Sola Fide Vs. Sola Gratia Essay, Research Paper

Sola Fide vs. Sola Gratia

Sola Fide, or the salvation by faith alone, has become the basis for the Protestant faith. When Luther split from the Catholic Church in 1517, his new doctrine was based on five key principles: 1) grace and sovereignty of God, 2) faith, 3) scripture as the word of faith, 4) the church as the fellowship of saints and the priesthood of all believers, and 5) the fallibility of man and his institutions. As important as all five of these tenants are, the first two, and especially the belief in faith truly separate Protestantism from other branches of Christianity. This is how Protestantism separates from Catholicism, in the fact that Catholics believe in good works to obtain God’s grace and that Protestants believe only in Sola Fide.

In 1517 Luther started the whole Protestant reformation by producing his Ninety-Five Theses. In these theses, Luther went on to denounce the act of Sola Gratia, claiming that selling of indulgencies to the Catholic Church was not a valid nor a moral way to gain salvation. Up until that time it was common practice for “religious” men to prove their holiness by giving good works to the church. A good work was an act done for the purpose of removing sin, for example donating money to the church, or the confessing of a sin. Luther claimed that The Creator disregarded good works, and that Christians needed to come up with a new form of achieving salvation. His suggestion was Sola Scriptura coupled with Sola Fide. The principle of Luther’s proposal claims the Canonical Scriptures, especially the New Testament to be the only infallible source and rule of faith. Luther also felt that the teachers of the scripture were subordinate to the Bible and its lessons. In fact Phillip Schaff (see bibliography) claims that “The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is the religion of Protestants. Protestantism, however, by no means despises or rejects church authority as such, but only claims of the Bibles superiority”. This only confirms Luther’s suspicion of a corrupt Catholic Church, as he felt that it was time for a change. The Bible says that in the beginning there was the Word; and Protestants believe that it is faith in that Word, and the Word only that will grant them salvation. This principle of Protestantism can be summed up by Phillip Schaff again: The Protestant goes directly to the Word of God for instruction, and to the throne of grace in his devotions; whilst the pious Roman Catholic consults the teaching of his church, and prefers to offer his prayers through the medium of the Virgin Mary and the saints.” It stems from this general principle of Evangelical freedom, and direct individual relationship of the believer to Christ, proceed the three fundamental doctrines of Protestantism -the absolute supremacy of (1) the Word, and of (2) the grace of Christ, and (3) faith of believers

The salvation by faith alone was Luther’s way of splitting from the Catholic Church’s good work system. Sola Fide was a way for a Protestant to relate to God in a one on one relationship without the worry of having to deal with good works. It is the justification by faith that means a complete trust in the savior. It is in this justification that we transform from the complete sinner to a state of holiness and one of god’s perfect imago dei. There are passages in the Bible that reaffirm this point, the story of Abraham being one such parable. In this lesson, God commanded Abraham to kill his son in order to prove his faith. Abraham, not wanting to doubt his savior, was ready to do such a deed. However, God interjected and said that He was only testing Abraham on his faith. Because Abraham had believed God gave His command in regards to Abraham’s best interest, Abraham had faith in whatever decision he would make. That is the ultimate faith in ones savior, to sacrifice a child based on faith proved Abraham’s holiness in God’s eye. It is the purpose of the scriptures to promote faith in God, and to instill a sense of obedience to the God.

I (and professor Twesigye) have stated before that the scriptures form a foundation for faith, however it can also be said that faith forms the basis for the very same scriptures. It was Luther who realized this in 1517 when he challenged that one did not need a leader such as the pope to instill faith. Instead, Luther claimed that all a man needed was his bible, his wits and his God. According to Luther man was a sinful creature, a fallen imago dei from God’s Garden of Eden. The only way to make it back to this paradise is in a process called the Justification, or Salvation. And, according to Protestantism, the only way to achieve this goal is to take up a bible and have faith in the Lords teachings. Luther stressed the state of original sin, that all men are born sinful due to Adam’s corruption in the Garden. “Death alone shall free us” from sin, and the only way to make up for our fallibility is by professing our faith onto our savior.

There have been debates for centuries, countless lives have been lost, and wars have been fought to see which side, Protestant or Catholic is the more righteous. Why is it so important that Catholics denounce Luther’s teachings, and why is it so important that only faith can save us? Faith is so important to us on so many levels, that it was only natural for Luther to adopt his Sola Fide philosophy. Faith is the positive orientation to life and its mysteries, therefore we need a divine being to entrust our faith to, in order to understand our surroundings. Since we are mortal and finite creatures, we will never be able to understand what goes on around us, and this is why we need a God to enlighten us. God appears for us as a redeemer, fulfiller and savior, and we can only become his perfect imago dei or be truly saved if we have faith in his teachings as told in the scripture. We as humans, besides being fallible, are also animals by nature. It is our faith in God that sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. We are the only creatures to engage in prayer rituals, and to also have a place in our minds and hearts for our savior. Our faith in a higher being is what makes us truly human. However for Protestants, it is not the mere act of prayer that makes us human, instead it is the belief that there is a higher God, and the faith that he is our savior that sets us apart from the animals. Luther wrote that it is not the man who attends church for every mass in his finest clothes that finds God; rather it is the man who looks for the Lord in the scripture and in his own mind that finds his true savior. No good work helps to find God; it is our belief and our faith that helps overturn our original sin in His eyes.

The belief in Sola Fide is hugely important, not just in the case that Luther thinks it is the only way to salvation. Sola Fide also differentiates humans from animals; it also helps us lead our normal human lives among each other. If the basis for the scriptures is on faith, then it can be seen that faith is directly responsible for the values by which we live. If by faith we are taught to obey God, we are also taught to obey our values. We are taught to show obedience to God, along with our parents, prophets, leaders and priests. The scriptures tell us how to govern our lives based on example, and those scriptures are written on faith. Our faith-based value system tells us to respect our elders and to have common courtesy for others. Also we are supposed show Agape towards all other men. Not only do these values help us feel better about ourselves, but the also get us closer on track with becoming the perfect imago dei. If man can learn to get along and to have respect for each other maybe there is a chance for salvation in God’s eyes. However these actions must be done on faith and faith alone, for it is Sola Fide that garners our salvation, and if man can learn to act on faith, then there might be a chance to reverse the fall of paradise due to the original sin of Adam and Eve

While this doctrine of Sola Fide may be accepted by many many people (10% of the worlds population is protestant), there are still some people who contest its relevance. Ireland for example has staged numerous bloody battles between Catholics and Protestants. These kinds of conflicts go to show that there are some proponents of Sola Fide, and there are the doctrine’s detractors. One reason why the Catholic Church seems so negatively biased toward this dogma is that they Protestants as lazy. The Catholics also question if the Protestants can be disciplined in their faith without a guiding figure such as the pope. Also Catholics question how the religion can function without all of the sacraments that can be seen in Catholicism. Another “flaw” that can be seen, is the fact that the Protestant faith is not unified; hundreds of reform sects have branched off from the main trunk of Protestantism, all arguing over which branch is best. Yet another question that Catholics often ask is “how can a man know that he is contacting God on his own accord.” All of these arguments hold water as far as the Catholics are concerned, however, Protestantism and Sola Fide can refute most of the questions and can be seen as an important religion as well as a key doctrine for human salvation. Protestants are not lazy, nor are they antireligious because they chose not to put on a show for prayer. This religion was built on one pillar, the salvation by faith alone, neither good works nor Sola Gratia apply to the Protestants. Also, the Protestants do not need a pope to lead them; their prayer is based on an individual meeting with God. It is on the individual’s accord that he seeks out salvation from the Lord. Also the many different sects also give Protestantism an advantage because they afford people the opportunity to make a choice for what religion they want to support, whereas there is only on Catholic Church, protestants have many to choose from, to make sure their religious needs are reasonably met. While there are many people who would like to condemn Protestantism, there is still an avid support group for the religion, and as long as people keep believing in Sola Fide, Protestant Church doors will remain open.

It is the doctrine of Sola Fide that is the main difference in Protestantism from Catholicism. There are no good works of grace in the Protestant faith, instead everything revolves around a sovereign God that expects and only tolerates total faith. Because it is in the scripture it is so. The truth lies in the scriptures, and the word of God is truth. And it is this acceptance of the scriptures that allows you into God’s good graces; only the word of God can garner a Protestant a space in heaven.

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