

## Week 4 - “Salvation by Allegiance Alone” (Ephesians 2.1-10)

We bring all of our selves to everything we interpret, including assumptions we have based on the influence of the cultures around us. When we come to this week’s text, Ephesians 2.1-10, many of us have been influenced by Modern, Western culture, which has conditioned us to understand the concept of “faith” as opposed to “works”. This is because of the view developed since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth-century. But, we want to understand faith in Christ as it was meant in its own context, and then apply that to our context today.

### Group Discussion Questions

#### Read Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 5

- Paul uses a vivid metaphor in the first five verses of this chapter, picturing people as the walking dead. This might make some of us think of zombie movies or shows. **Do you like zombie movies or shows? If so, what’s one of your favorites?**
- One of the reasons why some people like zombie movies or films, is because they are a way of talking about what makes us human or alive, and what causes us to think of others as inhuman. **What do you think it means to be human? What do you think it means to be alive? What do you think causes us to think of others as inhuman?**
- **What’s the difference between being fully alive and merely existing?**
- Paul talks about the “ruler of the kingdom of the air,” “the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” **Who or what do you think Paul is talking about? What’s at stake in our answer of this question?**
- **Why does Paul say it is that God has made us alive with Christ?**

#### Read Ephesians 2, verses 6 through 10

In the second half of this passage, Paul talks about grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor and seminary professor when Nazism took power in Germany. He saw many of his fellow German Christians embrace Nazism, even though it was clearly opposed to the Way of Jesus. He wrote about “cheap grace” in a book entitled *Discipleship*.

“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[...] Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

- **What has been your experience with the subject of grace? What is the danger of what Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace”?**
- In Protestant theology, “faith” is often contrasted with “works.” Martin Luther has serious objections to some of the practices in the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic church. He saw “works” as synonymous with things like buying indulgences. **In Paul’s first century context, what were the “works” Paul is talking about?**

- Some think that Paul was opposed to Jesus-disciples doing “good works,” even though verse 10 says Jesus-disciples were created to do them. **Why do you think some Christians today think “good works” aren’t good? What happens if Christians think “good works” are either to be avoided or not essential to faith in Christ?**
- Paul says that people are joined with God (saved) by grace through “faith”. But faith is a word that has come to mean many different things. **What has your experience been with “faith”? What’s problematic about understanding faith as belief in correct doctrine? What’s problematic about understanding faith as optimism, a particular theory of atonement, or intellectual assent?**
- Matthew Bates, author of *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, writes:

“Although contemporary Christian culture tends to separate personal salvation and discipleship, allegiance is where they finally meet—and they don’t just meet, they embrace. [...] A person is not first ‘saved’ by ‘faith’ in Jesus’s death for sins and then, once that is secured, plugged into a discipleship program as an optional extra in hope that he or she might ‘grow’. On the contrary, a person is first saved when she or he becomes a disciple by declaring allegiance to Jesus the king—that is, when a person agrees to submit obediently to Jesus’s wise and sovereign rule so as to take up his way of life.”

- Bates sees discipleship not as an extra, tangentially connected to salvation, but the discipleship in the Way of Jesus as what saves us. What has been your experience with “discipleship”? Why is it problematic to separate “salvation” from “discipleship”? **Why do you think we’re tempted to compartmentalize our lives? Why do you think we’re tempted to place our trust in people or things other than God?**