



“What Choice But to Believe?”

John 6:66-71

Theme: Only those who believe in Christ can truly understand God's Word.

Introduction: Some moments in life strip away pretense and reveal what is true. For example, when God doesn't act as we expect—when prayers go unanswered or plans fall apart—our true motives come to light. Are we following Christ because He meets our desires, or because He alone is worthy? Or, when Scripture penetrates our defenses and reveals sin we'd rather ignore, our response shows the state of our heart—whether we humble ourselves before God's truth or resist it. John 6 describes one of those moments—an unmistakable dividing line between those who only claim Christ and those who genuinely possess Him.

After feeding the five thousand and declaring Himself to be “the bread of life,” Jesus confronted the crowds with the tough truth about what true discipleship requires: total dependence on Him for life, forgiveness, and salvation. His words shattered their expectations of a political Messiah who would fulfill their worldly desires. Instead, He called for repentance, faith, and submission to His Lordship. The result was expected: *“As a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore”* (John 6:66). [\[Read Text\]](#)

- I. First, our text presents the **Critical Point of Decision**. The declarations of Christ always force the sinner to a verdict—either humble faith or hardened rejection. When the truth exposes pride, some walk away.
- II. But Second, amid others' defection, we find the **Confident Profession of Dependence**. Jesus turns to the twelve and asks, *“You do not want to go away also, do you?”* (v. 67). Peter, speaking for the faithful few, answers with conviction: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God”* (vv. 68–69). His response captures the essence of saving faith—there is nowhere else to turn, for only Christ, and Christ alone, speaks life to dead sinners.
- III. Then, finally, comes a sobering **Chagrined Preview of Disloyalty**. Jesus reminds them, *“Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?”* (v. 70). Even within the circle of the chosen twelve, hypocrisy lurked. Judas's presence stands as a chilling warning that proximity to Christ is not the same as union with Him. One can walk with the Savior, hear His truth, and still remain unconverted.

This passage compels us to examine our own hearts. Are we merely attracted to Christ for what we think He offers, or are we devoted to Him because of who He truly is? Have we come to see that there is *nowhere else to go* because He alone holds the words of eternal life? And are we daily proving the reality of our faith by continuing steadfastly when others drift away?

In this passage, the line is drawn. The false turn back. The true stay close. The betrayer remains among them. And the question still echoes from Jesus' lips to ours: *“You do not want to*

go away also, do you?” That haunting question from Jesus forces each listener to face the reality of their own heart. The Lord never softens His message to please the crowds. He never adjusts His teaching to make discipleship easier. When the truth causes division, He allows it, because only genuine faith will remain when the demands of the Gospel clash with our fleshly desires.

John records that *“many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.”* That tragic sentence marks the turning point of this entire chapter. The crowds who once followed Christ with excitement now abandon Him in disappointment. Why? Because the truth He proclaimed exposed their sin and stripped them of their illusions. What began as curiosity ends in conflict. *Only those who believe in Christ can truly understand God’s Word.*

First, let us see **the Critical Point of Decision**—where the Word of Christ separates the superficial from the sincere, the fascinated from the faithful, and the professors from the possessors of eternal life.

I. The Critical Point of Decision – 6:66-67

A. The Conflict Caused by the Declarations by Christ – v. 66

1. Once again, we turn to a section of Scripture rich in the Gospel presentation – the good news about what is available to sinners in the person of Jesus Christ.
2. However, because of the settled and dominant nature of sin – and the hardness of heart that attends it, not all will receive this good news.
3. In fact, when the Gospel is first presented, it is most common to encounter a negative reaction instead of a positive response.
4. In this text, people who had been “wowed” by the miraculous power of Jesus Christ reacted negatively when confronted with their spiritual needs through His teaching.
5. He had just finished telling them that unless they accepted everything He had to offer them, they had no hope of eternal life – cp. *vv. 53, 62-65.*
6. These “fans” of Jesus were interested in a quick ascendancy of Christ to a position of King – who would lead them into freedom from the oppression of the Romans.
7. His miraculous power had offered hope of fulfilling this dream, but Jesus responds to their desire by calling them to repentance and to faith in what He offers spiritually.
8. They were not interested in this, and *“as a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.”*
9. The declarations (or teachings) of Christ confront sinners with their needs and humiliate those who would be proud as they are brought face-to-face

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

with their sin.

10. For those hoping solely for the physical benefits of religion, the Gospel is a serious disappointment.

B. The Certification of the Disciples of Christ – v. 67

1. As Jesus noticed the disappointment of the carnally minded, he tests the disciples' commitment by questioning their devotion to Him – *“So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘You do not want to go away also, do you?’”*
2. The construction of this question in Greek presupposes a negative reply from the disciples, as He knew they would answer properly and say they would NOT leave Him.
3. This demonstrates confidence in the work He personally does when He chooses and quickens—He will lose none that the Father gives to Him.
4. However, He is giving the disciples the chance to express their commitment so it can be clearer in their own minds.
5. The opportunity to reflect on the truth and confidence of one's faith is a valuable exercise, one that is commanded to be done repeatedly – cp. 2 Corinthians 13:5.
6. Following Christ when it's popular is easy, but have we truly committed to stay His followers even when everyone else turns away?
7. It is our attraction to the Person of Christ Himself that makes us willing to accept His teaching – when His teaching is difficult and our following Him becomes a challenge, then we can see whether there is credibility to our firm boastings of yieldedness to Him.

II. The Confident Profession of Dependence – 6:68-69

A. The Confessed Grounds for Faith – v. 68

1. In response to this “inquisition” by Christ, Peter immediately replies – with an extremely firm response: *“Lord, to whom shall we go?”*
2. This signifies His understanding that men are unable to handle their own sin problem and depend solely on the aid that only God can provide.
 - a) Should we turn back to the **former** manner of life we knew before Christ –
 - b) Should we turn back to the **futility** of secular ideology that glorifies what we know to be aberrant behaviors as desirable?
 - c) Should we turn back to the **fallacies** of self-righteousness and religious performances to gratify the yearning of our souls to escape guilt and shame?

- d) Should we turn back to the **frustrations** of our bondage to sin?
 - e) Should we turn back to the **fears** of eternal darkness and judgment?
 - f) Exactly where should we turn if we were to find the demands of Christ unacceptable?
3. In essence, Peter emphasizes that there is no other source for God's provision of a solution to their sin problem and the gift of eternal life – there is simply no one else to turn to – cp. **Acts 4:12**.
 4. Again, this portrays Peter's recognition of men's need for a Savior.
 5. In addition, he states what it is that has drawn the Twelve to Him – it is the Word of God – **"You have the words of eternal life."**
 6. The import here is that Peter is stating several things about Jesus:
 - a) The exclusivity of the Gospel – **"You [and You alone] ..."**
 - b) The dynamic nature of the Word of God—they are not a static intellectual expression, but divine words that sink deep into the soul and impart life—**"the words of eternal life"**—v. 63.
 7. Whereas the crowd that was drawn to Christ by His wondrous miracles had been repulsed by His teachings, those who genuinely follow Christ do so because of the power of His teachings.
 8. This is essentially the difference between simply being a *"professor"* of faith in Christ and being a *"confessor"* of Christ Himself – the appeal of the Words of Christ.

B. The Confidence Gained through Faith - v. 69

1. Peter then makes a most powerful statement: **"We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."**
2. This statement is full of nuance, providing an incredible truth about the operation of God's grace in quickening the sinner and providing the faith needed for salvation, on par with the great confession by Peter in **Matthew 16:16**.
3. First, he states that **"we have believed"**—the tense used highlights that their faith is not diminished by confronting the Gospel but instead strengthened by it: we believed before now and continue to do so up to this moment and beyond. (Perfect Active Indicative)
4. He uses the same tense when he states, **"and have come to know"** – we knew it before and have had it certified in our minds – **"that You are the Holy One of God."**
5. Notice the order that Peter identifies – believe and then come to fully grasp these truths – instead of "seeing is believing," it is **"believing leads to**

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN

seeing” – cp. *1 Corinthians 2:14*.

6. It is by faith that we are granted the ability to understand – *Hebrews 11:3*.

III. The Chagrined Preview of Disloyalty – 6:70-71

A. The Pronounced Prerogatives of Christ – v. 70

1. Jesus response to this tremendous statement is to reiterate that He Himself has performed the work necessary for them to come to such an understanding – *“Did I Myself not choose you ...?”*
2. He is addressing the issue of the provision of His grace in choosing them and allowing them to persevere in their faith in Him – cp. *John 15:16, 19*.
3. In addition, Jesus’ statement begins to highlight the despicable nature of Judas’ betrayal – He was given every opportunity to know the glories of Christ Himself, yet his heart remained obstinately self-willed and focused – *“... ‘and yet one of you is a devil?’ Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.”*
4. Judas was possibly a zealot (a possible translation of the ascription “Iscariot”) – one who militantly opposed the Romans and who bitterly plotted to overthrow them.
5. His great hope was that Jesus would be the King, but when Jesus continually refused to make His messianic mission political, Judas became disillusioned, along with the other disciples, who withdrew from Him.
6. However, he persisted with the Lord and became all the more loathsome because of it.
7. However, Jesus chose Judas to fulfill the Scriptures – cp. *John 17:12*.
 - a) *The Messiah’s trust would be broken – Psalms 41:9.*
 - b) *This connection is made clearly in John 13:18.*
8. It is almost certain that Judas remained an unbeliever throughout his contact with Jesus – proof of this will be discussed when we approach his actual treachery later in the book.

B. The Proposed Purposes for the Conspirator¹ – v. 71

1. It provided an opportunity for Christ to demonstrate His perfections – He chose someone who would betray Him to fulfill God’s will – *Hebrews 10:7*.
2. It provided an impartial witness to the moral excellence of Christ –

¹ Pink, Arthur, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 363-365.

Matthew 27:4.

3. It revealed the horror of sin – he revealed in the inner circle of Christ's blessings only to treacherously betray Him – how dreadful is our sin!
4. It gives sinners a serious warning – showing that a person can be close to Christ and still be lost – eternal contact with the Savior cannot replace the inner fellowship of the Spirit.
5. It tells us we may expect to find hypocrites among the followers of Christ – **Matthew 10:4.**
6. It shows us that a devil is to be expected among the servants of God, and to place confidence in **no** man!
7. It provides another example of how vastly different God's thoughts and ways are from ours!

So What?

1. **How does my heart respond/react when Scripture confronts my pride, desires, or assumptions about what following Christ should bring?**
2. **In what ways might I be tempted to follow Jesus more for the temporal benefits He provides than for the spiritual life He gives?**
3. **How has the Word of God personally convinced me of Christ's exclusivity and sufficiency as the only Savior?**
4. **How has my obedience and trust led to deeper spiritual insight?**
5. **What warnings do I see in Judas's life about the danger of being near spiritual truth without being transformed by it?**

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