

The Gospel of John (45); The Fourth Discourse: Jesus, the Bread of Life (7)

Introduction:

It is our intention today to complete our study of this discourse of Jesus contained in John 6. Last time we began to address the last section of this passage, which is contained in verses 60 through 71. The main theme is that **only those enabled by God's sovereign grace will believe on Jesus Christ unto eternal life (6:60-71)**. Here we will have reinforced the biblical truth that God not only initially brings us to faith in Christ by His grace, but that He also keeps us in faith by His grace unto our final salvation. Let us read these verses once again:

⁶⁰Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

⁶¹When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶²What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

⁶⁶From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. ⁶⁷Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

⁶⁸But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

⁷⁰Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" ⁷¹He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

Up until this time our Lord had "many disciples", as we read in verse 60. But after hearing Jesus instructing them on this occasion, they voiced their concern and confusion to Jesus, saying, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" But our Lord did not soften His tone or mince His words to them when they expressed resistance to His teaching. He then spoke to them in terms that aggravated their dissonance and fueled their defection from Him. The result was that many of these "many" disciples stopped following Jesus, due to what they heard Jesus teach them in this discourse.

In their departure from following Jesus they proved themselves not to have been His true disciples. For had they been true disciples of Christ, then they would have continued with Him regardless of the difficulty or confusion that might have characterized their thinking. Jesus would say in another place, "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples" (John 8:31).

We stressed last week that true Christians are true disciples of Jesus Christ. If one is not a disciple of Jesus, he is no Christian. He does not know Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. Temporary disciples are not true disciples of Jesus Christ. Temporary disciples are not true Christians. Only those who endure unto the end in their faith in Jesus Christ are saved from their sins on the Day of Judgment and granted by Him the gift of everlasting life (Cf. Matt. 10:22).

Let us work through these verses by first considering:

I. Our Lord's response to those who reacted to and rejected His "hard saying." (6:60-65)

Our Lord had emphasized that the way unto eternal life was through faith in Him. Saving faith is present when a sinner wholly and fully depends upon Jesus alone for the gift of eternal life. In order to stress the nature of this full acceptance and submission to Him, Jesus described believing on Him as eating His flesh

and drinking His blood. He declared, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (6:53f). The Jews were greatly offended by His words. In verse 60 we read of their reaction to His Words and of their refusal to receive His words as true: “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’”

If you read carefully this verse in our New King James Version translation, it suggests that their objection posed to Jesus was due to the difficulty to “understand” what He had been saying to them. They said to Him, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” But actually, the objection of these “many disciples” was not in understanding His words; rather, they were telling Him that no one would accept what He was saying. In other words, the problem was not that they found His words *incomprehensible*, but that they found His words *objectionable*. I am reminded of the response of the infidel Mark Twain to a reporter who once asked him, “Do the things of the Bible that you do not understand trouble you?” His response was, “No, the things of the Bible that I do understand trouble me.” These people were declaring to Jesus that no one would accept or receive what He had been telling them. The English Standard Version (ESV) conveys this idea. It reads, “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can *listen* to it?’” Or perhaps the New International Version (NIV) better conveys the idea: “On hearing it, many of His disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can *accept* it?’” The fact is that they were not asking for Jesus to explain His words, they would have Him retract His words.

This clarification of their reaction justifies the manner in which our Lord responded to them in verses 61ff, which reads,

1. “Does this offend you? ⁶²What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” (6:61f)

We should not be surprised when people react to what we believe and teach regarding our faith in Jesus Christ. Much of Christian evangelism and the work of the ministry is the attempt to answer objections and settle confused and errant souls. Of these ones who protested our Lord’s words, **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) wrote:

Murmurs and complaints of this kind are very common. It must never surprise us to hear them. They have been, they are, and they will be as long as the world stands. To some Christ’s sayings appear hard to understand. To others, as in the present case, they appear hard to believe, and harder still to obey. It is just one of the many ways in which the natural corruption of man shows itself. So long as the heart is naturally proud, worldly, unbelieving, and fond of self-indulgence, if not of sin, so long there will never be wanting people who will say of Christian doctrines and precepts, “These are hard sayings: who can hear them?”¹

And so, what should our attitude be? **Ryle** went on to write,

Humility is the frame of mind which we should labour and pray for, if we would not be offended. If we find any of Christ’s sayings hard to understand, we should humbly remember our present ignorance, and believe that we shall know more by and bye. If we find any of His sayings difficult to obey, we should humbly recollect that He will never require of us impossibilities, and that what He bids us to do, He will give us the grace to perform.²

The Lord Jesus did not soften His words to these “followers”, but ramped up His assertion by making a claim far greater than what He had before. Here He spoke of His preexistence as God. He said, “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” Our Lord’s reference to “before” refers to the time of His existence prior to His birth into this world. For Him to ascend to “where He was before”, refers to heaven, the abode of God. Here Jesus was asserting His deity. Jesus Christ is eternal God, or more

¹ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 410.

² Ibid, p. 410.

specifically, He is the eternal Son of God who reigned as the Ruler over His creation from its beginning. In His divine nature He “descended” into this world, joining to Himself our human nature, which is both a physical body and a reasonable soul, thereby being born into this world as both God and man, two natures in one person.

The Apostle Paul wrote of this descent of the Son of God when he quoted an Old Testament prophecy of the ascent of the risen Lord Jesus. In the context of addressing spiritual gifts, Paul wrote:

⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸Therefore He says:

“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”

Paul quoted Psalm 68:18, which He applied to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ to His throne in heaven as Lord, the promised Son of David. After having conquered the devil and even death itself, Jesus ascended into heaven to be seated on the throne of God. It is at this point that the apostle Paul gave further explanation that this same Jesus who ascended into heaven had first descended from heaven in His incarnation, when He took upon Himself our human nature, becoming Jesus of Nazareth. Here are Paul’s parenthetical words of explanation of Psalm 68:18:

⁹(Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that ***He also first descended*** into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Eph. 4:9-10)

Here, “the lower parts of the earth” is a reference to the womb of the Virgin Mary. Paul declared that the Son of God had descended to the earth in His incarnation, as having come down from heaven. And in our passage of John 6, Jesus said to these people, “What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?”

Now Jesus was referring to His descent from heaven in His incarnation, but actually He was posing a question to them, “What then ***if you should see the Son of Man ascend*** where He was before?” He is speaking of the future event of His ascension after His resurrection. And it was actually the case that at least 11 of the 12 disciples hearing Jesus’ words would indeed witness His ascension, His return to heaven from whence He had descended. We read of this event in Acts 1:

⁹Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, ***He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*** ¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

His apostles did in fact “***see the Son of Man ascend where He was before.***” And so, here in John 6:62 our Lord Jesus claimed His pre-existence.

The Lord Jesus had already alluded in this discourse that He was God who had come down in His incarnation, when He identified Himself as true bread that had come down from heaven (Cf. 6:33, 38, 51). He also made this claim of having “come down” in other places in John’s gospel. Consider these references:

John 3:13. “No one has ascended to heaven but ***He who came down from heaven***, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

John 6:38. “For ***I have come down from heaven***, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

John 6:46. “Not that anyone has seen the Father, ***except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.***”

John 8:23. “And He said to them, ‘You are from beneath; *I am from above*. You are of this world; *I am not of this world*.’”

John 8:42. “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, *for I proceeded forth and came from God*; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.’”

John 16:28. “*I came forth from the Father and have come into the world*. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

Before we move on from this verse 62, we should take time to address the meaning of our Lord’s self-designation in this verse as “*the Son of Man*.” Again, Jesus declared, “What then if you should see *the Son of Man* ascend where He was before?” What did He mean to convey by this self-designation? No one else called Him by this name, but this is how He referred to Himself.

It is popularly taught and thought that when Jesus referred to Himself as “the Son of Man” that He was speaking of His human nature. “Whereas the term, Son of God, refers to His divine nature, the term Son of Man refers to His human nature.” But this is a wrong understanding of the expression, the Son of Man. When Jesus used this expression He was identifying Himself as the promised Messiah who would come to bring salvation to His people. Here is a description of the Gospels’ use of this term:

This title in the Fourth Gospel “connotes the heavenly, superhuman side of Jesus’ mysterious existence,” expressing what is commonly called His preexistence (John 3:13; 6:62). As the Son of Man, Jesus in the Synoptics claimed to have the authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24) and to regulate even the observance of the divine ordinance of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5)—clearly prerogatives of deity alone. To speak against the Son of Man, He said, although forgivable, is blasphemy (Matt. 12:32). As the Son of Man the angels are His (Matt. 13:41), implying thereby His own super angelic status and lordship over them. As the Son of Man He would know a period of humiliation, having no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58) and finally even dying the cruel death of crucifixion; but He, the Son of Man, would suffer and die, He declared, only to the end that He might ransom others (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). A man’s eternal destiny would turn on his relationship to the Son of Man, He taught, for unless the Son of Man gives a man life, there is no life in him (John 6:53). As the Son of Man, He would rise from the dead and “sit at the right hand of power,” and “come in clouds with all His holy angels in the glory of His Father, true enough (Matt. 16:27; Mark 8:38), but coming in His *own* glory as well (Matt. 25:31). And when He comes, He declared, He would come with the authority to execute judgment upon all men precisely because He is the Son of Man (John 5:27). Clearly the Son of Man sayings embodied Jesus’ conception of Messiahship; and its associations were supernatural, even divine, in character.³

B. B. Warfield wrote of this title, the Son of Man.

It is...in the picture which Jesus Himself draws for us of the “Son of Man” that we see His superhuman nature portrayed. For the figure thus brought before us is distinctly a superhuman one; one which is not only in the future to be seen sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven...; but which in the present world itself exercises functions which are truly divine,—for who is the Lord of the Sabbath but the God who instituted it in commemoration of His own rest (2:28), and who can forgive sins but God only (2:10, see verse 7)? The assignment to the Son of Man of the function of Judge of the world and the ascription to Him of the right to forgive sins are, in each case, but another way of saying that He is a divine person; for these are divine acts.⁴

Why did Jesus call Himself the Son of Man? Actually, He did so for two reasons.

³ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 217f.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 218.

(1) First, by this title, the Son of Man, Jesus identified Himself with the Son of Man as the promised Messiah in Daniel 7:13 and 14 who receives His kingdom from God the Father. There we read of Daniel's vision:

¹³"I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, One like *the Son of Man*,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.

¹⁴Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one
Which shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13f)

Our dispensational friends wrongly interpret this passage to be a prophecy of the second coming of Jesus Christ. They say things like this, "When Jesus first came, He came to be a Savior, but when He comes a second time He will return a King." But this is terribly wrong. They teach that this passage is a prophecy of His second coming when He will become King to reign during a future 1,000 year millennium.⁵ John MacArthur is wrong in his interpretation of these verses that he set forth in his study Bible. He declared that Daniel 9:13 and 14 is a prophecy of Christ's future earthly millennial kingdom. Of verse 14 he wrote of the reference to "all peoples, nations, and languages": "These distinctions are earthly and speak of the promise of an earthly kingdom, ruled by Christ, that merges into the eternal kingdom."⁶ In other words, he teaches that Daniel 7:13 and 14 is a prophecy of the second coming of Christ and that He then will be King over an earthly, 1,000 year millennium.⁷

But if you read Daniel 7:13 and 14, you will see that there is no reference to Jesus' second coming to the earth. It speaks of Jesus coming "to the Ancient of Days", that is, to God the Father sitting on His throne in heaven. The crucified but risen Messiah came to the Father and received from His authority to reign as King over the Kingdom of God. As Paul wrote of this event:

⁹Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

This took place when Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection. It is recorded for us in detail in Revelation 5. God the Father declared Jesus to be Lord, giving Him a name above all names. Jesus Christ sat

⁵ Charles Ryrie has this footnote for Daniel 7:13-14: "This is the first reference to Messiah as *son of man*, a title our Lord used of Himself often. See note on Matthew 8:20. At His second coming He will have *sovereign power* over this world." He made this statement because He does not believe that Jesus presently have sovereign power over this world, for that will not take place until His second coming. See Charles Ryrie, **Ryrie Study Bible** (Moody Press, 1986, 1994), p. 1315. Regarding his reference to his note on Matthew 8:20, Ryrie stated that Daniel 7:13 and 14 emphasizes "His future reign as King" (Ibid, p. 1472). Ryrie and classical dispensationalists like him do not believe that Jesus Christ is currently King.

⁶ John MacArthur, **The MacArthur Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson, 1997), pp. 1239.

⁷ MacArthur, although in many ways a wonderful servant of Christ, is dispensational in his understanding of this church age, and his belief in the distinct promises to Israel from those to the Church. He does not believe that the OT prophets foresaw this church age. He wrote, "OT prophets didn't see the great time period between the two comings. The church age was a 'mystery' hidden from them" (**The MacArthur Study Bible**, p. 1350). This is in conflict with what Peter declared in Acts 3:24, "Yes, and *all the prophets*, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold *these days*" (Acts 3:24). "These days" refer to this church age that MacArthur and other dispensationalists teach the OT prophets never foresaw.

down in His Father's throne and began to reign as the crucified, risen, and now enthroned Lord of lords and King of kings.

(2) The second reason that Jesus used this title, the Son of Man, was so that He could declare Himself to be the Messiah but in a way that no one would have imposed their wrong understandings of what kind of Messiah He would be to them. **Robert Reymond** stated this traditional understanding of this title of Jesus:

... the church has traditionally understood the phrase "Son of Man" as the title Jesus chose as a self-designation precisely because, although assuredly messianic (see Daniel 9:13), this title was ambiguous in meaning to the current popular imagination. This enabled Him to claim to be the Messiah with little danger of the current erroneous views being read into it before He had the opportunity to infuse it with the full-orbed content of the messianic task which was foreshadowed in and predicted by the Old Testament.⁸

There was no uniform understanding among Jews of the identity and the nature of the Messiah when He would come to His people. The majority of Jews were looking for descendant of King David, whom God would use to inaugurate the Davidic kingdom, leading Israel to become the predominant political nation that would rule over the Gentile nations of the world. There were other Jews, however, who believed that when the Messiah came that He would be a heavenly figure, one like a son of man who would usher in the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and a new heavens and earth. No one was anticipating a suffering Savior who would die as a sacrifice for sin and then be raised unto life, even though it was taught everywhere in the Old Testament. When Jesus asserted that He was the Son of Man, He could instruct and prepare His disciples for the great event of His impending sufferings and of the glories of His kingdom that would follow. In Jesus Christ the various streams of messianic understanding of the Jews were realized and displayed. Errant understandings were discredited. The truth of Jesus as the Promised Messiah was manifest. Through Jesus using this title, the Son of Man, He was able to instruct and prepare His disciples for the fulfillment of all of God's promises in Him.

After our Lord posed this question to those who had heard Him, He made this statement recorded in John 6:63:

2. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (6:63)

Jesus Christ declared that the faith to believe in Him and to believe His teaching was due to the spiritual life that the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows upon people. Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life. Only He can, for "the flesh profits nothing." Here is another statement of our Lord in which He declared the sovereign grace of God in bestowing spiritual life. Fallen man is incapable of achieving spiritual life. It cannot be gained by man. It must be imparted to him by the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord made this statement in the face of those who reacted and objected to His teaching. Only the Holy Spirit can enable a man to be open to hear and be enabled to understand and respond to the Word of God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

⁹But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

¹⁰But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

⁸ Reymond, p. 215.

Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

¹³These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ¹⁶For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:9-16)

The Lord Jesus then said, "*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*" The Holy Spirit uses the words of Jesus to bring forth spiritual life in His hearers.

A woodenly literal, flesh-denominated manner of looking at Jesus' words will not yield the correct interpretation. That is granted only to the spiritual man, the Spirit-dominated man. Such words cannot be comprehended by the fleshly, whose horizon is bound by this earth and its outlook. Only as the life-giving Spirit informs him may a man understand these words. This applies to much more than the words of this discourse. In His teaching as a whole Jesus emphasizes the Spirit, though specific references to the Spirit are not frequent. He is not concerned with the good that men may produce by the best efforts of the flesh. All His teaching presupposes the necessity for a work of the divine Spirit within man.⁹

Jesus said that His words are "*life.*" The Holy Spirit uses the words of Jesus to create spiritual life in those who hear Him. This means that "Jesus' words are creative utterances."¹⁰ His words tell us who He is and what He has done to save sinners from their sin and the death and damnation that is due them for their sins. The Holy Spirit enables sinners to both understand and embrace His words as truth. Due to the Holy Spirit informing the sinner and imparting a new heart to him in regeneration, the sinner becomes a believer in Jesus Christ.

But then Jesus declared,

3. "But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him." (6:64)

Not only does Jesus reveal Himself to others, but He reveals to others their true nature. Jesus is still speaking to "many of His disciples" who had become very troubled by His teaching. He declared that their problem was unbelief. They refused to believe Him and the words that He taught them. "The more Jesus became an offense (vs. 60-61), the more visible their unbelief."¹¹

It is here that the Apostle John, the writer of the Gospel, provides an explanatory statement for his readers. He wrote, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him." Our Lord Jesus knew the heart condition of the ones with whom He walked and fellowshiped day after day. They did not know that they were known by Him. John was writing this explanation long after the event.

Our Lord Jesus knew all that was taking place around Him. He knew the motives and the capabilities of those with whom He related. He was the Word of God, even as He is described in Hebrews 4:12ff.

¹²For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. (Heb. 4:12-13)

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 385.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 343.

So it is that Jesus knows your heart and mine. He knows what we believe and what we struggle to believe. He knows how devoted we are to Him, or how little we are committed to Him. But thankfully, He is a sympathetic High Priest who is moved with pity and compassion for those He represents. He intercedes with the Father on your behalf, if you know Him. He superintends your life and enables you to persevere in your faith unto His promised destiny.

But Jesus Christ also knows “*who would betray Him.*” And yet He was patient with them, even though He knew of their upcoming defection and departure from Him. There is no evidence that He regarded or treated Judas Iscariot differently from the other apostles whom He knew would continue in their faith and fidelity to Him.

Now after Jesus declared to them that only by the grace of God any of them could come to Him in order to receive eternal life, He affirmed once again in very strong terms that only through the sovereign will of God the Father could they come unto Him in faith. We have recorded in verse 65,

4. “And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’” (6:65)

He reaffirmed that salvation from sin and damnation would only be obtained through the will of God the Father.

Jesus concludes His postdialogue conversation with the so-called “disciples” with a statement that reemphasizes a fundamental theme of the entire pericope: the primary agent of faith is the Father.¹²

The latter clause of this verse reads, “*unless it has been granted to him by My Father.*” The verb of this clause is in a rather unique form. It is a participle, that is, a verbal adjective, in the perfect passive tense. “This latter phrase is conveyed with a perfect passive participle that nearly bursts with theological significance.”¹³ What this means is that it is the Father who enables the sinner to first understand and then to embrace the words of Jesus in order to have saving faith, and that initial enablement will continue throughout the life of the believer.

Faith is not just a specific gift, something upon which the Christian is utterly dependent. From start to finish there is no such thing as an independent Christian. Without the Father, there would be no children. It is the Father who must give the “right” (1:12); salvation is “from God” (1:13). In a real way, this is the ultimate rebuke of Jesus to His interlocutors in this challenge dialogue. They lose not only because of their own lack of faith but also because the Father was, quite simply, against them from the start.

God the Father is sovereign in His bestowal of salvation—salvation is due to the grace of God. And it was this last assertion that brought many “disciples” to end their commitment to believe on Him and follow Him.

II. Our Lord’s challenge to His Twelve. (6:66-69)

⁶⁶From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. ⁶⁷Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

⁶⁸But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

We read in verse 66, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” We addressed this verse in our last set of sermon notes, so we will not do so here and now. We will only reassert that these temporary disciples were not true disciples of Jesus Christ. A temporary disciple of Jesus

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Christ is no true disciple of Jesus Christ. These former followers did not lose their salvation; rather, they never possessed the true faith in Jesus Christ that saves the soul. Their departure from Jesus Christ, their refusal to continue in faith to Him as His disciples, proved that they had never truly known Him. This is in accordance with 1 John 2:19f. There the same author of this Fourth Gospel wrote in his epistle,

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. (1 John 2:19f)

But then Jesus turned to those few who remained, standing with Him. We read in **verse 67**, “*Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’*”

Here we read for the first time on John’s Gospel of “the Twelve.” The reason that there were **Twelve Apostles** is because the nation of Israel was comprised of **twelve tribes**. The Lord appointed Twelve Apostles to become the new leaders of the nation of Israel, comprised of all true Israelites who embraced their Messiah through repentance and faith.

That this was our Lord’s intention may be seen in what He said to the Jewish leaders of Israel who had rejected Him and His rule over them. Jesus said of them, “Therefore *I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits*” (Matt. 21:43). The Lord Jesus wrested the leadership of Israel, the professing people of God, from the rule and grip of the wicked unbelieving Jewish leaders and He entrusted the leadership of Israel to His Twelve Apostles. They became the twelve “Judges” ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel.

The book of Revelation describes the church as the fulfillment and realization of the promised destiny and hope of Israel. We read in Revelation 21 of a vision of the New Jerusalem, in which the twelve tribes of Israel are mentioned and the Twelve Apostles in the same context:

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on *the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed*-- ¹³on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were *the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*” (Rev. 21:10-14)

In verse 67 our Lord asked His twelve apostles: “Do you also want to go away?” We then read Peter’s response in verses 68 and 69:

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

⁶⁹Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Peter spoke on behalf of the Twelve. They would not defect and depart from Jesus. They were true believers; they were disciples indeed. They believed that the words of Jesus were true words. Moreover, they knew that Jesus Christ was the only way in which someone could obtain eternal life. They believed in *solus Christus*, that salvation was through Jesus Christ alone. Moreover they had come to understand and believe that He was the Blessed, eternal Son of God, the promised Messiah--the Christ, who alone could bring them to experience salvation. Actually, the NKJV of our text does not have the best translation. Earlier manuscripts than what was used by the translators of the KJV and the NKJV read instead of “Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, *the Son of the living God*”, they read, “We have believed, and have come to know, that you are *the Holy One of God.*” (John 6:69, ESV).¹⁴

¹⁴ The change in the NKJV and the KJV was probably due to a scribe who sought to conform these words in John 6:67 to those of Peter in Matthew 16:16. See Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 303.

These men were troubled men. On this occasion they had seen these thousands of people grow disillusioned and turn away from Jesus. His words had probably troubled them as they had troubled the multitude, but they would stay upon Him. True Christians can do nothing but stay upon Him in faith. True Christians can be tempted to turn away, but they cannot do it. It is not in them to do so. God in His grace keeps them unto Himself and He will not let them go.

I once used this knowledge of the grace of God's persevering grace in order to help a young Christian woman in her troubles. She was a young mother and wife of an unsaved husband that was terrible to her. He had so worn her down with his cruel words and his hard heart that she had enough. She knew that the Lord would not allow her to walk away from her husband, but she had determined that she was going to do so anyway. She was going to abandon her faith entirely, to walk away from Christ. There were other issues pressing upon her toward this action that I will not articulate. But she was hardened, resistant to my appeals, resolved to walk away. Every argument I gave, she dismissed entirely. I was all out of reasons and arguments. She was intransigent. I sat there for a moment, and then sitting back, said to her: "Fine, Betty, go ahead, walk away from Christ. Tell Him now that you refuse to believe on Him and that you will no longer follow Him." In only a few moments I could see her completely relax, as it were. Her resistance and stubbornness disappeared. She surrendered completely to the Lord. She said to me, "I can't leave Him." I had been convinced she was a true believer. I knew that though she may backslide, she would not, could not, deny the Lord so as to forsake Him.

The Lord keeps His own. He loses not one. Even though they may come to a place in which they are very troubled, very confused, and very discouraged, they will stay upon Him. They will find themselves as Peter saying to our Lord, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

But not only did these true disciples believe the words of Jesus, that through them came the knowledge of eternal life, but we read of Peter declaring, "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." They believed that Jesus Christ was God incarnate, that Jesus Christ was not only a man, but that He was the eternal Son of God. They believed what Jesus said, and they believed who Jesus truly is. They had saving faith, and their faith was of a persevering nature, all born of God's grace and sustained by His grace.

III. Our Lord's assessment of His Twelve. (6:70-71)

⁷⁰Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" ⁷¹He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

Here Jesus declared to His twelve apostles that He had chosen them. This is not speaking of their eternal election by God unto salvation, which is normally attributed to God the Father. This speaks of Jesus having called these specific twelve men to become His twelve apostles. He had done so after having spent all night in prayer, no doubt seeking guidance and direction from His Father. The next day He called out these twelve men from among His many disciples, and declared them to be His apostles (Cf. Matt. 10:1-4).

But in choosing them, He knew that one of them was "a devil." We know that He was referring to Judas Iscariot. John the Gospel writer declared him to be so in verse 71. But when Jesus said this to these twelve men, no one knew the identity of this betrayer. Perhaps Judas himself was ignorant of the action he would later take against the Master.

When Jesus declared this one as a devil, it should probably be understood as Judas having been fully controlled by satan.

Even there, the one catastrophic failure amongst the Twelve was not unforeseen. One of them was *a diabolos*: the word in common Greek means 'slanderer' or 'false accuser', but in the New Testament it always refers, when it is a substantive (a noun) to satan, the prince of darkness (e.g. 8:44; 13:2; cf. 13:27). Indeed the Greek should probably not be rendered *one of you is a devil* but 'one of you is the devil'. The meaning is clear from 13:2, clearer yet in Mark 8:33 par., where Jesus addressed Peter as 'satan'. The

supreme adversary of God so operates behind fallen human beings that his malice becomes theirs. Jesus can discern the source, and labels it appropriately.¹⁵

Conclusion:

These twelve alone remained in faith at the end of the day, but one of them would one day betray Jesus. He was a devil, that is, He would be led by and governed by the devil in his treachery and betrayal of Jesus. All of these twelve had their faith tried on this day, and the result of their trial was that they were stronger at the end of the day than they were at its beginning.

So it is, you as a believer will also encounter the trial of your faith from time to time. It is the destiny of all true Christians. Peter would later write of this common experience of all Christians. He wrote:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1Pet. 1:3-9)

A tried faith is a true faith. Our trials of faith are varied in nature and grievous to our experience, but our Lord is both purifying us and perfecting our faith in us through these trials. And He does not lose one of His own through these trials, for their faith is undergirded by the grace of God. He keeps us “by the power of God through faith” unto our full and final salvation, which is the outcome of our life of faith.

Upon the disciples’ commitment to stay true to Him in faith and resolve to continue to follow Him, He assured them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve?” They knew that He was their true Messiah, the Savior of their souls, the Giver of eternal life. He assured them that through their faith in Him, their eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which is the richest imaginable emblem of true faith, that their souls were eternally secure.

And yet, Jesus announced that one of them was a devil. Which one? The disciples knew not. And that was intentional on our Lord’s part. He would have them know that they are blessed, that they are secure, but He would not have them be complacent or presumptuous. I suspect all of them continued onward following Jesus, but in their thinking was this prospect: “By God’s grace I will not be that led by the devil to betray my Lord.”

So too, let us be assured and be at peace that we have life through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Granted, you may never understand all that He has taught or why He is doing what He is doing in your life, but that does not ultimately matter. It is sufficient that you know Him to be who He claims to be and that He has promised that those who believe on Him have everlasting life. Believe Him to be a greater Savior than you are a great Savior. Rest in that, and you will be okay.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

¹⁵ Ibid.