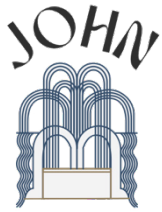


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“Stumbling at Salvation”

John 6:60-66

Theme: Those who stumble at the claims of Christ have no one to blame but themselves.

Introduction: This sixth chapter of John’s Gospel stands out for its contrasts. It starts with a large crowd eagerly following Christ because of His miracles, but it ends with that same crowd walking away in disbelief. At the beginning, thousands are fed by His hand; by the end, only a few stay at His feet. What changed? Not Jesus—His words and His character stayed the same. What changed were their hearts.

Jesus had declared Himself to be “**the bread of life**” (John 6:35), the only One who could satisfy the deep hunger of the human soul. Yet when He pressed His claims more deeply—when He demanded that they receive Him wholly, believe in Him completely, and depend on Him exclusively—they recoiled. The same words that gave life to some became a stumbling block to others. They found His teaching “a difficult statement” (v. 60), not because it was unclear, but because it was **unacceptable** to their pride and unbelief.

This passage exposes the moral responsibility of every sinner. Those who turn away from Christ do so not for lack of evidence, nor because His claims are unreasonable, but because their hearts are hard and their wills are stubborn. Jesus makes it clear that unbelief is not a problem of intellect—it is a problem of **inward resistance** to divine truth.

[Read Text] As we move through these verses, we find three solemn realities about those who stumble at Christ’s claims:

1. **The Reaction by Sinners to the Gospel** (vv. 60–62) – When confronted with Christ’s exclusive call to believe, sinners often murmur and turn away, offended by His demand for absolute faith and submission. Their reaction reveals not a lack of understanding, but a lack of willingness.
2. **The Relevance of the Spirit to the Gospel** (vv. 63–65) – The flesh is powerless to respond to the truth properly. It is the Spirit who gives life, and faith itself must be granted by the Father. Apart from divine grace, no one can come to Christ.
3. **The Reality of the Rejection of the Gospel** (v. 66) – Many who once followed Jesus outwardly will eventually turn away, proving that their allegiance was superficial. Their departure confirms that the fault lies **not** in Christ’s message but in their own unbelieving hearts.

This sobering scene in John 6 reminds us that the responsibility for unbelief rests solely on man. Christ is not to blame for the hardness of those who refuse Him. He stands as the Bread of Life, fully sufficient, freely offered, but the sinner who stumbles at His claims has no one to blame but himself.

Christ’s call to eat His flesh and drink His blood (vv. 53–56) was not a command for literal cannibalism but a metaphor for saving faith—an all-encompassing, inward acceptance of Himself as Savior and Lord. However, such surrender was too much for some then, and it may also be too much for some here this morning. The same truth that should have drawn them to worship instead led them to walk away. Let’s carefully examine the dynamic of their rejection...

I. The Reaction by Sinners to the Gospel – 6:60-62

A. The Perception of Sinners – vv. 60-61a

1. As Jesus revealed the true nature of God's plan for salvation—that He isn't mainly focused on the temporary, physical needs of sinners but on addressing the spiritual effects of their sin—people began to understand and respond.
2. To review, we have seen Jesus declare that He Himself is the provision of God – the Bread of Life
 - a) *He indicated that God's actual provision for men's sins would be His own flesh and blood, meaning He would die a violent death.*
 - b) *Unless sinners accept this provision (completely swallowing it by faith), then they have “no life in [them]selves” – v. 53.*
3. Furthermore, Jesus indicated that men are so depraved and alienated from God through sin that, unless the Father draws them, none would come to salvation.
4. Many of the people who had been clamoring to follow Him were deeply offended and reacted: *“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, ‘This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it’?”*
5. Their perception was that Jesus' statement was *“difficult”* or “scandalous” [σκανδαλίζω] – lit. = “shocking, stumbling,” or “harsh” – primarily because it was perceived as being judgmental and exclusive.
6. They understood what Jesus was saying but were offended because it shattered human pride.
7. John is essentially saying that when people hear that they can't be saved without accepting what Jesus offers, they are “giving up believing” – or deciding that what once sounded good to them is now objectionable – 1 Corinthians 2:14.
8. Even today, when God's Word is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, many people reject it because it conflicts with their own ideas and goes against their intentions or traditions.
9. Notice that instead of coming to Jesus with their struggle, they were grumbling as cowards – *“But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this ...”*
10. He was not duped by their façade of religiosity – He knew of their unreconciled, unspiritual realities – and was deeply burdened for them.

B. The Prediction of the Savior – vv. 61b-62

1. However deep His burden was for these people, He would not compromise the truth to “get a decision” from them.

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2. He never let up – in fact, He makes it even harder for them to swallow what He is saying.
3. In essence, He says this: “If these words are difficult and harsh to you because they conflict with what you expect or desire, what are you going to do when I return to my glory?”
4. He says, *“Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending where He was before?”*
5. Jesus knew their struggle essentially focused on His “assertion” that He had come down out of Heaven and thus their minds would be blown when He would return to Heaven.
 - a) *He is condemning their stubbornness that refuses to accept the truth despite evidence—“You reject My claim to have come from Heaven—yet what will you do when I prove it by going back there?”*
 - b) *The very thing they refuse to believe (that He came down from Heaven) will be unmistakably confirmed when He returns there. Their unbelief will become even more inexcusable.*
6. His claim to have come “out of Heaven” offended their sanctimony, but His ascension back into Heaven will expose their complete unbelief.
7. This is one of several moments when Jesus looks beyond the cross to the joy and glory of completed redemption! – cp. [Hebrews 12:2](#).
8. Notice what happened after Jesus had ascended and His disciples proclaimed that He had ascended – [Acts 5:30-33](#).

II. The Relevance of the Spirit to the Gospel – 6:63-65

A. The Resource of the Spirit – v. 63

1. He immediately points out that these things are not naturally swallowed or eaten; rather, the Spirit plays a crucial role.
2. Jesus is laying bare the core of the fallen condition of sinners – they are not merely unwilling but *unable* to believe apart from divine enablement through grace.
3. He states, *“It is the Spirit who gives life”* – in a monergistic (“one energy”) act of God - you cannot be brought to a place of faith and acceptance of Christ by yourself; one must be “quickened” or *“give[n] life.”*
4. In an unequivocal way, Jesus addresses any who may still be wondering whether He was indicating that they had to literally eat His body and drink His blood – He was speaking of faith, not some activity they had to physically do – *“the flesh profits nothing.”*

- a) *The fact that He will bodily ascend to Heaven proves His body cannot be literally eaten.*
- b) *Additionally, Jesus signals that what He has been saying about His body and blood is to be understood as metaphorical – cp. v. 63.*
- 5. He now indicates how the Spirit does what He does when He imparts the life of regeneration – He takes the Word of God and quickens the hearts of sinners: *“the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”*
- 6. This is the only way that men are brought to life – the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God, bringing faith in the Son of God, all to the glory of God – cp. *John 3:5-7*.

B. The Reliance on the Spirit - vv. 64-65

- 1. Jesus then emphasizes the personal responsibility each sinner bears to believe in Him, asserting that the failure to believe is directly due to his or her own hardness and refusal – cp. *John 5:39-40*.
- 2. He says: *“But there are some of you who do not believe”* – pressing upon them and us the need of believing in Him.
- 3. John then provides an editorial comment – that *“Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him¹.”*
- 4. Jesus then emphasizes that due to the depravity of their hearts, they are completely unable to come unless the grace of God works in them – *“For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”*
- 5. He doesn’t merely indicate that none would come – but that none could come – they are disabled because of their sin – proof positive that “the flesh profits nothing.”

III. The Reality of Stumbling at the Gospel – 6:66

A. The Evidence of the Rejection of the Savior

- 1. Those who were so hard-hearted that they refused to believe in the Lord Jesus turned their backs and withdrew from Jesus.
- 2. We are told that *“as a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.”*
- 3. Their activity of shunning the Lord and His teaching demonstrates their heart of unbelief and sin – cp. *1 John 2:19*.

¹ This is a reference to Judas Iscariot – the supreme example of an unbelieving, false disciple – cp. vv. 70-71.

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4. Each who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ bears the full brunt of the responsibility for their rejection – they indeed were given to their sinful hearts and agendas.

B. The Explanation for the Rejection by the Savior

1. There are two issues that combine to form the issue of human responsibility and divine sovereignty
 - a) *First, God draws whoever He wills—He does not turn away anyone seeking Him, but in truth, only those who feel the initial pull of His drawing recognize it and can respond appropriately.*
 - b) *The second issue is that men are so depraved that they love darkness and hate the light; left to themselves, they will never choose Christ – [John 3:19-20](#); [Romans 8:7-8](#).*
2. God isn't required to make those who hate Him love Him—why should He be blamed for not drawing away those who want to stay apart?
3. That He draws men to Himself is a testament to His grace and glorious mercy—and we should be overwhelmed with gratitude for this work of grace that is energized in us through the Holy Spirit, knowing that there is no natural explanation for why He has so blessed us with faith – [Ephesians 2:4-7](#).
4. Today, if you know that yearning stirred by God's Spirit, do not harden your heart, but turn to Him while He is at work in your soul!

So What?

1. **How does knowing that faith itself is a gift from God affect my gratitude and worship?**
2. **What habits or pursuits in my life demonstrate that I still trust in “the flesh” instead of the Spirit?**
3. **What are some ways that I can deepen perseverance so that my faith remains steadfast when others fall away or reject the truth?**
4. **What are some ways I am tempted to reinterpret or soften Christ's words to make them more palatable to my preferences or culture?**

Theme: Those who stumble at the claims of Christ have no one to blame but themselves.