



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 6:59-71

- Jesus “said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

60 Therefore, when many of his disciples heard this, they said, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?”

61 Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, asked them, “Does this offend you?”

62 Then what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

63 The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn’t help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

64 But there are some among you who don’t believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe and the one who would betray him.)

65 He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father.”

66 From that moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him.

67 So Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?”

68 Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.

69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

70 Jesus replied to them, “Didn’t I choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.”

71 He was referring to Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son, one of the Twelve, because he was going to betray him. (John 6:59-71 CSB)

SUMMARY:

- Jesus fed 5,000 people with bread, then proclaimed himself as the Bread of Life, offering his flesh for the salvation of the world. This produced a sifting: the crowd was disappointed, the Jews took offense, and numerous disciples abandoned Jesus. Amidst this turmoil, the Twelve Apostles, led by Peter, remained steadfast. The latent unbelief of many disciples was exposed. It’s a cautionary tale.

Not all who deserted were “false believers”; the ‘dropout disciples’ included genuine Christians. This holds true even today. We witness believers, including pastors, who stop following Jesus. Some even deny Christ, becoming ‘exvangelicals,’ no longer identifying or living as Christians. Peter’s confession during this crisis highlights crucial principles to remaining faithful, devoted disciples over the long run. Let’s explore and apply the lessons in our own lives.

I. Jesus’ Discourse: The ‘Bread of Life’ vs. ‘Death-producing Bread’ (6:22-59)

A. The Crowd’s Constituents

- “The reader must assume that the crowd to whom Jesus has been speaking [in the discourse] includes at least 3 groups: [1.] those from the crowd, [2.] members of ‘the Jews,’ & [3.] Jesus’ own disciples [including ‘the Twelve’ (6:67)]. Thus Jesus’ audience consists of those who are sympathetic to his words & those who are not.” [Christopher Skinner, *Jesus & Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, p. 90]

B. The Crowd’s Challenge

- “What miraculous sign will you perform, so...we may...believe you? What will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness...as it’s written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’.” (6:30-31)

- “6:31 is [the crowd’s] rhetorical challenge to Jesus, ‘tempting’ him of produce more bread by those who did not ‘see’ (perceive) his signs (6:26).” [Paul N. Anderson, *Christology of the 4th Gospel*, p. 59]

- “The crowd’s request [6:30-31] was a serious...challenge to Jesus...given the Exodus experience...[of] 40 years under...Moses...[when] people were freely fed with Manna...‘bread from heaven.’ With this behind their minds, why would they switch their loyalty from Moses to Jesus? Moses...the prophet-king (6:14-14) had...deliver[ed] providing...security and sustenance.” [Francis Machingura, *Messianic Feeding*, p. 147]

C. Jesus’ Response—The Choice: Life-producing vs. Death-producing Bread

- 6:27 paraphrased: “Work not for food that is death-producing, but for the food that is life-producing – eternally, which the Son of Man will give you...” – Paul Anderson

- “The life-producing food that Jesus gives and is [stands] in contrast to death-producing alternatives.” [Paul N. Anderson, “Authentic Faith,” T. Thatcher (ed.) *What We’ve Heard from the Beginning*, p. 258]

- “I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, & they died. 50 This is the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a person may eat from it and not die.” (6:48-50)

1. Death-producing Food

- “The [Israelites’] death-producing cravings for flesh in Num. 11 [quail]...are in John’s narrative equated with the crowd’s cravings for more loaves [6:26]...[Plus] manna is now considered death-producing, for the forefathers ate manna and died, but...the ‘Bread’ which Jesus gives [yields] life eternal (6:58) .” [Paul N. Anderson, *Christology of the 4th Gospel*, pp. 203-4]

- “Jesus’ association of manna with death-producing food [6:49, 58]...is striking...& unique. For the first time in the history...of the manna motif within Jewish/Christian writings...manna [is] regarded as inferior to another kind of bread...the ‘bread of life’...given by God, received by believers, and ingested by those who would be his disciples (6:58, 63).” [Paul N. Anderson, *Christology of the 4th Gospel*, p. 59]

- “The bread given to the Israelites in the wilderness & touted by the leaders of the Synagogue was death-producing, yet the bread of life by Jesus gives eternal life. The disciples who choose to leave were representative of Jews who...‘kicked themselves out’.” [Francis Machingura, Messianic Feeding, p 155]

2. The Choice

- “In John 6:27-71...Jesus invites his audience to choose the food that leads to life (which he gives) over food that leads to death...The exhortation [is] to chose the way of life—the life-producing food that Jesus offers versus its lesser alternatives.” [Paul N. Anderson, “John & Qumran,” in Tom Thatcher (ed.) John, Qumran, & the Dead Sea Scrolls, pp. 44-45]

II. The Sifting of Jesus’ Disciples John 6:60-71

A. Sifting of the Crowd

- “John 6 begins with a huge crowd that needs to be fed & is interested enough to track down Jesus across the lake, but soon becomes disenchanted & grumbling. Even many of Jesus’ disciples who stay around through the long sermon, in the end, cannot accept it. At the end of [Jn. 6], only 12 are left, & even one of them will betray Jesus. The direction of John 6 is not, [from a human viewpoint], a promising trajectory. [Jesus isn’t following the playbook of the ‘seeker-sensitive church’].” [Brian Peterson, Commentary on John 6:56-69]
- “John 6...reports the sifting of the crowd of disciples who followed Jesus because of the signs he that did. It’s like ‘Operation Gideon’ (Judg. 7:2-8, where the Lord tells Gideon that he has too many troops & to send most of them home).” [R. Alan Culpepper, John, p. 164]
- “The brutally frank picture of Jesus’ disciples in Jn. 6:60-71 [reflects] the sifting effect of the gospel...Jesus interacts first with a huge crowd (6:2), then with those...persistent enough to follow him to Capernaum (6:22, 25), then with those in the crowd who were becoming hostile to his teaching (‘the Jews’ 6:41, 52), then, with ‘his disciples’ (6:67-69, 70-71). The gospel has always had a sifting effect. Jesus’ first disciples included many who did not believe in him, one who betrayed him, & a few who stayed with him ‘through thick & thin’...because they knew of no...life-giving alternative...Jesus’ approach is not a formula for church growth. It is an uncompromising call to faithful discipleship.” [Lamar Williamson, Preaching John, p. 90]

B. The Sifting of ‘Dropouts’ from the ‘Many Disciples’

- “The 4th Gospel alone records explicitly the presence of ‘drop outs’ from Jesus’ disciples” –Kikuo Matsunaga
- Jn. 6:60-71 “speaks of a sifting of Jesus’ disciples. First there was the scandal over Jesus’ origin & identity (6:41-42), then came the invitation to ‘eat’ Jesus’ flesh and ‘drink’ his blood (6:52). Even many of Jesus’ disciples...find his teaching hard & difficult to accept (6:60)...Many of his disciples reject him & become ‘non-disciples’—no longer following him (6:66).” [Cornelis Bennema, Excavating John’s Gospel, p. 82]
- “A major sifting...takes place among Jesus’ disciples, & many of them abandon him. The Twelve, Jesus’ inner circle, however make a confession of adequate faith & a commitment to discipleship... Discipleship involves coming to Jesus & then remaining as a follower.” [C. Bennema, Excavating John’s Gospel, p. 84]
- “The plot...becomes also a plot of ‘sifting.’ Some find Jesus’ point of view offensive (6:61) because it’s difficult & unsettling to ‘normal’ or ‘traditional’ ways of viewing the world. Others see in Jesus’ sayings ‘words of eternal life’ & follow him (6:68). They come because it is granted by the Father’

(6:65). Yet, even within ‘the Twelve’ there is ‘a devil’ who will betray Jesus.” [James L. Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, p. 183]

- Jn. 6...clarifies Jesus’ identity as...the Bread of Life, but the people turn away from him...At the [chapter’s] end...Jesus is left with only the Twelve, & one of them will betray him. It’s another failed [recognition scene], except that Peter [confesses Jesus as ‘the Holy One...’] (6:69).” [R. Alan Culpepper, *Designs for the Church in... John*, pp. 208-9]

C. Jesus Challenges ‘the Twelve’— ‘Do you want to leave too?’ (6:67)

- “In 6:60-71 there is an increasing specificity...regarding Jesus’ disciples. Two groups emerge...[1.] one group simply ‘many of his disciples,’ & [2.] another group...‘the Twelve’. The former represents a falling away on account of Jesus’ message. The latter represents acceptance of his message, mission, and person.” [Christopher Skinner, *Jesus & Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, p. 88 #40]

III. The Disciples’ Response to Jesus, the Life-giving Bread (6:60-66)

A. Jesus—the Skleros Logos, the Difficult Word

- Jesus “has himself become the Skleros Logos, [the Difficult Word] for these departing disciples & in many ways, for the reader.”— Christopher Skinner

- After Jesus’ ‘Bread of life discourse, “many of his disciples say ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’ [6:60]. The phrase translated ‘hard teaching’ is skleros logos. It’s...a perfect title for Jesus who...is called God’s Logos. In Jn. 5-10, Jesus is truly the Skleros Logos, the Difficult Word. He is not an easy person to grasp, either...[for] comprehension or...apprehension.” [Mark Stibbe, *John’s Gospel*, p. 24]

B. The ‘Many Disciples’ Response (6:59-66)

- “60 Then many of his disciples, when they heard these things, said, “This is a difficult saying! Who can understand it?” 61 When Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining about this, he said to them, ‘Does this cause you to be offended?...64 There are some of you who do not believe.’...66 [Because of] this many of his disciples quit following him and did not accompany him any longer.” (6:60-61, 64, 66)

- “Once the [‘bread of life’] discourse has ended, another dialogue begins & clearly emphasizes two distinct responses to Jesus’ teaching & self-revelation...[Jesus] is now addressing...‘many of his disciples’ (6:60, 61, 66)...The response of...these ‘many disciples’ [described] as ‘grumbling’ (6:61), finding Jesus’ words ‘hard’ & being offended by them (6:60-61), not believing (6:64), and finally turning back and no longer walking with Jesus (6:66) is...puzzling.” [Nicolas Farelly, *Disciples in the 4th Gospel*, p. 45]

C. “This is a difficult saying!”—Disciples; Jesus: “Does this offend you?” (6:60-61)

- “The disciples describe Jesus’ words as ‘difficult’ (6:60) to accept or believe. The sense of the words being offensive, intolerable, or incredible is conveyed, as the question of Jesus in the next verse implies: ‘Does this offend [or ‘scandalize’] you? (6:61).” [Kevin Quast, *Reading...John*, p. 55]
- “The 4th Gospel alone records explicitly the presence of ‘drop outs’ from Jesus’ disciples (Matsunaga)... [John] reports disciples opting to withdraw from following Jesus: ‘From that moment many of his disciples turned back & no longer accompanied him.’ (6:66). The reason...is the words of Jesus, which the disciples describe as ‘hard’ (6:60). Jesus’ words are ‘hard, harsh, or rough,’ not in the sense of ‘difficult to understand’ but ‘unacceptable, harsh, offensive.’...Compar[e] the Gospel of John to...Mark where no record of the disciples’ retreat is made until the moment of Jesus’ arrest.” [M. Victor M. Kunene, *Communal Holiness in...John*, p 174]

1. *The scandal of the incarnation (6:41-42)*

- The Jews: “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father & mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’? (6:42)
- “The scandal of the 4th Gospel in the [Greek] world was its absolute commitment...that God... became ‘flesh’ in the incarnation (1:14)...John...never lets the reader assume that Jesus lacks humanity...John has another commitment. Again & again the Gospel refers to ‘truth’.” [Gary M. Burge, John, in CA. Evans (ed.) Routledge Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus, p. 241]

2. *The scandal of ‘eating Jesus’ flesh & drinking his blood’ (6:53-57)*

- Jesus: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man & drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 The one who eats my flesh & drinks my blood has eternal life, & I’ll raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, & my blood is true drink. 56 The one who eats my flesh & drinks my blood resides in me, & I in him. 57...I live because of the Father, so the one who consumes [‘chews’] me will live because of me.” (6:53-57 NET)

- “The statement Jesus makes...is understood as shockingly literal by those who hear it: ‘The context makes clear that they [Jesus’ audience] hear Jesus saying something literally obscene (disgusting to the sense): to indulge in cannibalism by consuming his flesh & blood. The offense of the saying triggers the decision by ‘the Jews’ to kill Jesus (cf. 7:1; 5:18) & the desertion of ‘many disciples’ (6:66).” [J. Albert Harrill, “Cannibalistic Language in the 4th Gospel...,” JBL 127.1 (2008) p. 135]

- Jesus’ “language is revolting, attaching an apparent command to break the [Law’s] ban on drinking blood to an even more outrageous one infringing the taboo on leaving exposed (let alone eating) the corpse of a...man...The language...would have struck the audience with considerable impact, but in different ways: it would...place a radically offensive and impassible metaphorical watershed for those who had not...cross[ed] from sign to signified (from manna...to the incarnate Christ), but for those who...think metaphorically on an incarnational base it would have...made good...It would remain a watershed...separating them from those outside [e.g. ‘the Jews’]...” [Ian D. Mackay, John’s Relationship with Mark, pp. 238-9]

3. *The scandal of the way of the cross (6:61-62)*

- Jesus: “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?” (6:61-2)

- “In the 4th Gospel, the ascension of the Son of Man is John[’s] language for Christ’s crucifixion (3:14; 12:34). Jesus returns to the Father via the cross [6:62]. What is more scandalous than...the bread of life discourse? The scandal of the cross.” [Raymond Bystrom, God Among Us: Studies in... John, pp. 126-7]

- “The theme of 6:60-71 is...‘the way of the cross’ a radically new theme begins at 6:51c [‘I’ll give my flesh’]... These verses have...the...motif: the cross...It is the way of the cross which scandalizes the would-be followers of Jesus...This would’ve been abundantly clear to the original audience...Jn. 6... highlight[s] the indispensability of solidarity with Jesus in his suffering & death if one expects to be raised with him on the last day...To follow Jesus is not to escape persecution.” [PN. Anderson, Christology...4th Gosp, pp. 255, 259]

4. *Jesus’ question implies “get over your offense” (6:61-62)*

- “Jesus’ [question]...pushes [the disciples] to overlook their offense & to see the bigger picture of life eternal.” [Douglas C. Estes, Questions of Jesus in John, p. 103]

5. *Jesus’ words—‘Hard Sayings’ or “Spirit & life”?*

- ‘Many disciples’ felt...Jesus’ words were hard (6:60), but he says ‘my words are spirit & are life’

(6:63). This means his words “are the product of the life-giving Spirit,” and “rightly understood,” Jesus’ words in the discourse...he just gave, are the source of life for the one who believes...One cannot feed on Christ without feeding on Christ’s words, for truly believing Jesus cannot be separated from truly believing Jesus’ words (5:46-47).” [DA. Carson, John, p. 302]

IV. Dichotomies— Unbelievers/Believers & Non-disciples/Disciples

- “60 Then many of his disciples...said, “This is a difficult saying! Who can accept it?” 61...Jesus said to them, ‘Does this cause you to be offended?...64There are some of you who do not believe’ ...66 After this many of his disciples quit following him and did not accompany him any longer.” (6:60-61, 64, 66)

- “What’s significant is...discipleship is no longer identical to the category of those who believe”—Kevin Quast

- “A ‘disciple’ is not necessarily a Christian, someone who’s savingly-trusted Jesus & sworn allegiance to him.” —D. A. Carson

A. Unbelief Among Jesus’ Disciples

1. Blurred Distinction between belief/unbelief & disciple/non-disciple

- “Unbelief is not limited to Jesus’ opponents. The introduction...of unbelieving disciples blurs the distinction between ‘the Jews’ [non-believers] & ‘the disciples’.” [Robert Kysar, *Voyages with John*, p. 206]

- “What is significant is that belief in Jesus has become a watershed for eternal life and the category of discipleship is no longer identical to the category of those who believe. Belief inevitably divides the hearers of Jesus into two groups...even among those who are reckoned to be [disciples] there are unbelievers. So, in [John’s] scheme, those who are considered ‘disciples’ may still not have the necessary belief. This evidently could even include members of the Twelve (6:70).” [Kevin Quast, *Peter & Beloved Disciple*, p. 46]

2. “Some of you [‘many disciples’] do not believe”—Jesus

- Jesus’ “statement ‘there are some of you [disciples] who do not believe’ (6:64) is...a revealing description of what was beginning to manifest itself among the disciples: ‘unbelief’ as, fundamentally, the inability & refusal to accept Jesus for who he is. Those whom Jesus is referring to had indeed followed him, were impressed by his words & works, & in that sense had begun to believe in him (cf. 2:23; 7:31; 8:30). But that faith was to suffer shipwreck & would be manifest as unbelief, because they were unable to overcome the offense felt by the flesh at the increasing visibility of the cross.” [Herman Ridderbos, *John*, p. 248]

3. Diverse kinds of Disciples

- “Just as there is faith & faith (2:23-25), so are there disciples & disciples. At the most elementary level, a disciple is someone who is at this point following Jesus, either literally by joining the group that pursued him from place to place, or metaphorically regarding him as the authoritative teacher. Such a ‘disciple’ is not necessarily a ‘Christian,’ someone who has savingly-trusted Jesus & sworn allegiance to him, given by the Father to the Son, drawn by the Father & born again by the Spirit... Only those who ‘continue in his word’ are truly his ‘disciples’ (8:31). The ‘disciples’ described here do not remain in his word; they find it a ‘hard teaching’ & wonder ‘who can accept it’ [6:60]... These ‘disciples’ will not long remain disciples, because they find Jesus’ words intolerable.” [D. A. Carson, *John*, p.]

B. Diagnosing ‘Dropout Disciples’—Unbelieving/False Disciples, Defeated/Secret Believers?

- 1. “Counterfeit converts...They are not Christians & never were Christians.” —Mike Morris*

- “‘Disciple’ can refer to someone who temporarily & loosely identifies with Christ but is not & never was a true convert...For example...many temporary disciples of Christ left Him at one point because of their lack of faith (John 6:64–66)...Many such disciples, counterfeit converts, exist in churches today. They are not Christians & never were Christians.” [Mike Morris, “Lost Balance in Missions Today,” *Great Commission Research Journal*, Vol. 7, #2 (2016) pp. 166-7]

2. *False (‘not genuine’) disciples; “Their initial ‘faith’ was not genuine”–Andreas Kostenberger*

- “Apparent initial belief may in due course turn out to be not genuine faith at all (e.g., 2:23-25; 6:60-71).” [Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Theology of John’s Gospel*, p. 292]
- “Many of these early disciples were not genuine disciples of Christ, for they ‘turned back.’ Their initial ‘faith’ was not genuine & they were perhaps following Jesus only because of the physical benefits he gave, such as healing & multiplying food.” – Andreas J. Kostenberger, *ESV Study Bible* note on 6:64]

3. *Deserted “because they didn’t believe”– David Croteau*

- The ‘many disciples’ desertion of Jesus was only possible because they did not believe; had they believed, they would have remained for that is part of John’s understanding of believing (1 Jn. 2:19).” [David A. Croteau, “Analysis of ...Believing in the Narrative...of John’s Gospel” *Liberty Univ.*, (2002) p. 81]

4. *“Discipleship is inextricably tied to believing.*

This fact is made particularly clear in an episode during which many of Jesus’ followers decide to desert him (6:60-70). When some of his disciples complain that his teachings are too difficult, [then] he remarks that ‘there are some of you who do not believe,’ and the narrator confirms... ‘Jesus knew...the ones who did not believe’ (6:64).” [J. David Woodington, *Dubious Disciples*, p. 140]

5. *“Belief, for these ‘many disciples’ was impossible...”– Nicolas Farelly*

- “If we assume these ‘many disciples’ were...part of the crowd...[it] seems that the...author never considered their discipleship to be anything more than a physical following (6:2, 24) of...a prophet & potential king (6:14-15) who would provide...food (6:26)...[In this] case, they had never understood his teaching nor his signs...& 6:60-66...show[s] this ongoing lack of understanding led to defection... Jesus’ comment in 6:65... reinforce[s] this conclusion & makes sense of their coming defection: ‘...no one can come to me unless the Father has allowed him to come’ (6:65). Belief, for these ‘many disciples’ was impossible because the Father had not granted it to them.” [Nicolas Farelly, *Disciples in the 4th Gospel*, p. 47]

6. *Deficient faith: “faith in Jesus... lacking or insufficient”– Joshua Jipp*

- “R. E. Brown...assert[s] that these apostate disciples are most likely Jewish Christians...whose faith was deficient from the start.” [Kevin Quast, *Peter & the Beloved Disciple*, p. 48]
- “In John 6:60-71...John describes many of Jesus’ disciples who chafe & grumble at Jesus’ difficult bread of life discourse (6:60-61). They are ‘scandalized’ by Jesus’ teaching (6:61b), and as a result, many ‘of his disciples’ stopped following Jesus (6:66). This fits more broadly within John’s... pessimism [about humanity] and his depiction of faith in Jesus as often lacking or insufficient (2:23-25).” [Joshua W. Jipp, “Abraham in the Gospels & Acts,” in SA. Adams (ed.) *Abraham in Jewish & Early Christian Literature*, pp. 121-2]

7. *Believed, but “defeated of secret believers”– John Painter*

- “The words of 6:53-58...scandalized the many disciples & this scandal was not removed by... [Jesus’] words of 6:62-63...This provocation...led to the apostasy of the ‘many disciples,’ 6:66. This passage might well [imply that]...many of those who believed either defected or became secret

believers.” [John Painter, “Jesus & the Quest for Eternal Life,” in RA. Culpepper (ed.) *Critical Readings of John 6*, p. 89]

8. *They “once believed in Jesus but did so no longer”– Terry Griffith*

- “The apostasy of some of Jesus’ disciples in 6:60-71 is recounted. They are described in 6:64 as ‘those not believing,’ & it’s said that many of his disciples turned away & no longer walked with Jesus. These are... ones ...who once believed in Jesus but did so no longer...[This is] the apostasy of some of Jesus’ disciples in 6:60-71.” [T. Griffith, “Jews who had Believed in Him,” in R. Bauckham (ed.) *John & Christian Theology*, p. 187]

- “It’s important to note...within...John’s Gospel, the devil functions as one who motivates people to commit apostasy. Thus, within the context of disciples who had once believed but now turned away from Jesus, Jesus refers to Judas as ‘a devil’ (6:70). Later John notes that ‘the devil’ had put it into Judas’ heart to betray Jesus (13:2).” [Joshua W. Jipp, “Abraham in the...Gospels,” in SA. Adams (ed.) *Abraham in Jewish Lit.*, p. 122]

C. A Way Forward: The ‘Many Disciples’ as a Group

- “True & false disciples, those who...believe, & those who [don’t]...characterize the disciple [group]”—S. Hulen

- In 6:60-71 John...characterizes the disciples as divided. After hearing Jesus’ address...‘many of the disciples turned back...’ Many interpreters have understood this rift as a division between true & false disciples, those who understand & believe, & those who [don’t]...However, it’s also possible to read the dissention...as... characteriz[ing] the disciples as a corporate character [group]...In 6:61...the [disciple] group as a whole is characterized by...complaint. Even when some turn away, John continues to identify them as disciples...The disciples [group’s] actions [are] mixed...they both believe in Jesus and turn away from following him.” [Susan E. Hulen, “Disciples,” in SA. Hunt (ed.) *Character Studies...4th Gospel*, p. 218]

D. Why Do Disciples Depart & Christians De-convert?

1. *The Scandal of Jesus’ Exclusive Claims (6:35; 14:6)*

- John records a number of...[Jesus’] claims: “I am the bread of life...” (6:35)...[But,] none of the “I am” claims of Jesus is more challenging than... “I am the way, & the truth, & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ...The claim cannot be disregarded &/or dismissed. It’s [Jesus’] most exclusive claim...[Today,] some people speak & act as though diversity itself is redemptive...Some churches try to be “inclusive,” saying: “Come one; come all. It doesn’t matter whether you are young or old, black or white, gay or lesbian or trans-gender, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist. None of that matters. Come on & join our Church.” ...[Here there are] no distinctive Christian claims. How can a Jew [as Jew] belong to a Christian church? Or a Buddhist? Or a Muslim? Never mind questions about conduct...or what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ claim is exclusive. “I am the way, & the truth, & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ...[There’s] “good news” that’s [an] exclusive claim...inclusive in its scope. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (3:16). No one is denied the offer of salvation. The crucified & risen Jesus is Lord. That’s our distinctive claim as Christians.” [Max D. Dunnam, “EXCLUSIVE CLAIM OF JESUS: SCANDAL OF PARTICULARITY,” *Ministry Matters*, Jan. 7, 2011]

2. *Unresolved doubts &/or unanswered questions about the Bible &/or Christian practices*

3. *Observing or affected by moral failures by religious leaders (e.g. pastors) &/or institutions*

4. *Unanswered Prayer, unfulfilled promises*

5. *Unexplained trials &/or sufferings—“why did this happen to me?”*

6. *Opposition &/or persecution to your being a Christian*

V. The Contrast: ‘The Twelve’ Remain, while ‘Many’ Retreat (6:66-71)

- Jesus: “Blessed is the one who is not offended [or ‘stumbled’] by me.” (Luke 7:23)
- “The division...reflects a contrast between the Twelve, who remain faithful, and those who retreat in disappointment.” [Kevin Quast, *Peter & the Beloved Disciple*, p. 48]
- “Jesus asked the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe & to know that you are the Holy One of God!” 70 Jesus replied, “Didn’t I choose you, the Twelve, & yet one of you is the devil?” 71 (Now he said this about Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for Judas, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.)” (6:66-71)
- “John 6...has seen...[‘many disciples’] depart from [Jesus]. There is one remaining group...[‘the Twelve’]. This group responds appropriately to Jesus’ revelation and...Peter emerges as a spokesman for and leader of the group.” [Christopher Skinner, *Jesus & Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, p. 92]

A. Jesus’ Question—Freedom & Opportunity (6:67)

- “Jesus asked the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?” (6:67)
- “Do you want to go away too?”—Free To Stay Or Go “God leaves us free to accept or reject the gift of faith. It always begins with God (“no one can come to me unless the Father draws him”), but the choice to stay or ‘leave’ remains with each individual: “Do you want to go away too?” Jesus Christ is the Lord of life & history, but he refuses to impose his rule on hearts that want to ‘stop going with him’ & return to their former way of life.” [John Bartunek, *Free To Stay Or Go (John 6:60-71)* spiritualdirection.com]
- “In John 6:60-71...many disciples deserted Jesus since they could not understand [accept] his teaching ...The reaction of Jesus was that he was not afraid of losing disciples. He gave them the space to make up their own minds, so they were in fact free to leave.” [Andreas Maurer, “In Search of a New Life,” in DH. Greenlee (ed.) “From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way, pp. 106-7]
- Jesus’ “question...’Do you want to go away as well?’ (6:67) reflects the fact that Jesus had seen the number of his...followers shrink dramatically in a short span of time, but it’s unlikely...it betrays his nervousness that the Twelve will also [defect]. Rather, Jesus gives the Twelve...an opportunity to reaffirm their belief in him & their willingness to continue to follow him.” [Nicolas Farelly, *Disciples in the 4th Gospel*, p. 47]

B. Peter Confession—a Positive Example (6:68-69)

- We have a contrast between the rejection...of 6:60-66 & the commendation...of 6:67-71. The behavior of ‘the many’ is not to be followed; the confession of Peter is to be emulated...It’s notable, however, that Jesus in no way commends Peter for his confession, as he does in Mt. 16:17.” [John Painter, “Jesus & the Quest for Eternal Life,” in RA. Culpepper (ed.) *Critical Readings of John 6*, p. 90]

- “Peter’s confession of Jesus [exhibits] superb timing ([during] the mass exodus of disciples from the ministry)...’Only in John’s Gospel is Peter’s confession juxtaposed to this falling away, which heightens its effect (K. Quast).” [Brad Blaine, Peter in the Gospel of John, p. 20]
- Peter’s “confession picks up key themes from the preceding discourse, especially believing & eternal life.”—R. Alan Culpepper.

C. Peter’s Positive Response

1. *Who Jesus is (6:69b)*

- Peter “declares ‘you are (su ei) the Holy One of God,’ which could be interpreted as Peter’s confirmation of Jesus’ prior & controversial ‘ego eimi’ [‘I AM’] declarations.” [N. Farelly, Disciples in the 4th Gospel, p. 48]
- The “title ‘the Holy One of God’ is used of Jesus only [in] Mk. 1:24/Lk. 4:34 and in Jn. 6:69...The early Christians understood this phrase to refer to Jesus’ messiah-ship.” [Graham Twelftree, in D. Wenham (ed.) Gospel Perspectives, Vol. 5, p. 376]

2. *Ongoing Belief & Knowledge (6:69a)*

- Peter: “We have come to believe (& continue to believe) and we’ve come to know (& continue to know) that you are the Holy One of God!” (6:69)
- The Twelve “have (truly) seen & (truly) heard Jesus...They now really believe and have come to know that Jesus is ‘the Holy One of God’.”—George Beasley-Murray
- “The perfect tense of the verbs [‘believe and know’] indicates belief & knowledge that began in the past and continue in the present, & it is also...expressing the state of the disciples’ belief and knowledge.” [Nicolas Farelly, Disciples in the 4th Gospel, p. 48]
- “The verbs...‘believe’ & ‘know’ here are in the perfect tense in Greek; that tense is...use[d] to indicate action completed in the past that has continuing effect in the present. That’s the kind of believing & knowing Jesus is after. Recognizing Jesus for who he is (...Son of Man, the Holy One of God, the Word made Flesh, etc.) requires both belief & knowledge; one without the other is useless.” [Jaime Clark-Soles, Commentary on John 6:56-69]

3. *Jesus has the “words of eternal life” (6:68 cf. 6:63)*

- “Jesus words are Spirit & life [6:63] in that the Spirit reveals the meaning & significance of Jesus’ life-giving teaching...The Spirit gives life particularly in his role as a cognitive agent—facilitating people’s understanding of Jesus & his teaching & hence assisting them to produce an adequate belief-response that will result in a life-giving relationship with Jesus” [Cornelis Bennema, Excavating John’s Gospel, p 84]
- “In saying ‘the Spirit gives life; the flesh is useless,’ [6:63] Jesus alleges that only the Son of Man... who has descended from the spiritual realm...can mediate access to life...Those of the realm of the flesh are incapable of brokering life...Moses & all other earthly brokers...[aren’t] representatives of the spiritual realm. They...can only broker fleshly benefits, such as manna...[But,] Jesus...[as] a representative of the God-realm...speak[s] spiritual words which mediate life.” [Tricia G. Brown, Spirit in...John, pp. 151-2]
- “The ‘word’ of Jesus that gives life (6:63, 68) is [John’s message about Christ]. As ‘spirit’ it is contrasted with the ‘flesh’ to show that what gives life is not the Eucharistic elements themselves, however conceived, but faith that sees...the Son of Man, the exalted...Jesus.” [David Rensberger, Johannine Faith..., pp. 74-75]

D. Jesus ‘damps down’ Peter’s enthusiastic confession (6:70-71)

• There’s a “constant pattern...in the 4th Gospel [and] also in the Synoptics of [Jesus] ‘damping down’ enthusiastic confessions of faith (6:68-71; Mk. 8:29-33)...It is...only after the cross and resurrection that the disciples gain true understanding...” [Craig L. Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of John*, pp. 217-8 #312]

E. Judas’ Negative Example (6:70-71)

• “Judas’ initial belief in Jesus was not the sort of faith adequate for a true relationship with Jesus”—A. Lincoln

• “Judas first appears...[in] the 4th Gospel..in 6:60-71...as the disciple who would eventually ‘betray’ Jesus...& as a figure whose implied association with certain [unbelieving] disciples (6:64) suggests that [Judas] too, from the perspective of the narrator..had never truly participated in the trust placed in Jesus by his authentic followers.” [Todd E. Klutz, *Metaphor, Ritual, & Order in John*, p.]

• Jn. 6 ends with Jesus’ prediction of a future betrayal by one of the Twelve...[He] eliminates the suspense: Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, is the future betrayer.” [C. Skinner, *Jesus & Thomas—Gospels in Conflict?*, p. 92]

• “...one of you is a devil” (6:70b) “Satan has made Judas his ally, a subordinate devil.”—C. K. Barrett

• “With ‘a devil’ among the chosen [‘Twelve’] uncertainty...and [the] prospect of active revolt could never be written off. Being drawn by the Father was no *carte blanche* [free pass]. Instead, there is... an unremitting need to partake of the bread that keeps coming from heaven (6:50).” [Dieter Mitternacht, “Knowledge-making ...in John 6: A Narrative-Psychological Reading.” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok*, Vol. 72 (2007) p. 69]

• “The gradual narrowing of the circle around Jesus functions in this discourse as a way to delineate true disciples from the crowd, the Jews, ‘the many disciples,’ & those who do not remain with Jesus. But let the reader be warned: even having once believed, betrayal [as with Judas?] is still possible.” [Jane S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, McMaster University (2001) p. 123]

QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you find yourself in this narrative? Are you a disciple who turns & leaves, or among those who with Peter confess that Jesus is the one – the only one – with the words of eternal life? What factors made the difference between these two responses?

2. Many of Jesus’ disciples said “This is a difficult saying! Who can accept it?” He asked them, “Does this offend you?” (6:60-61).

a. What was it about Jesus’ message that was ‘difficult, unacceptable &/or offensive’?

b. What aspects of Jesus’ message do people in today’s society find ‘unacceptable &/or offensive’?

3. Are there any Christian believers you know who have ‘dropped out’ as disciples &/or ceased to identify as Christians &/or abandoned the Christian faith?

a. According to your knowledge, what factors influenced their decision/action?

b. What lessons might we draw from their departure/defection?

c. Based on the above, what practical changes in your life might you make or suggest?

4. Jesus indicated that among Jesus’ ‘many disciples’ there were ‘some who did not believe’ (6:64). John records that “many of his disciples quit following him” (6:66).

a. Does this imply that only unbelieving (‘false’) disciples departed? Discuss.

- b. Is it possible that the “many” departing disciples included both believers & unbelievers? Discuss.
- c. Why is Judas mentioned, both with reference to ‘many disciples’ (6:64b) & the Twelve (6:70-71)?
5. Supposing some of the departing disciples had previously believed in Jesus can they blame God? Is there any basis in Jesus’ message (e.g. Jn. 6:37, 39, 44, 65) for them to claim that their departure was because they were “de-selected” by God &/or now “rejected/ ‘kicked out”” by God the Son? Discuss.
6. Jesus says “only the Spirit gives life; the flesh is useless” (6:63). Yet, Jesus “will give his flesh for the life of the world” (6:51b). Is there a contradiction here? Why or why not? Discuss.
7. Do the Twelve remain because Jesus elected them by divine providence (6:70)? Or do they remain because they’ve made an informed (& human) faith-decision (6:69). Which wins? Divine election or human decision? Discuss.