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REFORMATION

500 YEARS OF REFORMATION

2009

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

BOOKLET TWO

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GRACE

STUDY FOUR

Before the Reformation, the medieval church believed in salvation by grace. But they thought of grace in a different way. Going back to what the Bible taught about grace, the Reformers reminded God's people that salvation is by grace *alone*. This was certainly counter-cultural at the time, and is still so, even today.

Luther (before the Reformation) explained salvation by grace like this:
 "Hence the teachers correctly say that *to a man who does what is in him* God gives grace without fail... [God] bestows everything gratis and only on the basis of the promise of his mercy, *although he wants us to be prepared for this as much as lies in us.*" (Luther's Works, Vol. 11, p.396-397)

There are things we have in common with this medieval thinking: God gives grace and it is gratis. But the thing that should have jumped out at you as different was the idea of being 'prepared' and 'does what is in him'. According to the theology of that time you had to make yourself fit for grace, you could almost say you had to earn it. A person had to make themselves holy enough for heaven with a holy God.

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Gratis – free, without charge

"Our problem, according to this theology, is that, while God is holy, we are spiritually lazy. Only holy people belong with a holy God in heaven, but, while we may recognise the problem, we really cannot be bothered. We do not seem able to summon up the energy needed to be truly holy. And so, God in his kindness gives us *grace*. 'Grace' is thus a bit like a can of spiritual Red Bull. I find myself unable to pull myself together and get holy. Then God gives me *Grace*, and suddenly I find myself much more eager and able.

"This, then, was a theology of salvation by grace: without this grace, we could never become the sort of holy people it claimed belong in heaven. But it was absolutely *not* a theology of salvation by grace *alone*. Here grace provided the necessary boost it imagined we all need to earn eternal life; but it did not actually give or guarantee eternal life itself. The Red Bull of grace would be given to those who wanted and pursued it, and it saved only in so far as it *enabled* people to become holy and so win their salvation." (Reeves and Chester, p.69-70)

THINKING IT THROUGH

1) "'Grace' is still routinely thought of today as a package of blessing doled out by God." (Reeves and Chester, p.70)

Is this what the Bible teaches us about grace?

Define grace: (for the adventurous/puzzle-minded try doing this without using the letter 'r')

2) "...a common and instinctive view of salvation, that while we know God saves by grace, we still look to ourselves and our performance to know how we stand before him. Our prayer lives are often painfully revealing of this." (Reeves and Chester, p.70)

Why do we struggle to pray when we feel like we haven't prayed often enough, or haven't been keeping up with our Bible reading, or have given into a particular sin (again)?

READ Hebrews 4:14-16

Where is our confidence?

What will you do next time sins and failings make you feel like you want to shrink back from prayer or God?

GRACE IN THE REFORMATION

Luther's Reformation message of salvation by grace *alone* showed we have a confidence, not an uncertainty, about salvation and where we stand with God.

"He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ." (Thesis 25, Heidelberg Disputation, in *Luther's Works*, vol 31, p.55)

"The law says, "do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this," and *everything is already done*." (Thesis 26, *Luther's Works*, vol 31, p.56)

Activity: Try re-write Luther's message in the everyday language of the present day.

"In Reformation thought, grace was no longer seen as being like a can of spiritual Red Bull. It was more like a marriage." (Reeves and Chester, p.71-72). When trying to explain this rediscovery of Biblical grace and salvation, Luther told a story of a divine groom (Christ) who "marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness." (*Luther's Works*, vol 31, p.352). You can guess who she represents.

"In the story the prostitute finds that she has been made queen. That does not mean she always *behaves* as befits royalty, but, however she behaves, her *status* is royal. She *is* now the queen. So it is with the believer: she remains a sinner and continues to stumble and wander, but she has the righteous status of her perfect and royal bridegroom. She is – and until death will remain – at the same time both utterly righteous (in her status before God) and a sinner (in her behaviour)." (Reeves and Chester, p.72)

How do you react to this story?

"For Luther, God does not give something other than himself; in his grace he unites us to his Son by his Spirit that we might share the life and righteousness of the Son. Instead of handing out some enabling blessing, Christ makes *himself* ours, and so totally that we may plead what is his as ours." (Reeves and Chester, p.75)

THINKING IT THROUGH

Living under Grace Alone now

3) "Not many today find themselves wearing hair shirts and enduring all-night prayer vigils in the freezing cold to earn God's favour. Yet deep in our psyche is the assumption that we *shall* be more loved when (and only when) we make ourselves more attractive – both to God and others." (Reeves and Chester, p.71)

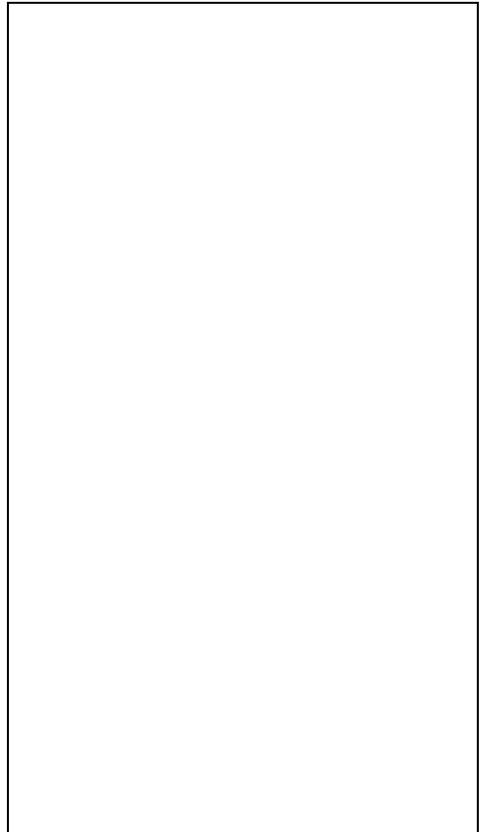
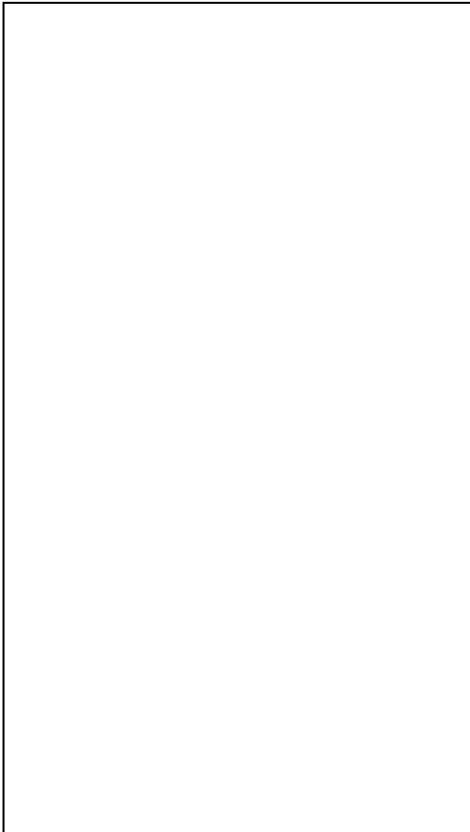
But Luther's words offer us a very different perspective;

"The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it... Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive." (Thesis 28, *Luther's Works*, vol 31, p.57).

Draw the different perspectives:

Assumption need to make ourselves more attractive

Sinners attractive because they are loved



4) "In the story the prostitute receives the royal status of her husband, but that does not tell us about the *point* or *intent* of the marriage. Marriages are supposed to point to the ideal marriage between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). And in an ideal marriage a man and a woman come together in order to get *each other*. Just so, believers trust in Christ and are united to him in order to get *him*. Not, first and foremost, to get heaven, righteousness, life or any other blessing, but to get Christ, in whom all those other blessings are found." (Reeves and Chester, p.77).

How does this motivation impact the way we do/don't share the gospel?

5) "From his [Luther's] own experience he found that we are so instinctively self-dependent that while we happily subscribe to salvation by grace, our minds are like rocks, drawn down by the gravitational pull of sin away from belief in grace *alone*. So he counselled his friend as follows:

They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own merits. But this is impossible. Among us you were one who held this opinion, or rather, error. So was I, and *I am still fighting against the error without having conquered it as yet*.

Therefore my dear brother, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to pray to him and despairing of yourself, say: "Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am thy sin. Thou hast taken upon thyself what is mine and hast given to me what is thine. Thou hast taken upon thyself what thou wast not and hast given to me what I was not." (Reeves and Chester, p.73, quoting To George Spenlein, in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*).

How are you still fighting against the error Luther was talking about?

Luther wrote, encouraging his friend to learn Christ and him crucified, and to learn an attitude to prayer. What do you need to learn?

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6) Even in the Early Church understanding salvation by grace alone raised some questions or confusions.

READ Romans 6:1

What is the question/confusion that it raises in this passage?

Read the first three words of **Romans 6:2** to get Paul's short answer. The attitude being addressed in Romans 6 is the cheapening of grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor in Germany during the time of Hitler, saw a wrong attitude to grace partly to blame for what he saw as the church's and people's easy capitulation to Hitler. He called it 'cheap grace'. "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p.36)

What do we need to do as individuals, Bible study groups and congregations to protect ourselves and one another from 'cheap grace' and wrong attitudes to grace?

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Testimony – Christians have come to use this term to mean telling 'our story' of how we came to know God and the way God has worked in our lives since that time. Our testimony is really 'his story' not 'our story'.

7) "What difference does living under grace alone make? Clearly, anyone who can know that they are accepted and loved by God because of Jesus and not because of how well they have done can know a confidence as secure as Jesus himself. In him they have an unsurpassable righteousness that is, like him, "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8)." (Reeves and Chester, p.76). As we have gospel sharing opportunities, there are often opportunities to share our testimony. Consider your answer to the following question and how it may play out in sharing your testimony.

What difference does being saved by grace alone make in your life?

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

PRE-STUDY FIVE

These pre-readings may not at first seem linked in any way, and that is OK. It will not be clear what is meant by the title 'The Theology of the Cross' until you get to the study. And it is at that point that you will realise the value of having thought through these passages.

READ 1 Corinthians 1:23-25

What is the 'foolishness of God'?

READ 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

What did God choose?

Why? (Hint look at the repeated word 'to', and the 'so')

READ Matthew 16:24

What does it mean to be a disciple?

READ 1 Peter 2:21-25

What example did Christ set?

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS

Romans 6:23... Do you remember it?

Did you share it with anyone this week?

Do you still remember **Romans 3:23**?

Give it another go... read, learn, share **Romans 5:8** this week!

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

STUDY FIVE

This is another week looking at Luther. But let's start this week with some things we already know about God through his Word.

God is full of glory.
 God is wise.
 God is powerful.
 God is victorious.

Let's brainstorm
 how we know
 these things...

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Glory – This can be hard to define. John Piper attempts a definition: "The glory of God is the infinite beauty and greatness of God's manifold perfections."

You can read more on how he comes to this definition in the article *What is God's Glory?*:

toms4christ.com/reformation

<p>How does God show he is wise?</p>	<p>Where do we see the glory of God?</p>
<p>How is God powerful?</p>	<p>How is God victorious?</p>

How can we know God?

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Theology – the study of God

('Theo' is the term for God and 'ology' is the study/science of)

"There are some visible things humanity could look at: creation, spiritual experiences, miracles. But Luther says they do not reveal God. Or rather they reveal something of God, but it is the kind of knowledge that puffs people up. As a result people never get beyond their pride to know the real God." (Reeves and Chester, p.83).

Luther calls these ways of knowing God 'theologies of glory', as they look to what **we** know and point to **ourselves** and **our** cleverness, **our own** 'glory'. The opposite of 'theologies of glory' is Luther's 'theology of the cross'.

MARTIN LUTHER'S 'THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS'

Martin Luther's 'Theology of the Cross' is not about how the cross saves us; it is about the approach to knowing God. "It claims that knowing him [God] starts with the cross. And this starting point turns all our notions of God and how he can be known upside down." (Reeves and Chester, p.83).

"God's invisible attributes are revealed in suffering and the cross: glory in shame, wisdom in folly, power in weakness, victory in defeat. God is known through the message of the cross." (Reeves and Chester, p.83, emphasis added)

Did you note Luther's answers to our questions about God's glory, wisdom, power and victory?

Glory in the shame of the cross.

Wisdom in the folly of the cross.

Power in the weakness of the cross.

Victory in the defeat of the cross.

"Luther developed the 'theology of the cross' as the foundational principle of theological method. It was his answer to the question, 'how can we know God?'. We know him not primarily through mystical insight or theological wisdom or supernatural visions or words of knowledge or the beauty of creation. We know God through the message of the cross." (Reeves and Chester, p.90).

"The theology of the cross stems from Luther's understanding of righteousness and justification. Luther's great realisation was that God justified sinners. God declares to be just those who are unjust. Luther realised that if that were so, human notions of justice would never lead us to understand God's justice. God's justice is revealed in the opposite of justice: in the justification of the unjust." (Reeves and Chester, p.83-84) In some ways this is a little like how some people try to explain God by putting him in a box.

THE YUCKY BIT

The uncomfortable part of this theology, for many, is the concept that God makes himself known through suffering. For Luther this was the suffering of Christ on the cross and for the individual believer as well.

"But God determined that he would be made known through suffering so that he would be hidden from all those who exalt themselves." (Reeves and Chester, p84). We see in the Gospels that those who 'exulted themselves,' like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, were too proud to listen and accept Jesus. It was those who recognised their greatest need who responded to Jesus in faith.

Luther argued that the suffering of the individual was necessary for them to recognise their need for Christ. "Only someone who has had 'all the spirit [taken] out of him and [been] broken' can know God...only someone who is humiliated before God can truly know God." (Reeves and Chester, p.85).

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Piety – Having reverence for God or the devout fulfillment of religious obligations

Luther was not saying to run out into the streets and find ways to suffer so you can know God better. He is not talking about the pious acts like flagellation practised by the Jews (and others). "Luther is not commending a certain type of piety that paves the way to a better understanding of God. He is saying that we have to come to

the end of ourselves before we accept God's gracious revelation." (Reeves and Chester, p.85) "It is often trials that move knowledge from our heads and embed it in our hearts." (Reeves and Chester, p.86)

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Flagellation - (Ritually or voluntarily) whipping oneself to express devotion to God (NOTE God does not ask or require this)

How has God used tough times in your life to reveal himself to you?

THINKING IT THROUGH

Why the Theology of the Cross Still Matters

1) "We know God through the message of the cross. But the same answer can be applied to the question of how we can know the power of God. We know the power of God through the message of the cross – not primarily through healing miracles or political influence or spiritual disciplines or media presence or managerial skill or megachurches or spiritual leaders or sociological theories." (Reeves and Chester, p.90).

Try use the same principle for one of the following questions we attempted earlier.

- i) How do we know God is wise?
- ii) How do we know God is victorious?

2) "But the challenge of the theology of the cross comes closer to home. For the cross defines not only how we think, but also how we live...The theology of the cross still matters and not just for theology. The whole of the Christian life here on earth is to be cruciform or cross-shaped." (Reeves and Chester, p.90)

READ Matthew 16:24

We could say this is Jesus' definition of what it means to be a disciple.
So, according to Jesus, what does being a disciple involve?

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Pagan – believing in many gods

READ 1 Peter 1:10-11

There is the encouragement in the model set before us, sufferings and then

Peter spends chapters 2 and 3 detailing how to live as a Christian (a disciple) in a pagan world. In each of these there is the encouragement to live "a life with missiological implications, for it leads to people glorifying God" (Reeves and Chester, p.91). Check it out in 1 Peter 2:11-12.

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL WORD?

Missiological – having to do with communicating the Christian faith across a variety of cultures (cross-cultural). Essentially, the outworking of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

Choose one of the following as an example to look at, and consider how the cross is the model in a Christian's life in these areas:

- Christian responsibility to state (1 Peter 2:13-17)
- In the workplace (1 Peter 2:18-20)
- Within marriage (1 Peter 3:1-7)
- Response when suffering for doing good (1 Peter 3:8-22)

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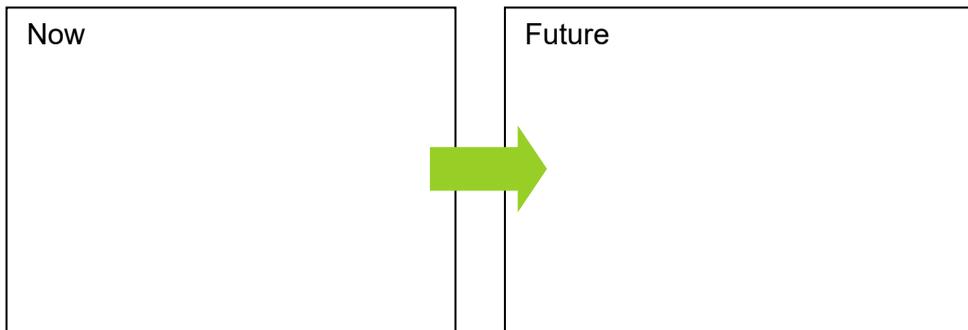
But what is the hope?

READ 1 Peter 4:13

READ 1 Peter 5:10-11

Fill in the boxes:

Now	Future
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3) "Although adopted by God, justified, forgiven and renewed by the Holy Spirit, Christians do not yet appear any more blessed than others, except to the extent that their hidden hope expresses itself in joy and confidence in God. Indeed, Christians more often appear worse off because of their commitment to the way of the cross." (Reeves and Chester, p.93)

i) How does your commitment to the way of the cross disadvantage you in the eyes of the world or make you appear worse off?

ii) What courage are you to take in this? (If you need some help with this, look at passages like Romans 8:18 and Romans 8:24-25.)

4) "Modern Westerns expect good health as a norm. We call for public inquiries because we think every disaster can be avoided. And we Christians are not so very different. We expect God to keep us healthy and safe. So when trouble comes, as Jesus promised us it will (John 16:33), we not only struggle to cope with the problem; we cannot make sense of what God is doing. Why does he not answer my prayers? Is my faith too weak? The result is that people struggling with turmoil in the circumstances of their life are [sometimes] beset at the same time with a crisis of faith. No wonder then that Paul prays Christians will realize 'the hope to which he has called you' (Ephesians 1:18)" (Reeves and Chester, p.93).

What is this hope?

SUMMARY

We know God through the message of the cross. As disciples we are called to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). Our lives should be cross-shaped. This means using the model of the cross in all aspects of our lives (1 Peter 2 and 3), so that through the way we interact with others, we may share the Christian message of the cross, and that they too may come to glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12). This will mean suffering. But just like the suffering on the cross led to future glories (1 Peter 1:11), so too we look forward to future resurrection glory (1 Peter 4:13, 1 Peter 5:10-11, Romans 8:18).

The theology of the cross "means power in weakness, wisdom in folly and glory in shame. It means we must put our confidence in God rather than ourselves." (Reeves and Chester, p.94).

UNION WITH CHRIST

PRE-STUDY SIX

READ Romans 6:1-7

What language is used to talk about a believer's union with Christ?

What are they united in?

READ Romans 6:8-14

What does it mean to 'live with him'...

i) In the future?

ii) Now?

READ Philippians 2:1-5

What impact is our union with Christ to have?

READ 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

Because of God we...

Christ became for us...

How do we boast in Christ?

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS

Romans 5:8... Do you remember it?

Did you share it with anyone this week?

Do you still remember **Romans 3:23**?

And **Romans 6:23**?

Give it another go... read, learn, share **Romans 5:8** this week!

UNION WITH CHRIST

STUDY SIX

The book of Revelation has this most marvellous image of a marriage; Christ, the bridegroom, being united with the church, his bride. It is something anticipated by all believers, and celebrated as God's plan in all its fullness complete. This union between Christ and the church has been thought and taught about through every generation, as an important theme in the Bible, and part of the gospel message. But what people mean by union with Christ has differed.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the medieval period, the book Song of Songs was a very popular choice for preachers. It was read as a parable of Christ's love for his church.

MEDIEVAL (PRE-REFORMATION) CONCEPT OF UNION WITH CHRIST

"The medieval theologian most associated with union with Christ was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), and partly for that

very reason he was highly esteemed by both Luther and Calvin."

(Reeves and Chester, p.95-96). In his third sermon (wait for it: third of eighty-six on the book of Song of Songs!), Bernard described union with Christ this way: (If you are feeling creative get someone in the group to act this out as another person reads aloud)



"Growth in grace brings expansion of confidence. You will love with greater ardour and knock on the door with greater assurance, in order to gain what you perceive to still be wanting to you. 'The one who knocks will always have the door opened to him.' It is my belief that to a person so disposed, God will not refuse that most intimate kiss of all, a mystery of supreme generosity and ineffable

sweetness. You have seen the way that we must follow, the order of procedure: first, we cast ourselves at his feet, we weep before the Lord who made us, deploring the evil we have done. Then we reach out for the hand that will lift us up, that will steady our trembling knees, and finally, when we shall have obtained these favours through many prayers and tears, we humbly dare to raise our eyes to his mouth, so divinely beautiful, not merely to gaze upon it, but – I say it with fear and trembling – to receive its kiss. 'Christ the Lord is a Spirit before our face,' and he who is joined to him in a holy kiss becomes through his good pleasure, one spirit with him." (Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1979), Sermon 3.5, pp.154-155, emphasis added)

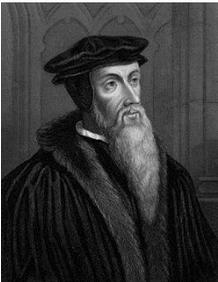
"That burning desire for Christ is just what the Reformers appreciated about Bernard. He longed for union with Christ. Still, though, Bernard was working with a medieval Roman Catholic understanding of that union. **For him union was a fluid state: you could be more or less united to Christ.** Hence he could imagine an 'order of procedure' whereby through 'many prayers and tears' (and sacraments) the Christian could get ever closer to Christ until perfect union." (Reeves and Chester, p.96, emphasis added).

REFORMATION CONCEPT OF UNION WITH CHRIST

During the Reformation there was a separation between two ideas – union and communion. Union with Christ, being united to him in his death and resurrection, and communion, not the bread and wine meal but a word meaning our enjoyment of Christ. So, in the Reformation our connection (union) with Christ and our enjoyment (communion) with him were separate ideas.

Richard Sibbes' work on the book of Song of Songs is from the viewpoint of the Reformation and he put it like this "Union is the foundation of communion."

"In Reformation thought, **union with Christ is a fixed and therefore stable thing**, the solid foundation on which we can know lasting joy." (Reeves and Chester, p.96, emphasis added)



Calvin, a Reformer who spent most of his time in Geneva, spoke about union with Christ with a different helpful image.

"Jesus Christ is the vine, filled with the love and life of God. Unattached to him we have no spiritual life whatsoever. But 'engrafted' to him like branches, we have, undissipated, all the life and love he enjoys." (Reeves and Chester, p.98)

MEET THE REFORMER – CALVIN

Calvin is known for reforming and transforming the city of Geneva.

Watch the video *John Calvin and the Reformation*:

toms4christ.com/reformation

For those who like small interesting details, John Piper gives some startling preaching facts about Calvin in the short clip

What's intriguing about John Calvin?

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Calvin wrote, "as soon as you become engrafted into Christ through faith, you are made a son of God, an heir of heaven, a partaker in righteousness, a possessor of life; and... you obtain not the opportunity to gain merit but all the merits of Christ, for they are communicated to you." (Calvin, Institutes, 3.15.6)

"As far as Calvin saw it, then, there can be no gospel without union with Christ. The Son of God – God himself – became 'God with us' precisely so that he might be one with us." (Reeves and Chester, p.98)

WHAT IS UNION WITH CHRIST IN REFORMATION THOUGHT?

READ Romans 5:12-19

What is our problem?

How deep does it go?

Fill in the spaces to help this quote make sense.

"We were born of A _____, and so we were born sharing his (doomed) status and his (sinful) inclination. This means it is not enough to have the record of our sinful acts expunged, or for us to be given a boost to do better: we must be b _____ a _____. As we were born of A _____, united to him and sharing his status and inclinations, so we must be born again of C _____, sharing his status and inclinations." (Reeves and Chester, p.99)

READ 1 Corinthians 15:22

Complete this sentence:

In Christ...

It gets better still! What do the following verses tell us?

Galatians 2:20

Galatians 6:4

Colossians 2:12

Romans 6:3

UNION WITH CHRIST IS GOOD NEWS

Union with Christ is indeed good news! Good news that believers need to be reminded of frequently. Spurgeon preached to his congregation, "remember that *he sees us now in Christ*. Behold, he has put his people into the hands of his dear Son. He has even put us into Christ's body; 'for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.' He sees us in Christ to have died, in him to have been buried, and in him to have risen again. As the Lord Jesus Christ is well-pleasing to the Father, so in him we are well-pleasing to the Father also; for our being in him identifies us with him. If, then, our acceptance with God stands on the footing of Christ's acceptance with God, it standeth firmly, and is an unchanging argument with the Lord God for doing us good. If we stood before God in our own individual righteousness, our ruin would be sure and speedy; but in Jesus our life is his beyond peril." (C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, London, Passmore & Alabaster, 1889, vol. 35, p.547)

What is the good news that Spurgeon was reminding his congregation of?

"Union with Christ was never treated by the Reformers as the mere engine under the bonnet of justification and no more. Rather, they believed, all the blessings of the gospel are ours because of union with Christ." (Reeves and Chester, p.102)

What do those blessings include?

- Adoption in Christ
- Transformation in Christ
- Hope of Glory in Christ
- Comfort and Assurance

Luther wrote,

"To summarize, the very essence of my heart is renewed and changed. This makes me a new plant, one that is grafted on Christ the Vine and grows from Him. My holiness, righteousness, and purity do not stem from me, nor do they depend on me. They come solely from Christ and are based only in Him, in whom I am rooted by faith, just as the sap flows from the stalk into the branches. Now I am like Him and of His kind. Both he and I are of one nature and essence, and I bear fruit in Him and through Him. This fruit is not mine; it is the Vine's." (Luther's Works, Vol. 24, p.226)

"The fact that Christians are united to Christ and share his life must affect them. We have not been given a 'saved' status and are then left to get on with holy lives all by ourselves. If we are united to Christ, we have a new heart and a new Spirit within us." (Reeves and Chester, p.104)

SUMMING UP

Catechisms, a series of questions and answers, were used by Reformation theologians and leaders to help as many people as possible understand Reformational theology. One of the best-known was the Heidelberg Catechism. Its first question was about union with Christ, putting centre stage the comfort we can have from being in Christ.

"What is your only comfort in life and death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him." ('The Heidelberg Catechism', quoted in Reeves and Chester, p.106).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1) This was a true Copernican revolution in theology, and all who come to believe this *feel* how it throws everything head over heels. We naturally have ourselves at the centre of our own solar system. Christianity, we assume, must be all about how *I* am doing. Being a Christian is like having Christ in *my* orbit. Which seems fine – when I am doing well. The rest of the time I must worry: Have I prayed enough? Have I sinned too much? Can God still love me after that? The Reformation instead placed Christ at the centre, replacing fitful anxiety with stable joy. For instead of asking 'How righteous am I?' to know how I stand before God, I ask 'How righteous is Christ?' And then I smile. For amid my ups and downs he is utterly righteous, yesterday, today and forever – and all his is mine." (Reeves and Chester, p.101).

How does this Reformation theology throw our ego ('I') -centric thinking on its head?

How can you use 'union with Christ' to answer the classic question: How can you be sure you are going to heaven? Or, how do you know you are saved?

2) "But it is good for us to ponder our union with Christ regularly and often. For all too easily I forget that Christ has become my identity and I think I am what I do. And that is just when things start to go wrong: when I am doing well, I then become proud and unbearable; when I am not, I curl up in defeated misery. Either way, when I forget my union with Christ and allow other things to define me, I become ridiculous and dangerous. But when I remember that Christ defines me, I find myself much more immune to both pride and failure. In him I am no failure at all, but triumphant. In him what do I have to be proud of but him?" (Reeves and Chester, p.104-105).

When are you at risk of forgetting your identity and union with Christ?

What can you do as individuals, as a Bible study group and as a congregation to 'ponder our union with Christ regularly and often'?

As those joined to Christ, how should we mark our own personal achievements? Or should we at all?

3) The Christian life can sometimes feel like a roller coaster ride, with its highs and lows. During the lows we can feel distant from God. And during the highs we often perceive we have got our relationship with God back on track. This does not fit Reformation theology.

Using the Reformers distinction between 'union' and 'communion', what could you say to a Christian brother or sister struggling with these feelings?

THE SPIRIT

PRE-STUDY SEVEN

READ Psalm 51

What does the psalmist (David) want God to do for him?

Why does he need this?

What in particular does he ask for in verse 10?

READ Mark 8:1-21

In verses 11 and 12, why were the Pharisees asking for a sign?
(What had Jesus just done?)

In verses 17-18, what has stopped the disciples understanding?

READ Ezekiel 11:17-21

What is God promising to do for his people?

Hearts are mentioned a couple of times. How?

Read Ezekiel 36:22-38

There is a lot of repetition of the Ezekiel 11 passage. But what is different?

Why is God doing this?

Why do you think a "new heart" was essential for God to give his people (Ezekiel 11 and 36)?

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS

Romans 5:8... Do you remember it?

Did you share it with anyone this week?

Do you still remember **Romans 3:23**?

And **Romans 6:23**?

Give it another go... read, learn, share **Romans 10:13** this week!

THE SPIRIT

STUDY SEVEN

"In many ways the Reformation as a whole would be a fight for the following line in the Nicene Creed: 'We believe in the Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.' For wrapped up in that affirmation is the belief that we do not have life in ourselves. We therefore need more than a bit of enabling grace: we need life. As the Spirit hovered over the waters in the beginning, giving life to creation, so again we need the Spirit in order to have new life. Luther therefore wrote that the first thing belief in the Spirit means is that 'by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel.' Salvation, in other words, cannot be a cooperative effort, God's assisting merely weak sinners; it is a divine rescue, God's raising the dead. Belief in the Spirit as the 'giver of life' means belief in salvation by grace alone. For, wrote Luther, 'we never read that the Holy Spirit was given to anybody because he had performed some works, but always when men have heard the gospel of Christ and the mercy of God.'" (Reeves and Chester, p.108)

The Reformers saw the Spirit as key to everything. "Without the Spirit, then, we would be capable of altering ourselves superficially, but no more than that." (Reeves and Chester, p.109)

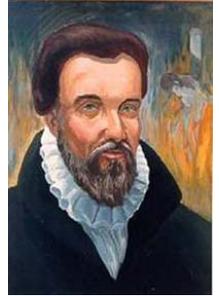
"They saw that we stony-hearted sinners need more than mere behavioural modification. We need a deep, internal reformation through the Spirit's opening our eyes to see who the Lord truly and beautifully is. We need our hearts to be overturned and melted, our love of self eclipsed by a superior enjoyment of a superlatively lovely God. That is, they believed in being born again, in God-haters being won by the gospel, not just to an outward act of obedience to God, but to love, desire and delight in him." (Reeves and Chester, p.109)

MEET THE REFORMER – WILLIAM TYNDALE

Tyndale was an Englishman who lived in exile because of his desire to write an English Bible (an illegal activity!). This was a feat because it was the first Bible in the English language but also because English wasn't very standardised yet. For example, Tyndale had more than four ways his name was spelt. His Bible in English helped to start standardising the English language. Even Shakespeare owes phrases to Tyndale 'creations'.

THE SPIRIT IN THE REFORMATION

"The English Bible translator William Tyndale was one of the earliest Reformers to make clear how different this belief in the living Spirit is to the superficial ritualism of his youth. He explained it like this: our problem, he wrote, is 'the heart, with all the powers, affections, and appetites, wherewith we can but sin'. Our only solution is 'the Spirit, which looseth the heart'. Only the Spirit has the ability so to 'loose' our hearts from their enslaving love of self and win them to the freedom of knowing God. Unless the believer 'had felt the infinite mercy, goodness, love and kindness of God, and the fellowship of the blood of Christ, and the comfort of the Spirit of Christ in his heart, he never could have forsaken any thing for God's sake'." (Reeves and Chester, p.109-110)



"If thou wilt therefore be at peace with God, and love him, thou must turn to the promises of God, and to the gospel... For faith bringeth pardon, and forgiveness freely purchased by Christ's blood, and bringeth also the Spirit; the Spirit looseth the bonds of the devil, and setteth us at liberty."

Tyndale, 'The Parable of the Wicked Mammon', Vol. 1, p. 48)

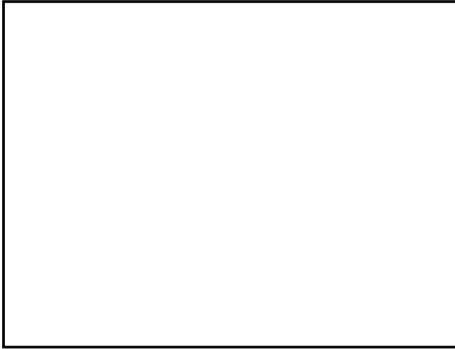
"This theology made for the most practical difference in Reformation circles. The Reformers saw that the root of our problem before God does not lie in our behaviour: it is not as if we have done wrong things and simply need to start doing right things. All our outward acts of sin are merely the manifestations of the inner desires of our hearts. Therefore, merely to alter a person's behaviour without dealing with those desires would only cultivate hypocrisy, the self-righteous cloak for a cold and vicious heart... This Reformation insight meant that hearts had to be turned, and evil desires eclipsed by stronger ones for Christ." (Reeves and Chester, p.110)

DID YOU KNOW?

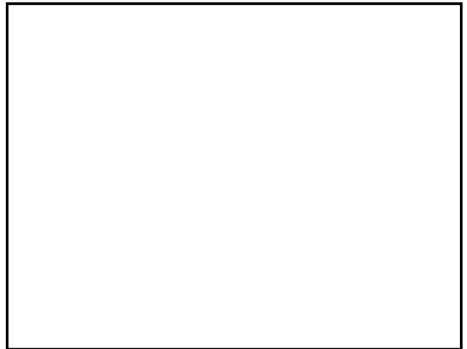
90% of the King James Version of the Bible and 75% of the Revised Standard Version are from the translation of the Bible into English made by William Tyndale. (Stats from Christianity.com)

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

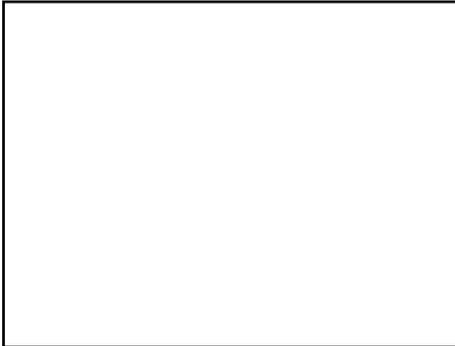
Fill in the boxes with words, pictures or diagrams to match the captions.



What our problem is



What our problem is NOT



The solution to our problem



What can't be the solution

RECEIVING THE SPIRIT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Watch the video on the Holy Spirit: toms4christ.com/reformation

What are two things that you learnt (or were reminded) about the Holy Spirit?

DIFFERENCE ONE - KNOWING GOD

Remember, pre-Reformation, grace was seen as a 'thing' God gave to help sinners along. "As a young man, therefore, Luther had never dreamed of actually enjoying direct communion with God. He would make his requests to the saints, but never to God himself. But he came to see that communion with God is precisely what the Spirit brings us." (Reeves and Chester, p.111)

"And besides giving and entrusting to us everything in heaven and on earth, He has given us His Son and his Holy Spirit in order to bring us to Himself through them."

– *Luther's Large Catechism*, quoted in Reeves and Chester, p.111

"More than any other gift or 'thing', by his Spirit God gives us himself to know and enjoy. God is the reward of the gospel, and knowing him is the life for which we were made and to which we are saved."
(Reeves and Chester, p.112)

"And therein is the difference: belief in the Spirit meant that the Reformers did not simply have some slightly alternative message or system; it meant people would personally know Christ." (Reeves and Chester, p.113)

"When we consider who the Spirit is, it makes sense that he would be about more than just enabling us to do good works. The Spirit is the one who has eternally enjoyed and empowered the Word as he goes out from his Father. Through him the Father has eternally expressed his love for his Son, and through him the Son has echoed his Father's love back. When the Father and the Son share their Spirit with us, they share with us their own life, love and fellowship." (Reeves and Chester, p.113)

DIFFERENCE TWO – RECEIVING A SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

"For the Reformers the Spirit not only gives us a new heart, a new life and a new enjoyment of God; he also gives a whole new assurance." (Reeves and Chester, p.114)

Calvin wrote, "To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself." (Calvin, Institutes, 3.1.1)

"In other words, the work of the Spirit – who is the Spirit of adoption – is so to unite us to the Son that we share the life and the assurance of the Son before God the Father." (Reeves and Chester, p.115)

DIFFERENCE ONE - KNOWING GOD

Calvin continued, "he is called the 'Spirit of adoption' because he is the witness to us of the free benevolence of God with which God the Father has embraced us in his beloved only-begotten son to become a Father to us; and he encourages us to have trust in prayer.

In fact, he supplies the very words so that we may fearlessly cry, 'Abba, Father!' (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). For the same reason he is called 'the guarantee and seal' of our inheritance (2 Corinthians 1:22; compare Ephesians 1:14) because from heaven he so gives life to us, on pilgrimage in the world and resembling dead men, as to assure us that our salvation is safe in God's unfailing care." (Calvin, Institutes, 3.1.3)

DID YOU KNOW THAT TECHNICAL TERM?

Benevolence – an act of kindness or an inclination to be kind.

Check out what Calvin is saying.

READ Romans 8:14-17

What does the Spirit do in this passage?

Calvin wrote more about the certainty of the assurance that the Spirit brings: "For the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart that it may be an invincible defence to withstand and drive off all the stratagems of temptation. But if it is true that the mind's real understanding is illumination by the Spirit of god, then in such confirmation of the heart his power is much more clearly manifested, to the extent that the heart's distrust is greater than the mind's blindness. It is harder for the heart to be furnished with assurance than for the mind to be endowed with thought. The Spirit accordingly serves as a seal, to seal up in our hearts those very promises the certainty of which it has previously impressed upon our minds; and takes the place of a guarantee to confirm and establish them." (Calvin, Institutes, 3.2.36)

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

What does Calvin say is the role of the Spirit?

THE SPIRIT'S REFORMATION

"Deep heart metamorphosis instead of superficial behavioural change, personal communication with God instead of abstract blessing, and joy-inducing assurance: these were some of the vital benefits of the Reformer's theology of the Spirit." (Reeves and Chester, p.117)

"But in fact the Reformers' view of the Spirit really permeated everything they fought for. If he is the giver of life, then salvation must be by grace alone. If he, the Spirit of adoption, freely unites us to Christ, salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone – and must be about knowing God with the security of the Son. In fact John Calvin showed that the Spirit even keeps us from placing any other authority over that of Scripture, so protecting the principle of Scripture alone." (Reeves and Chester, p.117)

"The fact that the Spirit is found in every doctrine the Reformers fought for should not be surprising. All the life-giving truths of the Reformation are life-giving because they are to do with him, the giver of life. The reformation was a human movement but it was also a movement of the Spirit, and that means that if we are to see the church and world reformed, revitalized and made healthy, we need him." (Reeves and Chester, p.117-118)

THINKING IT THROUGH

Does the Reformer's Theology of the Spirit Still Matter?

1) What do the pre-study readings have to do with what we have learnt about the Spirit in this study?

2) "Still today Christians display a strong gravitational pull away from knowing God. We can believe (and proclaim) some message called 'the gospel', we can hold a high view of the Bible, go to church and live what we like to think are 'holy(ish)' lives – and still not actually know God. Our 'gospel' can be like a 'Get out hell free' deal we have signed, where knowing Christ is non-essential. Our 'holiness' can be nothing more than self-dependent morality. This is precisely what sin does in us: it draws us away from keeping the greatest commandment, that we love the Lord our God (Matthew 22:37). This is precisely way the Reformer's theology of the Spirit is so necessary for the church's health today: it means the difference between that zombie religiosity the West has grown so sick of and a living faith that can transform it." (Reeves and Chester, p.114)

How can you make sure you are in the business of knowing God, not standing around holding a 'get out hell free pass'?

What could you say to someone who looks like they are stuck with the wrong priorities (i.e., wanting to be saved from hell rather than wanting to know God)?

3) "Ritualism – the notion that religious practices, by their very performance, bring grace – is not something that has disappeared with the passing years. Christian bookstalls, both Catholic and Protestant, groan under the weight of all the 'How to...' guides. And, we feel, why not? When life is so busy, it is so relieving simple to follow a 'Five Steps to Better Spiritual Health' manual. If our cars, our computers and our bodies tick over better when we follow a few essential techniques, why not our spiritual lives and our churches? And, indeed, there are many skills and practices that can be enormously beneficial. But there is such as thing as outward performance that is spiritually hollow. I can read my Bible, say my prayers and be the lynchpin of my home group without treasuring Christ. I can preach, pastor, teach and lead without sincerely turning to him for aid. And so we need the reformer's theology of the Spirit to help preserve us from such empty formalism." (Reeves and Chester, p.114)

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Have you been doing things but forgetting to treasure Christ?

How can we make sure that reading our Bible, praying, being involved in a Bible study group and serving brothers and sisters in Christ, don't become empty formalism?

4) The Reformation can be summarised by 5 statements used like a catch-cry at the time:

By Scripture Alone
By Faith Alone
By Grace Alone
Through Christ Alone
Glory of God Alone

4 out of these 5 have been used in this study on the Spirit.
Summarise the role of the Spirit in these Reformation truths.

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS

Romans 10:13... Do you remember it?

Did you share it with anyone this week?

Do you still remember **Romans 3:23**?

And **Romans 6:23**?

And **Romans 5:8**?

Give it another go... read, learn, share **Romans 10:13** this week!

