

Session 3: True Freedom: Costly Grace vs. Cheap Grace

Overview:

The goal of this lesson is to discuss how believers can abuse grace due to a misunderstanding of its implications for living. The lesson is broken up into two parts: cheap grace, or the wrong view of grace and costly grace, the right view of grace. Cheap grace is the view that because we have received God's grace we are given permission to sin and can live how we please. The goal of this section is to give students a correct mindset when thinking about what freedom in Christ means. We want them to see that freedom is dying to sin rather than living in sin and serving the Lord instead of serving the flesh.

Talk about it:

How was grace defined in lesson 1?

The undeserved gift of salvation in Christ

I. Cheap Grace

Read it:

Romans 6:1-2

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Comment:

If we continue living in sin we have misunderstood the grace we have been given. If you have died to sin you can't live in it, its contradictory.

Ex: If you have been cured from a disease you don't act as someone who is still sick, you live as someone who has been made well.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to this misunderstanding as "cheap grace". He writes, "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."¹

Talk about it:

1. What are some ways we take advantage of grace?
 - **We think if we've already been forgiven it's okay to sin and it doesn't matter how we live**
 - **We say we follow Christ in order to get to heaven but don't actually surrender to Him as Lord**
2. Why do you think we do this?

Selfishness & pride, we think we deserve to live for ourselves

Read it:

Romans 6:3-4

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Talk about it:

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York City: Touchstone, 1959), 43.

1. Based on this verse, what is the purpose of us being brought from death to life?
That we might walk in newness of life
2. What does it mean to walk in newness of life?
To turn away from who you once were and walk as a person who has made new by putting sin to death and growing more into the likeness of Christ

Comment:

To walk in new life is to walk in freedom, but we can abuse grace by having a misconstrued idea of freedom. We can see freedom as a license to keep sinning and live how we want to live.

Read it:

Galatians 5:13

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

1 Peter 2:16

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Talk about it:

According to these verses, how are we not to use our freedom?

As an opportunity to sin or as a cover-up for sin

Comment:

Paul is clear in these verses that walking in freedom means that we live as servants of God and not slaves to our flesh. If we are still living for our fleshly desires, we aren't actually free at all but instead we have allowed ourselves to be enslaved by sin Christ died to set us free from.

Talk about it:

How have you seen yourself be a slave to sin instead of a servant to the Lord?

Read it:

Hebrews 10:26

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

Talk about it:

1. What do you think Paul means by sinning deliberately?
What Paul is not saying in this verse is that if we sin as believers we will lose our salvation. The key phrase in this verse is "sinning deliberately." If someone says they are a follower of Christ but chooses to sin deliberately (habitual sin without repentance) then they have rejected the grace that has been offered to them. To reject this grace is to reject Christ's sacrifice made for them on the cross which is why the writer of Hebrews says "there no longer remains a sacrifice." It is as if the hope of salvation is forfeited for the person who willingly chooses to live in sin. As John McArthur puts it, "to turn away

willingly from this sacrifice leaves no sacrifice, it leaves only sin, the penalty for which is death.”

2. What is the difference between sinning deliberately and the daily sins we commit as believers?

Although we have been set free from the slavery of sin we will still struggle with sin in this life. There is a difference between choosing to willfully sin without repentance versus sinning and repenting of those sins daily. (Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10)

I. Costly Grace

In comparison to cheap grace, the right view of grace is what Bonhoeffer calls “costly grace.” He writes, “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.”²

Read it:

Romans 6:5-7

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Talk about it:

1. What does it mean that our old self was crucified?
Who we were before Christ, the person who lived only for their flesh, has been done away with completely
2. What is the result of our old self dying?
We are no longer enslaved to sin and are set free from sin

Read it:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Comment:

Grace is costly because it cost Christ his life. If we take this lightly and live our lives unchanged then we have not understood grace. If we have been crucified with Christ, we no longer live for ourselves but live for Christ. It is a worthwhile cost because the life we have in Christ far surpasses the life we had before because it is a life of true freedom.

Talk about it:

Have you struggled with fully committing your life to Christ? If so, why? How can reminding yourself of God's grace change this?

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York City: Touchstone, 1959), 45.

Read it:

Romans 6:9-11

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Comment:

Christ defeated death and won the victory over sin by his death and resurrection. Just as death and sin no longer has dominion over Christ, death and sin no longer has dominion over those who are in Christ. Because our sinful self has died we are mastered by sin no more and are free to serve the Lord with gratitude for the freedom he has given us.

Talk about it:

1. What are some ways that you have felt mastered by sin and have struggled to walk in freedom?
2. What are some steps you can take to walk in freedom?

Comment:

For a lot of us, we want to serve the Lord but still feel enslaved to certain sins in our lives. If you feel this way, know that you are not alone. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” Let’s look at several ways we can rely on the Lord when we are tempted or struggling with sin.³

A — *Admit* that without Christ you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

P — *Pray* for God’s help. (Psalm 50:15)

T — *Trust* in a promise suited to your need. (Isaiah 41:10)

A — *Act* with humble confidence in God’s help. (Phillipians 2:12-13)

T — *Thank* him for the good that comes. (Colossians 3:17)

³ John Piper, “Practical Help for Praying for Help”, *Desiring God*, (1988).