

Part One

Duty Faith

In chapter 1, I explain what I mean by duty faith. In chapters 2 and 3, I show from Isaiah 45:22 and John 6:28-29 that duty faith is biblical. In chapter 4, I give some examples of Calvinists who have argued for duty faith.

1

What is Duty Faith?

I said there are two questions arising out of Ella's book. The first is what is known as duty faith. Let me define my terms:

Duty faith is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility, of all sinners to trust Christ. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe.¹

Let us start at the beginning – where Ella and I agree.

A command implies a duty

Ella: 'One can only have a duty towards the law when the law is given... the command to exercise duty applies to the law'.² I agree. But the principle is general. Any law – not only the law of God – inevitably imposes a duty on all who are under it. Their duty is to obey, to carry out, to fulfil what is commanded.

In particular, since all men are God's created subjects, he has the right to impose upon them any law or command he wishes, which command they are duty-bound to obey. Above all, when God in the gospel issues a command, then those he addresses – whether believers or unbelievers – are obliged to obey that command. And God in the gospel does issue commands, scores of them.³ Here are two: 'Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of

¹ Please note, reader, it is not the duty of an unconverted sinner to believe that Christ died for him in particular; his duty is to trust Christ. In any case, the sinner cannot know the former until he has done the latter; and even if he could, he would be exercising historical faith, accepting a fact, when what is required is saving faith, reliance upon Christ. See chapter 3; Owen: *Death in Works* Vol.10 pp404-410.

² Ella: *The Free Offer* pp57-58.

³ Contrary to Gill: 'The gospel... is a pure declaration of grace and salvation by Christ; it has no commands, but all promises' (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p183). As Gill himself said on Acts 17:30: 'Repentance being

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

the earth! For I am God, and there is no other' (Isaiah 45:22). 'God... commands all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30).

So this is the principle: When God issues a command, then those to whom he issues that command are duty-bound to comply.

But, it is vital to note, when God commands men, it does *not* imply they have the ability to perform. God commands his created subjects because he has the right, whether or not they can comply. The command implies their duty, their responsibility, their obligation, *not* their ability. As Gill said: 'The commands of God show his authority, and man's duty'. He drove the point home by saying that although 'the promises of God... are a relief to man's weakness... [they] no way lessen his obligation to duty... Nor does... prayer... excuse men from obligation...⁴ or any duty'; God's 'will of command... signifies [that] what is the pleasure of God should be the duty of man, or what he should do'. Referring to specific biblical texts in which sinners are commanded, he said these 'declare God's will of command, or what he has made man's

represented as a command... a command to all'. I agree with Gill, of course, repentance is a gift of God's free grace, and not in man's power, but this does not alter the fact that God in the gospel commands all men to repent. Gill was wrong to try to water down Acts 17:30 by introducing the notion of 'natural repentance'. The fact is, in the gospel, God commands all sinners to repent; to repent, full stop! And what did Gill mean when, speaking of 'the gospel ministry', he said: 'Though in the gospel, strictly taken, there is no command, yet being largely taken for the whole ministry of the word, it includes this [the grace of evangelical repentance], and everything else which Christ has commanded, and was taught by him and his apostles'? Gill had earlier (on Luke 24:47) called 'repentance and remission of sins' 'the sum of the gospel ministry', saying 'the doctrine of repentance is not of the law, which neither requires, nor admits of it, but [it is] of the gospel' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 pp589,939). Gill, it seems to me, was saying, quite rightly, that the gospel requires repentance; in other words, it is a duty under the gospel because it is commanded.

⁴ Gill's words, in light of what is to come below, are most interesting: 'God's requiring [internal conversion] does not suppose man's ability to perform it, but his need of it; and is done with a view to bring him to a sense of his state, and that he may apply to God for it... *Nor does such a prayer for conversion excuse men from obligation to turn to the Lord*' (emphasis mine). This is duty faith!

duty'.⁵ I couldn't agree more. As John Berridge put it: 'It is not in man to direct his steps. Then, it may be asked, of what use are commands, exhortations, promises and threatenings? I answer, they do not respect [concern] our native ability, but our *duty*; and are not designed to show us what we *can* do, but what we *ought* to do. The command directs our *duty*'.⁶

But we do not need Gill's or Berridge's support for the principle. Christ taught a parable in which a servant 'did the things that were commanded him'. Christ drew the lesson: 'When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We... have done what was our duty to do"' (Luke 17:9-10). The principle is clear: A command implies a duty.

In this book I am concerned with the commands of the gospel. Let's get down to brass tacks.

The gospel commands all sinners to repent; therefore it is their duty to repent

Sinners, asserted Ella, are commanded in the gospel to repent: 'In Scripture, all sinners are called to repentance'. I agree. It is their duty to repent, said Ella: 'Scripture teaches man's duty to repent'. I agree.

I am also of the same mind as Ella when he said the command does not imply ability. Ella, on the command to repentance: 'Scripture also teaches that man has no natural abilities to do so'. I agree. God commands all sinners to repent but no sinner by nature has the power to comply. On this, I agree with Ella.

I am one with Ella when he said: 'The Christian's calling and

⁵ Gill: *Cause* pp114-115,159.

⁶ Berridge pp165-166, first emphasis mine, the others his. Berridge continued: 'The command directs our *duty*, and the promise, or [the] grace in the promise, gives strength to perform it. Besides, God is pleased to make these exhortations and promises the means of conveying spiritual life and strength. Hence these effects are ascribed to the word, which are really and only wrought by the grace conveyed with the word. God may therefore order commands and exhortations to be used towards us, notwithstanding our inability to comply with them, since he can and does make them effectual to the end aimed at' (emphasis his).

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example, and call and command sinners to repentance'. Indeed, I go further. It is the duty of believers to command sinners to repent, not merely because Christ himself did it, but because he *commanded* them to do it in preaching the gospel to every creature (Luke 24:47).

So I am in complete agreement with Ella when he said: 'Sinners must be called, commanded, even beseeched to repent and turn from their evil ways. God commands all to repent, and grants repentance to some who would not otherwise repent'.⁷ Christ did it; he commanded his disciples to do it; the apostles did it; we must do it.

So Ella and I are agreed: Sinners are unable to repent, but in the gospel God commands them to repent. In other words, he commands them to do what they cannot do. Just as Christ commanded the man to stretch out his withered hand (Mark 3:5) – the very thing the man could not do, but by Christ's power was enabled to do – so must dead sinners,⁸ unrepentant sinners, be commanded to repent. And this must be done even though God grants the gift of repentance only to his elect; God still commands *all* sinners to repent, and *all* sinners have a duty to repent. This surely is the teaching of Acts 17:30: 'God... commands all men everywhere to repent'.

But what about faith?

The gospel commands all sinners to believe; therefore it is their duty to believe

Repentance does not exist in isolation from faith. No man can truly repent without exercising saving faith. Nor can he savingly believe without truly repenting. He must turn from sin in turning to God. 'Repent, and believe', said Christ (Mark 1:15). 'A great number believed and turned to the Lord' (Acts 11:21). 'Whatever is not from faith is sin' (Rom. 14:23); repentance must, therefore, be from faith. And both faith and repentance are the gift of God to his

⁷ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58,71. Indeed, unless Christ grants repentance, no sinner can or will repent.

⁸ By 'dead sinners', I mean, of course, unregenerate sinners, the spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1).

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

elect (Acts 5:31; Eph. 2:8). What is more, the same benefits are promised to both repentance and faith, unitedly called ‘turning to God’ (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 10:43; 11:17-18,21; 13:38-39; 16:31; 26:18-20; Rom. 3:22; 4:24; 10:10; 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 2:16; 1 Thess. 1:3-6,9-10 *etc.*) To try to drive a wedge between faith and repentance is futile.

Now this is where I part company with Ella. On repentance, we are of one mind; *on faith, we are not*. On repentance, Ella and I are agreed: Sinners must be commanded to repent, and it is their duty so to do. In other words, we both hold to duty repentance. But whereas I say the same for faith, Ella does not.

Does it matter? Very much so! R.J.Baldwin asked: ‘Is saving faith a duty?... Does God command all men to believe?’ As he said: ‘These are extremely important questions, because if God commands all men to believe, and we... preach it not, then we are not preaching all the counsel of God, and therefore our preaching is not consistent with our divine commission’.⁹

What was Ella’s position? ‘Does the Bible invite [command] all men indiscriminately and everywhere to believe?’ he asked. Here is his unequivocal answer: ‘No, says the Bible. Repentance must come first... When God grants repentance we may talk of belief, but not before’.¹⁰ In other words, only repentant sinners may be commanded to believe. Consequently, according to Ella, the unrepentant must be commanded to repent – even though they cannot – but the unbelieving must not be commanded to believe. Certainly the unrepentant must not be commanded to believe, even though they must be commanded to repent. It is only the repentant who are to be commanded to believe.

I strongly disagree with Ella. Calvin was clear:

Those who think that repentance precedes faith instead of flowing from, or being produced by it, as the fruit of the tree, have never understood its nature.¹¹

⁹ Baldwin p1, my numbering, the paper being unnumbered. Baldwin’s question was rhetorical. He did not believe saving faith is a duty for all men.

¹⁰ Ella: *The Free Offer* p61.

¹¹ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 p510.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

I go further. Not only is Ella's logic baffling, it is not possible biblically to discriminate between faith and repentance as he did. John Colquhoun:

In the moment of regeneration the Holy Spirit implants... at the same instant the root or principle of saving faith and true repentance. He gives these two graces together and at once in respect of time; and therefore, though in our conception of them, they are to be distinguished, yet they are never to be separated from each other. The principle of faith in the regenerate soul... is not in point of time before that of repentance, nor is the principle of repentance before that of faith.¹²

C.H.Spurgeon made the same point in his usual pithy way: Faith and repentance, he said, 'are like the Siamese twins; they are born together, and they could not live asunder, but must die if you attempt to separate them.'¹³ Faith always walks side by side with his weeping sister, true repentance. They are born in the same house at the same hour, and they will live in the same heart every day... They are so united, so married and allied together, that they never can be parted'.¹⁴

What is more, by saying only the repentant may be commanded to believe, Ella has opened a Pandora's box.¹⁵ Let me explain. How can a preacher tell who is repentant? But he has to know, otherwise he cannot command his hearers to believe. And the

¹² Colquhoun p105. Indeed, Colquhoun, entitling his chapter, 'The priority of the acting of saving faith to the exercise of true repentance' (Colquhoun pp105-118), argued faith comes before repentance. As did Gill: Repentance and faith – 'where the one is, there the other is; they are wrought in the soul at one and the same time... the one is not before the other in order of time... repentance is mentioned before faith, not that it precedes it... faith as to its inward exercise on Christ is full as early [as repentance], *if not earlier*; souls *first* look to Christ by faith, and *then* they mourn in tears of evangelical repentance' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p961, emphasis mine). I myself would not try to dissect the operation of the Spirit too precisely (John 3:8).

¹³ I am quoting the Spurgeon of 1860, needless to say, not a surgeon of the twenty-first century.

¹⁴ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.6 p346; see also *Soul Winner* pp31-32.

¹⁵ 'A process that once activated will generate many unmanageable problems' (*Concise*).

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

sinner has to know he is repentant – truly repentant – before he can believe. I will not digress to develop the point,¹⁶ but when this notion has gripped preaching, it has had a dire effect. It has its own vocabulary. Only those sinners who are ‘fit for Christ’, or ‘prepared’ or ‘sensible’¹⁷ sinners, may be commanded to believe. But the truth is, there is no biblical way a sinner can know he is warranted to believe because he is repentant or ‘sensible’. The Spirit convicts sinners of sin because they do not believe in Christ (John 16:8-9). We are never told he will convict repentant sinners that they are truly repentant so that they might then believe. Nor are we told the Spirit will inform a preacher when his hearers are repentant, so that he may call them to faith. Such promises do not exist in Scripture. In other words, there is no biblical way a sinner can know he is repentant and so may believe, and there is no way a preacher can know his hearers are repentant and so can command them to believe.

Spurgeon put it like this:

We have a new legalism to fight with in our... churches. There are men and women who think they must not believe on Christ till they feel their sins up to a most agonising point. They think they must feel a certain degree of sorrow, a high degree of sense of need before they may come to Christ at all... Man... come and take Christ just as he is, and come to him just as you are. ‘But, sir, *may* I come? I am not invited to come’. Yes you are: ‘Whosoever will, let him come’. Don’t believe that the invitations of the gospel are given only to characters [that is, those who meet certain conditions];¹⁸ they are, some of them,

¹⁶ I intend to publish on preparationism, the notion of being ‘fit for Christ’, in a forthcoming book on the law. But see, for instance, Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.9 pp529-540. Spurgeon frequently denied preparationism. See also Appendix 2.

¹⁷ ‘Sensible’ sinners are the regenerate who, conscious of their sin and need of salvation, repent, and desire Christ. They are, therefore, demonstrating that they must be elect. Lest I should be misunderstood, although I speak against preparationism, I am convinced a sinner must be convicted of his sin, and will be convicted of his sin, before he comes to Christ, but his conviction is not the warrant for his being invited to come. He is invited because he is a sinner, and he must come as a sinner; but he will only come when he is a sensible sinner.

¹⁸ See Appendix 2.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

unlimited invitations. 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... Trust now in his precious blood, you are saved.¹⁹

'Many minds... make repentance a preparation for Christ',²⁰ said Spurgeon, and consequently argue: 'Sir, I must repent before I come to Christ'. To all such, Spurgeon issued this challenge: 'Find such a passage in the word if you can'.²¹

As I say, it is at this point that I part company with Ella. On repentance, we are of one mind; on faith, we are not.

For example, as I have shown, on repentance, Ella felt able to write:

Scripture teaches man's duty to *repent*... The Christian's calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example, and call and command sinners to *repentance*... Sinners must be called, commanded, even beseeched to *repent* and turn from their evil ways. God commands all to *repent*, and grants *repentance* to some who would not otherwise *repent*.²²

But not:

Scripture teaches man's duty to *believe*... The Christian's calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example, and call and command sinners to *believe*... Sinners must be called, commanded, even beseeched to *believe* and turn from their evil ways. God commands all to *believe*, and grants *saving faith* to some who would not otherwise *believe*.²³

Ella was right, of course, to say: 'The Christian's calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example and call and

¹⁹ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.6 p107, emphasis his. And in the same volume (not to mention the rest of the books of his sermons), see pp59-64,171-172, 218-219,397-399,403-406.

²⁰ Spurgeon: *New and Metropolitan* Vol.7 p204; see also same volume pp108-109.

²¹ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.6 p60.

²² Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58,71.

²³ As I noted above on repentance, unless Christ grants faith, no sinner can or will believe.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

command sinners to repentance'.²⁴ But why did Ella stop short? Why did he tell only half the story? We are in no doubt as to what Christ did. We have his example. And, as Ella said, we must 'follow Christ's example'. Let us do as Christ did, therefore, when he went to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. How did he preach? What did he say? He commanded all his hearers to 'repent, and believe' (Mark 1:14-15). Christ did not divide faith from repentance. He preached both at the same time, to the same sinners, and in the same breath. Christ knew nothing of Ella's division between repentance and faith. So why did Ella not say we should 'follow Christ's example', and command sinners to repent *and believe*? Notice Christ did not command sinners to repent, and, *when they had repented, then* command them to believe. Oh no! He commanded all his hearers to repent and believe at the same time. Repentance and faith go hand in hand. The gospel commands all sinners to repent *and* believe, and all sinners are duty-bound to repent *and* believe.

Paul certainly followed Christ, 'testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21). It would be the merest quibble to say the word 'command' is not in the verse. No. It is not. But whatever Paul did as regards repentance – and, as Ella agreed, we know Paul commanded his hearers to repent – he did the same for faith, and did it at the same time. There is no suggestion he divided or distinguished the two in any way.²⁵ As he explained to Agrippa, he 'declared... that [Jews]... and... Gentiles... should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance' (Acts 26:20). Note the 'should'; sinners '*should* repent', they '*should*... turn to God'. This is the language of command, of duty. And if 'turning to God' does not include trusting Christ, what does it include? Should sinners 'turn to God' *in unbelief*? Thomas Goodwin: 'As Christ did... so did the apostles also; they did still put men upon believing as well as upon repenting... They always held it forth clearly and nakedly

²⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* p58.

²⁵ See Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 pp960-961. Note how Gill said Paul was 'urging and insisting upon' both repentance and faith, and that both were spiritual.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

to them'.²⁶

John Owen connected repentance with the notion of 'duty'. As it is the duty to believe, so it is the duty to repent:

After the angels had sinned, God never once called them to repentance... He has no forgiveness for them, and therefore would require no repentance of them. It is not, nor ever was, a duty incumbent upon them to repent. Nor is it so unto the damned in hell. God requires it not of them, nor is it their duty... Assignation then, of repentance, is a revelation of forgiveness. God would not call upon a sinful creature to humble itself and bewail its sin if there were no way of recovery or relief... What, then does God aim at in and by [various scriptures]?... It is to bring [the sinner] to repentance... [And] no repentance is acceptable with God but what is built or leans on the faith of forgiveness... [For God] to prescribe repentance as a duty unto sinners, without a foundation of pardon and forgiveness in himself, is inconsistent with... all [the] glorious excellencies and perfections of the nature of God... Repenting is for sinners only... It is for them, and them only. It was no duty for Adam in Eden, it is none for the angels in heaven, nor for the damned in hell... [In] Isa. 55:7, [God] speaks... to men perversely wicked, and such as make a trade of sinning. What does he call them unto? Plainly, to repentance, to the duty we have insisted on.²⁷

Of course faith is the gift of God; but so is repentance.²⁸ This is not at issue. Repentance, according to Ella,²⁹ is commanded – and therefore must be a duty – so why not faith? If Ella was right to dismiss duty faith by saying: 'The command to exercise duty faith³⁰ can only be given to those who have a faith to exercise dutifully', why did he not apply the same argument to repentance – which he listed with faith – and which he said sinners are commanded to do, and which he joined with faith as the gift of God?³¹ If the command to believe implies the ability to comply –

²⁶ Goodwin p584.

²⁷ Owen: *Psalm 130* in *Works* Vol.6 pp437-440.

²⁸ As Ella stated (Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58-59).

²⁹ And Scripture, of course.

³⁰ Does any free-offer preacher tell his hearers to 'exercise duty faith'? I don't. The same goes for duty repentance – see below. I tell sinners to repent and believe, that it is their duty so to do, or words to that effect.

³¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58-59,62.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

as Ella alleged – why does the same not apply to repentance? But neither command implies any ability. When Ella cited Gill, who ‘could not believe [that it] was... the duty of the evangelist... to preach that sinners were duty-bound to exercise a faith savingly of which they knew nothing, and of which they had nothing’, what now of commanding the unrepentant to repent?³² How could Ella continue to argue it *is* the duty of the unrepentant to repent? If the argument destroys duty faith, it destroys duty repentance.

The truth is, the gospel never restricts God’s commands to what sinners are able to do by nature.³³ It pays not the slightest attention

³² Ella: *The Free Offer* pp62,67. And what of Gill, who, when speaking of the one who ‘with his heart, or heartily... believes in Christ for righteousness; which righteousness... is imputed to him for justification’, declared: ‘Faith, as an act of ours, is a duty; for whatsoever we do, in a religious way, we do but what is our duty to do’? Gill, I realise, was here arguing for eternal justification, tortuously defending the truth that righteousness, not faith, is imputed for justification, and, as a consequence, he dismissed duty faith as belonging to the law. I do not want to digress into tackling eternal justification, so I will say no more about it here – except that I heartily agree with Gill when he said ‘it is God, and not faith, that justifies’, and ‘faith is not the cause... of justification’, but I disagree with him when he said ‘faith is... the fruit and effect of justification’ (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp185-187,197). No! Faith is the *means* of justification, and is the fruit and effect of *election*. See my note in chapter 5. To return to the main point: Gill’s words – that ‘faith, as an act of ours, is a duty’ – are right. Even so, I admit that Gill limited this requirement to the sensible: If God reveals his gospel inwardly to sinners, ‘by the spirit of wisdom, in the knowledge of Christ; or God by his word calls men effectually by his grace, and reveals his Son in them, as well as to them; this sort of revelation comes with such power and influence upon the mind, as certainly to produce a true and living faith in the soul, which infallibly issues in eternal life and happiness; and of such persons, and of such only, acts of special [that is, spiritual or saving] faith in Christ are required’ (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.1 pp122,135). Gill, however, was clearly arguing in a circle; he required saving faith only of those who had already exercised it! Indeed, in the same sentence he actually called them ‘believers’; as they were, since God had already produced ‘a true and living faith’ in them. But it is *unbelievers* who have to believe! And one thing unbelievers do not have is a living faith!

³³ Whoever and whatever Ella was speaking of when he said ‘Fullerite’ preaching ‘combines the free offer of salvation with the notion that

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

to it; rather, it commands them to do what they cannot do. The basis of the command is God's authority, and not, I repeat, the sinner's ability. God demands repentance, nothing less, even though sinners cannot repent. And God also demands saving faith, nothing less, even though sinners cannot believe savingly. I have already mentioned Christ's miraculous cure of the man with the withered hand, by which he aptly illustrated the principle. Let me glance at it again. He told the man to 'step forward'; then he told the man to stretch out his hand. It was an impossibility, but 'he stretched it out' (Mark 3:3-5)! Observe the difference in the two commands. In the first, Christ told the man to step forward – something he could do; this does not illustrate the gospel. In the second, Christ told the man to do what was impossible for him to do; and he did it! This *does* illustrate the gospel! Likewise, the dead Lazarus came out of the grave, the widow's dead son got out of his coffin at Nain, Jairus' dead daughter got up, the paralytic walked with his bed, the deaf man heard, the dumb spoke, the blind saw, the lame leaped, and so on – all miracles, impossible by human power, but all accomplished by Christ's command. Furthermore, it was Lazarus' duty to come out of the grave, Jairus' daughter's duty to get up, the paralytic's duty to walk with his bed, and so on.

It is exactly the same with the gospel. God commands the sinner to believe, and the sinner's duty is to obey. Ella, however, stoutly disagreed. He thought sinners may not be commanded to believe, because they have no power to believe, and have no faith to believe with.³⁴ Only awakened, sensible, regenerate, repentant – even believing – sinners may be commanded to believe. But this is wrong, utterly wrong. Christ did not command a man who had a

believing in Christ is the natural duty of all men according to natural abilities', and teaching 'two routes for salvation' (Ella: *The Free Offer* p19), I hope he exempted me and my preaching. I suspect, however, from what he said immediately after these words, he had me in his sights. If so, let me state my position loud and clear: I believe and preach nothing of the sort; nothing of the sort, I say! I do not 'preach to persuade men according to their natural abilities to repent and believe on... purely rational grounds' (Ella: *The Free Offer* p22).

³⁴ See above for Ella's citation from Gill.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

healthy hand to stretch it out; he commanded a man with a withered hand. Christ did not command a man with excellent sight to see. Christ did not tell an able-bodied man to walk. In its call for salvation, the gospel does not command believers to believe, the repentant to repent, the awakened to live, the looking to look, the seeing to see. The preacher's task is not to command living sinners to believe; he is to command dead sinners! The gospel commands sinners to do what they cannot do, and although these commands do not inform them of their ability, they do tell them their duty. What is more, God gives grace with his command so that the withered hand can be stretched out. In the same way, the unbelieving are enabled to believe, and the unrepentant are enabled to repent of their sins.³⁵

Spurgeon raised the objection of one who 'wants to know how it is that men are bidden to come – and yet we are taught in Scripture that no man can come – and he must have that cleared up; just as if the poor man who had a withered arm, when Christ said, "Stretch out your arm", had replied, "Lord, I have got a difficulty in my mind; I want to know how you can tell me to stretch out my arm when it is withered". Suppose when Christ had said to Lazarus, "Come forth", Lazarus could have said, "I have a difficulty in my mind; how can a dead man come forth?"'

Spurgeon replied:

Why, know this, vain man! When Christ says, 'Stretch out your arm', he gives you power to stretch out your arm with the command, and the difficulty is solved in practice; though I believe it never will be solved in theory. If men want to have theology mapped out to them, as they would have a map of England; if they want to have every little village

³⁵ See Spurgeon: *Soul Winner* pp174-177. Compare God's command to Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-14). Take the raising of Lazarus as an illustration of the principle. We have the sinner's state: 'Lazarus is dead'. We have the gospel call to the dead sinner: 'Lazarus, come forth!' (As above, the command to take away the stone (John 11:39) does not illustrate the gospel). We see the result: 'He who had died came out' (John 11:14,43,44). I admit, of course, that in the miracles, specific individuals were commanded and the 'success rate' was 100%. The preacher of the gospel, however, issues the gospel command promiscuously; it is God who, by his secret working, makes it effectual in the case of the elect. See Appendix 2.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

and every hedgerow in the gospel kingdom mapped out to them, they will not find it anywhere but in the Bible; and they will find it so mapped out there that the years of a Methuselah would not suffice to find out every little thing in it. We must come to Christ and learn, not learn and then come to Christ.³⁶

Berridge, commenting on Acts 16:31, said: ‘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’.³⁷

I agree with Ella when he said ‘no true Christian would deny that man is responsible for not believing’.³⁸ But this raises an important question: How then can it not be man’s obligation to believe? As John Elias put it: ‘If [since] unbelief of the gospel is a sin, is not believing it a duty?’ Indeed, it is! But this in itself leads to an inevitable conclusion; in light of the fact that sinners have a duty to believe, ministers therefore must have a duty to preach it. Otherwise, as Elias asked: ‘How can it be a duty of some to believe what is not the duty of ministers to preach?’³⁹

But as for preaching duty faith, and the sinner’s duty to believe, some common misunderstandings cloud the subject. Elias swept them away:

No one ever saw before he believed in Christ that he was elected or redeemed. So there is no need of preaching general redemption as a ground to call lost sinners to Christ; and there is no need of preaching that man can of himself believe the gospel, as a ground to encourage ruined sinners to believe in Christ.⁴⁰ Not the ability of fallen man is the rule or measure of his duty, or the ground for the justice of God to require it. [Conversely,] the inability of man is no excuse for his

³⁶ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.4 p439, emphasis his.

³⁷ Berridge p175.

³⁸ Ella: *The Free Offer* p55.

³⁹ Elias was not saying that only some have the duty to believe; clearly, he held that it is the duty of all men. Rather, as I say, Elias was making the obvious point; namely, since sinners have the duty to believe, preachers have the duty to preach it.

⁴⁰ Elias was not saying that it is acceptable to preach general redemption and creature power; both are false. He was rightly arguing that neither is the basis of duty faith or the free offer – mistaken allegations which are often made.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

disobedience. His sin, his enmity, are his inability. He ought to be ashamed on the account of them... [Of course,] faith is the gift of God. But notwithstanding this, faith is the duty of man.⁴¹

Ella thought ‘the New Testament method of preaching is to... preach the need for repentance and the need for faith in the Saviour’.⁴² But this, reader, falls a long way short of ‘the New Testament method of preaching’. The New Testament preacher does not preach merely the *need* for repentance and faith; he calls for it, he commands it, he demands it. Ella himself said so concerning repentance, but stopped short of saying it about faith. Why?

‘The main weakness of the free offer dogma’, Ella argued, ‘is that in warranting and offering salvation to all, sinners are being offered the gospel who have no ability of their own to accept it’.⁴³ This is not its weakness,⁴⁴ but allowing it for the moment, if Ella is right, what now of commanding all sinners to repent? All sinners must be called and commanded to repent even though no sinner has any power to comply. Ella, as I have shown, agreed with this. Why not, therefore, the same for faith?

Of course it is not right to appeal to the sinner’s ‘sense of duty’ to repent or believe.⁴⁵ I don’t know of any free-offer preacher who does it. Sinners are dead in sin, totally depraved, without any sense of the duty to repent or believe. There is nothing to ‘appeal to’. But this is not the issue.

* * *

Enough of this skirmishing. It is high time we got to grips with the question. The facts are simple. The sinner must be commanded to repent; it is his duty. Ella and I agree. The sinner must be commanded to believe; it is his duty. So I say, but Ella disagrees.

⁴¹ Morgan pp317-318; see also pp368-372.

⁴² Ella: *The Free Offer* p58.

⁴³ Ella: *The Free Offer* p56. The free-offer preacher, of course, can only warrant (guarantee) salvation to sinners on condition that they believe: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:31).

⁴⁴ It is foolishness in the eyes of men, but it is God’s ordained way of calling sinners (1 Cor. 1:17-21).

⁴⁵ Ella: *The Free Offer* p58.

Chapter 1: What is Duty Faith?

But what I say or Ella says is of little importance. What does Scripture say? What does Ella make of those places in Scripture where sinners – as sinners – are commanded to believe? For lack of space, I take just two, both of which Ella raised,⁴⁶ namely, Isaiah 45:22 and John 6:28-29.

I begin with Isaiah 45:22.

⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Ella spent little time on his ‘exposition’ of the first, most of it attacking John Murray’s view. And although he said he was going to ‘look closely’ at the second, he devoted only two small paragraphs to his ‘exposition’ of it, mostly attacking Robert Oliver concerning Fuller (Ella: *The Free Offer* pp26-28,54-55).