

UNDISCIPLED DISCIPLES

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27)

Three times in the New Testament the followers of Christ are called "Christians." But they are called "disciples" over 260 times! There is more than semantics going on here. The Gospel of Jesus is about discipleship. The goal is not just to get people into heaven when they die. Rather it is a call to a certain quality of life and level of commitment rarely encountered in the church today. The New Testament was written by disciples to disciples in the hopes that they would produce more disciples!

Imagine a basketball coach saying to his team, "Don't worry about coming to practice; just show up for the game and all will be well." Imagine an army general saying to new recruits, "It's OK if you want to skip boot camp. You'll do fine in battle without it." Or imagine a piano teacher saying to her pupils, "Don't worry about practicing those lessons. Just look over the score before the recital." The absurdity is readily apparent. Without preparation and discipline it is unreasonable to expect any level of proficiency in sports, music or warfare. Yet when it comes to the Christian faith, we often get the impression that discipline (discipleship) is optional. "Don't worry about reading your Bible, learning to pray or developing skills to resist temptation. Don't worry about being part of a community or learning how to defend your faith. When moments of trial and testing come, you'll be OK."

The American church is full of undisciplined disciples. We've raised a generation of "believers" who think that spiritual disciplines are optional. They think they can follow Christ without following Christ (walking as he walked). They have a theology that permits them to receive Christ as "Savior" without surrendering to him as "Lord." This is pure irrationality!

One of the primary causes of this lamentable state of affairs is the way many of us have understood the grace of God. We've been so intent on telling the world that God is love, we have actually transformed the Gospel into something it was never intended to be! Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this "cheap grace."

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 call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.... 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 cost God the life of his Son... it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life.... (The Cost of Discipleship. p. 44f.)

The decision to become a disciple is indeed costly. Jesus was clear about that and insisted that no one make such a decision without first sitting down and calculating the cost (Luke 14:25-33). But before you turn back in doubt and fear thinking the cost is just too great, think about this: have you considered the cost of non-discipleship?