



Faith and Works

Eduqas A level R.S. G1A Christianity Theme 2D

Key Concepts:

- Luther struggled with the concept of **holiness**. In particular, how could unholy humans ever hope to have a relationship with a holy God?
- He tried the path of **penitence/confession** but was aware that he could not ever remember all of the sins he would need to confess.
- He also tried the path of **mysticism**, the experience of surrender to the greater reality of God, but he felt that such experiences were fleeting.
- Luther was painfully aware of his lack of holiness and came to hate God for creating a situation with no bridge between unholiness and holiness.
- In **Romans 1:17** he discovered that whilst no human actions could create holiness, one had to have faith that God gave holiness to humans as a gift.
- This led to Luther's focus on **Sola Fide** (justification through faith alone) and **Sola Gratia** (grace alone) and rejection of Judaism as dead legalism. He insisted that the Bible must be revered above the traditions of the Church as a source of authority (**Sola Scriptura**).
- Key passages for Luther include Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:6; he rejected James 2:24 - it suggests works are important along with faith.
- The **Council of Trent** met from 1545-1563CE (Luther died in 1546C) and sought to reform the church and also opposed Luther's doctrine of Sola Fide.
- The council banned 'base gain' for securing **indulgences**, a practice which Luther linked to one trying to work for holiness.
- Critical to the Council was the clarification that God works both through the Bible and through **apostolic tradition**; this undermined Sola Scriptura.
- The Council appealed to the Bible to convince the Church that we are justified by faith, but not by faith alone: '...the only thing that counts is faith working through love.' (Galatians 5:6); 'If you wish to enter life, keep the commandments.' (Matthew 19:17)
- Human free will, moved by the grace of God must cooperate in salvation.
- **E.P. Sanders** is a contemporary Biblical scholar who believes that Luther misinterpreted the Bible's teaching on 'law', Judaism and justification.
- Luther viewed the Bible only through his **individualistic** lens and consuming focus on finding personal peace with God.
- Luther missed that the Jewish covenant is based on grace, not law: it is a gift to be chosen by God. The relationship is maintained through obedience. This is called '**covenantal nomism**' - law in the context of the covenant.
- Christians are a part of a new covenant, not through the law of Moses, but through the cross. This also involves covenantal nomism.
- Paul focused on faith because he had a very specific concern: did Christians have to obey the specifically Jewish laws (i.e. **circumcision**, diet, sabbath)?
- The answer of Paul is no; however, Sanders notes that Paul expected Christians to keep all sorts of laws. (**2 Corinthians 5:10**)

Key quotes:

'Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace' (M. Luther)

'...the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments.' (E. P. Sanders)

Key arguments/debates:

Many Protestant Christians believe that Luther 'got it right' as so many Biblical passages do not place a value on human achievement for salvation. Yet, the New Testament assumes that Christians will 'repent', do works of the law and follow Jesus. Paul does not use the word 'alone' in his explanation of justification.

Catholics believe that tradition clarifies these points and that faith and works are two sides of the same coin produced by the grace of God. Christianity is not a lawless religion (antinomian) and salvation is a process that requires that the human will cooperate with God.

Key questions:

- What is unfair about characterizing Judaism as dead legalism?
- Can you put all of the Bible passages mentioned in this specification into your own words?
- How are Bible passages on the subject of justification used by Protestants? By Catholics?
- Is James 2:24 reconcilable with the primacy of faith?

Key words:

Holiness | penitence | confession | mysticism | Rom 1:17 | Sola Fide | Sola Gratia | Sola Scriptura | Council of Trent | indulgences | apostolic tradition | E. P. Sanders | individualistic | covenantal nomism | circumcision | 2 Corinthians 5:10