

Bonhoeffer - Agent of Grace

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before Him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything. And this is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as He has commanded us. Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. 1 John 3:16-20, 23-24 ESV

When an oppressive government takes control of a nation some of the first freedoms taken away are freedom of speech and the right to worship freely. In this true story, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had the opportunity to visit the United States. Although his friends encouraged him to stay and be a minister in the US during the war, he chose to return to help the German people even though he knew it could cost him his life. When the Nazis hung their flags in his church, Dietrich took them down and continued to preach.

What do you think would make a man return to a dangerous place when he could choose safety?

Bonhoeffer said, "We owe it to God and ourselves to believe in the future." What kind of future would the world have if there were no longer any morals or rules or standards of right and wrong? If every person chose to think only of his or her own safety, the world will soon be ruled by tyrants. If the survival of the fittest becomes true, the biggest bullies always win. God has called us to a different kind of life. He wants us to listen to Him and to trust that He will work in our behalf. What should a moral person do when living in a very immoral society? How can we stand up for God's morals and values today?

In the middle of the war, Bonhoeffer said, "I'm thirsting for kindness and neighborliness". Kindness knits people together. Meanness and cruelty divides people. We trust people who are kind to us. When people are cruel and mean we don't know who we can trust. When people are hurt deeply they often withdraw into themselves not believing that they can trust anyone.

Who can you trust? Can people trust you? What are some ways we can help bring people together?

The Nazis arrested those who would not take the oath of allegiance to Hitler. They closed churches and made it illegal to teach the Christian faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds. Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough for us to find our way back?"

Do you think our country can find its way back to the values and morals of God's word? How can we help?

Bonhoeffer said, "We'll need more than just religion in the formal sense. We'll need faith with Jesus Christ in the center. Christianity means sharing each other's pain."

How does sharing each other's pain help? What difference does it make when we know that someone cares about us and the struggles we are facing?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew that his earthly life was not as important as his eternal life. He was willing to live out his convictions, putting himself in jeopardy to try to free his nation from the tyranny of an unjust ruler. At the time of his death he knew that it was not the end of his life, but rather the beginning of forever with Christ. Bonhoeffer left behind a strong foundation of faith that has inspired many people.

Dear Lord, thank You for the many people who have bravely lived their lives so that we might be free. Help us to stand for what is right, even when those around us make wrong choices. Give strength to those who are suffering and victory to all who want what is good and right. Defeat the plans of those who choose evil. Grant Your people hope and peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.