

Bible Study about Cheap Grace

This expression is from Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer a Lutheran pastor who was in the resistance movement during the Second World war and he ended his life as a martyr.

He was asked how it could be that a church fell for national socialism and for the Nazi movement? His answer was: Because of the teaching of the cheap grace in the church.

So, what is the cheap grace?

First, I want to speak about some scriptures that tell us why there is no cheap grace.

Philippians 2, 12b: ***“Work hard to show the result of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.”***

Our faith has always two sides. It is 100 % Grace and 100 % our effort and willingness to obey the Lord. A coin has two sides, and the only question is: which side are we seeing at the moment?

Many believers cannot handle this tension and get one sided. They teach that it is only grace and they are right because in the end everyone will say it was only the grace of God that saved me. But this still means that we need to do everything we can from our side.

John 10, 27 to 30 ***“My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hands’. My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Fathers hand. I and my Father are one.”*** The Lord comforts the one who is afraid that he could lose his relationship with the Lord against his will. He wants to stay all his life with Him even though it will be very difficult at times. His hand is greater to hear our hearts cry to be faithful until the end. As a very young believer I once climbed a very high mountain near Salzburg while at the bible school I visited for two years. I felt at times that I would not make it, but the Lord helped me to reach the top of the mountain. After I came home the Lord showed me that this is also an example for my life. I sometimes think, I can’t make it, but know He will help me to reach the goal.

As I talk to young people, their question is often, ‘What is God allowing me to do and what not to do?’

I often answer: As the Lord is calling us into His ministry the expectation of the Lord becomes higher. If we start to jump, we maybe start with a stick put up to half a meter. As we became better the stick will be moved higher and the challenge becomes grater according to our age and maturity in the Lord. Jesus is saying 'to whom a lot is introduced a lot is expected'.

A leader must grow into a new standard of maturity in the Lord, because he is called by God to lead stringently.

Matthew 24, 49 to 51” ***But what if the servant is evil and thinks, my master won't be back for a while, and he begins beating the other servants, partying and getting drunk? The Master will return unannounced and expected, and will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. “***

We understand it was a servant of the Lord and just as the one before (46 to 47) was doing well and got more responsibility in Gods Kingdom, he expected the same. The first sin was that this servant was thinking in his heart: My master will not be back for a longer time. He is not coming soon. The web of expectation of the return of the Lord is bringing us to wrong conclusions. Apostle Paul brings it to the point when he said: Philippians 4, 5 ***“Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember the Lord is coming soon.”*** Or in 2 Timothy 4, 8 ***“And now the prize awaits me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing. “***

With those words we understand we cannot trick anyone, because if we are waiting for the Lord's return, the Lord already knows it best. Apostle Paul is not talking here about his work for the Lord. He is only talking about waiting for Him. If we wait with deep love for our master, we will do the right thing.

Being content with our daily life and not waiting for the Lord brings us to the wrong understanding of our responsibility. Living in the expectation of the Lord's coming will remove the fear of the Lord in all we do and create the right relationship with all our brothers and sisters.

Pursue holiness (Hebrews 12,14 and 15) ***“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone falls short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by this many become defiled;”***

'No one will see the Lord'--- means---we will not get there without allowing the Lord to prune us and to grow into a holy lifestyle. We cannot make ourselves

holy, but we can hinder the Lord in the process of making us holy, if we do not obey, or chose our one way instead of His. A tree does not bring fruit if it stands there and says in its own strength, 'I bring fruit, now I bring fruit'. The fact that the tree is continuously grounded with its roots in the earth, is the reason that it will bring fruit in the Lord. Jesus said 'if the grapes are not staying close to the vine, they will not bring fruit'. So it will be with us; if we are not close to Him there is no real fruit. If there is a complaining spirit and bitterness, it can affect and spoil our own situation, and even a whole church.

1 Timothy 6, 5 ***“who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself”***. Today many pastors study to be a pastor as a profession and to receive a regular income. The Apostle Paul is writing in the first letter to Timothy chapter 4, 1 to 5 and second timothy chapter 3 about the last days. The situation and attitude of believers in the church will be terrible. Some people think that being a pastor is only a job, and not firstly a calling. Only the one who has a call to be a pastor will care really about the sheep. Jesus is asking Peter: Do you love me? 'Yes, Lord you know that I love you!' Peter answered. Then Jesus said 'take care of my sheep'---John 21,16. We never have the power to take care of sheep if it is not coming from the Lord.

Jude 1, 4 and 5, ***“For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God (Ruler) and our Lord Jesus Christ. But I remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”***

Other scriptures agree that we can end up leaving the Lord, even though we started off with him well, and 'turn the grace of God into lewdness', to live for our own pleasure. Think about the ten virgins in Matthew 25. All of them were waiting for their bridegroom the messiah. Five were really prepared and five were not, because His coming took a very long time.

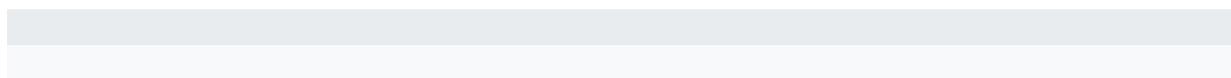




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From by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945):

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack's wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing....

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth; the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. 'All for sin could not atone.' Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin....

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus. It comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

On two separate occasions Peter received the call, "Follow me." It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1.17; John 21.22). A whole life lies between these two calls. The first occasion was by the lake of Gennesaret, when Peter left his nets and his craft and followed Jesus at his word. The second occasion is when the Risen Lord finds him back again at his old trade. Once again it is by the lake of Gennesaret, and once again the call is: "Follow me." Between the two calls lay a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ. Half-way between them comes Peter's confession, when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God....

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now prevailing upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme fellowship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs, (pg. 45-49).