Ideas that changed the world

by Dominic Steele with Laura Sieveking
When I was 19 I left the big smoke of Sydney and headed to the country to work as a radio station disk jockey at the only station in northern New South Wales that didn't play country music (2MO Gunnedah).

On my first Sunday in town I went along to St Mary's Catholic Church. I think at that stage you could have counted on two hands the number of Sundays in my life that I hadn't been to mass.

On my second Sunday at mass I was invited to join the church council. I thought I was too young but I was encouraged to stand and was appointed.

I had been christened and I participated in Confession, Communion and Confirmation in the Catholic Church, I attended a Catholic School for eight years and served as an altar boy at mass for five years. Now I was on the church council.

However, in the months that followed I became increasingly disillusioned with Gunnedah's priest and church. It came to a head when in a homily during mass he criticised something I had said on the radio. I left that day (not the church in Rome, but the church in Gunnedah).

When I moved back to Sydney I went back to my family's parish church at Pennant Hills. I'd been there virtually every Sunday for 15 years (apart from the last 15 months). But, no one said 'Hello Dominic, we've missed you!'

I'd grown up belonging to the Catholic Church, but felt I didn't belong anymore. Either I'd rejected church or church had rejected me. But I still knew that God existed and somehow things needed to be fixed with God.

When my friend Russell Powell invited me to church and I eventually nervously accepted his invitation to his Protestant church I was astonished at the differences.

There wasn't the same ceremony. But there was an authenticity that I hadn't seen before. Instead of walking straight out to the car park after receiving Communion people stayed for hours talking about the things they had been taught from the Bible.

Having been in church for years and then out of church for a while, I (shockingly) would say I became a Christian (began a personal relationship with God through Jesus) on 26 January 1986.

After this I spent a long time working out how my new faith differed from the faith of my childhood.

Growing up I wouldn't have said that I was saved by God's grace alone. I trusted in my own works to make me right with God rather than having faith alone in what Christ alone had done. And my authority came from the church institution rather than from the Bible alone.

I have come to see that these differences are enormously significant.

In these talks and studies we introduce you to people who grew up Catholic and see how they have wrestled with the four major ideas of the 16th century Protestant Reformation: Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Bible Alone and Christ Alone. We will see people interviewed, watch a talk, discuss some Bible passages and engage in a question time.

Whether you see yourself as Catholic, Protestant or neither our aim in these studies is to have a better understanding of what it is to be saved by Grace Alone (God's gracious initiative in Jesus), made available to us through Faith Alone (not by us being good enough). Further we will aim to know God through the Bible Alone (and not through any church authority) and to see that we can pray to the Father through Christ Alone (and not through the saints).

Yours in Christ,

Dominic Steele
# Contents

Grace Alone................................................................. 4

Faith Alone................................................................. 10

Bible Alone................................................................. 16

Christ Alone................................................................. 22

Bibliography and further reading................................. 28
1. Ideas that changed the world

2. We were dead Ephesians 2:1–3

3. We were saved by God’s grace alone Ephesians 2:4–9
   a. saved
   b. because of God’s grace
c. Grace alone

4. We were saved by grace alone to do good works *Ephesians 2:10*

5. Personal implications
John Calvin, 1509–1564

John Calvin is the first of our featured thinkers. Calvin is, after Saint Augustine, the most influential theologian since the writing of the New Testament. He was born in 1509 in northwestern France. By the time he went to the University of Paris, the Protestant Reformation was having a significant impact across Europe.

Calvin was forced to flee Paris in 1534 when, in a Roman Catholic crackdown, his mentor Nicolas Cop (the rector of the University of Paris) was accused of heresy over a sermon that it is thought Calvin helped write.

In 1536 Calvin stopped over in Geneva as he journeyed to Strasburg. It was here that he was convinced by a fellow reformer, William Farel, to stay and work to reform the church in Geneva. This became his major life’s work.

Five hundred years after it was published, Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion* is still one of the most influential and significant theological works ever written. In the *Institutes* Calvin shows that it is by the grace of God alone that we can approach a Holy God. He wrote that it is not of ourselves that we can attain salvation by works of some kind, but that it is a gift from God alone. As Calvin wrote: ‘Faith, then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ.’

Calvin had a very organised mind. He organised Protestant thought and the Geneva Church, taking the church away from the traditional Catholic order of worship. His reforms impacted the whole city as he attempted to bring everything – be it cultural, economical, social or political activity – under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Under Calvin’s lead Geneva moved from being one of Europe’s most immoral cities to the Protestant capital of the Reformed Church.
Jasper Lee

I was born in the inner west of Sydney and from a young age attended a large Asian Catholic Church in Sydney. I was baptised into the Catholic Church and remember my first experiences of going to church surrounded by kind and generous family friends. In the mid 80s, our family moved to the suburbs and we started attending church at our local parish. My experience here was mixed. I was profoundly unhappy at my Catholic primary school and as I grew older found church increasingly dry and ritualistic.

I knew who God was but even at a young age I found him remote and unattainable. Like every ‘good Catholic’ boy I did the sacraments hoping that this would change my relationship with God, but somehow I didn’t find the answers I was looking for.

In 1994 my parents switched to a Baptist Church. They were dissatisfied with the traditional form of church and wanted me and my sister to meet more young people.

At this new church I was introduced to the Bible in a meaningful way. I was in a Bible Study with people my age and for the first time I was introduced to the Jesus of the Bible. Until then, for me Jesus had been a good teacher and a way to follow, but I had not seen him as Lord of my life and saviour of the whole world. Gradually, over a few years (influenced by some very patient youth group teachers), I became a Christian.

What had changed? Looking back I realise that growing up I did not have an understanding of God’s grace. My religion revolved around obeying the commandments and ‘doing’ things in order to attempt to be right by God. In many ways I understood the areas of my life where I wasn’t perfect and struggled with guilt. I tried to deal with my sin by either trying to do better, or simply downplaying what was wrong with my life.

Now I see that I along with everyone else can not meet the standards of God. But God in his grace provided Jesus, who died on the cross, so I could have a relationship with Him.

IDEA 1: GRACE ALONE
Before beginning the discussion, watch the presentation on Grace Alone (either Dominic Steele’s DVD presentation or a live speaker).

Pray

Read Ephesians 2:1–10 and answer these questions directly from the passage.

What contrasts can you find in this passage?

i ...................................................................................................................................................................................................

ii ...................................................................................................................................................................................................

iii ...................................................................................................................................................................................................

iv ...................................................................................................................................................................................................

What does God do (look for the verbs)?

verse 5 ...................................................................................................................................................................................

verse 6 ...................................................................................................................................................................................

verse 6 ...................................................................................................................................................................................

verse 8 ...................................................................................................................................................................................

Why does God do it?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................

............................................................................................................................................................................................................

............................................................................................................................................................................................................

Where does ‘faith’ come from?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................

............................................................................................................................................................................................................

............................................................................................................................................................................................................

What works can I contribute to my salvation?

.............................................................................................................................................................................................................
Thinking Further (These ‘Thinking Further’ questions are a bit harder and will require some analysis.)

Given what you have read in Ephesians 2 and heard in the earlier presentation, what are the key differences between Protestant and Catholic understandings of grace?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................

Read Romans 6:1–4

How does our understanding of grace alone affect our view of sin (especially 6:1)?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................

‘A Christian can sin because they’re covered by the grace of God anyway.’ Discuss this statement in light of the passage in Romans.

Personal Application

Have I accepted God’s gift of grace making me alive (or am I still dead)?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................

How can I encourage others to ‘walk as God created us to’?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................................................................................................

Pray

IDEA 1: GRACE ALONE