

Duty Faith

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Duty-faith. Say the words again and think about them. Duty, faith. They should not even be spoken in the same sentence, far less linked together and presented as the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet preaching man's duty to trust in Christ is said by some to be the foundation of a proper gospel ministry.

Duty is an obligation, a responsibility. Faith, on the other hand, is a gift. The two are distinctly different. Duty is about law. Faith is about grace and our new nature in Christ. Duties, when followed, produce efforts, faith, when given, produces spiritual life. Efforts do not save sinners, but grace does.

Yet we are assailed by those who make duty-faith the foundation of their preaching and the basis of their message. Why is this? Is it because they cannot bring a word from the Lord if they have nothing in their pockets for their hearers to do? Is it because they must mix the efforts of the creature with the mercy of the creator? Where does a phrase such as duty-faith come from? Not from holy scripture, that's for sure.

Duty faith is not saving faith for it is founded on man's own efforts to please God by doing something commendable. Nor is it spiritual faith. Spiritual faith is the gift of God by the Holy Spirit who is the source of true faith and the giver of genuine lively trust in Christ and the efficacy of His sacrifice. Duty faith tries to lay on men an obligation to believe when they cannot, and a warrant to believe what they know not.

Suppose a preacher berates his congregation: "It is your duty to trust in Christ. It is your responsibility to have faith in the sacrifice He has made." "Do it now", he declares, "And God will save you." What does such a preacher mean? If the sinner does his duty, will he be saved? If the sinner does not do his duty, will he be more damned than he already is?

Now suppose that, indeed, one of this preacher's listeners resolves to do his duty. He will obey the preacher's call. He decides, in all sincerity, that he will do as he is told and have faith. After all, it is his duty. Can he 'will' faith into being? Can he, upon a decision, spark himself into spiritual life? Can he manufacture trust because this preacher tells him to? Sadly, we have become so inured to the language of free-will offers and the decisionism of the Arminians and Fullerites that many do not even flinch at such a prospect.

Where does Christ instruct a preacher to play upon the natural inability of a sinner in this way? Where are we told that it is the natural man's duty to do what grace alone enables a sinner to do, or to be what God alone makes a believer? Quite simply, duty-faith preaching is telling the flesh to do the work of the Spirit and it has no place in a sovereign grace pulpit. Men cannot win other men to Jesus; nor can a man save himself. It is foolishness to preach legal obligation when only the power of the Holy Ghost falling upon a dead sinner can bring him to life.

The law-bound manipulations of modern preachers are a mockery of God's great salvation. Let those who lament too-little preaching and blame everyone but themselves, consider if the problem is not those whom they wrongly call hyper-calvinists, but rather those who preach law instead of gospel and duty instead of grace. Clearly, when faith is given, we have a duty to use it, but then it is used according to the law of faith and not the law of Moses.

Properly preached, the gospel humbles sinners by exalting Christ. It does not meddle in the duties of the dead but extols free grace and the sovereign purpose of God to save sinners by the righteousness of Christ and the regenerating gift of faith.

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