carries us into new life in Christ, pleases God, inherits righteousness, inspires obedience, looks for a city whose builder

and maker is God. We could go on.

Is it the infidel's duty to possess the father's ring or is it the son's privilege? Why must duty faith preachers bring something so beautiful and glorious as faith in Christ down to the grubby level of man's depraved will?

9. Duty faith confuses the curse of the law with the call of the gospel

If a man does his duty will he be saved? Is the law of duty and doing to be found anywhere in scripture as a step towards eternal life? All commandments are God's but not all commandments are alike. There is a legal commandment that condemns the transgressor and brings him under guilt and condemnation and there is a life giving commandment that brings forth life from the dead. There is a command that kills and a command that causes to live. Christ commanded Lazarus to come forth. He commanded the widow's son to arise from his bier. He took a young maid by the hand, returned life to her corpse and commanded her to arise.

The first command was given by Moses and is a duty of obedience imposed upon all men indiscriminately under pain of death. The second command comes by Christ upon certain individuals and is empowered with divine purpose. The end of the first command is judgment and eternal condemnation. The end of the second command is liberty and eternal life. Duty faith confuses the two and is a vain attempt to apply the blessings of Christ universally to those for whom it never was intended and by whom it never can be received.

There is only a certain number who will believe. They are identified in scripture as those who are ordained to eternal life. Such was the Philippian Jailer, and Lydia, the seller of purple, whose heart the Lord opened. To such as these comes the life-giving command to repent and believe the gospel. It comes with power and accomplishes salvation. This is not the command of duty faith but the command of gospel obedience. It is not preached indiscriminately with no power to effect change, but specifically and directly to the heart of the sinner by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This power is in the Word preached. This is why Paul calls the preaching of the gospel the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

The advocates of unscriptural duty faith preaching make the Gospel not only a law, but even a harder law than that of Moses. God gave Adam, as His upright creature, a certain ability to obey the law under which he was created. But God never gave even to Adam in the state of innocence any spiritual ability to believe with the faith that is now required of unregenerate men. To require of Adam's fallen posterity the duty of believing in Christ to the saving of the soul, is to require more of the children in sin than God even gave their father ability to perform when in innocence.

10. Duty faith trashes the fruit of the Spirit

Paul tells the Galatians that faith is the fruit of the Spirit. Faith is not the fruit of the law, no more than love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and temperance, being spiritual graces, can be produced by law. Paul explicitly states this (Galatians 5:23) and ought not to be contradicted. Consequently, duty cannot be called upon to produce that which it never was intended or equipped to produce.

Faith is the fruit of the Spirit and it is no more the duty of every man to have faith in Christ than it is the duty of the Spirit to give faith in Christ to every man. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8).

As faith is the fruit of the Spirit so evangelical obedience is the fruit of faith in the life of the believer. There are no good works outside of Christ. There is no such thing as carnal obedience. All of a Christian’s obedience to God must be spiritual obedience, every good work must be spiritually motivated. If faith is a good work, if faithfulness is obedience to God and well pleasing in His sight then it must come and can only come through the Spirit. There is therefore no such thing as duty faith.

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