



‘The Grace Revolution’

Six studies in key theological issues that arose during the Protestant Reformation. These studies are meant to be used in conjunction with the Sunday sermon series at St Alban’s, Lindfield
Term 4, 2017

Reformation Foundations: 'The Grace Revolution'

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Bibliography

- 'The Reformation: What you need to know and why'
Michael Reeves & John Stott
- 'The Essence of the Reformation' - Kirsten Birkett
- 'Ideas that Changed the World' - Dominic Steele
- 'For Calvinism' - Michael Horton
- 'What we believe about the 5 points of Calvinism'
- John Piper
- 'Systematic Theology' - Wayne Grudem

Background Information

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century was a revolution of grace. The only church at the time, being the Roman Catholic Church, had lost its way in terms of proclaiming the gospel of salvation by grace. It had introduced many practices including the selling of indulgences, which essentially amounted to buying a ticket to heaven or reducing ones time in purgatory.

Under the sovereignty of God many significant events came together at this time in history, including the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1450, which meant the Reformers could spread their 'new' teaching far and wide in a short period of time.

As one of the Bishops of the time said, '*We are not innovators but renovators.*' The Reformers did not see themselves bringing radical new teaching but simply rediscovering the gospel of grace and presenting it to the largely poor and illiterate masses who had been held captive by the Pope in Rome and his legalism.

This series of studies is not a study of the Reformation. Rather it will seek to look at 5 key theological concepts which have been attributed to John Calvin, under the acronym of T.U.L.I.P. This equates to: Total Depravity; Unconditional Election; Limited Atonement; Irresistible Grace & Perseverance of the Saints.

Calvin who is famous for having written his 'Institutes of Religion' did not coin this acronym, but others who came after him did so, in an attempt to summarize his principle theological convictions.

It is fair to say these convictions do not belong to Calvin but have been held by Christians for many centuries before him and have their origins in the gospel and the authority of scripture.

This series will require the reader to think seriously about theological truths that undergird the gospel of grace! It may stretch and challenge our thinking but the ultimate goal is that we might grow in our confidence in the God of grace.

After a general introduction to the Reformation, the series will focus on five particular theological truths.

We begin with the sobering subject of original sin and total depravity. We are always in danger of minimizing our understanding of sin and therefore the wonder of the gospel of grace.

We then reflect on the irresistible nature of God's grace poured out on the undeserving. This naturally leads into a study on election, and the fact that God chooses a people for himself.

We then explore the nature of the atonement and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The series concludes by considering the perseverance of the saints and that God will fulfil his promise to bring his people home to glory.

Some Christians find the study of theology difficult or wonder what is the point. However, it is our theology (the study of God) that determines our thinking and the way we live.

Theological study is never just an intellectual exercise because it is the very thing that determines our 'practice', the way we conduct our lives. If we don't get our theology 'right' we may miss out on living in the freedom that Jesus and the gospel of grace offers to each of us.

May the Holy Spirit teach us anew and ignite a fresh fire in our hearts as we contemplate the glorious 'grace revolution' that changed the world in the days of the Protestant Reformation.

Michael

| Reformation Timeline | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1450 | Johannes Gutenberg invents the printing press |
| 1483 | Martin Luther born in Eisleben, Saxony |
| 1484 | Huldrych Zwingli born in Wildhaus, Switzerland |
| 1487 | Hugh Latimer born in Leicestershire, England |
| 1489 | Thomas Cranmer born in Nottinghamshire, England |
| 1491 | William Tyndale born in Gloucestershire, England |
| 1494 | Martin Bucer born in Selestat, France |
| 1495 | Thomas Bilney born in Norfolk, England |
| 1500 | Nicholas Ridley born in Northumberland, England |
| 1505 | Luther joins Augustinian monastery |
| 1509 | John Calvin born in Noyon, France |
| 1513 | John Knox born in Haddington, Scotland |
| 1516 | Erasmus publishes Greek New Testament |
| 1517 | Luther posts 95 Theses to door of Castle Church, Wittenberg |
| 1521 | Diet of Worms. Luther taken into protective custody in Warburg Castle, where he translates the New Testament into German. Henry VIII publishes his <i>Defence of the Seven Sacraments</i> against Luther and is awarded the title 'Defender of the Faith' |
| 1522 | Luther completes German translation of the New Testament |
| 1526 | William Tyndale's English New Testament completed |
| 1528 | Patrick Hamilton burned for heresy in St Andrews, Scotland |
| 1531 | Thomas Bilney burned for heresy in Norwich, England |
| 1532 | Thomas Cranmer consecrated as Archbishop of Canterbury |
| 1534 | Henry VIII declared 'supreme head of the church in England'. First complete edition of Luther's translation of the Bible. |
| 1536 | Calvin arrives in Geneva. First edition of his <i>Institutes</i> published. Erasmus dies. William Tyndale executed. Lady Jane Gray born, probably in Leicestershire, England |

| | |
|--------|--|
| 1546 | Luther dies in Eisleben, Germany |
| 1547 | Henry VIII dies. Succeeded by his evangelical son, Edward VI |
| 1549 | Book of Common Prayer published |
| 1551 | Martin Bucer dies in Cambridge |
| 1553 | Death of Edward VI. First cousin Lady Jane Gray crowned as Queen of England, but deposed after nine days |
| 1553-8 | 'Bloody' Queen Mary ascends to the throne and restores Roman Catholicism to England |
| 1554 | Lady Jane Gray beheaded |
| 1555 | Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer burned in Oxford |
| 1556 | Thomas Cranmer burned in Oxford |
| 1558 | Elizabeth I succeeds Mary, returning the Church of England to roughly its Edwardian state |
| 1564 | Calvin dies in Geneva, Switzerland |
| 1572 | John Knox dies in Edinburgh, Scotland |
| 1611 | King James Version (or Authorized Version) of the Bible completed. |

Research the Reformers

As an exercise to go along with these studies, let me encourage you and your Growth Group to allocate someone each week to come with a short summary about the life of one of the Reformers. They were people of principle who lived and died for the sake of the Gospel. Their example can be a wonderful encouragement to us.

Here is a list of some of the Reformers you might like to consider:

Martin Bucer, John Frith, Martin Luther, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, John Calvin, William Tyndale, John Knox, Thomas Bilney, Peter Vermigli, John a Lasco, Erasmus, Patrick Hamilton & Zwingli to name just a few.

The Reformation we had to have?
Romans 1.8-17

1. The Protestant Reformation was a time when the authority of scripture and the gospel of grace were rediscovered and made available to the ordinary and uneducated in many parts of Europe & the UK. It was a 'light bulb' moment on the world stage when millions embraced the gospel of grace for the first time.

Can you recall any spiritual 'light bulb' moments in your own Christian journey? Share.

2. Many consider the core teaching of the Reformation are best summarized in the five 'sola's'. 'Sola' = alone.

Salvation is by: Faith Alone, Grace Alone, Christ Alone
Scripture Alone, To the Glory of God Alone.

Consider the following texts & discuss:

- **Faith Alone:** Rom. 3.21-26; Gal. 3.21-29
- **Grace Alone:** Rom. 5.12-2; Eph. 2.8
- **Christ Alone:** Rom. 6.5-10; Hebrews 9.24-28; 10.19-25
- **Scripture Alone:** 2 Timothy 3.10-17;

3. Justification by faith - was at the heart of the Reformation—as the reformers protested against the requirements being imposed by the Roman Catholic Church.

Identify ways that people today think they will be 'justified' before God on the day of judgment?

OR

What reasons are commonly given by people who think they are 'right' with God?

Read Romans 1.1-17

4. Martin Luther's conversion came about through the Holy Spirit convicting him of the truths in this passage, particularly v16-17.
You might like to consider this chapter using the Swedish Method or by contemplating the following questions:
5. List the ways Paul refers to the gospel in the opening verses 1-7. What stands out for you?
6. What is the connection between faith & obedience? V5
7. Why would anyone be ashamed of the gospel? Why is Paul NOT ashamed?
8. How is the 'righteousness of God' revealed in the gospel? What is revealed to us?
9. Why do we as Christians often struggle to believe we are acceptable to God by faith & the gift of grace?

Study 2.**The Grace Revolution****The Heart of Humanity: Original Sin - Total Depravity****Genesis 1.27-2.3; Romans 3.9-20**

1. When you think of 'humanity' what generally comes to mind first? Do you think how great humanity is, how wonderful all his accomplishments are, how good he is? Or how tragic and painful is the record of human endeavor, especially his inhumanity to his fellow man? Discuss.

2. This study is really about 'anthropology' - ie. what does it mean to be human, particularly in our fallen state. But we need to remember there is a grandeur and nobility to humanity—that God has given to us in creation. Consider the following passages. What do they teach us?
 - Genesis 1.27-28, 31
 - Psalm 8.3-6
 - Psalm 139.13-17

3. It is undeniable that there is something unique and special about humanity as God created us and yet the 'fall' has had a devastating effect.

Read Genesis 3.1-24

If 'sin' may be defined as that which is contrary to God's good will, how did sin enter the world?

4. Did anyone 'make' Adam & Eve sin? Did they have freedom of choice?

5. What are the consequences of sin according to Gen. 3?
6. The 'fall' changes everything! Consider how humanity is described after the fall. Is this the way we tend to see ourselves? Why? Why not?
 - Gen. 6.5-6, Gen. 8.20-21
 - Psalm 36.1-3
 - Psalm 51.5
 - Jeremiah 17.9
7. Reformed Christianity has been known for its emphasis on the total depravity of man. Total depravity might be defined as, *'Our bondage to Adam is complete in its extensiveness, (ie. totality—every part of us and every one) though not in its intensity. In other words, we are not as bad as we possibly can be, but original sin has thoroughly corrupted every aspect of our existence—including the will.'* M. Horton p15

Read Romans 3.9-20

Summarize Paul's description of fallen humanity. What stands out for you?

8. *'The Enlightenment of the 18th Century successfully challenged the Reformation view of man and humanity. Man's natural goodness and perfectibility were affirmed. It also affirmed man's inevitable progress and the sufficiency of reason to solve the world's problems.'* Bloesch p109

Can you see evidence in our world today for the Enlightenment's view of man being affirmed rather than the Biblical view of man's lostness? Is this evident in the church as well?

9. Why do you think many people seem to struggle to come to terms with the total depravity of humanity?

We live in a culture that says, 'let's keep everything positive, the power of positivity rules!' In what ways can this be unhelpful or misleading?

10. Consider the following prayer by one of the Puritans:

'O Lord, bend my hands and cut them off, for I have often struck thee with a wayward will, when these fingers should embrace thee by faith.

I am not yet weaned from all created glory, honour, wisdom, and esteem of others, for I have a secret motive to eye my name in all I do.

Let me not speak the word sin, but see the thing itself. Give me to view a discovered sinfulness, to know that though my sins are crucified they are never wholly mortified. Hatred malice, ill will, vain glory that hungers for and hunts after man's approval and applause, are all crucified, forgiven, but they rise again in my sinful heart. O the tormenting slavery of a sinful heart! ...

There is no treasure so wonderful as that continued experience of thy grace toward me which alone can subdue the rising sin within. Give me more of it.' Valley of Vision p126

The Reformers seemed to have embraced a bold view of our hopeless state as fallen sinful beings, which only heightened their wonder at the gospel. Have we lost this robustness of faith? Why don't we pray like this anymore?

11. Read Romans 5.1-11

Where is true hope found?

Have you experienced the grace revolution in your own life that Jesus alone brings?

Study 3.**The Grace Revolution****Simply Irresistible: The Power of Grace**
Ephesians 2.1 -10

1. The Reformers, like Luther & Calvin, built their revolution on 'salvation by grace alone.' This means that salvation is ALL of God and we can make no claim to contribute to our salvation in any way.

It is helpful to be aware of alternate views - some of which, over the centuries have been condemned as heresies by the Church.

i.) Pelagianism: also called Pelagian Heresy

This was a 5th-century Christian heresy taught by Pelagius and his followers that stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will.

Pelagianism was opposed by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, who asserted that human beings could not attain righteousness by their own efforts and were totally dependent upon the grace of God. Condemned by two councils of African bishops in 416, and again at Carthage in 418, Pelagius was finally excommunicated in 418 A.D

ii.) Semi-Pelagianism

Semi-Pelagianism grew out of the debate between Pelagius and Augustine. Semi-Pelagianism accepted the existence of original sin as a consequence of the Fall of Man, but it taught that a human could, of his own free will (unaided by grace), voluntarily make the first move toward God, and thus receive the divine grace which would culminate in salvation. It was God's grace that would then assist the believer in the life of faith & good works. This view was also condemned at the Council of Orange 529 AD.

iii.) Arminianism

Arminianism is a teaching regarding salvation associated with the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). The fundamental principle in Arminianism is the rejection of predestination, and a corresponding affirmation of the freedom of the human will. Shortly after his death, the followers of Arminius (later called Arminians) presented a statement to the governing authorities of Holland in which they set forth five articles of doctrine.

These were: (1) that the divine decree of predestination is conditional, not absolute; (2) that the Atonement is in intention universal; (3) that man cannot of himself exercise a saving faith, but requires God's *help* to attain this faith; (4) that though the grace of God is a necessary condition of human effort it does not act irresistibly in man; (5) that believers are able to resist sin but are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace.

In essence, the Arminians maintained that God gives indispensable help in salvation, but that ultimately it is the free will of man which decides the issue. After a period of sharp theological controversy the Dutch government convened a National Synod of leading churchmen, which met in Dordrecht in the years 1618-19. At this "Synod of Dort" the members adopted five articles in direct opposition to the five articles of the Arminians. The articles of Dort have come to be known as the "five points of Calvinism."

2. Do you think most people, (including Christians) struggle with the concept of 'grace'. ie. unmerited favour, receiving an undeserved gift? Why?

Read Ephesians 2.1-10

3. Give a summary of our situation prior to salvation, as described in these verses.

4. What were we by 'nature' according to Paul?
5. Who takes the initiative in receiving God's grace through Jesus?
6. Consider the following verses. What do they teach us?
 - John 6.44
 - Rom. 3.23-24

Once again—who is the author of salvation? Man or God?

Read Titus 2.11-14; 3.3-8

7. When did grace 'appear'?
8. What is the purpose of God's grace in human lives?
9. Why did God save us? Titus 3.4
10. If salvation is all an act of God's grace, what is the point of living a good life?
11. *'Man's will must be transformed by an infusion of grace before it can seek the good and do the good. And this divine grace is irresistible, since it overpowers and converts man's will.'* Augustine Discuss.
12. How should this understanding of grace affect the way we pray for ourselves and others?

Study 4.**The Grace Revolution****The Joy of Salvation: The Atonement****Luke 23.26-43; Rom. 5.1-11**

The Reformers were concerned that a right understanding of Jesus' death on the cross be made clear. The Roman Catholic Church in a variety of ways was confusing the issue by calling people to put their faith in Christ but in addition you had to do various good works to ensure you were saved.

Calvin and other believed in **Limited Atonement**, although this phrase was not found in any reformed confession. (Some prefer to describe it as 'definite atonement' or 'particular redemption') What it meant was that the atonement was unlimited in its nature but limited in its extent. ie. who it applied to or received it.

In this study we will explore the **nature and extent** of the atonement, brought about through Jesus' death on the cross.

'When we say that grace is procured for us by the merit of Christ, we intend, that we have been purified by his blood, and that his death was an expiation for our sins.' Calvin

'This is a mystery of the riches of divine grace for sinners, for by a wonderful exchange our sins are now not ours but Christ's, and Christ's righteousness is not Christ's but ours.'

M. Luther

1. As you think of the cross of Christ and his death how would you explain it to a non-believer?

Alternatively, finish the sentence: Jesus death on the cross means.....what?

Read Isaiah 52.13 — 53.12

2. Isaiah 53, is a prophetic image of Christ's death as the suffering servant. List the various accomplishments of the suffering servant for us. What did his death achieve?

3. Which aspect stands out for you? Why?

A. The Nature of the Atonement

Note: 'Atonement' means: the price, cost or payment made due to an offence.

Consider the following ways in which the atonement is referred to in scripture:

i.) Propitiation & Expiation

These are not terms that we usually find in the scriptures as translators have tended to use the word 'atoning sacrifice' to cover both meanings. But they are at the heart of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

Propitiation = 'to cover'. In the NT it means to 'placate, pacify, appease, conciliate.' It means to turn away God's righteous wrath.

Expiation often used along side of propitiation carries the idea of 'satisfaction'.

'Whereas God's wrath is propitiated or turned away, man's guilt is expiated or annulled.' (ie. satisfying God's righteous demands) Bloesch p150

4. Consider the following verses:
 - Romans 3.25-26
 - Hebrews 2.17

- 1 John 2.2
- 1 John 4.10

What do these verses teach us about sacrifice, atonement and the love of God?

ii.) Reconciliation

What do you understand it to mean when two parties are reconciled?

5. Consider the following verses & discuss:
 - Romans 5.9-11
 - 2 Cor. 5.19-20
 - Eph. 2.15-18
 - Col. 1.19-20

iii.) Redemption

Redemption carries the idea of purchase or paying back a debt, also of a ransom being paid.

6. Consider the following verses & discuss:
 - Romans 3.23-24
 - Ephesians 1.7-8
 - Col. 1.13-14

NOTE: During Church history different ‘theories’ of the atonement have been proposed. Those theories include the following:

- **Penal Substitution**

This is the view of the atonement that the Reformers sought to protect. The essential nature of Jesus’ death on the cross was as a **penalty** or to pay the price or debt of our sin, in our place or as a **substitute**.

- **Recapitulation**

2nd Century theologian Irenaeus developed this view. In this view, Christ, not only by his death and resurrection, but also by his incarnation and obedient life—undoes the work of the first Adam and fulfills his commission representatively on our behalf. Many reformers supported this view.

- **Christ Victorious**

This view emphasizes Christ's death as a conquest of victory over Satan. So we can trust in Christ because he defeated our great enemy—overcoming the principalities and powers.

- **Satisfaction of Divine Honour (Anselm)**

Anselm of Canterbury (11th Century) proposed this theory which suggests that in the cross, Christ was an offering made to satisfy God's offended dignity. Reformers recognized it wasn't God's dignity that was at stake but his justice.

- **Moral Influence**

Abelard (1079-1142) reacting to Anselm, suggested that Christ died, to offer a moving example of God's love for sinners, sufficient to induce them to repentance. Jesus simply becomes a good model for Christians to imitate, nothing more nothing less.

- **Governmental Theory**

This was first taught by Dutch theologian, Hugo Grotius (1583 -1645) This theory suggests that God did not actually have to require payment for sin, but since he was omnipotent he could have set aside the requirement and simply forgiven sin without payment of a penalty.

7. Which of these theories fails to give assurance of sins forgiven? Could any of them lead to a works based idea of salvation?

B. The Extent of the Atonement

The **extent** of the work of Christ on the cross (the atonement) has been the source of much debate over the centuries. What did Jesus death on the cross actually achieve?

There are essentially three views:

i.) Jesus' death: does redeem every person. (Universalism)

This view borders on Universalism. It holds out the prospect that everyone could be saved. However, because of sin and unbelief many forego the redemption Jesus won for every person.

ii.) Jesus' death: salvation for every person is possible (Arminianism)

This view is commonly associated with Arminians. Christ's death makes everyone 'savable' but salvation requires grace enabled faith & obedience, which may be accepted or rejected by people. ie. Strong emphasis on human choice.

iii.) Jesus' death: redeemed all the Elect (Calvinism)

This view believes that Christ's death is sufficient for the salvation of all, but is efficient & effective for the elect only.

8. Which view resonates with you? Why?

Consider the following verses. Do they support a particular view? If so which?

- John 1.29, 3.16-19, 6.35-40,
- John 10.14-15, Eph. 5.25-27

9. Praise God for the wonder of Jesus' death on the cross that achieved our atonement. Pray for joy and confidence in this life based on what he has done for us!

Study 5.**The Grace Revolution****The Gift of Election: Unconditional?****Deut. 9.1-6; Eph. 1.3-14**

The Reformers were committed to ‘sola gracia’, salvation by grace alone. It was foundational to their fight against the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. However, a ‘natural’ accompaniment to salvation by grace alone is the doctrine of election and predestination.

In the five points of Calvinism, (T.U.L.I.P)— the U stands for unconditional election.

Admittedly, this is not an easy topic to grasp, and many Christians seem to be confused at best or want to avoid it at worst. This is unfortunate because it is a liberating truth that lies at the heart of the gospel of salvation by faith, grace & Christ alone!

1. When you think of the ideas of election or predestination what comes to mind? Define each term. Do those concepts fill you with joy or apprehension? Why?

2. The idea of God’s election runs through the whole of the Bible including the Old Testament.

Read each of the following. What stands out for you?

- Genesis 12.1-3
- Exodus 19.4-6
- Deut. 9.4-6

3. Now consider the way God's people are described in the New Testament.
- Acts 13.46-48
 - John 10.25-30; John 15.16
 - 2 Tim. 2.10

Read Ephesians 1.3-11

4. When did the election of God's people take place?
- What is the purpose of God's election?
- How are the elect saved?

Read Romans 8.28-39

5. In v28-33 there is an ordering for our relationship with God. The initiative is all his!
- Organize these terms in the appropriate order:
Called, glorified, foreknew, justified, predestined,
Conformed.
6. What is the purpose/goal of God's electing grace?
7. Why does Paul see God's electing grace as reason for confidence and celebration? v31-39

8. Why do people often struggle with assurance of salvation and are reluctant to say, 'I am sure I am going to heaven?'

9. Is election unfair?

Consider this: Do we really want justice before a holy God? Justice according to the scriptures demands that ALL people be condemned — we are without excuse. (Rom. 1.18-23)

The fact that some are saved is a miracle of God's amazing grace.

The Calvinists view puts the emphasis on God choosing to have mercy on his people; the Arminian view puts the emphasis on people having free will to choose to accept or reject Christ. Both positions have challenges and tensions that are not easy to reconcile.

However, if you take the Calvinist position—you are left to wrestle with the question of freedom of the will, which the Bible clearly says we have.

If you take the Arminian position—you are left with the problem that salvation becomes a matter of merit/good works, ie. you chose Christ. Salvation comes down to your choice, not the finished work of Christ on the cross. Clearly salvation by grace alone, excludes this possibility.

Read Romans 9.1-23, 11.33-36

10. What do these verses teach us about the sovereignty of God and his right to choose?

11. Do you think we struggle with the doctrine of election because our view of God is too small? Do we struggle to let God be God—a God who can choose to bestow mercy or justice as he pleases and in his infinite wisdom? (11.33-36)

12. As you take time to pray— I hope you will rejoice in the God of electing grace. May this old hymn be a comfort and guide.

"Lord, 'Tis Not that I did Choose Thee"

by Josiah Conder, (1789-1855)

Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee;
 That, I know, could never be;
 For this heart would still refuse Thee
 Had Thy grace not chosen me.
 Thou hast from the sin that stained me
 Washed and cleansed and set me free
 And unto this end ordained me,
 That I ever live to Thee.

'Twas Thy grace in Christ that called me,
 Taught my darkened heart and mind;
 Else the world had yet enthralled me,
 To Thy heavenly glories blind.
 Now my heart owns none above Thee;
 For Thy grace alone I thirst,
 Knowing well that, if I love Thee,
 Thou, O Lord, didst love me first.

Praise the God of all creation;
 Praise the Father's boundless love.
 Praise the Lamb, our Expiation,
 Priest and King enthroned above.
 Praise the Spirit of salvation,
 Him by whom our spirits live.
 Undivided adoration
 To the great Jehovah give.

Study 6.**The Grace Revolution**

When the Saints go Marching in: Perseverance
Hebrews 5.11-6.12; Rom. 8.28-39

1. Have you known church going Bible believing people who have fallen away and no long claim to be a follower of Jesus?
 If you are aware give the reasons why they gave up the faith.

Perseverance may be defined as: 'Not giving up. It is persistence and tenacity, the effort required to do something and keep doing it till the end, even if it's hard.'

Once again the Reformers were concerned about the issue of perseverance of the saints because the Church of Rome placed a heavy burden on Christians in terms of their obligations to attend mass, confession, buy indulgences etc. if they were to attain glory. There seemed to be little room for God's grace.

Read John 6.35-40

2. What promise does Jesus give here?

What assurances does Jesus offer his followers?

Read John 10.25-30

3. What are the identifying characteristics of Jesus' sheep?
4. What certainty for the future does Jesus give his followers?

Read 1 Peter 1.3-7 & Romans 5.1-5

5. Jesus promises to keep us and bring us home to glory, and yet we are called to persevere—we have to stick at it! (See also 2 Peter 1.10-11, Phil. 2.12-13)

What is the value or purpose of perseverance in the life of the Christian?

6. Suffering has a divine purpose in the lives of God's people—without it we wouldn't have to persevere!

Do you underestimate its value in your life as part of God's plan? What needs to change so that you see it as God sees it? (Rom. 8.28)

Read Hebrews 6.4-8

7. It is important to note v6, is a conditional phrase and would better be translated, 'if they fall away.'

Many scholars suggest the writer of Hebrews is offering a hypothetical situation, in order to give a strong warning & encourage his readers to persevere in the faith.

What sorts of things should Christians do to ensure they don't fall away?

Read the following:

- John 8.31-32
- John 15.1-17
- Colossians 1.21-23

Each of these passages calls the follower of Jesus to action, to live a life that bears fruit.

8. What is the key element to continuing in the faith and bearing fruit?
9. If Jesus elects, calls and justifies then he will certainly bring his people home to glory! What a great assurance.

Apart from trusting the wonderful promises of God, what other evidence provides assurance that we are his?

See John 13.34, Galatians 5.13-26, Matt. 28.16-20

Read Matthew 7.21-28

10. What warning does Jesus offer here?

Why is true faith ultimately a matter of the heart and not external practices?

11. What does Jesus say is the foundation for the true disciple so they can withstand the storms of life and persevere?

Finish by reading these great passages of comfort and assurance:

- Jude 23-24
- I Thess. 5.23-24
- 1 Cor. 1.8-9
- Phil. 1.6

12. The Reformers, (by the grace of God) began a grace revolution 500 years ago, and we are in their debt. Identify at least one thing that you have learnt and been encouraged by through this series. Share.

Assurance—a prayer.

Almighty God, I am loved with everlasting love,
 clothed in eternal righteousness,
 my peace flowing like a river, my comforts many and large
 my joy and triumph unutterable,
 my soul lively with a knowledge of salvation,
 my sense of justification unclouded.

I have scarce anything to pray for;
 Jesus smiles upon my soul as a ray of heaven
 and my supplications are swallowed up in praise.

How sweet is the glorious doctrine of election
 when based upon thy word,
 and wrought inwardly within the soul!

I bless thee that though wilt keep the sinner thou hast loved,
 and hast engaged that he will not forsake thee,
 else I would never get to heaven.

I wrong the work of grace on my heart
 If I deny my new nature and my eternal life.

If Jesus were not my righteousness and redemption,
 I would sink into nether most hell
 by my misdoings, shortcomings, unbelief, unlove;

If Jesus were not by the power of his Spirit my sanctification,
 There is no sin I should not commit.

O when shall I have his mind or conform to his image?
 All the good things of life are less than nothing
 when compared to his love,
 and with one glimpse of thy electing favour.

All the treasures of a million worlds
 could not make me richer, happier, more contented,
 For his unsearchable riches are mine.

One moment of communion with him, one view of his grace
 is ineffable, inestimable.

But O God I could not long after thy presence
 If I did not know the sweetness of it;

And such I could not know except by thy Spirit in my heart,
 Nor love thee at all unless thou didst
 elect me, call me, save me.
 I bless thee for the covenant of grace.'

A Personal Spiritual Growth Evaluation

1. Weekly Church Attendance (8 weeks of the term)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10.
 Poor (2 out of 8 weeks) (4/8) Terrific (8/8)

2. Growth Group Attendance (Out of 8 weeks)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10.
 Poor (2/8) (4/8) Great (8/8)

3. Devotional Life (Daily Prayer & Bible Reading)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10.
 (Almost never) Occasionally Daily

4. MP3 or Praying for Non-believers intentionally

1. _____ 5. _____ 10.
 (Almost never) Occasionally Regularly

5. Serving in the Life of the Church

1. _____ 5. _____ 10.
 (I don't do anything) (I do too much)

6. Financial support of the Church (ie. Does my giving reflect Gospel faith and generosity trusting in God's provision)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10.

Prayerfully and thoughtfully consider **two areas** you want to improve on in the Term to come & share with the group:

a.) _____ b.) _____