

Costly Grace, Session 1

Winter 2022 Mini Series

“It is simply not true that every word critical of our preaching today can be taken as a rejection of Christ or as anti-Christianity. Today there are a great number of people who come to our preaching, want to hear it, and then repeatedly have to admit sadly that we have made it too difficult for them to get to know Jesus. Do we really want to deny being in community with these people? They believe that it is not the word of Jesus itself that they wish to evade, but that too much of what comes between them and Jesus is merely human, institutional, or doctrinaire. Who among us would not instantly know all the answers which could be given to these people and with which we could easily evade responsibility for them? But would an answer not also demand that we ask whether we ourselves get in the way of Jesus’ word by depending perhaps too much on certain formulations, or on a type of sermon intended for its own time, place, and social structure?” (Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, xxii)

- What is the issue that Bonhoeffer is identifying?
- How do we make it “too difficult for [others] to get to know Jesus”?
- What kind of “formulations” do you think Bonhoeffer has in mind? How about in our church culture/context?

What is grace?

Romans 3:23 (ESV) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,...

Romans 11:5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

1 Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Heidelberg Catechism

Q & A 21

Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture; it is also a wholehearted trust, which the Holy Spirit creates in me³ by the gospel, that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also, forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation.

These are gifts of sheer grace,
granted solely by Christ's merit.

Q & A 60

Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, 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,
and as if I had been as perfectly obedient
as Christ was obedient for me.
All I need to do
is accept this gift with a believing heart.

Q & A 63

Q. How can our good works
be said to merit nothing
when God promises to reward them
in this life and the next?

A. This reward is not earned;
it is a gift of grace.

Q & A 64

Q. But doesn't this teaching
make people indifferent and wicked?

A. No.
It is impossible
for those grafted into Christ through true faith
not to produce fruits of gratitude.

Q & A 115

Q. Since no one in this life
can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly,
why does God want them
preached so pointedly?

A. First, so that the longer we live
the more we may come to know our sinfulness
and the more eagerly look to Christ
for forgiveness of sins and righteousness.

Second, so that
we may never stop striving,
and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit,
to be renewed more and more after God's image,
until after this life we reach our goal:
perfection.

How would you define *grace*?

What do you see as the relationship between grace and discipleship?

Bonhoeffer's Historical Context

- Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran theologian and pastor in Germany during the rise of the Nazi party in the 1930s.
- From very early on, he wrote and preached against the policies of the Nazis.
- He was one of the leading theologians of the “Confessing Church,” which arose in opposition to the “German Christians,” a pro-Nazi group within the established German Protestant church.¹



Flag of the “German Christians”

- Bonhoeffer wrote *Discipleship* while teaching at Finkenwalde, a Confessing Church seminary. It was written for his students, urging them to true discipleship amidst the social and cultural powers working to minimize the call to follow Jesus.

Key Questions

- What does Jesus want to say to us? What does he expect from us? How does he expect us to be faithful Christians today? — An urgent call to discern “what Jesus wants...”

“In times of church renewal holy scripture naturally becomes richer in content for us. ...[A] more intense, questioning search arises for the one who is our sole concern, for Jesus himself. What did Jesus want to say to us? What does he want from us today? How does he help us to be faithful Christians today? It is not ultimately important to us what this or that church leader wants. Rather, we want to know what Jesus wants.” (xxi)

For next week: Preface and Ch. 1 through page 7.

¹ The Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church can be found here:
<https://seymourchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Barmen-Declaration.pdf>