

Five Foundations

*House Groups Oct-Nov 2017*

Hebron Evangelical Church

Summer Street

Aberdeen

Five Foundations

This year marks 500 years since the start of the Protestant Reformation. For many of us this can feel like a movement that is not terribly relevant, not only are we separated by five centuries, but as an independent church we can wonder how it relates at all. However, we will be greatly enriched to see that the core issues rediscovered and contended for in the Reformation are the very foundation upon which our faith is built. When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle church in Wittenberg in 1517, he began a (fierce!) debate around the question, ‘who has authority to forgive sins?’

Luther was already working out his doctrine and in the years that followed he would come to greater and greater clarity about the way of salvation – for Luther and the Reformers there was only one place to reliably find the truth about salvation:

*“Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men’s books and human teachers.”*

***Martin Luther***

And so one of the great mottos of the Reformers was *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). The Reformers battled for a biblical view of salvation, which was grounded on the following foundations:

Salvation is…

…by **grace alone**… *(Sola Gratia)*

…through **faith alone**… *(Sola Fide)*

…in **Christ alone**… *(Solus Christus)*

…to **God’s glory alone**… *(Soli Deo Gloria)*

…revealed in **Scripture alone**.

*(Sola Scriptura)*

As we look at each of these five foundations (often called the *five* *Solas*) I hope you will be encouraged by the great plan of salvation and be grateful that we are dependent upon God for every aspect of it. I also hope that it provokes you to look into the Reformers a bit more and see how they reclaimed the true Gospel even though many powerful establishments stood in their way. Hopefully we too will be emboldened to defend and proclaim the true faith, which others fought to preserve for us.

**How to get the most out of these studies**

If you want to get as much as you can out of these studies both on a personal level and in having a good discussion, then you need to consider the material *before* going to house group.

Each study provides a copy of the main passage being considered – this is to make life as simple as possible, and to let you write on it and mark the patterns you see in the text. All the passages come from Paul’s letters and you may find it helpful to work through the following:

1. What is the context of the passage – what’s been said leading up to this bit of the letter? (You’ll need a Bible for this bit!)
2. Try and summarise the passage in a sentence or two (i.e. what is the point being made here?)
3. Are there any obvious divisions in the passage – is there a progression in Paul’s argument?
4. Are there any things in the passage that stand out to you (e.g. any repeated words/phrases; anything surprising?)
5. What does the passage teach us about God and his plan of salvation?
6. What response does Paul want to draw from his readers?
7. In the light of what God has revealed in this passage, how will you think/act differently?

Throughout these studies you will find some quotations from the prominent Reformers – these are not there just to fill space, but to show you how they articulated these truths and hopefully to get you to engage with their perspective on the Gospel.

I also want to encourage you to actively discuss application of the things we find in these studies – what difference are these great truths going to make to us day-to-day? House groups provide a great opportunity for encouragement and accountability on these challenges. And, of course, praying together is a vital resource – use this time to share specific prayer points with the group.

If you are keen to find out more I have provided a short booklist at the end of the booklet.

1. Scripture Alone

***14****But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,****15****and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.****16****All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,****17****so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

***2 Timothy 3:14-17 NIV 2011***

1. The apostle Paul clearly thought Scripture was important(!). What are the typical perceptions of the Bible in our society today? How have you heard non-Christians whom you know describe the Bible? What is their opinion based upon?

2. Take time to consider the context of these verses by reading 2 Timothy 3:1-13.

What is Timothy told to expect in these “last days”?

Where does Paul send Timothy in order to come through these difficulties?

3. What does it mean for Scripture to be “God-breathed”? If this is the case what does that mean we hear every time we read it? How often do you think like that when you’re reading the Bible?

*“In the words of Scripture you will find the swaddling clothes in which Christ lies. Simple and little are the swaddling clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them.”* ***Martin Luther***

4. Explain what is meant by each of these words in the passage and give examples of how Scripture is “profitable” for achieving these things

a) teaching

b) rebuking

c) correcting

d) training in righteousness

5. What is the biggest hindrance to the word of God having all of these effects in you? What are you going to do/seek out in order to overcome this? How can your brothers and sisters in the group help you?

6. What sort of things can tend to replace the authority of the word of God a) in the life of the church in general and b) in your everyday life?

7. Think back to Q.1 – what can you do to bring non-Christians you know into meaningful contact with the Bible? How would they respond to the suggestion to read through one of the Gospels together?

Pray together as a group – if you have not had a right relationship with God’s Word, confess that. Pray for friends/family/colleagues whom you might be able to read the word of God with. Pray that each member of the group would be thoroughly equipped to serve by their time reading the Bible.

*Almighty, eternal and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, open and illuminate our minds, that we may purely and perfectly understand Thy Word and that our lives may be conformed to what we have rightly understood, that in nothing we may be displeasing unto thy majesty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* ***Huldrych Zwingli***

2. Grace Alone

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,****2****in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.****3****All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.****4****But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,****5****made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.****6****And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,****7****in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.****8****For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –****9****not by works, so that no one can boast.****10****For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

***Ephesians 2:1-10 NIV 2011***

1. Try to summarise the passage in a sentence.

2. What are the main divisions in the passage? What is the main point Paul is trying to get across?

3. How are people described *before* they are changed by God’s grace? How are they described *after*? How does Paul emphasise these big contrasts?

4. From this passage, why can salvation only come from God’s grace? What would the alternative be?

5. On the basis of this passage, try to give a definition of God’s saving grace.

6. This passage is taken from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus – a place he had stayed for two years teaching them *the whole counsel of God* (Acts 20:27).

a) With all of the understanding they must have had, why do you think Paul brings them back to the foundations of the Gospel here?

b) What does that teach us about how we need to keep relating to the Gospel?

How can we do this?

7. Is there really nothing to boast in here? What about faith?

8. That salvation is by grace alone is more clearly appreciated, as we more clearly understand how utterly lost human beings are when left by God to their own devices. Read Romans 1:16-3:20 [esp. N.B. 3:9-20]. What happens to human beings if God does not intervene?

*“He who does not receive salvation purely through grace, independently of all good works, certainly will never secure it.”* ***Martin Luther***

Pray together in your group…

Confess your sinfulness and utter helplessness without Christ.

Thank God for his gracious, undeserved, intervention in your life.

Praise God for all that is now yours in Christ.

3. Faith Alone (Part 1)

***21****But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.****22****This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,****23****for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,****24****and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.****25****God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished****26****– he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

***Romans 3:21-26 NIV 2011***

1. Take a moment to be clear on the context of this passage. What is Paul contrasting with when he writes *But now…*? [Read vv19-20 – what is Paul’s great conclusion about the law?]

2. What is your understanding of what the word *righteousness* means? What do vv21-22 reveal to us about God’s righteousness?

[At its simplest, to be righteous is to have a right standing with God.]

3. From this passage, consider *how* we are made right with God.

a) Why is it needed?

b) What is provided?

c) How do we receive it?

4. In dealing with our sins, God doesn’t just ignore them and pretend they don’t exist. How does Paul show us in this passage that God *cannot* do this? What does God do instead?

5. The following quotation from Martin Luther was used in a recent sermon in Hebron:

*“[There are] two different kinds of faith. The first goes like this: you believe that it is true that Christ is the person who is described…in the gospels, but you do not believe he is such a person for you. You doubt if you can receive that from him, and you think: ‘Yes, I’m sure he is that person for someone else…But is he that person for me? Can I confidently expect to receive everything from him…?’ You see, this faith is nothing. It receives nothing of Christ, and tastes nothing of him either…This is a faith related to Christ, but not a faith in Christ… The only faith which deserves to be called Christian is this: you believe unreservedly that it is not only for Peter and the saints that Christ is such a person, but also for you yourself – in fact for you more than anyone else.”*

***Martin Luther***

[Compare with ***James 2:19*** - *“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!”*]

1. What is the key difference between these two types of faith?
2. Do you think the first type of ‘faith’ is common?
3. What do you think Luther means by *for you more than anyone else*?

6. How can you help make sure those who are younger in the faith don’t fall into the wrong way of thinking about faith? Who could you walk with to help them grow in genuine faith?

Pray together in your group…

Give thanks for Christ’s sacrifice.

Claim all the benefits of Christ’s work by faith.

Pray for opportunities to help others grow in their walk with Jesus.

4. Faith Alone (Part 2)

***13****It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.****14****For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,****15****because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.*

***16****Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.****17****As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.*

***18****Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’****19****Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.****20****Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,****21****being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.****22****This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’****23****The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone,****24****but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.****25****He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

***Romans 4:13-25 NIV2011***

We saw last time that saving faith was not just believing historical events to be true, but it personally united the believer to Jesus – the Christian sees that Jesus is Saviour for them. This week we’re going to look at another aspect of faith, again seeing that salvation is by faith alone – but not by just any faith.

1. In Romans 4 Paul begins to demonstrate Gospel principles through the example of Abraham. Abraham’s faith is in God (cf. Genesis 15), but what is it about God that Abraham believed?

What does this tell us about the type of faith that is credited as righteousness?

2. (From the passage) what preceded Abraham’s faith?

3. What could Abraham see that might cause him to doubt God’s promise? How does saving faith deal with these obstacles?

4. How does Paul parallel Abraham’s experience of being made right with God with our experience (vv22-25)?

5. Here is John Calvin’s fairly succinct definition of faith (based, in part on Romans 4):

*“Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”* ***John Calvin (III.2.7)***

a) *Faith* is to be convinced of what?

b) Faith is convinced on the basis of what?

c) Why, then, can we be confident that even weak faith can save?

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

***Hebrews 11:1 NIV 2011***

Pray together in your group…

Worship God – meditate on who he is and what he has done (e.g. his faithfulness; his great salvation in Christ; his love and mercy) – and declare your trust in His promises.

Give thanks for the gift of saving faith.

5. Christ Alone (Part 1)

***15****The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.****16****For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.****17****He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.****18****And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.****19****For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,****20****and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

***21****Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.****22****But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation –****23****if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

***Colossians 1:15-23 NIV 2011***

1. Read the passage above several times and then try to summarise in a few words what Paul is trying to say about Jesus in the following sections:

a) verses 15-17

b) verses 18-20

c) verses 21-23

2. What stands out to you from vv15-17 about Jesus Christ? Are there any other passages of Scripture that Paul might have in mind here?

3. What stands out to you from vv18-20? What has Jesus accomplished? How has he accomplished it? In what way is Jesus unique here?

4. Why do vv15-17 make vv18-20 all the more amazing? What qualifies Jesus to be a reconciler between God and us?

5. In vv21-23 the application of vv15-20 becomes personal. How does Paul describe the transformation that Jesus brings?

6. On the basis of this passage, why *must* salvation be *in Christ alone*?

*Because an eternal, unchangeable sentence of condemnation has passed upon sin – for God cannot and will not regard sin with favour, but his wrath abides upon it eternally and irrevocably – redemption was not possible with a ransom of such precious worth as to atone for sin, to assume the guilt, pay the price of wrath and thus abolish sin. This no creature was able to do. There was no remedy except for God’s only Son to step into our distress and himself become a man, to take upon himself the load of awful and eternal wrath and make his own body and blood a sacrifice for sin. And so he did, out of his immeasurably great mercy and love toward us, giving himself up and bearing the sentence of unending wrath and death.* ***Martin Luther***

7. How does Paul explain what it means for us to “continue in the faith” (v23)? Where must we not move from? In what ways can we be guilty of doing this?

Pray together in your group…

Worship the Lord Jesus: give thanks that he is the only Saviour; give thanks that he bore *your* sin on the cross.

6. Christ Alone (Part 2)

***26****Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.****27****But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.****28****God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are,****29****so that no one may boast before him.****30****It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.****31****Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.’*

***2****And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.****2****For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.****3****I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.****4****My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power,****5****so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.*

***1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5 NIV 2011***

Paul writes this letter to a church in which Christians were forgetting some of the implications of the gospel for church unity and for holy living. As Paul so often does, he starts by reminding the Corinthians about the nature of the Gospel.

1. Summarise Paul’s main points in the following verses:

a) 1:26-31

b) 2:1-5

2. From 1:26-29, how has God gone out of his way to make it clear that salvation is not something designed or accomplished by human beings?

3. Look at vv30-31 – the centrality of Jesus is seen in what he becomes for us when we place faith in Him. What does it mean for Jesus to become, for us:

a. wisdom

b. righteousness

c. holiness

d. redemption

*We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else.* ***John Calvin***

4. In 2:1-5, Paul reminds the Corinthians of how he had conducted his mission in Corinth. What were the key principles that he stuck to? Why were these so important? Does anything in these verses surprise you?

5. Consider Paul’s description of his evangelistic mission in Corinth (2:1-5).

a) How does that compare with our approach to evangelism?

b) How does Paul’s description of evangelism encourage you to share the Gospel? What might that look like in the coming week?

Pray in your group…

Give thanks for the suffering of Christ

Give thanks that He chooses weak things!

Pray for the work of the Gospel – give thanks that its success does not depend on your strength or ability.

Pray for boldness to share the Gospel with friends/family/work colleagues.

7. To God’s Glory Alone

***33****Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
     How unsearchable his judgments,  
    and his paths beyond tracing out!****34****‘Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
     Or who has been his counsellor?’****35****‘Who has ever given to God,  
     that God should repay them?’****36****For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
     To him be the glory for ever! Amen.*

***12****Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.****2****Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

***Romans 11:33-12:2 NIV 2011***

This week’s reading is taken from the great transition point of Paul’s letter to the Romans. In Chapters 1-11 he outlines the doctrine of the Gospel and then moves to the Christian response – these verses show us what effect an understanding of the gospel should have on the Christian.

1. How would you divide these verses? What is Paul doing in each section?

2. Think about 11:33-36 first of all. Which attributes of God does Paul meditate upon here?

3. From this hymn of praise – why does God do anything?

4.Notice the use of the word *glory* in v36. This word is used a lot in church (and house groups!). Here is a good definition of God’s glory:

*God’s glory is a Divine attribute that reflects and reveals his character. Therefore, when we glorify God it is not that we are adding anything to Him; rather we are “taking note of his excellency, and esteeming him accordingly.”*

1. How does this differ from how God’s glory is often thought of?
2. Is it possible to speaking about giving God glory, but for it still to be a very human-centred thing?

5. In 12:1-2, Paul gives the very practical response – what motivates and what characterises this *worship*?

*“He who has learned to look to God in everything he does is at the same time diverted from all vain thoughts.”* ***John Calvin***

6. What are the everyday hindrances to us responding to God with this *worship*? What are the means God uses to *renew* our minds? What are you going to put in place to truly live to God’s Glory Alone?

*“Not to us, Lord, not to us  
     but to your name be the glory,  
     because of your love and faithfulness.”* ***Psalm 115:1 NIV 2011***

Pray in your group…

Pray for a greater appreciation of who God is

Pray for the grace to look to God in everything

**For those interested in reading some more**

As you can imagine the amount of books and articles written on the Reformation could fill a warehouse, but if you are looking to follow up these studies and learn a bit more there are some excellent and accessible resources – here’s some suggestions to get you started:

Overviews

*The Reformation: What You Need to Know And Why* – Michael Reeves & John Stott

*The Unquenchable Flame* – Michael Reeves

*The Reformation* – Owen Chadwick

*Reformation* – Diarmid MacCulloch (very detailed)

Biographies

*Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* – Roland Bainton

*John Calvin* – T.H.L. Parker

*John Knox –* Jane Dawson

Theology of the Reformation

*Reformation Thought* – Alister McGrath

*Theology of the Reformers –* Timothy George

*The 5 Solas Series* (recently published by Zondervan)

* *God’s Word Alone* – Matthew Barrett
* *Grace Alone* – Carl Trueman
* *Faith Alone* – Tom Schreiner
* *Christ Alone* – Stephen Wellum
* *God’s Glory Alone* – David VanDrunen

Notes