

the cost of discipleship by dietrich bonhoeffer

the cost of discipleship by dietrich bonhoeffer is a seminal work in Christian theology that explores the profound demands of following Jesus Christ. This influential book challenges believers to reconsider what true discipleship entails, emphasizing the necessity of grace, obedience, and sacrifice. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian and martyr, presents discipleship not as a casual commitment but as a costly and radical path. The work critiques cheap grace—the grace that is taken for granted without transformation—and contrasts it with costly grace, which requires repentance and a willingness to suffer for faith. This article delves into the core themes of the cost of discipleship by dietrich bonhoeffer, examines its theological implications, and discusses its continuing relevance to contemporary Christian practice. The following sections provide an overview of Bonhoeffer's main arguments, his concept of grace, the role of obedience, and the impact of his writings on modern Christian thought.

- Overview of The Cost of Discipleship
- Bonhoeffer's Concept of Grace
- The Call to Obedience
- Cheap Grace versus Costly Grace
- The Relevance of Discipleship Today

Overview of The Cost of Discipleship

The cost of discipleship by dietrich bonhoeffer is a profound examination of what it means to follow Christ authentically. Originally published in 1937, the book challenges Christians to embrace the radical demands of discipleship in contrast to superficial or nominal faith. Bonhoeffer argues that true discipleship requires a total commitment that may involve suffering, sacrifice, and a complete reorientation of one's life. The text is structured around the Sermon on the Mount and other biblical teachings, which Bonhoeffer interprets as calls to active, obedient faith.

Historical Context

Written during the rise of Nazi Germany, the cost of discipleship by dietrich bonhoeffer reflects the tension between Christian ethics and political tyranny. Bonhoeffer's involvement in the Confessing Church and his opposition to Hitler's regime underscore the urgency and seriousness of his call to discipleship. This context highlights the costliness of following Christ in a hostile environment.

Key Themes

The book addresses several key themes central to Bonhoeffer's theology:

- The necessity of grace as the foundation of Christian life
- The imperative of obedience to Christ's commands
- The rejection of cheap grace and nominal Christianity
- The willingness to suffer and possibly die for faith

Bonhoeffer's Concept of Grace

Central to the cost of discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the distinction between cheap grace and costly grace. Grace, in Bonhoeffer's theology, is not a license for complacency but a transformative power that demands a response.

Cheap Grace Defined

Cheap grace refers to the grace that is offered without repentance, without the cross, and without discipleship. It is grace that allows believers to avoid the hard realities of faith and continue in sin without genuine transformation. Bonhoeffer criticizes this form of grace as a distortion that undermines the true message of the Gospel.

Costly Grace Explained

Costly grace, on the other hand, is grace that calls believers to follow Jesus Christ fully, even to the point of suffering and sacrifice. It is grace that costs the believer something and demands a life of obedience and commitment. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field, worth giving up all else to obtain.

The Call to Obedience

Obedience is a foundational aspect of the cost of discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For Bonhoeffer, following Christ means actively responding to His commands rather than passively accepting beliefs.

Obedience as Discipleship

Discipleship, according to Bonhoeffer, is not merely about faith but is inseparable from obedience. He insists that disciples are those who obey Christ's words and live according

to His teachings. This obedience involves a radical reordering of priorities and often sets the disciple apart from societal norms.

Suffering and Obedience

Bonhoeffer underscores that obedience may lead to suffering. True discipleship can demand costly sacrifices, including persecution, rejection, and even death. This willingness to suffer is part of the authentic Christian path and reflects Christ's own example.

Cheap Grace versus Costly Grace

The contrast between cheap grace and costly grace is the cornerstone of the cost of discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Understanding this distinction is essential to grasping Bonhoeffer's critique of modern Christianity.

Characteristics of Cheap Grace

Cheap grace is characterized by:

- Grace without repentance
- Baptism without church discipline
- The Lord's Supper without confession of sin
- Christianity without the cross
- Forgiveness without requiring transformation

Characteristics of Costly Grace

In contrast, costly grace includes:

- Grace that demands repentance and change
- Baptism and communion with a commitment to live as Christ taught
- A willingness to embrace the cross and suffer for faith
- Transformation through obedience and sacrifice

The Relevance of Discipleship Today

The cost of discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer remains highly relevant to contemporary Christians seeking to live out their faith authentically. Its call to costly grace challenges believers to rethink the ease with which grace is sometimes accepted today.

Modern Application

In an age of religious consumerism and cultural Christianity, Bonhoeffer's message serves as a corrective. The call to obedience and the readiness to bear the cost of discipleship confront modern believers with the reality that faith is not merely a private belief but a public, costly commitment.

Impact on Christian Thought

Bonhoeffer's work has influenced numerous theologians, pastors, and Christian communities worldwide. His emphasis on the intersection of faith, ethics, and social responsibility encourages a holistic approach to discipleship that integrates belief and action.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'The Cost of Discipleship' by Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

'The Cost of Discipleship' centers on the idea that true Christian discipleship requires a radical commitment to follow Jesus Christ, emphasizing the necessity of costly grace as opposed to cheap grace.

How does Dietrich Bonhoeffer define 'cheap grace' in 'The Cost of Discipleship'?

Bonhoeffer defines 'cheap grace' as grace without discipleship, without the cross, and without Jesus Christ. It is grace that is received without repentance, without a change in life, and without obedience.

Why is 'The Cost of Discipleship' still relevant in modern Christian thought?

'The Cost of Discipleship' remains relevant because it challenges believers to consider the true demands of following Christ, calling for authentic faith that involves sacrifice, moral integrity, and active obedience in a world often hostile to Christian values.

What historical context influenced Bonhoeffer's writing of 'The Cost of Discipleship'?

Bonhoeffer wrote 'The Cost of Discipleship' during the rise of Nazi Germany, a time when he was actively resisting the regime. This context influenced his emphasis on costly grace and the call to courageous, obedient faith in the face of political and moral challenges.

How does 'The Cost of Discipleship' distinguish between grace and discipleship?

The book distinguishes grace as the unmerited favor of God, but true grace is costly because it calls for a response—discipleship—which involves following Jesus, self-denial, and a willingness to suffer for one's faith.

Additional Resources

1. *The Cost of Discipleship Study Guide by Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

This study guide provides a comprehensive framework to delve deeper into Bonhoeffer's seminal work, "The Cost of Discipleship." It includes chapter summaries, discussion questions, and reflective prompts designed to enhance understanding and application of Bonhoeffer's call to radical Christian living. Ideal for individual study or group discussions, it helps readers grasp the challenges and rewards of true discipleship.

2. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy by Eric Metaxas*

This biography explores the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in rich detail, highlighting his theological insights and courageous resistance against Nazi Germany. Metaxas paints a vivid picture of Bonhoeffer's commitment to discipleship at great personal cost. The book provides context for the ideas in "The Cost of Discipleship," showing how Bonhoeffer lived out his beliefs to the very end.

3. *Discipleship: The Series by Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

This collection includes "The Cost of Discipleship" and related writings, offering a broader perspective on Bonhoeffer's thoughts about what it means to follow Christ. It addresses themes such as grace, obedience, and community life. Readers gain a fuller appreciation of Bonhoeffer's theology and its application to modern Christian living.

4. *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eberhard Bethge*

Written by Bonhoeffer's close friend and biographer, this book provides intimate insights into his theological development and ethical convictions. Bethge's narrative helps readers understand the profound implications of discipleship that Bonhoeffer articulated in "The Cost of Discipleship." It also traces the historical circumstances that shaped his resolve to oppose tyranny.

5. *Radical Discipleship: Bonhoeffer's Legacy for Christian Formation by Robert Kolb*

Kolb examines Bonhoeffer's influence on contemporary Christian discipleship and formation, emphasizing the radical call to live out faith authentically. The book bridges historical theology with modern practice, offering practical guidance inspired by Bonhoeffer's teachings. It challenges readers to consider the cost and commitment

involved in following Christ today.

6. Life Together and The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This volume pairs two of Bonhoeffer's most influential works, exploring both the communal aspects of Christian life and the personal cost of following Jesus. "Life Together" discusses Christian fellowship, while "The Cost of Discipleship" focuses on obedience and grace. Together, they provide a comprehensive view of Bonhoeffer's vision for a committed Christian community.

7. Bonhoeffer's Theology of Discipleship by John W. de Gruchy

De Gruchy offers an in-depth theological analysis of Bonhoeffer's writings on discipleship, with special attention to "The Cost of Discipleship." The book explores key themes such as costly grace and ethical responsibility within a Christian context. It serves as an academic resource for those seeking to understand the doctrinal foundations of Bonhoeffer's thought.

8. Costly Grace: The Challenge of Discipleship by James W. Sire

Sire's book reflects on the concept of costly grace, a central theme in Bonhoeffer's work, and its implications for modern believers. It explores how discipleship demands sacrifice and commitment beyond mere belief. This accessible work encourages Christians to take seriously the demands of faith as portrayed in "The Cost of Discipleship."

9. Following Christ: Bonhoeffer's Path to Discipleship by Geffrey B. Kelly

Kelly provides a clear and concise introduction to Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship, focusing on the practical and spiritual dimensions of following Jesus. The book highlights Bonhoeffer's insistence on active obedience and the rejection of cheap grace. It is an excellent resource for readers seeking to apply Bonhoeffer's insights to their own faith journey.

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