

(Luke 9:57-62, NIV84)

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Should being a Christian be easy? To answer this question, let's listen to some of the things that Jesus Himself tells us:

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31).

"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!" (Matthew 10:24-25).

"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:28).

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

"You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me" (Matthew 24:9).

After reading these statements of Jesus, if any of us thinks that being a Christian is supposed to be easy, then we're not listening to what Jesus has said. Being a Christian requires effort, commitment, struggle and sacrifice. Now, don't misunderstand. This does not mean that we BECOME Christians by our effort or commitment, struggle or sacrifice. We are Christians by God grace, undeserved and unearned, but freely and completely given by God. However, AS Christians we will expend effort. AS Christians we must have an undying commitment to our Savior. AS Christians we will struggle against the devil, against our sinful nature and against the sinful world in which we live. AS Christians we will gladly sacrifice our personal priorities, our belongings, our time and whatever else our Lord may require of us.

All of this proceeds from a thankful heart. We know what we WERE. We WERE lost and condemned creatures, sinners separated from God and facing eternity in hell. Now, in Christ, we know what we ARE. We ARE saved in Christ, new creations, born again by the Spirit to live before God in righteousness, innocence and blessedness. We ARE forgiven of all our sins, washed in the precious blood of Jesus, holy in God's sight and heirs of eternal life.

Does any one of us look at these blessings as some sort of burden too heavy to carry? I didn't think so.

So, while being a Christian is not easy, it is so utterly worth it. May God grant each one of us an undying love and devotion to Him. And remember: "We [can] love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

At ease with you in Christ,
Pastor Golm

May 14

Grace-Free or Cheap?

[Jesus says:] If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Matthew 16:24

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who, in the late years of World War II, was locked up in a German concentration camp because of his outspoken Christian beliefs. While in prison he wrote many letters as well as a few books, in which he expressed his unshakable faith in Christ as his personal Savior.

As he contemplated the state of Christianity, not only in his beloved Germany, but also throughout the Western world, he came to the conclusion that one of the serious (if not fatal) illnesses of the contemporary church was its preoccupation with what he called "cheap grace".

What did he mean by that? He did not deny the scriptural doctrine of "free grace", but he insisted that the modern church had made God's grace cheap instead of free. He lamented a religion which called for no sacrifice, no allegiance, no commitment. Or to use our traditional terms, he lamented a religion which preached all "justification" and almost no "sanctification".

One who accepts the grace of God also makes a personal commitment, he said: a commitment to be God's man or God's woman in all the varied situations of life. He pointed again and again to the word of Christ quoted above this meditation: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

Christianity is no mere reading of a formal creed and then signing on the dotted line. Rather, it is taking a position with the redeeming Christ and

then standing in the firing line. The salvation God has given us through Christ is free, but the price he sometimes puts on Christian living is very high. That price is symbolized by the cross which Christ asks you and me to bear. Listen as he speaks to us right now:

I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be And quickened from the dead.
I gave Myself for thee; What hast thou given for Me?