

JANUARY 23, 1994

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Have you ever been asked to join a fraternal club such as the Elks or Moose? Some people have membership in golf courses or country clubs. Any of these organizations have fees for signing up and periodic payments for maintaining membership. There is a certain cost associated with being able to participate in the activities of the organization. It makes sense that costs are involved. Does this same logic apply to church membership? The answer is "Yes" and "No." If "church membership" means that you are a member of a local group of Christian people who have agreed to worship together in a facility owned by the group and have a professional staff to organize religious activities for the benefit of the group, then there is definitely a need for each member to pay for the cost of the operation. On the other hand, if "church membership" means that you have been saved by grace through faith and are, therefore, a member of the Body of Christ, the cost picture changes. First of all, you cannot buy this "membership" because it is beyond our ability to pay. It is argued, and rightly so, that it is a gift from God. So, where is the cost? The paradox of the grace-salvation relationship is that even though you cannot buy it nor earn it, it requires all you have and are to possess it. So, while it is free, it is infinitely costly.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, discusses the concept of Costly Grace and Cheap Grace. He claims Cheap Grace to be the deadly enemy of the Church. "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." (p. 45) "Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner." (p. 46) "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion with confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." (p. 47)

"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; . . . it is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. . .

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." (pp. 47-48)

When Jesus called people to follow Him, He did **not** minimize the cost of being His disciple.

LUKE 9:57-62 Jesus had many followers in addition to the twelve apostles. Many who heard Him were inspired by His message and the miracles and in the emotion of the moment was ready to commit anything to the cause of following Him. I have seen such eagerness in the revival meetings of yesteryear. A skilful orator would make an emotional appeal to people and they would respond to their emotional urging. The revival leader would then go away chalking up so many "decisions for Christ." The man that came to Jesus agreeing to follow Him where ever He went was not encouraged by Jesus to do so without first counting the cost of what he was really doing. Jesus was not into material possessions and real estate, He did even have a place to sleep. Jesus was challenging the man to consider the priorities in his life.

The second person mentioned was asked by Jesus to follow Him. This was apparently a person who had heard Jesus speak and may have been one of those who was frequently in the crowd that follow Jesus. The occasion may have been when Jesus was picking out the 70 people to go out and prepare the way for His visits to other areas. My guess is that Jesus had asked this man to join with the others in travelling throughout the region to proclaim the nearness of the Kingdom of God. The excuse the man gave for not going was family obligations, specifically to take care of his father until he died. The implication was that when he didn't have anything better to do, then he would go out and witness for Jesus. The third person that Luke mentioned was willing to go but "not right now." This was just an excuse to cover up his unwillingness to make a decision. We often want to put off the decision until tomorrow, but the message from Jesus is that of

urgency and the emphasis is that today is the day of salvation. When we commit to follow Jesus we cannot keep looking back to the former days as the children of Israel did when they came out of Egypt and thought it would be better to be back in slavery. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:17 "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new." So it is to be with us.

LUKE 10:1 Earlier Jesus had sent the twelve apostles out on a similar mission. Now the mission was expanded to include more people. Some speculate that 70 were chosen because there were 70 nations (kingdoms) that the Jews recognized in existence at that time. We can also see that Moses had appointed 70 elders to help him administer the law. Sending these out two by two had practical significance. They could help each other, encourage each other, and they would be company to each other. In addition, the Jews would accept the message of two people more readily than just one in accordance with the teaching of Moses: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall the matter be established." Part of the cost of discipleship is going where Jesus send us.

LUKE 10:2 These seventy may have felt some pride in being chosen for a special job. The call to prayer and to request that God provide help for the tremendous job before them was to introduce a perspective of humility to those who were going out. Even today, there is a large amount of money and effort going into foreign and local mission activities. We in the various church denominations who sponsor such work will often point with pride to the great work that is being done. The truth of the matter is that people are being born at a higher rate than the rate we are winning people to Christ. Put very simply, we are losing the race. The job is so big that we cannot succeed without God's help.

LUKE 10:3-9 Jesus' instructions started with a warning that the message of the gospel would not be accepted by most people. There were and still are many enemies of God who would oppose His Kingdom. The other instructions were to travel light and don't waste time in idle conversation (emphases the urgency).

Hospitality in that time and that part of the world was such that travelers were often welcomed into homes for meals and a place to sleep. Jesus told them to accept such hospitality as they found. That would be their base of operation in that area. Their ministry was to

proclaim the Kingdom of God and to validate their claim with healing of the sick.

LUKE 10:10-12 Jesus recognize that some cities would be antagonistic toward the gospel message. In such cases, He did not encourage them to argue with the people but to simply dramatize the consequences of rejecting God's love. They were to wipe off the dust from their feet and state that God's coming judgment would be worse for them than it was for Sodom.

One cost of being a disciple of Jesus is that as we go where He sends us, we are forced to consider and come to grips with our own limitations and inadequacies and prayerfully seek God's help in all that we do. We also need to realize that we will not be welcomed with open arms by everyone that hears the message. Just as Jesus was despised and rejected by men, even so will those that follow Him.