

# The Cost of Discipleship

**A Study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Classic Book**

**prepared by Peter Horne**

**for Lawson Rd Church of Christ**

**in Rochester, NY.**

**Jan – Mar 2013**

9 lessons

My primary goal in studying this material is to expose my church to the concept of “cheap” and “costly” grace. Reflecting on this, I certainly didn’t gain 100% understanding or acceptance. However I do think though that most people in the class grasp the basics.

I stopped the lessons at this point as the book really just turns into a study of the Sermon on the Mount and I’m not convinced that I want to use “Cost of Discipleship” as my primary text for that study. I included his discussion of Matt 5:1-16 as an opportunity to demonstrate how his teaching on discipleship and grace is applied to specific Scriptures. Other teachers may want to be more selective in the sections of the Sermon on the Mount they use to demonstrate this application.

**Primary Resources:**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (Touchstone: 1995).

Jon Walker, *Costly Grace* (Leafwood Publishers: 2010).

As an alternative to using my lesson plan, I would seriously consider just using Walker’s book. I found it much easier to read and apply to contemporary circumstances. I think enough of Bonhoeffer’s teaching is retained that it’s a good indirect way to expose people to his teaching. And makes reading *Cost of Discipleship* itself, unnecessary.

# What is Discipleship?

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

9 January, 2013

When I say the word “disciple” I’m guessing most of us think of The Twelve. **How would you define the word disciple?** (Acts 6:1-2) Matthew 4:19, John 21:22 – Jesus’ first and last word to Peter, “Follow Me”.

**True & False Disciples:** *Read Matthew 7:15-23* In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus drew several comparisons from nature. How does each one illustrate true and false discipleship?

- What form might the “wolf” take, and what damage might result? **NOTE:** The wolf is a false teacher/prophet. However, his falsehood is not revealed by his teaching, but by his fruit!
- In verse 21-23 Jesus warned of the destiny of certain false disciples. What is their fault, and why does Jesus reject them? **NOTE:** Nothing these false disciples claim to have done is challenged by Jesus. It seems their description is accurate. They did real prophecy and miracles in Jesus’ name. So what did they do wrong? Presumably, given the fruit before and foundations after, they didn’t do Jesus’ teaching. Since these warnings come at the end of the Sermon on the Mount it’s reasonable to say that these false disciples do not live their lives in accordance with the teachings Jesus has just given regarding the kingdom of God.

*Read Matthew 7:24-27*

- What contrasts did Jesus draw in the parable in verses 24-27? **NOTE:** Hears and does, vs just Hears. Again, note that “these words of mine” refer to the Sermon he’s concluding.
- What’s something in your life that you would say is building on the rock while other people are building on the sand?

## **BONHOEFFER:**

1. The first sentence says “when we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person.” DISCUSS In your life, what other attachments threaten your “exclusive” attachment to Christ?
2. Most Christians find certain attachments (such as to family, work, church and country) quite legitimate and even part of their discipleship? How can the disciple of Christ fit these into their proper place while maintaining the “exclusive” attachment to Christ? **NOTE:** These *legitimate* attachments should only ever flow from our attachment to Christ, not compete with our allegiance.
3. Bonhoeffer wrote that abstract ideas and knowledge about Christianity make discipleship “superfluous,” and they even “positively exclude” discipleship. Why is genuine discipleship so opposed to an abstract version of Christianity?
4. Bonhoeffer stated that the only true relation we can have with Jesus is to follow him. What are false ways we try to relate to Jesus? (personal genie; unknowable; sentimental; ideal/out of reach)

*Christianity means to abandon all, or we abandon Jesus.* (Walker, *Costly Grace*: 40)

- Luke 9:57-58 True disciples commit to Jesus.
- Luke 9:59-60 True disciples focus on Jesus. (don’t use the law as an excuse not to follow.)
- Luke 9:61-62 True disciples abandon to Jesus. (discipleship is not a career map – we don’t decide)

*The call of Jesus is a real command and it requires that we take a real and tangible step in response. Bonhoeffer says this first step of obedience places us in a position where faith becomes possible. Before the call, we are able to live life without faith. It may even be a good and admirable life, but it is a faithless life. (p42) It is a paradox of*

*faith: Our first step of faith places us in a position where faith becomes possible. By our obedience, we learn to be faithful. If we refuse to follow, we never learn how to obediently believe. We stay stuck in the shallow end of faith, trusting in ourselves, living by sight and not by faith.*

# Free Grace vs Cheap Grace

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

16 January, 2013

EPHESIANS 2:1-10; ROMANS 5:17, 20-21; 6:21-23; ACTS 15:11

- We are saved by grace.
- Grace is a gift.
- Grace cannot be earned or it becomes wages.

John 5:24 – confidence of salvation

- When do we receive grace?
- What does God's grace cover in our lives?

Alexander Campbell several times expressed the idea that “Sinners are justified by faith, and Christians by works.” (Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All*, 317)

- DISCUSS the statement, “We are saved by the grace of Christ and our obedience to him.” **NOTE:** In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus tells the parable of a servant who works super hard, but no matter how hard he works he's only doing what he's supposed to. He's not gaining points to make up for shortcomings. It's just not possible. If our obedience is part of the equation, we put more faith in ourselves than in Christ.

We often have a fear of grace. Rather than embracing grace we have a nagging fear that it will lead to anarchy. That sin will multiply amid “anything goes”. That's not grace, it's a perversion of grace. Paul addressed this in Romans 6:1. So let's get over it. Grace does not promote or encourage sin... it forgives it.

- When have you seen grace in action? When have you seen it exercised at Lawson Road?

**BUT there is such a thing as CHEAP GRACE. (handout p1 of Cost)**

Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 44-45. “Instead of following Christ, let the Christian enjoy the consolations of his grace! That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

*Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*

- Grace = “unmerited favour” – broad, ambiguous, impersonal. It says that Christ died for sin, but doesn't say “Christ died for the lie I told last week.” The less I can personalize my faith the less costly it is. Cheap grace requires no contrition; we need not even have a desire to be *delivered* from our sins, just forgiven.”

God's grace is personal. Read Philippians 2:8 then, Walker, *Costly Grace*, p25-26. “Did Jesus die so we could follow a doctrine? ...”

- We see a prime example of cheap grace in the ease that anyone in a “Christian nation” can call themselves Christian. The entry bar is low or nonexistent.
- How would you summarise the difference between “free grace” and “cheap grace”?

- How does this influence the way we present the Gospel to people and our expectations of new (and not so new) Christians?
- Should people be required to put the same thought into conversion as they do marriage? (See Lk 14:25-33) If a couple just showed up at your church wanting to get married, wouldn't you want to have a pretty serious conversation first? It's possible that in many ways churches have become the spiritual equivalent of a Las Vegas wedding chapel.

Cf Psalm 51:1-4, 10

# Costly Grace

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

23 January, 2013

## **God's Grace Costs Us ~~Something~~ Everything.**

MATTHEW 13:44-46; The Pearl of Great Price – Costly grace will prompt us to give up everything to receive it.  
MATTHEW 5:27-30; Pluck out Your Eye – A person will cut off their hand to ensure they receive costly grace.  
MATTHEW 7:7-8; Ask, Seek, Knock – Costly grace requires some effort on our part to receive it.

## **God's Grace Cost Him.**

1 CORINTHIANS 6:20; “*Bought with a price*”

ROMANS 6:3,6-9; Grace = baptized in Christ Jesus; Cost = baptized into his death.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; Jesus humbled himself to the point of death.

JOHN 12:23-26; A grain of wheat must die to bring a harvest.

ROMANS 6:20-22 Grace means we freely become slaves. We gain the freedom to give up our freedom. Then we realize that our prior freedom was only an illusion anyway.

*“One way to distinguish between grace and mercy is that grace costs while mercy does not. Mercy says, “I won’t press charges.” Grace says, “I not only won’t press charges, I’ll pay for your rehab program.” (Walker, Costly Grace, p33)*

Costly grace is intimately linked to discipleship. Accepting costly grace means accepting the call to follow Jesus.

## **Grace is a transforming power.**

“Grace allows people to make choices and assumes they’ll make the best choice. Grace is free and flowing and unencumbered by guilt or shame, or fear, for true grace says, “I know all about you, and I still love you with a godly acceptance.” eg. John 4 – Woman at the well. (Walker, *Costly Grace*, p32) How did the grace Jesus showed the woman transform her? How did it transform the disciples? What did Jesus’ grace cost the disciples?

READ Philippians 3:7-11. The whole passage describes costly grace. How has God’s grace transformed Paul? Particularly discuss, “How do v10-11 illustrate costly grace?”

## **Grace Helps us Become Other-Centered**

When we try to give grace to ourselves, it can only be cheap grace. We rationalize our behavior and decide it wasn’t a sin. Or we maintain the delusion that “we’re not that bad”. We tell ourselves that “nobody’s perfect”. We comfort ourselves with the reminder that “God will forgive me”. We find reasons to avoid dramatic transformation. We begin to think that Jesus died for my sins, instead of Jesus died for me.

Grace is not a feeling. We can’t keep it to ourselves. For grace to exist, it must be given. If we cannot give grace to ourselves, we must give it to others. How does Philippians 2:1-4 encourage us to be gracious? (Consider also Matt. 5:9-12 and Matt. 5:38-48)

# Costly Grace – Quiz

---

## Match the Pairs

<b>COSTLY</b>	<b>GRACE</b>
If we died with Christ	...and the result is eternal life.
Sell what you have, give it to the poor	God so loved the world
You have become slaves of God	It is better
even death on a cross	Therefore God exalted him
...he gave his only begotten son	Freely you have received
Cut your hand off and throw it away.	...you shall have treasure in heaven.
Those who are persecuted	...theirs is the kingdom of heaven
Flee from sexual immorality	...you were washed, you were sanctified
...freely give	...you were bought
And that's what some of you were	...we will also live with him.

**Bonus Points if you find the Scripture Reference**

# Disciples Obey (Single-Focused Obedience)

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

30 January, 2013

## SUMMARY SO FAR

**Free Grace:** Grace offered freely to us by God, but it cost Jesus his life. It is free because of the cross.

**(Fake) Cheap Grace:** “Grace without the cross”. Forgiveness & eternal life without discipleship, without the call to follow.

**(For Real) Costly Grace:** Grace that calls/inspires us to give up everything to obtain it. (Matt 13:44-46)

## READ Matthew 19:16-22. (*Cost of Discipleship*, 70-76)

1. RYR approaches Jesus seeking a theological discussion regarding eternal life with a rabbi.
  - a. Jesus confronts him with the authority of God. This isn't a whimsical question.
2. Unwilling simply to obey Jesus and go “keep the commandments” the RYR again turns to theory. Of all the commandments, which ones must I keep to get eternal life? (What are the salvation issues?) He implies an assumption that he can pick and choose which commands to obey.
  - a. Jesus refuses to keep the conversation at a theoretical level. He challenges the life and behavior of the RYR. “Go and obey the commandments.” (*There is only one thing Jesus takes seriously, and that is, that it is high time the young man began to hear the commandment and obey it.*)
3. Consider this about his 3<sup>rd</sup> statement. He has kept all the commandments, but yet he wonders about eternal life. “*He thinks, that cannot be all God wants of him, there must be something more, some extraordinary and unique demand, and this is what he wants to do.*”
  - a. Jesus’ “commandment is plain and straightforward: “Follow me.”
  - b. “*First the young man must go and sell all that he has and give to the poor, and then come and follow. Discipleship is the end, voluntary poverty the means.*
  - c. “*The life of discipleship is not the hero-worship we would pay to a good master, but obedience to the Son of God.*”

For this man the call to discipleship involved letting go of his possessions. For others that same letting go could become a source of pride. “The choice Jesus requires isn't about the young man's possessions; it's about the things that possess him.” (Walker 48)

## READ Luke 10:25-37.

### READ (or reference) John 4:1-29

Notice that in all 3 of these conversations Jesus relentlessly works his way down to specifics. He's not interested in theoretical discussion. All three begin with a discussion of principle. When Jesus refuses to get drawn into the theoretical the person switches tack by attempting to ask a specific question they assume is ambiguous and thus equally theoretical. Jesus rejects the assumption of ambiguity and simply demands obedience (implied in John 4): obedience to the command, and obedience to the call to follow him.

(NOTE: possibly print all three accounts and have groups analyse them to see if they identify the above pattern. Ask, where does the conversation start? Where does it end? How does Jesus get it there?)

We also face the temptation to avoid obedience because the commands don't fit within our “principles”. Or, the specifics can't possibly mean what the face value demands. “We must maintain that the paradoxical interpretation

of the commandments of Jesus always includes the literal interpretation, for the very reason that our aim is not to set up a law, but to proclaim Christ.” (Cost, 84)

*Legalism, on the one hand, establishes biblical principles as law, eliminating the need for intimacy with Jesus. Cheap grace, on the other hand, employs biblical principles as guidelines, eliminating the responsibility to adhere to the commands of Christ in any and all situations. The point is, we should never let a list of rules or principles come between us and our intimate relationship with him. (Walker, 56)*

### **Matthew 19:16-22**

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

<sup>17</sup> “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

<sup>18</sup> “Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, <sup>19</sup> honor your father and mother,<sup>[c]</sup> and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[d]</sup>”

<sup>20</sup> “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

<sup>21</sup> Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

<sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

### **Luke 10:25-37**

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

<sup>27</sup> He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’<sup>[c]</sup>; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[d]</sup>”

<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

<sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii<sup>[e]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

# Discipleship & the Cross

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

13 February, 2013

## KEY TEXT: Mark 8:31-38

Start by asking for “Things NOT to say to someone who’s suffering.” (death, lost job, bad health prognosis)

### What Does Jesus Say About Suffering? READ Mark 8:31-38

Last week we saw Jesus steer conversations from the theoretical to points requiring decisions. This week we begin with a decision. Even when speaking to the Twelve at this point in his ministry he begins with, “*if a person is to follow me...*” Jesus never coerces his followers.

NOTICE: There are two elements to Jesus’ statement in v31: Suffering & Rejection. (**Isaiah 53:3**) The rejection ensures that the suffering doesn’t bring him glory. Suffering is not an end.

Peter reflects our society’s impatience with suffering. We live in a technological age where there’s an expectation that every discomfort can be solved. (And over time our definition of suffering becomes more and more trivial. Can you think of examples of “trivial suffering”?) Peter says to Jesus, “You don’t need to die, no one will reject you, suffering isn’t necessary.” “*Suffering and rejection are laid upon Jesus as a divine necessity, and every attempt to prevent it is the work of the devil.*” (Bonhoeffer, 87)

Jesus’ call for us to “take up our cross” is a call to suffering and rejection.

*Jesus isn’t speaking about the watered-down sort of cross-bearing we so readily accept today, where we speak of the obnoxious neighbor, the dwindling asset, or the occasional migraine as daily crosses we must bear. Bonhoeffer notes that comparing the standard ‘trials and tribulations’ of life with the bloody death of Jesus reduces his cross to an “every day calamity” and suggests the gospel is nothing more than a means to feeling good about our circumstances. Certainly we’re meant to bear the obnoxious shortcomings of others, the things that annoy us about them. But when Jesus says we must bear our cross daily, he means we must bear the sins of others just as he bore our sins. (Walker, 62.)*

“*Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian’s duty to bear.*” (Bonhoeffer, 90) I think it’s easy to understand how forgiving caused Christ suffering. How does forgiving cause us suffering?

**Galatians 6:1-2;** Bearing burdens is connected to “restore one another gently”. Forgiving and helping someone overcome sin can cause suffering because we now join someone else’s battle.

**James 5:15-16;** (Without getting into the whole “oil, elders, health, sickness, sin, confession” discussion...) This verse at least says that churches can be places where we confess sins to each other and pray for each other’s forgiveness. In this way we “bear the sins of others” by praying for their forgiveness and encouraging them in their struggles. It complements the church culture described in Gal 6:1-2 very well.

**2 Cor. 1:3-7** Note v5 how we suffer with Christ for the benefit of others. Again, a bearing the cross mentality.

We need to remember that grace (therefore forgiveness) is costly. Grace is the giving of something. If nothing else a gracious person will at times receive criticism from those who believe a stronger action is required. **Why is forgiving difficult? What is the cost associated with it?**

This is a difficult concept and maybe not the only way of understanding “take up your cross” but I like the connection between Jesus’ suffering and our cross-bearing. Jesus connects His suffering with his disciples’ and I think it’s a good way for us to think about it. Forgiveness is at least one important element of our cross bearing.

# Discipleship & the Cross – Part 2

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

20 February, 2013

**KEY TEXT: Mark 8:31-38**

## **Suffering for God is Redemptive**

Everyone's cross is different but it's the same. It's a call to obedience. A call to follow. A call to die. The rich young ruler was called to sell everything while Luther was called to leave the monastery. Some are called to martyrdom and others are tempted just as much as they can bear.

*“As we learn to think like Jesus, Bonhoeffer says our perspective on suffering and rejection will change from fearful avoidance to redemptive endurance.” (Walker, 63) “To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity.” (Bonhoeffer, 88)*

God is not surprised when we suffer! (The promise of suffering is a grace, because it means we're not shocked by it.)

“If suffering and rejection lead to intimacy with the Father, could it be the inability of so many of us to go deeper with God lies in our fear of suffering and rejection? Is it possible our avoidance of these things keeps us in the shallow waters of discipleship?” (Walker, 63)

## **READ Matt 26:69-75**

- Why did Peter lie? What was he trying to avoid?
- How did avoiding suffering impact his relationship with Jesus?
- How are you tempted to deny your relationship with Jesus?
  - *If you don't make a confession of faith within the first 3 times of meeting someone, you probably never will. – Stan Granberg*

## **READ Matt. 26:38-42**

- How does Jesus' attitude differ from Peter's?
- What does Jesus have in his life that Peter's missing that allows him to have this different approach?

“The cup of suffering will indeed pass from him – but only by his drinking it. The suffering will pass as he accepts it. That is the only path to victory.” “Suffering means being cut off from God. Therefore those who live in communion with him cannot really suffer.” **Heb 12:2, Rev 21:4**

*“The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” (Bonhoeffer, 89)*

*“Within the fellowship of Christ's suffering, suffering is overcome by suffering and becomes the way to communion with God.” (Bonhoeffer, 92) **2 Cor. 4:10-11***

Jesus does not so much meet us in our suffering, as we meet him in his. (**John 13:15-17**)

# Loyal Disciples

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

27 February, 2013

**KEY TEXT: Luke 14:26**

## Discipleship Isolates Us

This seems like a strange concept at first glance. Jesus demands undiluted loyalty from his disciples. This is akin to God's "jealousy" in the Old Testament. At conversion, we are baptized "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3). Can we be immersed in Christ, and in direct contact with anything else? **Hebrews 12:1** tells us to let go of anything that's holding us back.

*"The cost of discipleship is that from now on the only way you can related to anyone is as "one with Christ." Your ability to love others, to respond to them as eternal beings, comes from your connection with Jesus (1 John 4:11-12)." (Walker, 70)*

Jesus' demand in Luke 14:26 seems extremely harsh, particularly throwing in the word "hate". But compare it to one's wedding vows... When we "forsake all others" our relationships with our parents, siblings, friends, hobbies, and career all change. Our spouse becomes the highest priority in our lives. When any of those other worthy responsibilities assume higher responsibility than our spouse the marriage relationship suffers. We then go through a similar shuffling of the deck when a child is born. Given this comparison, is Jesus' demand more reasonable? How is it different? How is it similar?

## Wearing Jesus' Glasses

Our immersion into Jesus or "oneness with Jesus" not only transform our loyalty, they also transform the way we interact with the world. Bonhoeffer (98) points out that **1 John 2:15** instructs us "Love not the world", while **John 3:16** tells us that "God so loved the world..." How can we reconcile these contradictory ideas? The answer is that we can only love the world in the way that God does. How would you describe God's love for the world? Part of the answer is that he seeks its transformation or reconciliation, his love won't accept its current state.

"When we buy into cheap grace, we assume, since we are forgiven, that we can now go back and relate to others as if we are not connected to Jesus." (Walker, 71) We think that we are still free moral agents. We are not and we cannot.

Abraham discovered this reality in two ways. First, God called him to leave family. He called him to individual faith, to abandon everything (**Genesis 12:1**). But he also gave him a new vision as he could travel around Canaan knowing God was going to give this land to his descendents. God's call on his life changed the way he viewed the world. This was a sudden call similar to the call the Gospel makes on a drug dealer. "Come follow me" and the movement is obvious.

Second, God called Abraham to sacrifice his son. **READ Genesis 22:1-14** This break is less obvious, in fact, it's invisible... at least initially. Abraham and Isaac came down the mountain together, just as they'd gone up it. But they'd met God at the top of it and now their relationship was forever different. They now saw each other through their experience of meeting God. Surely it transformed their relationship, but in a way that only time would reveal.

Similarly, our encounter with Christ changes the way we view people and the world. Immersed in Christ, everything looks different.

**Close by asking people, "How has your encounter with grace changed your view of the world?"**

# The Beatitudes

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

13 March, 2013

**KEY TEXT: Matthew 5:1-12**

## **3 WAYS TO READ THE BEATITUDES**

**Teaching Note:** I wasn't really excited by Bonhoeffer's treatment of the Beatitudes, although it does provide a good example for how the theology of the first section can be applied to a particular passage of Scripture. I prefer Woodroof's approach (*Walk This Way*). My main point in teaching this class is to demonstrate how our perspective impacts the way we read Scripture. None of these approaches are wrong, they perhaps just contain messages we need to hear at different points in our lives. (This page and the next one may be most helpful as handouts.) I'm sure other commentaries also present other ways of applying this passage.

### **1. FACE VALUE**

- This approach encourages us to integrate these traits into our personal lives. It basically has the phrase "in everyday life" attached to the end of each first line.
- It primarily focuses on our interactions with others.
- **Major Positive:** This reading is very practical. It gives us something concrete to work on in our attitudes, thoughts and actions.
- **Limitation:** This way of reading can turn the Beatitudes into a checklist. It also doesn't always make sense. It's not true that "those who mourn" are blessed more than other people, or that all of them receive some sort of special comfort.

### **2. BONHOEFFER**

- Bonhoeffer's approach ties each of the Beatitudes to Jesus' call, "Follow me".
- Like #1 Bonhoeffer still makes a very practical application of each of the Beatitudes, but fits it within the framework of discipleship and separation from the world.
- **Major Positive:** It fits the context of Jesus teaching his newly called apostles. It also provides a consistent way to apply the message of the Beatitudes.
- **Limitation:** If the predetermined "filter" is wrong, the whole thing falls over. It's a bit arbitrary. For instance, "*By 'mourning' Jesus, of course, means doing without what the world calls peace and prosperity.*" Really? Of course? That's the obvious meaning?

### **3. CHIASMUS**

- Like the 10 Commandments the Beatitudes begin describing our relationship with God and move to our relationship with people. In the Beatitudes it's an even split 4/4.
- This is a more academic approach as it requires an understanding of ancient literary structures.
- Think of this style like climbing a mountain. 4 steps up to God. 4 steps back to your everyday life.
- **Major Positive:** It fits the context. It considers the literary structure. It lays out a path of discipleship.
- **Limitation:** I think it requires considerable diligence to apply this in life. It seems it would be easier to leave as an academic novelty.

# The Beatitudes

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

13 March, 2013

KEY TEXT: Matthew 5:1-12

Beatitude	Bonhoeffer	Woodroof
<i>Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</i>	<b>Dependence on Jesus:</b> Jesus' disciples "have no spiritual power, experience or knowledge... For his sake they have lost all... even their own selves. Yet, the kingdom dawns on them."	We always begin discipleship at the end of ourselves. God must do for us what we can't do for ourselves.
<i>Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.</i>	<b>Mourn for the world:</b> "We'll see a world in need of a savior; people in desperate need of a loving Shepherd – and that should encourage us as we make our break with the world in order to join Jesus on his mission to save this world." (Walker, 80)	Mourning is the realization that failure and sin and guilt can only be addressed by treating them with the seriousness they deserve. Mourning is a killing pain that demands the death either of the sinner or the sin.
<i>Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.</i>	<b>Renouncing Rights:</b> "...they renounce every right of their own and live for the sake of Jesus Christ. Those who now possess [the earth] by violence and injustice shall lose it, and those who here have utterly renounced it, who were meek to the point of the cross, shall rule the new earth."	Meekness is a posture we adopt in the presence of God: humble and submissive. It's bowing the knee to God. It's the surrender of self-will to God's will.
<i>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.</i>	<b>Righteousness is from God:</b> "Not only do the followers of Jesus renounce their rights, <i>they renounce their own righteousness</i> too."	The longing to be positively holy. Jesus doesn't ask if we can <i>define</i> righteousness but whether we <i>desire</i> it. RISK: starting or stopping here.
<i>Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.</i>	<b>Renounced Dignity:</b> Jesus fills us with an irresistible love for the downtrodden, the sick, the wretched, the wronged, the outcast and all who are tortured with anxiety. Jesus calls us to be like him, to reflect the kingdom of heaven, where none of us will be outcasts...."	<u>Now we start considering our interactions with those around us.</u> Mercy is more than forgiveness. Mercy is compassion. It is the state of mind and the condition of heart that permits us to be moved by the desperate souls who disturb our comfortable lives with their insistent cries for help.
<i>Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.</i>	<b>Surrender:</b> The pure in heart have a child-like simplicity like Adam before the fall... if they rely solely upon Jesus, then his word purifies their hearts. They shall see God whose hearts have become a reflection of the image of Christ.	Psalms 24:3-4, James 4:4, 8. Pure motives. Integrity. Genuineness. Sincerity. Transparent. Are we on the inside what we appear to be on the outside.
<i>Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.</i>	<b>Called to Peace:</b> "When he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only <i>have</i> peace, but <i>make</i> it."	As we come down the mountain, we apply mercy and purity to the crowd, but peace applies first to our friends, family & fellowship.
<i>Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</i>	<b>Offense:</b> Jesus calls us into a community of believers, where Bonhoeffer says, "the poorest, meekest and most sorely tired of all men is to be found – on the cross at Golgotha." <u>With Jesus we lose it all, but with Jesus we find it all.</u>	To hear people you trust slander and malign you, and to respond with graciousness. To see your credibility undermined and your witness ridiculed, yet to refuse yourself instead to God, you embody the character Jesus wants to build in his disciples.

# The Visible Community

Lawson Rd Church of Christ, Rochester, NY.

20 March, 2013

## KEY TEXT: Matthew 5:13-16

*“The Beatitudes emphasize the change produced in the character of disciples who are transformed by the arrival of the kingdom. [Living as salt and light] in the world requires us to be alert to the stark difference between our discipleship and the world’s values and habits, and to live out the kingdom values summarized in the Beatitudes and revealed more fully in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.”* (Wilkins, NIVAC: Matthew, 225)

**“You ARE the salt of the earth.”** Bonhoeffer emphasizes the point that we do not “have” the light, or “teach” the light, or “know” the salt. As Jesus’ disciples we are the salt. He doesn’t say we “will be” or “have been” the salt, but we ARE. By virtue of being a disciple, we are salt. We are not the salt because of our actions, but because of who we are. Because we have absorbed the character of Christ as laid out in the Beatitudes. Because of our connection to Jesus.

**What are the virtues of salt that Jesus might be referencing when calling his disciples “salt”?** Possible Answers: *Salt in the ancient world represented many things: a preservative; flavor enhancer; essential part of diet; even a fertilizer, (also negatives of salt water, and rust).* Given the wide variety of answers, how do we know which one is correct? So it’s perhaps most likely that Jesus here refers simply to salt and light as something that is “good and necessary for everyday life”, rather than one particular application.

**Do you think the world views Christians as “good and necessary for life”?** What do they need to know to change their opinions?

Another element of this passage is that the salt/disciples are IN the world. Our saltiness includes, but is not limited to, the fundamental Gospel message.

**How can we as spiritual salt lose our flavor?** One way our saltiness is lost, is when it never leaves the saltshaker. Another is when we compromise the role of Jesus in favor of humanitarianism.

**“You ARE the light of the world.”** READ 2 Cor. 4:6; Phil 2:15-16; John 8:12 Note in each of these that although we ARE the light, in another sense we’re not. Our light comes only from our proximity to God.

Again – Mission: Bonhoeffer notes, *“Since you are that light, you can no longer remain hidden, even if you want to.”* The city on a hill is a discipleship community. It’s the collective glow of our individual lights. **What is the collective glow of our church? Are we a city on a hill, or many candles across the landscape?** (Consider John 13:34-35 as much as we individually need to be salt and light, we can’t “love one another” unless we’re together.)

Note that Jesus says we are to let our light shine so that others can see our good works, but those good works are seen, not to show us to be good, but to bring praise to our Father in heaven. (Eph 2:10 *Created for good works...*)

Our good works do not reveal God; Jesus simply said others will see our good works and glorify God as a result.

**SUMMARY:** This illustration is intrinsically linked to the Beatitudes. When we become a disciple of Christ, when we absorb his character as described in the Beatitudes, we become salt and light. We then have the responsibility to be salt in light *in the world*.