

# REFORM

500 YEARS OF PUTTING JESUS BACK AT THE CENTRE

WORD | CHRIST | GRACE | FAITH | GLORY

## Intro study

It's been 500 years since the Protestant Reformation began in Europe and over the next few weeks we'll be considering some of the key biblical teaching and insight that drove this movement which we benefit from directly today.

Our hope is that this will be far more than a history lesson or an exercise in improving our theology. The reformation at its heart was about the Gospel of Jesus in Scripture being made known and being made real so that individuals and communities were joyfully transformed. It is the same with us today as we ourselves need the Gospel to keep reforming us.

## Some questions for your group

**Out of interest: When you hear of the Reformation what sort of things come to mind for you?**  
(Either positive or negative)

### Back in the day:

In pre-reformation Europe the entire culture was deeply religious.

- The Pope was the highest spiritual authority.
- Priests dispensed grace through various sacraments.
- Saints (especially Mary) were appealed to as mediators for spiritual help and blessing.
- Offerings (indulgences) were effective in limiting God's judgement for the living and the dead.
- The Bible was not readily available or even readable by peasant or priest.
- Heretics (those who disagreed with the church) were condemned to exile, prison or death.

**Imagine then the impact of a reformation statement like the following:**

*In the Scripture, God promises assurance of forgiveness and eternal life that no-one deserves and yet which he has made freely available. The **Bible alone** reveals this information, **Christ alone** does the work to make it possible, out of sheer **grace alone** does God move in loving mercy for us, and by **faith alone** do sinners receive this astonishing gift.*

**What sort of things would have been at stake with this teaching being proclaimed?**

**Consider the statement and reflect for yourselves:**

- What do you find most striking?
- Which do you find most difficult to believe?
- Which one do you most especially want to understand more?
- Which of the 'alones' do you think is most under threat in our generation? Why?

- People often also speak of God's glory alone being protected and affirmed with statements like these. Why might this be the case? How can our religious systems and beliefs threaten God's glory?

**Take a look at Ephesians 2:1-10 and try and read it thru pre-reformation eyes.**

Imagine the following and discuss what difference it would make to your understanding if you believed:

1. That grace was a vital substance gained through the sacraments.
2. That such grace grows through your love and good works.
  - How might you then express faith?
  - What might this say to you about God's love?
  - What kind of assurance could you hope to experience?

**Now switch it round with the reformation understanding that:**

1. Grace is God's undeserved loving kindness to you through Jesus.
2. That good works flow because you already belong to Jesus, not because you are trying to merit his favour.
  - What difference does this make?
  - What questions do you still have?

**Martin Luther** said that by default, we keep going back to a pre-reformation view of ourselves and God.

That is, in our insecurity, we keep believing we have to somehow merit God's love and favour through our goodness. This is why we will always need the reformation.

- Do you agree/disagree with this assessment?