

*John 6:28-29*

**‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent’ (John 6:28-29)**

There are three questions:

1. What did Jesus mean by ‘the work of God’?
2. What did Jesus mean when he told the people to believe?
3. Were they sensible sinners who were told to believe?

***1. ‘The work of God’ – what is it?***

There are two alternatives. Either it is the work which God himself does, or else it is the work God requires men to do. If the former, then since the Jews asked Christ what they had to do (John 6:28), they must have been asking how they could do what only God can do, and Christ told them how to do it. A most remarkable suggestion! Did they want to create? Did they want to rule all nations? Or what? The notion is absurd. We can dismiss it. What is more, Christ’s answer, to ‘believe in him whom he sent’, can hardly be described as God’s own work. Sinners have to believe, not God!<sup>1</sup>

But before I move on, let me deal with a refinement of the idea. Were the Jews thinking in a much more subtle way – were they

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge, of course, the obvious; ‘the works of God’ *can* mean God’s own works. When Jesus told his disciples that the blind man had been born blind so ‘that the works of God should be revealed in him’ (John 9:3), this is precisely what he was talking about. God was going to display *his* works – his compassion, his power, and so on – in giving the man sight. Yes, of course. But Jesus made this very clear by saying the works of God were to be *revealed in* the man; God was about to demonstrate his compassion and his power. But this is very different to John 6:28-29.

thinking of saving faith as the work of God in his elect? In other words, were they asking how God would work in them, enabling them to believe? This too we can dismiss. The suggestion that they had reached this level of spiritual understanding, and reached it *before* believing,<sup>2</sup> and were sincerely asking how God would work faith in them, is too much to swallow. Saving faith came into the conversation only *after* the Jews had asked their question about the work of God, and it arose only because Christ raised it. It had not entered the minds of the Jews. Above all, the idea introduces a dreadful confusion. The Jews were asking about what *they* had to do, not what God would do. The confusion is this: When a sinner believes, who does the believing? Is it the sinner or God? It is the sinner. While faith is the *gift* of God (Eph. 2:8), it is never called the *work* of God. Although God gives faith to the elect sinner, working in him, it is the sinner who believes (Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 2:12-13). The Holy Spirit does not believe for the sinner; God does not do the believing. Gill had it right when he said ‘it is the convinced sinner, and not God or Christ, or the Spirit, who repents and believes’.<sup>3</sup> ‘Faith... as a principle, is purely God’s work; [but] as it is an act, or as it is exercised under the influence of divine grace, it is man’s act’.<sup>4</sup> Yes, indeed, ‘it is man’s act’. The upshot is, even if the Jews were asking about saving faith – which they were not – they were asking about what God required of them, not what he would do in them.

Let me stress this. The fact is, the Jews were not talking about God’s *own* work at all! They wanted to know what *they* had to do. They wanted to know how *they* could please God, what did he require of *them*, what was *their* duty.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, they had asked their question only because Christ had spoken of what they ought to ‘labour’ for (John 6:27). This is what they wanted to know, and

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<sup>2</sup> They were not spiritual men; see below for proof of their carnality.

<sup>3</sup> Gill: *Cause* p112.

<sup>4</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p654. ‘Faith, as it is our act, is our own; hence we read of *his* faith, and *my* faith, and *your* faith, in Scripture’ (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 p185, emphasis his). ‘Whilst faith is unquestionably God’s gift, it must be your act’ (White p39).

<sup>5</sup> Once again, note the link between duty faith – that which God requires – and God’s desire – that which would please him.

this is what Christ told them. The work under discussion was not the work which God *does*, but the work which *pleases* him, the work God *requires*. As Goodwin put it: ‘By works of God they mean works acceptable to God’.<sup>6</sup> Lexicons tell us it is ‘the works required and approved by God, the deeds that God desires’.<sup>7</sup> Henry Alford: “‘The works of God’ must not be taken to mean “the works which God works”, but... “the works well pleasing to God””.<sup>8</sup> As the NIV translates it: ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ And Jesus, by his answer, was telling them this is your responsibility, this is what you must do to please God, this is what God requires of you, this is the work of God, this is your duty. ‘Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you,<sup>9</sup> because God the Father has set his seal on him... This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent’ (John 6:27,28). Alford again: ‘The meaning is not that faith is wrought in us by God... but... working the work of God is to believe on him whom he has sent’.<sup>10</sup> Believing in Christ is that which pleases God, it is what God requires, it is what he demands, it is the sinner’s duty.<sup>11</sup>

Consider Christ himself. He did ‘the works of God’. What did

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<sup>6</sup> Goodwin p584.

<sup>7</sup> Thayer; Arndt and Gingrich.

<sup>8</sup> Alford p518.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, salvation, and all the things which accompany it – repentance, faith, and so on – are gifts and graces which only God can give and produce. This is not at issue!

<sup>10</sup> Alford p518.

<sup>11</sup> ‘The work of God is to believe. Faith includes all the works which God requires’ (Vincent Vol.1 p441). Compare ‘the work of the LORD’ (Jer. 48:10), the work God requires: ‘Which is said with respect to the Chaldeans, who were enjoined to destroy the Moabites, which is called the work of the Lord, because he had given them a commission to do it; and which was to be done by them... This is a general rule... every man has work to do for God’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.4 p209). Compare also ‘my [Christ’s] works’ (Rev. 2:26): ‘By his works are meant [here], not the works which were done by him... but the works which are commanded, and required by Christ to be done by his people... [such] as the work of faith... and every act of obedience’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p949).

this entail? Take the curing of the blind man which I noted a moment ago. Yes, God was about to reveal his works in making the blind man see (John 9:3), but as Jesus immediately went on to say: ‘I must work the works of [God] while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work’ (John 9:4). Clearly, Christ was speaking of the work *he himself* would do. Yes, it was ‘the work of God’ in that it would be done by God’s power (John 14:10), and would please God; yet, in making the blind man see, whilst it was God’s work which Christ did, *it was Christ who did the work*. It was one of *his* works (John 15:24).

Christ’s curing the blind man is not an isolated example of the way he pleased his Father by his works. Christ’s entire life and death was a constant demonstration of it. Coming into the world, he set out his manifesto: ‘I have come... to do your will, O God’ (Heb. 10:5-7,9). Addressing his disciples, he elaborated the point: ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work’ (John 4:34). In other words, Christ was saying he delighted to obey God his Father, to carry out his commands, to complete the work, the duty, the Father had given him to do. In this way Christ was at work. ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’ (John 5:17), he told the Jews. True, as he explained, ‘I can of myself do nothing’ (John 5:19,30), but even so his works were *his* own works; *he* did them. In all this, he could say, ‘I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me’ (John 5:30); in other words, I do my works in order to please the Father; indeed, ‘I always do those things that please him’ (John 8:29); ‘the works which the Father has given me to finish – the very works that I do – bear witness of me’ (John 5:36), ‘for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me’ (John 6:38). Of ‘the works that I do in my Father’s name’ (John 10:25), one – which he called ‘the will of the Father’ – was not to lose any who had been given him by the Father (John 6:39); this work he did (John 17:12). Further, we hear him praying in the garden: ‘O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’ (Matt. 26:39). It was just as he had said: ‘I have come... to do your will, O God’ (Heb. 10:5-7,9). And he completely fulfilled and accomplished all the work the Father had given him to do: ‘I have glorified you on the

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earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do' (John 17:4), 'I have accomplished it'. We hear it loud and clear in his triumphant cry on the cross, 'It is finished' (John 19:30), 'it is accomplished'.

In short, Christ did the works of God; that is, he did those works (John 14:31; 15:10) and said those words (John 12:49; 14:10,24) which God commanded him, which God required of him, and which pleased the Father (John 10:37). But it was Christ himself who did the works. While they were 'the works of God', they were *Christ's own* works.<sup>12</sup>

In John 6:28-29, therefore, the Jews were asking, as William Gurnall put it, about 'that part of his will which above all he desires should be done – called therefore with emphasis "the work of God" (John 6:29)'.<sup>13</sup> And this is what Christ meant when he told them to believe. God requires you to believe, he told them. In short, Christ preached duty faith.

The principle is established: God requires sinners to believe; it is their duty; it is what pleases him.

Ella, however, did not agree. The people, he thought, were asking Christ 'what is to be done so that they might be sealed and be given everlasting food'. No! The people were not asking *what needed to be done*, but *what they needed to do*. 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?'<sup>14</sup> As Ella said: "'You must believe in me", Christ tells them'. At which point, Ella dragged a red-herring across the track: 'Christ's hearers do not ask him how they can work to obtain this belief'. I agree. There is not the slightest suggestion of it in the passage. What is more, in the free offer, in duty faith, there is not a hint that any sinner can work to

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<sup>12</sup> To cap it all, Christ promised his disciples, 'He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do' (John 14:12). And when we come to sanctification, believers – who are God's 'workmanship' – produce 'good works, which God prepared beforehand'. But, I emphasise, believers do the good works. God doesn't. 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:10). See also Phil. 2:12-13. Of course, believers can only do the works by God's grace, but the point stands; believers do the works.

<sup>13</sup> Gurnall Vol.2 pp49-50.

<sup>14</sup> They were using the active voice, not the passive.

obtain faith. But this is irrelevant. As Ella said, this is what they did *not* ask. So what *did* they ask? That is the question. Ella again: They ask ‘how Jesus will work to give them that belief’, the work God will do. No! I have already answered this. Are we to understand they sincerely wanted to believe, and knew Christ would have to give them faith, but they did not know how he would work to give them that faith? The notion is so far removed from reality, words fail.<sup>15</sup> The fact is, they were asking what works *they* had to do, not what works *Christ* would do. Ella, however, cited John 6:30 as proof of his point.<sup>16</sup> Yet, once again, this is irrelevant. The Jews opening question came in John 6:28: What do we have to do? Christ’s answer came in John 6:29: You must believe. In John 6:30, the Jews were trying to side-step Jesus’ doctrine – by demanding a sign from Christ – *after* he had told them what they must do. They were trying to divert his attention; they were on the defensive. And the best form of defence? Attack! The Jews took this route.<sup>17</sup> ‘You talk about what we have to do. What will *you* do?’ they snapped. ‘What work will you do?’ (John 6:30). ‘You’re quick enough to tell us about what we have to do, to tell us our work; what’s yours?’ All this is a far cry from asking sincere questions about how Christ would work saving faith in

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<sup>15</sup> Note how hyper-Calvinists are obsessed with a sinner’s doctrinal understanding before conversion. Their demand for ‘sensibility’, for instance, means the sinner has to be persuaded of his regeneration, repentance and desire for Christ, before believing. Quite a list! Here, it is claimed, unbelievers are curious about how God will give them faith! But none of this is the unbeliever’s concern; he has to trust Christ! See Murray: *Spurgeon* p72. By a ‘hyper-Calvinist’, I mean one who does not hold with the free offer, who does not hold with duty faith. Some hyper-Calvinists are knowingly so, but many are what I call ‘incipient’ or *de facto* hypes; that is, while they accept the principles of the free offer, in practice they fail to preach it. See chapter 9. Unfortunately, the word ‘hyper’ makes it sound as though it is a ‘superior’, ‘stronger’ sort of Calvinism; it would be better thought of as ‘exaggerated’, ‘false’ or ‘defective’ Calvinism. See Spurgeon: *New Vol.4* p341; *New and Metropolitan Vol.7* p302; Murray: *Spurgeon* pp39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Ella: *The Free Offer* pp55,61.

<sup>17</sup> Just like the woman at Jacob’s well who struggled hard, in as many ways as she could think of, to attack Jesus or divert him (John 4:9,12,20,25).

them, or how ‘they might be sealed and be given everlasting food’.

Ella was wrong. The Jews were asking what works they had to do in order to please God. John Brine conceded as much. He said the work was not something which God did in them but it was ‘an act acceptable and pleasing to God’. And Gill agreed. It is something which is enjoined by God’s ‘will and commandment’, he said.<sup>18</sup> Calvin rightly said the men in John 6 ‘ask what they ought to do’, and ‘by “the works of God” we must understand those [works] which God demands, and of which he approves’. Calvin went on to explain ‘that faith alone is sufficient, because this alone does God require of us, that we believe’. He then dealt with that misunderstanding I raised a few moments ago: ‘Those who infer from this passage that faith is the gift of God are mistaken; for Christ does not [here] show what God produces in us, but what he wishes and requires from us’.<sup>19</sup>

Ella missed the point. The work in question is that which God requires of sinners; it is their duty. And Christ told them that God requires faith.

## **2. But what is the faith which pleases God?**

As Ella said, Christ told the people: ‘You must believe in me’.<sup>20</sup> I agree. But what sort of faith was he demanding? There are different kinds of faith.<sup>21</sup> Was Christ calling for saving faith, or what? If it was saving faith, since he told the people God requires faith, the principle of duty faith is established. But did Christ demand saving faith?

Ella had no doubt about it; Christ meant saving faith.<sup>22</sup> Once again, I agree. In the context, Christ was speaking of ‘everlasting life’ (John 6:27,40,47,51,54,58); of the one ‘who comes to me’ (John 6:35,37,44,45); of the elect (John 6:39); of irresistible and

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<sup>18</sup> Both quoted by Fuller: *Defence in Works* p197.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 Part 2 pp243-244. Faith is the gift of God, of course, but it is not what Christ was saying in John 6:29.

<sup>20</sup> Ella: *The Free Offer* p55.

<sup>21</sup> In particular, historical faith is an acceptance of the facts of the gospel (Mark 1:24; Acts 26:27; Jas. 2:19); saving faith is trusting Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Ella: *The Free Offer* pp54-55,61.

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essential grace (John 6:44); of being ‘taught by God’ (John 6:45); of the atonement (John 6:51); of ‘eating [Christ’s] flesh and drinking his blood’ (John 6:53-58); of ‘believing’ (John 6:29,35,36,47,64); of regeneration (John 6:63); and so on. Christ could be speaking of nothing but saving faith.

Calvin was of this opinion.<sup>23</sup> Matthew Poole likewise: ‘Our Lord calls them to a work they never thought of, the owning and acknowledgement of him to be the true Messiah; the embracing and receiving him as such, and trusting him with all the concerns of their souls... This our Saviour calls “the work of God”, in answer to what they had said’.<sup>24</sup> Matthew Henry: ‘That faith is the work of God which closes with Christ, and relies upon him’.<sup>25</sup> Owen also saw it as saving faith, calling it the ‘fundamental act of faith, whereby we close with Christ, whereby we receive him’. He referred to John 6:29, saying, ‘the act, work, or duty of faith, in the receiving of Christ... is not to be reckoned unto... common duties... but the soul must find out wherein it has in a singular manner closed with Christ upon the command of God’.<sup>26</sup> To please God, sinners must believe savingly in Christ. Indeed, as Fuller said, not only is believing a duty which will please God, but ‘this is the first and greatest of all duties’.<sup>27</sup>

Gill did not agree with this; saving faith was not the issue, he said. Christ, he alleged, was replying to a request by the Jews as to whether he had any other laws to give them in addition to the laws of Moses, in order that they might do them to please God. Gill thought ‘believing in Christ, is believing in God that sent him’.<sup>28</sup> But Christ was saying nothing of the sort. Whereas Gill claimed Christ demands that sinners believe in the one who did the sending, Christ said God commands sinners to believe in the one who was sent!<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 Part 2 pp244-245.

<sup>24</sup> Poole pp308-309.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Henry.

<sup>26</sup> Owen: *Meditations in Works* Vol.1 pp427-428.

<sup>27</sup> Fuller: *Worthy in Works* p158. Quoted and dismissed by Ella (Ella: *The Free Offer* pp54-55).

<sup>28</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p654.

<sup>29</sup> They asked what sign Jesus would perform that they might believe *him*



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Goodwin, even though he made the same point as Gill about Moses' law, unlike Gill, was in no doubt about the real issue. Christ was teaching, said Goodwin, 'that which is acceptable to God, which God delights in... [Christ] puts them upon believing alone... [and] immediately... he puts them upon believing'.<sup>30</sup> And Goodwin meant saving faith.

But Gill did not give up easily. On John 6:37 – the same context – he wrote: 'The Jews might be reasonably accused for not believing on [Christ] as the Messiah'; this, Gill defined as 'a bare assent to him as such'.<sup>31</sup> In saying this, he avoided the crux of Christ's demand by taking the escape route of historical faith,<sup>32</sup> rejecting the claim that Christ was speaking of saving faith – the very thing Christ *was* insisting on.

What is more, Gill contradicted himself, for when writing on Acts 16:31 he described the faith Paul spoke of as being 'much the same' as the faith in John 6:29.<sup>33</sup> He further said the faith which Paul commanded the jailer to exercise was not 'a bare historical faith, as only to believe that [Christ] was the Son of God, and the Messiah... but so as to look unto him alone for life and salvation, to rely upon him, and trust in him; to commit himself, and the care of his immortal soul unto him, and to expect peace, pardon, righteousness, and eternal life from him'.<sup>34</sup> Gill was right on Acts 16 and wrong on John 6. So which kind of faith did he think it was – historical or saving? Did Christ tell these sinners that God demanded faith, but not saving faith, only historical faith? that God was looking for a bare mental assent? Is this what Christ meant? Is

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(John 6:30). He told them it was *he himself*, 'the bread from heaven... the bread of God', they had to be concerned about, telling them again and again they had to come to *him*, believe in *him*, see (that is, look to) *him*, eat *his* flesh and drink *his* blood (John 6:32-33,35-40,44-58).

<sup>30</sup> Goodwin p584.

<sup>31</sup> Gill: *Cause* p87.

<sup>32</sup> See note above.

<sup>33</sup> If so, and I agree with Gill, then Paul made the same demand of the jailer (a sensible sinner, I presume), as Christ did of the Jews (non-sensible sinners – see below); namely, saving faith. In other words, God requires saving faith of sinners whether or not they are sensible. My point exactly!

<sup>34</sup> Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p930.

God satisfied when men get as far as agreeing that Jesus is the Messiah? Is this the faith which God demands? To ask such questions is to answer them.

Brine, unlike Gill, did not try to deny the obvious. He agreed it is saving faith which Christ referred to. But he had another way of trying to side-step the inevitable. He said all Christ was doing was *telling* sinners what it is that God requires; he was not *commanding* sinners to do anything. How lame, how desperate, an argument! If Christ tells men what God requires of them, then God in Christ is actually commanding those men. Will hyper-Calvinists not face up to it? In the following, note Brine's use of the word 'declaration' in his attempt to get round the idea of 'command' and 'duty'.<sup>35</sup> Brine alleged:

The words contain a declaration that believing in Christ for salvation is necessary to the enjoyment of eternal life, and that faith in him is an act acceptable and pleasing to God; but afford no proof that it is required of men in a state of unregeneracy. To declare to unregenerate persons the necessity of faith in order to salvation, which is what our blessed Lord here does, falls very far short of asserting it to be their present duty.<sup>36</sup>

Now by this, as Fuller pointed out, Brine shot himself in the foot. *First*, Brine agreed that Christ was speaking to the unregenerate; he was not addressing sensible sinners. This is most important; I will come back to it in a moment. *Secondly*, Brine acknowledged that Christ was talking about saving faith; this is the point we are looking at now. *Thirdly*, Brine agreed that the work was not God's own work but the work he requires of sinners, that which pleases him; in other words, the first point above. In this way, Brine here destroyed the hyper-Calvinistic case he tried so hard to build. He allowed that unregenerate sinners were addressed on the subject of saving faith, and that unregenerate sinners were told saving faith is what God requires, that saving faith is necessary for salvation. The only way Brine could evade the consequence of his correct

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<sup>35</sup> A preacher must 'declare', of course, but he must also 'command', 'beseech', 'urge', 'invite', and so on. Sinners need to be told the facts of the gospel, yes, but they also need to be commanded to believe, and urged to come to Christ. See chapter 9.

<sup>36</sup> See Fuller: *Worthy* in *Works* p158.

analysis was to say that Christ was simply making a factual statement about faith; he was not demanding it of his hearers.

But it will not wash. The sinners who spoke to Christ wanted to know how they could please God – how *they* could please God, mark you – ‘that *we* may work the works of God’, they said. They were not looking for an abstract declaration of how certain sorts of sinners under various specified conditions might work the works of God. They were asking for *themselves*: Tell us what *we* have to do. I do not say their motives were pure,<sup>37</sup> but I do say they were not speaking in theoretical terms. They were asking a practical question: What is our God-ward duty? What does God require of us? This is it, said Christ, believe on me! And Christ did not merely *describe* their duty; he told them what they must do to please God. In other words, he told them their duty. This is what they had to do!

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Christ was preaching duty faith here. Just because Jesus did not use the word ‘command’ it does not mean he was not commanding his hearers. What else was he doing? They asked what their duty was; Christ told them. And their duty was savingly to believe. Some who deny duty faith seem to think that Christ was prepared to deal in generalities and abstract theories, when we know he came into the world to seek and to save sinners. He addressed men in the second person, and did so in the imperative, the commanding mood. This is the essence of John 6:28-29. Christ did not say merely that God is pleased when men believe. What he said was: This is what *you* must do!

Thus the passage teaches that to exercise saving faith in Christ is the sinner’s duty.

### ***3. Were they sensible sinners who asked the question and who were told their duty?***

As I have hinted, those who asked Christ about ‘the works of God’ were far from sensible sinners who were sincerely interested in salvation. Indeed, as I have said, they were attacking Christ in

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<sup>37</sup> See my comments above on the way they wanted to divert Christ.

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order to ward off his penetrating demand. A few moments ago, I showed how Brine admitted they were unregenerate, and Poole considered the believing in question was ‘a work they never thought of’. Indeed, it is utterly self evident.<sup>38</sup> The men who asked the question, the men to whom Christ directed his reply, were carnal men who were interested in Christ only because he could give them bread (John 6:26). They certainly did not believe, no, not even after Christ had commanded them (John 6:36). Having been told in no uncertain terms that they ought to believe, they did not like it, and immediately tried to side-track Jesus, and get him on to Moses and the manna – anything but face up to Christ’s call for faith (John 6:30-31).<sup>39</sup> They either showed a preoccupation with a full stomach or mocked Christ by demanding bread (John 6:34). When Christ rebuked them for their lack of faith (John 6:36), they ‘murmured [grumbled] against him’, ‘complained about him’ (John 6:41,43), and belittled him (John 6:42). And when they found out what was involved in trusting Christ, it was the last straw; the sheer spirituality of the commitment he was demanding of them totally exposed them as carnal and rebellious, men who had no more time for him (John 6:66). Alford: ‘The seeking [of Christ]... was merely a low desire to profit by his wonderful works, not a reasonable consequence of deduction from his miracles that he was the Saviour of the world’. Alford called it ‘this low desire of mere satisfaction of their carnal appetite’.<sup>40</sup>

Were they sensible sinners? Were they repentant? They were not!

Yet these were the very sinners whom Christ addressed concerning their spiritual duty. He commanded these very men to believe savingly, men who had their minds set on earthly, carnal satisfaction (John 6:26-27). Indeed, their question about wanting to know the work which would please God was an attacking reply to

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<sup>38</sup> ‘They do not understand what they say, and talk without any definite object’ (Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 Part 2 p243). I do not agree with Matthew Henry when he said: ‘I... take it as a humble serious question, showing them to be... willing to know and do their duty’. Christ was telling them their duty, but they didn’t want to hear it!

<sup>39</sup> See above for more on the way they tried to divert Christ.

<sup>40</sup> Alford p517.

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Christ's rebuke of their carnality. 'You only sought me because you wanted bread. Get your priorities right; set your minds and hearts on everlasting life, not mere bread', Christ told them. 'What do you want us to do?' they retorted. 'Your first and greatest duty is to believe in me', said Christ. To claim these were sensible sinners is ludicrous. To deduce that only sensible sinners may be commanded in the gospel, is to miss the target by a mile.<sup>41</sup>

The evasions will not stand up. Christ did not say God commands sinners to exercise natural faith<sup>42</sup> and repentance. Nor can it be said God merely encourages sinners by his commands. Nor is it enough to say we must merely declare and describe the way of salvation to sinners. Nor is it sufficient to tell sinners God alone can give them repentance and faith. Of course this last is true, and of course we must let sinners know it. But this is not enough. Far from it. God, in the gospel, commands all sinners to believe savingly. To use Ella's words – which he limited to repentance: 'Sinners must be... commanded'.<sup>43</sup> So they must! And they must be commanded to believe, to trust Christ for salvation. Preachers must command sinners in no uncertain tones. Faith is what God requires of all sinners. Faith, therefore, must be the duty of all sinners. Since all men are created by God, it is the duty of all men – not just sensible, repentant sinners – to please him. Consequently, since it pleases God when men believe in the one whom he sent, it must be the duty of all sinners to trust Christ. All men are *obliged* to please God, for it cannot be indifferent as to whether or not men please him. Thus all men are obliged to trust Christ.

In short, faith is every sinner's duty because God commands every sinner to believe.

There is a further point to be made. Not only is it the duty of sinners to believe, it is the duty of preachers to command them to believe. Now if preachers fail in this, but rather keep telling their hearers they have no power to believe, it is little wonder if such an unbalanced presentation of the truth leads sinners to lose all sense

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, a man exercises 'natural' faith when he sits on a chair, believing it will bear his weight.

<sup>43</sup> Ella: *The Free Offer* p71.

*Chapter 3: John 6:28-29*

of urgency and, even worse, feel somewhat excused for their unbelief and lack of repentance. Indeed, instead of being awakened to seek for mercy and so escape the wrath to come, they might well be encouraged to stay where they are, feel justified in their lack of response, and think themselves, not so much objects of wrath, but objects of pity. The harm to such sinners, and the accountability of such preachers, will be great.

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There are many other passages of Scripture which ought to be looked at in detail, but for lack of space I must move on to glance at what others have said on the subject of duty faith. As I have already made clear, I do not do this to establish principles – I have tried to do this from Scripture – but I think it is important to know that many undisputed Calvinists have held – and still hold – to duty faith.