

Exploring the Foundations of Christianity

An RUF Bible Study at OU
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Not much of this material is original or unique since we are striving to present historic Christianity to the 21st Century world. Therefore, we are building on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Please feel free to use this material in discussions with others and even in other Bible studies. Feel free to adapt and modify for your own purposes.

For more information about RUF at the University of Oklahoma, visit our website: www.ouruf.org

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RUF at OU – Who are We?

Especially since RUF is new to OU, many people ask what we at RUF believe. Sometimes the questions are asked in these ways: What are the theological distinctives? What does Reformed mean? What denomination are you a part of? Are those issues even important? Do we, in our theological tradition, care about evangelism and discipleship?

While this document may not answer every question, the staff and members of RUF want to answer every question and help people learn about RUF and its mission and distinctives. We are convinced that RUF must not be so broadly open that it fails to make vitally important distinctives, which the Bible itself makes; nor are we to insist that every member share the same precise set of theological convictions.

RUF is and will be characterized accurately with the following terms:

We are Evangelical

To say that we are evangelical means that we take our stand with all those who believe in what used to be called the “fundamentals”: the existence of the triune God, the deity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement and the vicarious atonement of Christ, the physical resurrection of Christ, the sure return of Christ and the divine authority of the Bible which is a faithful and true guide to what we are to believe and how we are to live. We joyfully affirm our unity with those from every tradition and denomination who hold to these fundamentals, and the other various campus ministries in which we joyfully agree with on the essential issues.

We are Evangelistic

This means that we take seriously the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Without compromising the sovereignty of God, we affirm the responsibility of each person to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and our responsibility to extend the Gospel (see the link to What is the Gospel) invitation as a call to salvation to everyone who hears its message. We invite all, without distinction, to drink freely of the Water of Life and to live eternally with God. In this way, we see to “extend the transforming presence of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.” You will see evangelism taking place in large group, small group and one-on-one settings in the various forms available to us. Since the Gospel is everything to us, it will permeate everything we do.

We Love Discipleship

This is the other aspect of the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Discipleship is a term that is “in” these days. At RUF we seek to disciple believers by equipping them to know Christ ever deeper, to seek repentance as the norm of Christian life, to understand and commit to the Scriptures (in large-group, small-group and one-on-one settings), to become involved in the ministry and mission of RUF and the church, to learn to read the Scriptures and pray in personal times with God, to engage with culture with a Christian worldview and a gospel lens, to invite others to the living water that only Jesus provides their thirsting souls. These things take time and cannot always be evaluated easily. People who wish to “be disciplined” tend to look like this: they pursue time with Doug and Julie and of older believers in RUF and in the church, they attend church regularly and are a vital part of that body of believers, they read the Bible, they attend RUF as a place to grow and also as a place to minister to others, they have non-believing friends, they repent often because they realize they are enormous sinners, they display the fruits of the Spirit as Christ works His life through them, they jump in an help out to meet the needs of others an of the ministry, they made difficult choices in order to glorify God, they are growing in their understanding of who God is on a theological level and that is melting their hearts so they love Him and others more. You can see that discipleship isn’t really a program, but a way of life. It isn’t an hour a week, but an attitude of placing yourself at the feet of Jesus and following what He says. We seek to be disciples and to disciple others to have this kind of lifestyle.

We are Reformed

The word “reformed” can be defined simply in two ways: 1) It is a reference to our historical link to the Reformation of the 16th century and intends to describe us as heirs of that tradition which comes from Luther, Calvin, Knox and other reformers. 2) The word “reformed” is used most commonly to refer to certain theological distinctives which have marked reformation believers.

These distinctives can be summarized by our glad affirmation of the responsibility of every person to repent and believe, and that it is God who, by His sovereign electing grace, draws men and women, otherwise dead in sin, to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. By this faith alone are God's people justified.

Reformed distinctives include the sovereignty of God in His creation, providence and election of believers apart from any merit of their own, the irresistible grace of God provided for and preceding the faith of the individual; the sufficiency of God's grace apart from which man is dead in sin and wholly defiled in all his faculties of soul and body; the efficacy of Christ's death for all those who believe in Him by grace; the life-guarding of all those whom Christ died for eternal life.

We are Kingdom-Centered

We believe that the Kingdom of God is not only a future hope but is also a present reality. We believe that the ascension of Jesus Christ means that He is presently reigning from Heaven and therefore, we are called upon to honor Christ's Kingdom rule in every area of human endeavor. We believe the church is the institution through which God is building His kingdom and is renewing every aspect of life. Every Christian has a unique calling and a unique giftedness to serve others in his or her community. Christians should demonstrate this by serving others and working with excellence, for God's glory, in all that they do.

We Seek Transformation

We believe that the Gospel has the power to change us. That as we seek Christ and not ourselves, that profound changes take place in our understanding of who God is, who we are and how we are supposed to interact with the world. God saves us. But why? Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For it by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God has created us, saved us from the bondage of sin, in order that we might bring Him glory in everything we do. That is quite a lot. At RUF, we will continue to seek the practical application of the gospel to every area of life. However, we do not want to slip into a legalism, thinking that our applications are THE applications that every Christian should and must make. We want to seek out what God says and then hold that up, instead of manmade rules and criteria. We want to steer the middle, Biblical course between being able to do anything we selfishly want to do, and erecting too many rules that shield out true Christian freedom. Admittedly, this is not easy, but we seek to engage each other without a judging spirit, in true discussion about applying the Bible, and admitting our own sinfulness and need for the Gospel.

We are, and Our Campus Minister is, Confessional

This means that we have a written confession of faith which our campus minister, Doug Serven, and the PCA (the Presbyterian Church in America, the denomination which RUF comes from and in which Doug is ordained) believes to be a good and accurate summary of the Bible's teaching. Our confession consists of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (you can link to those documents by clicking here) are in no way considered infallible; yet we believe they do contain carefully worded summaries of the Bible's teaching in a systematic way. All ruling and teaching elders in the PCA must vow that they hold to these standards and are required to indicate to their presbyteries or sessions where they take exceptions. It is important to note that every church and campus ministry has a confession, formal or informal, even though some claim they have "no confession but Christ" or "no creed but the Bible" or are "non-doctrinal." Every church and campus ministry summarizes its convictions in some form in order to distinguish its members from those who are not believers or who do not believe in its distinctives. Though this discussion may seem inconsequential, it is actually very important. Because you know Doug Serven and other PCA pastors are held accountable to the Westminster Confession and to a strict standard for ordination, you know what it is you are getting when you sit under their teaching. Though there are differences in each pastor's gifts and personalities and there are also debatable issues within the Scriptures, there is an extremely large area of uniformity in understanding and acceptance because of the confessional approach to ordination and continued pastoring.

We are Presbyterian

This word refers to our form of government, though you won't see it much affect RUF meetings or your involvement. You should know, however, that we believe that the most clear biblical pattern is for churches to be governed by presbyters (elders) who rule jointly in what are called "church courts": sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly. This means that RUF at OU, and Doug Serven is connected and accountable to the other pastors in the presbytery as they seek to serve Christ and minister together for His glory. RUF at OU isn't just "out there" on its own.

We are a Community

RUF is not a place where you should expect to “attend meetings.” We believe that the teaching and preaching of the Word of God are at the core of what we do, but that those activities take place in the context of a community. This community involves authenticity, admitting our sinfulness, asking questions of ourselves and others, taking risks in initiating and continuing relationships, forgiveness, an appreciation of our and others’ gifts and using them in the body of Christ, in inviting others to join us, in having fun and taking road trips, in rejoicing and crying together.

This is important because...

It is important to know that these distinctives are good ones; that is to say, it is profitable and health-producing for Christians to believe these things. We believe that as we come to appreciate them, we will grow to love and honor the Lord Jesus more fully and understand more richly what it means to live by grace.

Nevertheless, acceptance of all these distinctives is in no way required for participation in RUF or in membership with any PCA church. One can be involved without holding to any (though we will seek to promote the evangelical distinctives over all the others).

In the Reformation era, Martin Luther had a sponsor whose name was Fredrick of Saxony. Fredrick was a prince and a 16th century entrepreneur who funded many of Luther’s projects. He was a man of warm heart and deep conviction. On his coach, he had emblazoned these Latin words: *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*, which means, “gentle in manner, strong in truth.” This is what RUF at OU desires to be: warm, gracious, inviting, open and non-judgmental; yet holding strong convictions that always come directly from the Bible. It is our absolute and unwavering conviction that to be strong in truth without being gentle in manner is unbiblical. It is also our profound conviction that to be gentle in manner while not adhering to scriptural truth is also unbiblical. By God’s grace we will be both as we press on in the Lord’s grand design for RUF at OU to be used at OU, in Norman and to the world.

The Gospel

At RUF, the gospel is our greatest treasure – it truly is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, and that continues all throughout our Christian lives. However, in our day and culture, there is confusion as to just what the gospel is. The following article, written by Pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, clearly defines the gospel.

The Third Way of the Gospel

The Gospel means “good news.” It is the basic message that: “God made (Christ), who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). The gospel says that we are so sinful, lost and helpless that only the life and

death of the Son of God can save us. But it also says that those who trust in Christ's work instead of their own efforts are now "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22-23).

The gospel tells us that our root sin is not just failing in our obedience to God but relying on our obedience to save us. Therefore, the gospel is a "third way," neither religion nor irreligion. The religious person may say, "I am doing the right things that God commands"¹ and the irreligious person may say, "I decide what is right and wrong for myself." But both ways reject Jesus as Savior (though they may revere him as Example or Helper). Both ways are strategies of self-salvation – both actually keep control of their own lives. So the gospel keeps us from legalism and moralism on the one hand and from hedonism and relativism on the other.

The Gospel's Power for Change

The gospel is not just the ABC but the A-Z of the Christian life. The gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom but is the way to address every problem and is the way to grow at every step. If we believe we can find our own worth and meaning through performance, then we will become either proud or disdainful of others (if we reach our goals), or else discouraged and self-loathing (if we fail our goals). But the gospel creates an entirely new self-image.

First, it tells us that we are more wicked and sinful than we ever dared believe but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared to hope – at the same time. In fact, if the gospel is true, the more you see you sin, the more certain you are that you were saved by sheer grace and the more precious and electrifying that grace is to you.

So the gospel gives us enormous power to admit our flaws. Then secondly, the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ makes (for the first time) the law of God a beauty instead of a burden. We come to use it to delight the One who has enriched us so mightily, instead of using it to get his attention or win his favor. The first way makes the moral and sacrificial life a joy; the second way makes it a burden.

Therefore the gospel changes everything. It brings down racial barriers by melting away facial pride or inferiority. It brings down psychological problems by melting away self-inflation or self-hatred. It brings down personal facades, for we are free to admit who we are. It effects the way we do everything... how we motivate people, how we help them work through counseling problems, how we worship, how we take criticism.

¹ "Our core problem, say St. Augustine, is that the human heart, ignoring God, turns in on itself, tries to lift itself, wants to please itself, and ends up debasing itself. The person who reaches toward God and wants to please God gets, so to speak, stretched by this move, and ennobled by the transcendence of its object. But the person who curves in on himself, who wants God's gifts without God, who wants to satisfy the desires of a divided heart, ends up sagging and contracting like a little wad. He desires are provincial. 'There is something in humility which, strangely enough, exalts the heart, and something in pride, which debases it.'" - Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, p. 62, (at the end quoting Augustine, *The City of God*)

How to Do This Bible Study

With those important preliminaries aside, we're excited that you have decided to join us in exploring some of the foundational truths of the Christian faith. Whether you are investigating Christianity or have been a believer for as long as you can remember, we hope that this study will be fruitful for you. You may come with lots of questions or even with some apprehensiveness. Whatever the case, we earnestly desire this to be a time where you can honestly ask questions and explore the foundations of Christianity.

You may have been in a Bible study before, or you may be joining us for the first time. I want to make a note on our method of study. In each of the texts before us, we will use the simple O-I-A method of study: Observation – Interpretation – Application.

Observation: We simply want to know what the text actually says. The answers are sometimes so obvious that you may feel like it's a trick question, but its not. In observing the text, we want to ask, "***What does the text say?***"

Interpretation: This admittedly is the toughest part of studying the Scriptures. Usually, we'll be comparing Scripture with Scripture. We are interested in how the Scripture speaks to us, not in what we may want it to mean. Here, we are asking, "***What does the text mean?***"

Application: This is where the rubber meets the road. Sometimes in observing the text and understanding its meaning, the application flows naturally. Sometimes, we will need to do some discussin' to work it into our lives. Having understood and accurately interpreted the text, we now ask, "***So what?***" How does this affect my beliefs, my words, my actions, my community?

I wish we had time to study God's Covenant of Grace, the Church and the Sacraments, or even more spiritual disciplines other than those we do touch on in this study. But considering we have only 10 weeks together in this study, we have to start somewhere. Our goal throughout this study is to be *reformed* or *transformed* in our minds and lives. The Apostle Paul put it like this in Romans 12:2,

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of you mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

You have each of the ten studies that we will be covering. You *do not* have to complete them before coming. They are simply here in one place for convenience. (But if you did work through it ahead of time—what could that hurt?).

Also, please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions about the material or would like to talk about your spiritual life. May grace and peace be yours in abundance,

Rev. Doug Serven, RUF campus minister at the University of Oklahoma
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Study #1
*“The Forgotten Attribute:
The Holiness of God”*
~ Isaiah 6:1-8 ~

Isaiah 6:1-8

6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

6:4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

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Study #1

“The Forgotten Attribute: The Holiness of God”

Isaiah 6:1-8

~ Observation ~

1. What sorts of things does the text highlight for us in the first four verses about the scene around the throne of God?
2. Of all the things that angelic beings could be speaking in the presence of God, what are the angels in verse three speaking?

What are some other characteristics that could have been attributed to God, but weren't?

What does this tell us about the centrality of God's holiness?
3. When Isaiah took in this overwhelming and captivating vision, what was his response (vs. 5)?

What is intriguing about this response? Does it seem out of place or odd to you?
4. What happened in response to Isaiah's confession of his 'uncleanness'?

~ Interpretation ~

1. What was it about the vision of God *in particular* that evoked such a response from Isaiah? In other words, what contrast does the text draw to our attention?
2. In your own words, Isaiah was overcome with a sense of _____?

Is that contrary to what many today would expect in seeking an encounter with God? Explain.
3. Let's compare the response of Isaiah to that of some other people who caught an unexpected glimpse of God. How do these people respond?
 - a. Job in Job 42:1-6.
 - b. Peter in Luke 5:1-8.
 - c. John in Revelation 1:12-17.
4. In Isaiah's situation, how was his sinfulness dealt with (vs. 6)? To ask the question in another way, what part did Isaiah play in his 'cleansing'?

In light of Isaiah 64:6, could Isaiah have done *anything* to make up for the sense of sinfulness he felt within himself and within his community? Why or why not?

5. What the angel did here is really a picture of what Jesus Christ would later do in purifying His people from their sins. How does 1 Peter 2:24 *illuminate* what Christ did in order to offer healing to those who are wounded by their sin?

6. What was the effect of the realization of the forgiveness of sins upon Isaiah (vs. 8)?

~ Application ~

1. Often times, the charge is made that Christians are too casual when they approach God to worship. Do you agree or disagree?

How does this passage inform your “vision” of what heaven must be like?

2. Taken as a whole, what does this passage teach about God’s willingness to grant forgiveness to one who is unholy or unclean in His sight?

3. How could you use this passage to respond to someone who says, “God could never use me, I’m too sinful” ?

On Your Own...

- How have you grown in your understanding of the holiness of God as a result of this study?

- The angels called out, “The whole earth is full of His glory.” How easy is it for you to see the glory of God filling the earth? Pray that God may awaken you to a God-centered, glory-filled reality.

- In what ways do you want to cultivate a greater sense of the holiness of God in your day-to-day life?

- Consider memorizing some verses on the holiness of God (such as Is. 6:3, or Rev. 4:8) and use them in your own personal praise and adoration of God.

Some Things To Think About

“It is less injury to Him to deny His being, than to deny the purity of it; the one makes Him no God, the other a deformed, unlovely, and a detestable God....He that saith God is not holy speaks much worse than he that saith there is no God at all.”

~ Stephen Charnock

“Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool; Holy is He...Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy hill, for Holy is the Lord our God.”

~ Psalm 99:5, 9

“The historic Christian teaching on holiness has been largely forgotten, and that also is a pity, for it is central to the glory of God and the good of souls.”

~ J.I. Packer

“Holiness is likeness to God, to Him who is the Holy One of Israel, to Him whom they laud in heaven as “Holy, holy, holy” (Rev. 4:8). It is likeness to Christ....”

~ Horatius Bonar

“Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and Seraphim falling down before thee
Who wert, and art, and evermore shall be.

Holy, Holy Holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful many thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee
Perfect in pow’r, in love, and purity.

~ “Holy, Holy, Holy!” by Reginald Heber, 1783-1826.

“The presence of God in all of his holiness is devastating when we recognize our unholiness.”

~ Michael Horton

Study #2
*“Human Dignity:
Created In The Image of God”*
~ Psalm 8 ~

Psalm 8

For the director of music. According to *gittith*. A psalm of David.

8:1 O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory
above the heavens.

8:2 From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

8:3 When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

8:4 what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

8:5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

8:6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

8:7 all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

8:8 the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

8:9 O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

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Study #2

“Human Dignity: Created In The Image of God”

Psalm 8

~ Observation ~

1. What initial impressions do you get as to the ‘tone’ or ‘feeling’ of this Psalm? How is it conveyed?
2. How is this Psalm “bracketed”?

How do these brackets provide an appropriate context for understanding the significance of man?

3. What is it that causes the Psalmist to wonder why God is interested in people? Can you relate to his experience? How so?
4. What does the Psalmist note about the exalted status that God has given to humanity? In other words, how does he paint the picture of that exalted status?

~ Interpretation ~

1. How does Genesis 1:26-28 underscore the unique place within creation in which God has placed men and women?
2. Both Psalm 8 and Genesis 1 teach us that men and women are to rule over the works of God’s hands. What does this entail?
3. Psalm 8 is ‘bracketed’ with the refrain, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” How does this inform the way in which mankind is to ‘rule’ the works of His hands?

Is humanity free to ‘rape & pillage’ the earth? Why or why not?

4. Genesis 1 is like a panorama of God’s creative activity. In Genesis 2, the Scripture goes in and takes a detailed look at the creation of man and his tasks. In 2:28, God says that it

is not good for man to be alone, so God makes a helper suitable for him (hence, a wife for Adam).

- What does this tell us about the way in which God has designed marriage to reflect the image of God? (augh! a tough question, I know!!!)
- What does this tell us about the way in which man is to go about his activity in ruling God's creation?

~ Application ~

1. How should knowing that you were created in the image of God and given the task of ruling over creation affect the meaning of your life?

Or, the way you approach your studies?
Or, the way you pursue a vocation?

2. If men and women are the accidental, random results of time + chance, what *real significance* can they have?

Or to put it another way, can people have any significance or relevance that is not merely an illusion if reality = time + chance? Support your answer.

3. What does the life and death of Jesus Christ tell us about the worth that God places on redeeming a rebellious *people* for Himself?

On your own...

- People tend to fall into two different schools of thought when it comes to anthropology: either man is junk or man is divine. How does the biblical view of man avoid both errors and establish the only real foundation upon which to properly treat humanity?
- People speak of "human rights"? What assumptions are behind such statements? Should humans have rights? On what basis?
- Find some personal time where you can get alone and praise God that you are "fearfully and wonderfully" made (Psalm 139) and seek some time to bring your life "on line" with God's plans and designs for you.

Some Things To Think About

“...before sin entered the world, and before we were condemned by God to painful and difficult work, it was necessary for men to occupy themselves with some work. Why? Because it was against our nature for us to be useless blocks of wood.”

~ John Calvin

“Made in God’s own image, man has the unique responsibility to ‘subdue’ the earth and rule over every living creature....this subduing involves the bringing out of all the potential within the creation which might offer glory to the Creator. Such an ordinance, embedded in the creational responsibilities of man, clearly intends to affect his entire life pattern.”

~ OP Robertson

“Human history and the unfolding of culture and society are integral to creation & its development...[they] were built in from the beginning...[if we can see this] then we will be much more open to the possibilities for service to God in such areas as politics and the film arts, computer technology and business administration, development economics and skydiving.”

~ Albert Wolters

“For the same reason an artist takes pleasure in his masterpiece, God takes pleasure in his works. It is not for our happiness or pleasure that we exist, but for God’s.”

~ Michael Horton

“It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which if you say it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”

~ CS Lewis

Study # 3
*“Human Depravity:
Man in Rebellion Against His Creator”*
~ Genesis 3 ~

Genesis 3

^{3:1} Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

^{3:2} The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

^{3:4} "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

^{3:6} When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

GE ^{3:8} Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

^{3:10} He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

^{3:11} And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

^{3:12} The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

^{3:13} Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

^{3:14} So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

^{3:15} And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

^{3:16} To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

^{3:17} To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

^{3:20} Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

^{3:21} The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." ²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

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Study # 3

“Human Depravity: Man in Rebellion Against His Creator”

Genesis 3

~ Observation ~

1. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent is described as coming to the woman & asking her a question. What was the question? And what seemed to be the implication(s) behind it?
2. What is the difference between what Eve said God said and what God actually said (Gen. 3:2-3; cf. 2:16-17)?
3. There were two interpretations of reality presented to Eve: God's & the serpent's. What was the root of Eve's sin that led to the fruit of her sin (the fruit of her sin being the actual eating of the forbidden fruit)?
4. God came walking in the Garden 'in the cool of the day' and asked Adam a question, "Where are you?" Why do you suppose God asked *this* question (3:8-9)?
5. When God confronted Adam with his rebellion, what was Adam's response (vs. 12)?

What did Adam imply in his response?

What was Eve's response? How was her response similar to Adam's?

6. What was the result of Adam's choice?

~ Interpretation ~

1. In Genesis 3:15, God promises that He will put enmity between the serpent (and his seed) and the woman (and her seed). What is enmity?

What is significant about the fact that God is the one who places this enmity there?

2. What do the following verses tell us about the condition of humanity after the Fall?
 - a) Genesis 6:5 _____
 - b) Jeremiah 17:9 _____
 - c) Romans 3:10-12 _____
 - d) Ephesians 2:1-3 _____
 - e) Psalm 143:2 _____
 - f) Ecclesiastes 9:3 _____

3. Read Romans 1:25. What do we learn about fallen humanity from this verse?

Do people ever *stop* worshipping?

4. According to the account of the Fall of man into sin in Genesis 3, who took the initiative in providing a remedy / covering for Adam & Eve? Why is this important to note?

Did Adam & Eve have a right to God's provision? Why or why not?

5. Refer to Romans 5:12. What does this verse teach about the *extent* of the effect of Adam's sin?

Is this fair? Why or why not?

Have you ratified Adam's decision (cf. Romans 3:23)? How?

~ Application ~

1. How does the biblical teaching on the Fall of men and women into sin explain the universal sense of alienation that people feel between themselves and God, themselves and others, themselves and their environment?
2. How does this teaching explain deviant human behavior that our society is baffled about (such as school shootings, rampant lying & cheating, etc.)?
3. Can men or women make any demands upon God for grace or mercy? Why or why not?

On Your Own...

1. How does Christianity provide for man's deepest need? Cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19; 2:24.
2. Have you personally ever felt the gravity of sins & the condemnation that you – like everyone else – deserves?
3. Have you ever personally come to Jesus Christ in faith believing that His punishment on the Cross was sufficient for you?

Cf. Romans 8:1; John 3:16; Romans 4:7-8; 5:6-11.

Some Things To Think About

“All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.”

~ Westminster Shorter Catechism #19

“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

~ Romans 3:23

“Like victims of a contaminated blood transfusion, we all have inherited Adam’s guilt and corruption. This is what theologians call “original sin.” Adam included us all in his decision, and that decision was fatal for the entire race....As Adam’s children and heirs, we think his thoughts and imitate his actions—by instinct, without having met him. That means that while we are capable of incredible artistic, intellectual, and cultural accomplishments (due to creation), we are also capable of unbelievable cruelty and harm (due to the fall).”

~ Michael Horton

“I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.”

~ A young nurse by the name of Sheila interviewed by sociologist, Robert Bellah

“Man behaves as though he were not a dependent creature with a limited and temporary existence in a limited and temporal universe.”

~ Harry Blamires

“...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

~ Romans 8:7-8

Alas! And did my Savior bleed,
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that Sacred Head
For sinners such as I?

Was it for sins that I had done
He suffered on the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

~ Isaac Watts

Study # 4

“Salvation: When God Comes To The Rescue”

~ Ephesians 2:1-10 ~

Ephesians 2:1-10

2:1 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 sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects 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 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 workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

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Study # 4

“Salvation: When God Comes To The Rescue”

Ephesians 2:1-10

~ Observation ~

1. In 2:1-3, the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesian believers what their spiritual condition was before they became believers. What are some of the key phrases that he used to do this?
2. In verse 1, he tells them that they were “dead” in their trespasses and sins. What are some initial thoughts on what he meant by this? (Remember Gen. 2:17.)
3. According to Paul, someone had to rescue these “children of wrath” and change their condition. This *someone*, Paul says, is God (vs. 4). What are the two reasons stated in verse 4 that compelled God to do this?
 - (i) _____
 - (ii) _____
4. There are three actions mentioned in verses 5-6 that God has performed. These actions are true of all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. What are these?
 - (i) _____
 - (ii) _____
 - (iii) _____
5. Paul tells us that there is one reason—and only one reason—that anyone is saved. What is it (vs. 8)? What is it not?

~ Interpretation ~

1. Read Ezekiel 36:26. How does this text describe the promise of what God will do to / for those upon whom God pours out His salvation?

How does this underscore what Paul was saying about the work of God in salvation in Ephesians 2:1-10?

2. Why is it necessary that God take the initiative in the salvation of an individual (cf. vs. 1)?

How does Romans 3:10-12 underscore why *God must take this initiative*?

3. "Grace" is a word that is often heard among Christians. Given what we have seen so far in this study, what would be a good working definition of grace? What does *grace* mean?

4. Some say that salvation is by grace alone. Others say that salvation is by grace + works of merit. Based on what Ephesians 2:1-10 says, which would we have to conclude is the biblical teaching? Support your answer as if answering someone who would disagree with Eph. 2.

How does Romans 11:6 inform your answer?

5. Is there a place for good works in the Christian life? If so, where does it come in to play? Cf. Ephesians 2:10.

6. How Titus 2:11-14 describes the lifestyle of those who have been saved by grace.

What are they supposed to be eager to do?

~ Application ~

1. Why must people understand the "bad news" that Christianity presents before they can grasp the "good news" that salvation is freely given by God to all who will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins?

2. Is there any room for Christians to boast that they are better than non-Christians? Why or why not?

Among Christians, where does a "holier-than-thou" attitude come from?

3. If salvation is by grace, what should be the appropriate *heart-response* of those who have experienced this salvation?

What should be the appropriate *life-response*? Be specific and concrete.

On your own...

- What is your response knowing that the forgiveness of sins is based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ and not on your own righteousness (or lack thereof)?

- Take some time to reflect personally on what you believe God is teaching you so far in this Foundations study. Journaling may be a good practice to articulate your thoughts.

Some Things To Think About

“Who would have thought God would set out to recover a race of rebels? Just as the race declared war, God announced peace.”

~ Michael Horton

“Those who fail to come to terms with their sins and the distance that this creates between God and themselves will never enjoy the blessedness of being forgiven. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, there were those moments of absolute silence, moments of astonishment when men and women were suddenly conscious of being in God’s presence with nothing to wear. It is only then, stripped of the fig leaves, that they—and we—can be clothed with God’s sacrifice to enter into his holy presence properly and with confidence.”

~ Michael Horton

Q. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel.

~ Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #85

“And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing Love! How can it be?
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

He left His Father’s throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself, so great His love
And bled for all His chosen race.
’Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night,
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray
I woke—the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

~ Charles Wesley’s hymn, “And Can It Be?”

Study # 5
*“The Good News:
Justification by Grace Alone
Through Faith Alone In Christ Alone.”*
~ Romans 3:9-4:8; 5:1-2 ~

Romans 3:9-4:8; 5:1-2

^{3:9} What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

¹⁰ As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

¹³ "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

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

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ²⁹ Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

^{4:1} What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.

⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷ "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

^{5:1} Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

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Study # 5

“The Good News: Justification by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone”

Romans 3:9-4:8; 5:1-2

~ Observation~

1. What picture is painted for us in verses 9-18?

How extensive is the bad news that Paul is declaring?

2. After Paul talks about the fallen condition of man (3:10ff), he says that no one can be justified (or ‘acquitted’) through the works of the law (vs. 20). Why does this make sense?

What is one of the main functions of the law according to verse 20?

3. The text tells us that since no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law, God Himself provided another way of being declared righteous in His sight. Describe what the text is saying in your own words (cf. 21-22).
4. If one looks at the world’s religions, it seems that a basic impulse in man is to justify himself by some kind of combination of faith (in a higher being or principle—you supply the name) and works. How do these verses debunk this prevalent notion?

What specific verses lend support to your answer?

5. How was Abraham justified, that is, how was he declared not guilty before God (4:1-3)?

If he was justified by his works, then what could Abraham do (cf. 4:2)?

~ Interpretation ~

1. Why couldn’t have God just told sinners that they were forgiven instead of sending Jesus Christ to live and die for them?

In other words, what is it about God that prevents such a thing from happening? (Cf. 3:26, “...so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”)

2. What does it mean “to credit” something?

3. Fill in the following chart:²

The Unbeliever: Without Faith in Christ

Debit	Credit
What is owed (Romans 6:23)?	What is credited to the unbeliever's account? (cf. Romans 3:19-20; 5:19a)

The Believer: With Faith in Christ

Debit	Credit
What does the believer owe because of sin? (Romans 8:1)	What is credited to the believer's account? (cf. Romans 4:5)

How does this "spiritual bank account" help you understand justification?

How does this spiritual bank account help you understand the importance of Christ's life
AND death for the believer?

4. What does Romans 11:6 teach about the possibility of being saved through some combination of grace + works?
5. Recalling last weeks discussion out of Ephesians 2:8-9, if someone could be justified by their own efforts, what could they rightfully (and pridefully) do?

~ Application ~

1. Sometimes, *justification* is understood to mean "Just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned." Is this a good way to understand justification? Is it adequate?
2. Read Romans 5:1. What is one of the great results of being justified by faith?

² Adapted from David Sinclair's *Foundations: An Introduction to the Christian Life*.

3. How should the doctrine of justification by faith alone assure the believer of the security of God's salvation?

4. What are some appropriate responses for the believer who understands this message?

On your own...

- If a person is justified apart from their obedience to the law, then why should someone not go and sin all they want? Cf. Romans 6:1-14.

- Spend some time asking yourself the question, "Am I resting in my ability to impress God, or have I come to the realization that on my own I cannot please Him, and therefore I must rest upon Jesus alone for my salvation?"

- Consider explaining "justification by faith alone" to your dorm mate or some other friend that you know.

Some Things To Think About

Q. What is 'justification'? A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, in which he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

~ Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A # 33

"Thus, the key question of the Reformation was not, 'How can I be a better person?' but 'How can I, an evil person, be accepted by a holy and righteous God.'"

~ Michael Horton

Q. How are you right with God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.

~ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A #60

"Yet the salvation is not in our act of believing, trusting, knowing, or remembering; it is in the thing or Person believed on, trusted, known, remembered."

~ Horatius Bonar

"For if the article of justification is lost, then all true Christian doctrine is lost. He who strays from Christian righteousness falls into the righteousness of the law; that is, when he loses Christ, he falls into the confidence of his own works."

~ Martin Luther

"Justification...is a one-time declaration, but salvation also involves a *process* of, over time, becoming righteous, which is called *sanctification*."

~ Michael Horton

"The Scriptures speak of God justifying us in the sense of judicially declaring us righteous before the Law of God. This declaration of righteousness involves two things: (1) God declares before the Law that we have never sinned. Thus it is a declaration of our *perfect sinlessness*. (2) God declares before the Law that we have lived in total disobedience to the Law and have, therefore, merited the blessing of eternal life. Thus justification is a declaration of our *perfect obedience*."

~ Robert Morey

Study #6

*“Saved—And Being Saved—Without A Doubt:
The Confidence of the Believer”*

~ John 10:1-33 ~

John 10:1-33

JN 10:1 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

^{10:7} Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

^{10:11} "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

^{10:14} "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

^{10:19} At these words the Jews were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

^{10:21} But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

^{10:22} Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

^{10:25} Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

^{10:31} Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, ³² but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

^{10:33} "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

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Study #6

“Saved—And Being Saved—Without A Doubt: The Confidence of the Believer”

John 10:1-33

~ Observation ~

1. In this passage, Christ says He is the Good Shepherd. For whom does the Good Shepherd lay His life down (10:11, 15)?

2. According to 10:17-18, who takes Christ's life away from Him?

Why is this significant?

3. What was the reason why the Jewish leaders do not believe Christ's testimony (v. 26)?

4. What distinguishes Christ's sheep from those who are not His sheep (vs. 27)?

What should we expect to see in our lives if we follow the Shepherd?

5. Where does the confidence of the 'believing' sheep come from (cf. 28-29)?

6. What claim was Christ making in all of this that underscores the trustworthiness of what He teaches on this topic (vv. 31-33)?

~ Interpretation ~

1. Read Philippians 1:3-6. Of what does Paul say he is confident?

What implications does this verse have for the believer?

2. Read Jude 24-25? Who is attributed the ability to keep true believers in Jesus from falling away?

3. Go back to Philippians. Read 2:12-13. What reason does the Apostle Paul give to his readers that should cause them to persevere in their faith?

How does this guard against the mistaken notion that says, "Since I've made a decision to be saved, I can live however I want now"?

4. Read Romans 8:29-30. How does this underscore what Christ is teaching in John 10 regarding the security of His believing sheep?

~ Application ~

1. Based on our discussion so far, which question do you think is better to ask: (1) "Can a believer in Christ lose his/her salvation?" or (2) "Can Christ lose one who believes in Him?" Why?
2. If a person believes that they can once again become an unbeliever by virtue of something they do, then what was the assumption they were working with in the first place when it comes to salvation?
3. How ought this teaching from Scripture (that Christ has laid down His life for His sheep) affect our view that salvation is ours *only* because of the grace of God given to us in Christ?

On Your Own...

- How should the fact that Christ accomplished our salvation affect your day-to-day lives?
- Knowing that the gift of salvation is absolutely free to us but was infinitely costly to God, what impact should this truth have upon the life of a believer? Cf. Titus 2:11-14. Consider memorizing these verses or posting them somewhere where you will see them regularly.

Some Things To Think About

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you if faithful and he will do it.”

~ 2 Thessalonians 5:23-24

“The Apostle places the basis of ultimate salvation upon the *covenantal faithfulness of God*. God’s faithfulness was displayed when He effectually called us into union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). And as God’s faithfulness *began* our salvation by calling us, His faithfulness guarantees the ultimate *completion* of our salvation. The Apostle says that God “will do it”, i.e., He will bring His people to complete sanctification. God’s covenantal faithfulness guarantees it.”

~ Robert Morey

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”

Jude 24-25

“Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they are in God’s favor and in a state of salvation, this hope of theirs will perish. Nevertheless, those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus, love him sincerely, and strive to live in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, a hope that shall never make them ashamed.... True believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, or temporarily lost in various ways: as by negligence in preserving it, by falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit, by some sudden or violent temptation, or by God’s withdrawing the light of his countenance and allowing even those who reverence him to walk in darkness and have no light. Yet, true believers are never completely deprived of that seed of God and life of faith, that love for Christ and fellow believers, that sincerity of heart and conscience concerning duty, out of which—by the operation of the Spirit—this assurance may in due time be revived; and by which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.”

~ Westminster Confession of Faith 18.1, 4

Study #7
*“Bold Proclamation:
The Gospel In A Pluralistic Society”*
Acts 17:16-34

Acts 17:16-34

17:16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

17:22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

17:29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

17:32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

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Study #7

“The Gospel In A Pluralistic Society”

Acts 17:16-34

~ Observation ~

1. As the Apostle Paul was going through Athens, what was his reaction to this city “full of idols” (vs. 16)?

Not strictly observation questions, but some initial thoughts.... Why does the text draw our attention to this? Was this reaction appropriate, or did he overreact?

2. Why were the synagogues & the marketplace great places for Paul to reason with people about the Gospel and about what they believed (vs. 17, 21)?
3. How did the Epicurean philosophers (who believed that life was found in pleasure) and the Stoic philosophers (who believed that life was found in developing the intellect) respond initially to Paul’s message (vv. 18-21)?
4. Paul arises in the midst of the Areopagus & declares to them “the unknown God.” What are some of the important points about this “unknown God” that Paul wants his audience to know (vv. 24-29)?
5. According to Paul, what was unique about Jesus Christ that *could not* be said about all the other gods that were being worshipped (cf. vs. 31)?

~ Interpretation ~

1. In verses 28-29, Paul quotes pagan poets as saying that “we are God’s offspring.” What point is he trying to make?

How does this compliment what the Apostle John said in John 1:12 says, “Yet to all who received him [i.e., Jesus Christ], to those who believed in his name, He [i.e., God] gave the right to become children of God...”? How do we account for the difference?

2. Paul mentioned that the Athenians were “very religious in all respects” (vs. 22), yet to Paul the fact that they were very religious did not matter at all. Why is this the case?

Cf. Romans 1:21-25.

3. Read John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. How do these verses underscore & reinforce the climax of Paul's argument in Acts 17:30-31.
4. Paul says God now commands all people everywhere to repent. From the context, what would this repentance look like for the Athenians?

~ Application ~

1. What were the various responses to Paul's message (vv. 32-34).
 - (i)
 - (ii)
 - (iii)

Should we expect anything different? Why or why not?
2. What can we learn about the way Paul treated these Athenians? How does that fit into your view of the way evangelism is sometimes done by well-meaning Christians?

On Your Own...

- As you reflect upon Paul's zeal for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what impresses you the most?
- Many people today describe the university campus as the modern day marketplace of ideas and beliefs. Is this a good description? Describe your reaction to our campus "full of idols."

Never really thought about it in that way	It's not really that big a deal	More apathetic than anything else	Curious. Glad to be exposed to so much.	Provoked within but that's about where it stops.	Provoked to share the Gospel
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- Ask God to enlarge your vision of how He can use you to spread the message of the Gospel.
- Meditate on these verses: Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:6; Acts 4:12.

Some Things To Think About

“My answer to this question [i.e., ‘By what authority do you believe what you believe?’] is a personal commitment. I am—in Pascal’s famous phrase—wagering my life on the faith that Jesus is the ultimate authority. My answer is a confession: I believe. It is a personal commitment to a faith that cannot be demonstrated on grounds established from the point of view of another commitment. In saying, “I believe” in this way, the Christian is placing himself in a position like that of a scientist who affirms his belief in the truth of a statement in physics. All statements that claim to speak the truth about realities external to the speaker are affirmations of faith to which the speaker commits himself....The Christian commitment is distinguished in that it is a commitment to a belief about the meaning of the whole of human experience—namely, the belief that this meaning is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen, and destined to rule over all things. I make this commitment as part of and in dependence on the community of those who have lived by this faith from the beginning.”

~ Leslie Newbiggin

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”

~ John Piper

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

~ Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

“[The Apostle] Paul sought to save men; and because he sought to save them, he was not content merely to throw truth at them; but he went out of his way to get alongside them, and to start thinking with them from where they were, and to speak to them in terms that they could understand, and above all to avoid everything that would prejudice them against the gospel, and to put stumbling-blocks in their path. In his zeal to maintain truth he never lost sight of the needs and claims of people.”

~ J. I. Packer

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

~ 2 Corinthians 5:20

Study #8
*“God’s Word: A Certain Guide
In Uncertain Times”*
~ 2 Timothy 3:10-17 ~

2 Timothy 3:10-17

3:10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance,

11 persecutions, sufferings--what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

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 man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Reformed University Fellowship

Study #8

“God’s Word: A Certain Guide In Uncertain Times”

2 Timothy 3:10-17

~Observation ~

1. What particular characteristic does the Apostle Paul state that the Scriptures are capable of producing in the lives of those it touches (vs. 15).
2. What is true of all those who want to lead godly lives (vs. 12)?

Why do you suppose this is the case?

3. Paul says all Scripture is “God-breathed.” What image does this bring to mind, and how does it illuminate for us Who the true Author of Scripture is?
4. List the four ways that the Scriptures are useful, and briefly define what these mean (vs. 16).
5. For what purpose does vs. 17 tell us that the Scripture works in our lives?

~ Interpretation ~

1. What does 2 Peter 1:20-21 teach about how God inspired the Scriptures?
2. If God is the ultimate Author of Scripture, what conclusions can we draw about its teachings and its trustworthiness? Cf. Hebrews 6:16-18.
3. How does Psalm 19:7-13 concur with these previous verses from the New Testament?

What are some of the verbs and nouns that are used to describe the Word of God that are particularly striking to you?

4. Thinking back to the temptation of Adam and Eve, what was the Serpent's fundamental weapon against our first parents (cf. Gen. 3:1)?
5. Hebrews 4:2 says that the Word has little value to some people because they do not combine it with faith? What does this mean? (It might be helpful to check out Hebrews 11:6.)

~ Application ~

1. In light of the fact that God has seen fit to give us a clear revelation of Himself in His Word and in the Person of Jesus Christ, how can we press His Word into our lives more? Be concrete and specific.
2. How can we encourage one another to intake greater quantities of the Word of God without becoming legalistic?
3. How does meditating on the Gospel (the life and death of Jesus for sinners like us) draw us back to the Scriptures?

On Your Own...

- If someone were to look at your life over the past week, what conclusions would they arrive at in terms of your appetite for God's Word?
- If you were to rate your appetite for the Word of God, with 0 being non-existent and 10 being insatiable, where would you rate yourself? Has something else taken the place of your appetite for the Word of God?
- What are some very practical steps towards letting "the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16)?
- Spend some time reading and praying through portions of Psalm 119, a song about the Word of God.

Some Things to Think About

“Prefer having eyes to read the Scripture, and be blind to everything else, rather than to read everything else and neglect the Bible.”

~ M. Richmond

“This is what we should seek...throughout the whole of Scripture: to know Jesus Christ truly, and the infinite riches which are included in Him and are offered to us by God the Father.”

~ John Calvin

“‘The pleasures of this life’ and ‘the desire for other things’—these are not evil in themselves. These are not vices. These are gifts of God. They are your basic meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking. And all of them can become deadly substitutes for God.”

~ John Piper

“It is one thing to be unfamiliar with Scripture when you don’t own a Bible; it’s another thing when you have a bookshelf full...great numbers of professing Christians know little more about the Bible than Third-World Christians who possess not even a shred of Scripture.”

~ Donald Whitney

“Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God’s Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.”

~ R.C. Sproul

“We have scarcely begun to see all of God that the Scriptures give us to see, and what we have not yet seen is exceedingly glorious.”

~ John Piper

“I delight in your commands because I love them.
I lift up my hands to your commands which I love,
And I meditate on your decrees.”

~ Psalm 119:47-48

Study #9
*“Prayer: Communicating with
our Heavenly Father”*
Matthew 6:5-13

Matthew 6:5-13

6:5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one. '

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Study #9

“Prayer: Communicating with our Heavenly Father”

Matthew 6:5-13

~ Observation ~

1. The Lord Jesus begins this discourse by saying, “And when you pray....” What is His working assumption here?
2. What warning is given to those who pray in order to be seen by others? Why is this ‘reward’ particularly empty and unfulfilling?
3. Where does Christ instruct His disciples to pray? Why is this significant?
4. Verse 7 contains a reference to “not keep babbling like pagans.” What do you think this entails? (cf. with end of verse).

Do you ever wrestle with this temptation? If so, how? when?

~ Interpretation ~

1. If our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask him, then why even bother asking Him? (Cf. Matthew 6:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
2. Christ instructs us to present a request to God that His name would be ‘hallowed.’ What does this mean? (cf. Psalm 29:1-2; 103:1).
3. What is suggested by the request, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”?

What would that look like in your life? On the campus of TAMU?

4. In instructing us on prayer, Christ tells us to address God in heaven, for us to tell God that we desire that His name be hallowed, that His kingdom would come and that His will would be

done. All of this comes before He instructs us to ask about things for ourselves. Why is this significant?

How would this restore a healthy balance to our prayers?

5. We are to pray that God would forgive us of our debts? What is meant by this (is he referring school loans? Credit card bills? Etc?)? (Refer to Matthew 18:21-35 for a complementary passage).

How is the use of 'debt' appropriate language to convey offenses?

~ Application ~

1. What must we guard against when we do gather with others for prayer? How can we do this?
2. What are some ways in which you can use the Lord's prayer more often in your life without it becoming rote, i.e., mere words?
3. How would you like to see God grow you in this area?

On Your Own...

- What are the things that seem to get in the way of prayer for you. Be specific.
- Examine your own heart. Could it be the case that the reason you don't pray more often is because you are avoiding God? That you are scared? That He's not all that important to you? That you believe that you are not important to Him?
- Beg God to grant you greater desires to approach His throne of grace.
- Spend time balancing your prayers the way the Lord's prayer is balanced. That is, concentrate on praising God, and praying for His will to be done, and His name to be recognized as holy throughout the earth.

Some Things To Think About

“Devote yourselves to prayer.”

~ Colossians 4:2

“When you make something a priority, when you will sacrifice for it, when you will give time to it, you know you are devoted to it. God expects Christians to be devoted to prayer.”

~ Donald Whitney

“Every kind of prayer ultimately rests upon our dependence on God. Petitions are based on what we need. The confession of sin points to our hope for forgiveness from God. Intercession expresses the needs of others. Praise recognizes that God blesses us with great gifts. If we fully consider our absolute dependence on God, prayer becomes more than an obligation; it becomes a way to acknowledge the one who provides for all our needs. Given this perspective, we can remove prayer from our list of boring chores and begin to rank it where it belongs—among the essentials for meaningful existence. Fruitful, life-giving prayer rests firmly on the foundation of recognizing our need for God; it begins with the attitude of a dependent servant.”

~ Richard Pratt

“To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven. It is to be on the road to hell. Now can you wonder that I ask the question, Do you pray?”

~ J.C. Ryle

“The devil is aware that one hour of close fellowship, hearty converse with God in prayer, is able to pull down what he has been contriving and building many a year.”

~ John Flavel

“Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart,
And my portion forever.”

~ Psalm 73:25-26

“It will never be altogether well with us till we convert the universe into a prayer room.”

~ George Bowen

Study #10
*“Love In Action:
Mirroring Christ to the World”*
~ Luke 10:25-37 ~

Luke 10:25-37

10:25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."
Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Reformed University Fellowship

Study #10

“Love In Action: Mirroring Christ to the World”

Luke 10:25-37

~ Observation ~

1. An expert in the [Jewish] law approached Jesus and asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. What do you find striking about the question? Is this a good question to ask?

What was the wrong assumption behind the lawyer's question?

How would you have responded to this question?

2. Jesus pointed this man back to the Law. Why do you think He did this? Was He trying to get the man to earn his own salvation?
3. What was the motivation behind the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbor?" in verse 29? And what does this mean?
4. In the story Christ tells, what were some of the obstacles that the Samaritan had to overcome in order to help this man?

What were some of the things that the Samaritan did to help this man? Be specific.

~ Interpretation ~

1. A priest and a Levite, two religious people, bypassed the man and refused to offer him any assistance. This, in itself, is shocking. Why is it perhaps even more shocking what the next man did? (cf. John 4:9.)
2. Summarize in your own words Jesus' answer to the question "What does it mean to love my neighbor as myself?"

3. Why is the conclusion of the story in verse 37 so shocking?

4. Is Jesus calling us to do anything He Himself has not done? How so? Read 1 John 3:16.

~ Application ~

1. How should this parable drive us to the Cross of Jesus Christ? For forgiveness? For enabling power to love?

2. I Peter 1:22 says, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." What are some tangible ways we can love one another deeply, from the heart? What would that look like?

3. Someone read aloud 1 John 3:16-20, and begin the group in a time of prayer.

On Your Own...

- Consider where we would be today if Jesus loved us the way the lawyer, the priest, and the Levite assumed we should love.

- Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Examine your life to see ways in which you need to love others better (a roommate maybe, or perhaps a family member).

- Meditate on 1 John 3:1; 4:7-12

Some Things To Think About

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

~ Romans 5:6-8

"Like salvation, sin is a word that belongs to the traditional Christian vocabulary. "I am not a sinner," people often say, b/c they seem to be associating sin with specific and rather sensational misdeeds like murder, adultery, and theft. But "sin" has a much wider connotation than that...What the bible means by sin is primarily self-centeredness. For God's 2 great commandments are first that we love him with all our being and secondly that we love our neighbor as we love ourself. Sin, then, is the reversal of this order. It is to put ourselves first...our neighbor next when it suits our convenience, and God somewhere in the background."

~ John Stott

"Mercy to the full range of human needs is such an essential mark of being a Christian that it can be used as a test of true faith. Mercy is not optional or an addition to being a Christian. Rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the inevitable sign of true faith."

~ Tim Keller

"We love because He first loved us."

I John 4:19

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

~ James 2:14-17