

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

50 Reasons Why Jesus Came and Died

A study from the book by John Piper

OURUF Fall 2004

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Reformed University Fellowship

Who are We?

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 and the PCA (the Presbyterian Church in America, the denomination which RUF comes from and in which the RUF campus minister 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 (these can be easily found by searching online) 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 your campus minister 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 on campus, in the city 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" 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.

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 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 reasons why Jesus Christ came to this earth to live and die. Whether you've been a Christian for years and years, have just now considered the question, or are still skeptical, this will be a rich discussion that needs to be had.

Piper's Book

We aren't reading the Bible directly, but looking at a secondary book that claims to explain the Bible.

We'll be reading four chapters at a time, but the chapters are short, typically only two pages at a time.

Think through what Piper says about the reasons why Jesus had to die. It may work best to read one chapter a day instead of all the chapters at once. Think about what Piper is saying and what you think about it. Consider how that may make a difference in your life or in the lives of others.

We have provided a page for each week's study for notes.

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 your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Attendance

You should commit to coming each week. Not only will you benefit by this commitment, but the other people in your group will as well by your presence. It can be really discouraging for each week's study to be optionally attended. While this is in by no means a badge of righteousness for you, it will mean something if you put this as a priority of your week's schedule and make every effort to be there.

Also, please do not hesitate to call or email 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,

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Week One

Read:

RUF - Who are we?
The Gospel
How to do this study

Questions:

What are you expecting from this study?

Why are you here?

What commitment will you make to doing the readings and attending the study?

As you look over the book, what is your impression of it?

Week Two

Read:

Introduction

Chapter One: To Absorb the Wrath of God

Chapter Two: To Please His Heavenly Father

Chapter Three: To Learn Obedience and Be Perfected

Chapter Four: To Achieve His Own Resurrection from the Dead

Chapter Five: To Show the Wealth of God's Love and Grace for Sinners

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Three

Read:

Chapter Six: To Show His Own Love for Us

Chapter Seven: To Cancel the Legal Demands of the Law Against Us

Chapter Eight: To Become a Ransom for Many

Chapter Nine: For the Forgiveness of our Sins

Chapter Ten: To Provide the Basis for Our Justification

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Four

Read:

Chapter Eleven: To Complete the Obedience That Becomes Our Justification

Chapter Twelve: To Take Away Our Condemnation

Chapter Thirteen: To ABolish Circumcision and All Rituals as the Basis of Salvation

Chapter Fourteen: To Bring Us to Faith and Keep Us Faithful

Chapter Fifteen: To Make Us Holy, Blameless and Perfect

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Five

Read:

Chapter Sixteen: To Give Us a Clear Conscience

Chapter Seventeen: To Obtain for Us All Things That Are Good for Us

Chapter Eighteen: To Heal Us from Moral and Physical Sickness

Chapter Nineteen: To Give Eternal Life to All Who Believe on Him

Chapter Twenty: To Deliver Us from the Present Evil Age

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Six

Read:

Chapter Twentyone: To Reconcile Us to God

Chapter Twentytwo: To Bring Us to God

Chapter Twentythree: So That We Might Belong to Him

Chapter Twentyfour: To Give Us Confident Access to the Holiest Place

Chapter Twnetyfive: To Become for Us the Place Where We Meet God

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Seven

Read:

Chapter Twentysix: To Bring the Old Testament Priesthood to an End and Become the Eternal High Priest

Chapter Twentyseven: To Become a Sympathetic and Helpful Priest

Chapter Twentyeight: To Free Us from the Futility of Our Ancestry

Chapter Twentynine: To Free Us from the Slavery of Sin

Chapter Thirty: That We Might Die to Sin and Live to Righteousness

Questions:

Over the past weeks, have any of your thoughts about Jesus and His work changed? If so, what?

What emotion and/or attitudes does Jesus' work produce in you?

What unresolved questions do you have?

How might your study group do something to express to each other, the community, the campus, your friends and family what you've been learning from this study?

Discuss this as a group and take action from what you decide to do.

Week Eight

Read:

Chapter Thirtyone: So That We Would Die to Sin and Live to Righteousness

Chapter Thirtytwo: To Enable Us to Live for Christ and Not Ourselves

Chapter Thirtythree: To Make His Cross the Ground of All Our Boasting

Chapter Thirtyfour: To Enable Us to Live by Faith in Him

Chapter Thirtyfive: To Give Marriage Its Deepest Meaning

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Nine

Read:

Chapter Thirtysix: To Create a People Passionate for Good Works

Chapter Thirtyseven: To Call Us to Follow His Example of Lowliness and Costly Love

Chapter Thirtyeight: To Create a BAnd of Crucified Followers

Chapter Thirtynine: To Free Us from Bondage to the Fear of Death

Chapter Forty: So That We Would Be wih Him Immediately After Death

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Ten

Read:

Chapter Fortyone: To Secure OUR Resurrection from the Dead

ChapterFortytwo: To Disarm the Rulers and Authorities

Chapter Fortythree: To Unleash the Power of God in the Gospel

Chapter Fortyfour: To Destroy the Hostility Between Races

Chapter Fortyfive: To Ransom People from Every Tribe, Language, People and Nation

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Eleven

Read:

Chapter Fortysix: To Gather All His Sheep from Around the World

ChapterFortyseven: To Rescue Us from Final Judgment

Chapter Fortyeight: To Gain His Joy and Ours

Chapter Fortynine: So That He Would Be Crowned with Glory and Honor

Chapter Fifty: To Show That the Worst Evil Is Meant by God for Good

Questions:

What stood out to you from these chapters?

What new thoughts did you have?

What challenged you?

What questions do you have for the group?

What difference might understanding these things make in your life?

Week Twelve

Questions:

What chapters had the most impact on you?

Why was that?

What will you take away from your study of this topic this semester?

Write out, in your own words, what Jesus' life and death mean for you.

At the end of the book, there is a prayer. Write out your own prayer that expresses your thoughts and desires.