

“Disciples Who Don’t Believe”

January 19, 2014

Text: John 6:59-65

A Xn couple asked their pastor for marriage counseling.

The husband was a very successful businessman, & was also involved in various leadership activities w/i the church.

His wife faithfully attended the ladies’ Bible study.

The tension was obvious during their counseling session, as they each accused the other of not loving or caring enough about their own children from previous marriage, now grown into adulthood, but not all out of the home yet.

The pastor offered a number of biblical suggestions, all of which went unheeded, because they were both convinced the other person was the main (or sole) cause of their problems. They each hoped the pastor would soon figure that out, set the other person straight, & let them out of there.

The pastor’s ultimate conclusion=> Prob. neither one of these active members of his church was born again.

Is it really possible to be an active, professing Xn, & not be saved?

Yes, in today’s text, X will say this about people who were called

His disciples: *“There are some of you who do **not believe.**”*

If that was true among those to whom the greatest preacher who ever lived ministered, it’s safe to assume it’s true among us today as well.

I don't know whom Jesus might determine to be disciples
w/o saving faith, but He knows who they are now,
just as He did then.

Religious actions/activities are not a reliable gauge of true saving
faith.

- * A person may be able to pray eloquently, & w/ what
seems like real/heartfelt sincerity—but not be
redeemed.
- * A person may be scrupulously moral—& not be saved.
- * He may be actively involved in ministry, & not be saved.
- * He may impress others w/ his generosity towards the
poor/needy, and still not have saving faith.

This is good reason to heed Paul's admonition to the
Corinthians=>

“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5).

- * There are pastors who need to search their own hearts and
test themselves.

They preach the Word & in some cases cut it straight;
But in reality, their own hearts are w/o genuine faith.
They are like flying buttresses on a cathedral, holding
the structure up, though they themselves are
outside the true Church.

Even Judas went out & preached God's Kingdom.

But unknown to anyone but X, he was a son of perdition who would ultimately go to his own place—hell.

* There are people serving diligently in important offices of the church, but who do not have saving faith.

They include elders, deacons, deaconesses, teachers, & others, regularly ministering in Jesus' name.

But in X's view, they are like spiritual lepers, giving medicine to others who are spiritually sick, & doing so w/ hands that are pock-marked w/ leprosy.

Like the church at Sardis, they are thought to be alive, but X Himself says they are dead

(Rev 3:1).

We can only hope/pray that the H.S. will awaken them to the true condition of their souls before it's too late.

It's good for all of us to examine our hearts from time to time, making sure our hope is established/settled on genuine saving faith.

In today's text, Jesus' false disciples will grumble in unbelief.

He will ask them a question=> why they don't believe.

Then He will answer His own question for them...

So our outline is=>

* The disciples' unbelief

* Jesus question

* Jesus answer.

* **The Disciples' Unbelief**

[John 6:59]=> *“These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.”*

**Jesus had entered Capernaum early that morning,
having crossed Lake Galilee from the eastern shore
during the night (walking across part of the way).**

When the Galilean Jews following Him caught up w/ Him in Capernaum, He taught them, apparently being outdoors still, as He did so.

At some point, He had moved into the synagogue (vs 41?), continuing His discourse there in front of Capernaum's Jewish leaders.

“These things” (vs 59) prob. included all that X had taught them=>

- 1) That He is the Bread of Life come down from heaven, & that if they would come to Him in faith, they would never again hunger/thirst spiritually.
The Bread of Life would fill up their souls.
- 2) That the Father had given Him certain people, that these people would be drawn by the Father to Jesus, & that they alone would believe in X, & receive eternal life.
- 3) That to gain life from X, man must perform the spiritual equivalent of eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

That means they must truly believe in Him,
committing their whole hearts to Him.

True believers don't just dabble in the truths about X.
They unreservedly take to heart the truths about
Himself which He has taught us, just as a
person might eat/drink food.

This speaks of the total commitment w/ which one
believes in our Lord, unto eternal life.

**Jesus' false disciples felt that this was asking far too much at
this point.**

[Verse 60]=> *“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard
this said, ‘This is a **difficult** [skleros—unacceptably
hard/rough] statement; who can listen to it?’”*

These would-be “disciples” will decide that Jesus' statements
have been so unpleasant, & hard-to-accept, that they are
no longer willing to listen to anything He has to say.

What they wanted from Jesus was food, miracles, and a
political messiah who would take away the Romans
from their homeland.

They refused to turn loose of their own authority in
spiritual matters, submitting to and relying upon His
authority, so they were incapable of real faith in Him.

They were offended by Jesus' claims to be authorized by
God to give people eternal life.

So next time, in verse 66, we'll read=> *“As a result of this
many of His **disciples withdrew** and were*

not walking with Him anymore.”

That is the tragedy of withdrawal from Jesus.

In chapter 8, Jesus will say=> “If you **continue** in My word, then you are **truly disciples** of Mine” (8:31).

They won’t, because they are not truly His disciples.

So what does this teach us?

1) That there are “disciples” of Jesus who mistakenly believe they are truly His disciples, and that discipleship is nothing more than hanging out around Xns.

They neither eat His flesh, nor drink His blood.

Jesus saves those who are poor in spirit, & they’re not;

- * Those who mourn over their sin, & they don’t.
- * Those who hunger/thirst for righteousness, and they never have.
- * Those who will take up their cross daily & follow Him, & they have no intention of doing so.

False disciples love Jesus as the Baby in the manger, the social reformer, the advocate for love/tolerance, and the ideal man whose goal is to make all men happy. I.e., they love a Jesus who goes along w/ all their own thinking.

But they find what the biblical Jesus said, too “*difficult*” to live w/, so they ignore Him, & revert back to their much more easy-going (& nicer) make-believe Jesus instead.

Folks like this are gathering w/ other professed believers in churches all over the world right now.

Some of them may even be here this morning.

And none of them are truly born again.

2) There is also a different kind of disciple, who is for real.

11 of Jesus' 12 Apostles were among that second group.

So when Jesus asked them if they too were going to

withdraw/leave Him, Peter would answer=>

“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.” (6:68-69).

True disciples never leave X because it's not an option for them—they know eternal life is found nowhere else.

* Jesus' Question(s)

Jesus asks His false disciples 2 questions about why they have decided not to believe in Him.

[Verse 61]=> *“But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, ‘Does **this** cause you to stumble?’”*

Jesus, by His supernatural knowledge of people's hearts, was fully aware that they were grumbling about “*this*” (all the things He had taught in His discourse).

He asked if what He had said was the cause of their “stumbling.”

“*Stumble*” can have several meanings in Scripture, which vary from simply offending someone, to causing him to give up his faith in X (the meaning in this case).

The stumbling of these false believers meant that they had fallen into the sin of unbelief, and were now withdrawing their hearts from X.

When Jesus asked if their sinful stumbling was caused by what He had said, He wasn't seeking information from them, but was challenging them to think about the question themselves.

The correct answer to it was that He had not caused them to sin by His claiming to be the Bread of Life come from heaven, nor by claiming that they could receive eternal life by believing in Him (eating His flesh & drinking His blood, spiritually).

He had provided ample evidence to back up these claims by healing their sick & miraculously feeding 5000 of them the day before.

The reason people like this stumble over Jesus is that they cannot squeeze Him/Xnity into their own predetermined mold.

They have certain non-negotiables, & they will only accept Jesus' words as long as they fit w/i the confines of their own predisposed/preconceived ideas of what is/is-not acceptable.

I.e., they are their own authority—Jesus/His-words are not.

In confronted for their lack of faith, they might say, "It's not my fault, it's X's fault."

“I can’t believe what He says because it’s not believable, so it’s not acceptable to me.”

In reality, it’s that they will not believe—not that they can’t.

In essence, Jesus’ false disciples were accusing Him of not offering them a convincing enough argument to believe.

The implication was that, if He would simply present better arguments and more compelling evidence, they would believe in Him.

Jesus responded by asking a 2nd question, which is really a hypothetical proposition—a “what-if” question.

[Verse 62] (Jesus)=> *“What then if you [subjunctive mood=> should/might] see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?”*

Some commentators believe Jesus was referring to His ascension into heaven; some believe He had His crucifixion in mind.

I doubt it was the ascension because very few of these Galileans actually saw Jesus ascend.

I also doubt that Jesus was referring to His crucifixion, because that didn’t involve anyone seeing Him go to heaven where He was before.

I think Jesus was simply throwing out a hypothetical scenario=>

“Just suppose you should watch Me ascend into heaven. Would that be enough to convince you?”

That He was saying, “If you somehow actually saw the Son of Man ascending into heaven, would that convince you, He came down from heaven in the first place?”

Jesus’ claim to have come from heaven was central to their rejection of Him as the One who can give eternal life. They thought He had come from Nazareth, not from heaven.

They had known His parents and had seen Him grow up. So they thought they knew all about Him.

If Jesus’ false disciples were honest, they would have answered, “No, even such evidence as your ascending couldn’t convince us.”

We know that the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection didn’t convince the chief priests (who knew about it), that He actually was the Son of God.

They just reacted by making up a story about His body being stolen.

Jesus Himself had said (Lk 16:31)=> *“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”*

He actually did rise from the dead, & they didn’t believe, because they weren’t persuaded.

That’s the whole point of Jesus’ questions to His false disciples in our text.

Their lack of faith had nothing to do w/ a lack of evidence.

They may have thought it did, but it didn't.

So where did their lack of faith come from?

Jesus answers that in the 3rd section of this text, where we find=>

* **Jesus' Answer** (to His own questions)

[Verse 63] (Jesus)=> *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the **flesh** profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."*

"*Flesh*" here refers to man's humanness.

In last week's text it referred to Jesus' humanness, when

He said (vs 54)=> *"He who eats **My flesh** and drinks **My blood** has eternal life."*

X's "flesh" is His incarnation in human flesh, coming to earth as the "Son of *Man*," & taking upon Himself our human nature w/ all its weaknesses/limitations.

Now Jesus tells us that our human flesh profits us nothing.

The false disciples had relied on their own human wisdom in judging the validity of Jesus' claims.

As a result, they had come to the wrong conclusion about Him because fallen man's mind is incapable of discovering good/life-giving truths in the spiritual realm from mere evidence, no matter how convincing it may be.

So if man cannot rely upon his fallen mind to discover spiritual truth about Jesus, how is he ever to acquire eternal life?

X's answer=> *"It is the **Spirit** who gives life."*

The H.S. is the divine wind that blows over man's soul & brings it to life—He is the Giver of spiritual life.

That's what Jesus had told Nicodemus in Jn 3=>

*“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the **Spirit** is spirit” (3:6).*

Then, comparing the Spirit w/ the wind, Jesus added=>

*“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is **born** of the **Spirit**” (Jn 3:8).*

Man acquires spiritual life as a gift from the H.S., not through his own human evaluation of the evidence available to him.

But that doesn't mean man's mind is not involved/engaged in the process.

It must be involved, as it contemplates (under the power & influence of the H.S.) Jesus' words about Himself.

That's what Jesus meant at the end of verse 63=>

*“The words that I have spoken to you are **spirit** & are **life**.”*

* Jesus' words “*are spirit*” in the sense that they come from, and bear the divine nature/wisdom of, the H.S. They also result in man's receiving a new spirit (Ezek 36).

So they appeal to our own regenerated spiritual nature (our new spirit), which feeds/thrives on truth/love/grace/holiness.

* Jesus' words "*are [also] life*" in that they generate eternal life, when brought home to man's heart by the H.S.

Someone: Help me better understand what all that means.

Give me a practical example of how my new spirit operates w/i me as a believer.

OK, let's look at it in terms of praying with/in the spirit, as opposed to praying in the flesh (which profits you nothing). Our spiritual-life is eternal-life, given to us by the H.S. at the time of our salvation.

Ezek 36:26 (God)=> "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.*"

Our new/renewed spirit is that part of our nature by which we fellowship and commune w/ God—who is an unseen Spirit (we commune w/God spirit-to-Spirit).

But unfortunately, many of our prayers are prayed w/ our spirits completely disengaged, as our flesh is going through the motions of praying.

In reality, a fleshly prayer is no more than a recitation—not a real prayer at all, so it profits nothings.

Martin Luther used to complain of distractions in his prayers.

Only when our spirits are focused on God, actually talking to Him, & w/ Him, are our prayers real prayers.

Frequently, as I pray, I have to check up on my own mind, and ask myself, "Am I talking to God, or just saying words and talking to myself?"

Spurgeon quoted a man name Bernard, who grieved over the tendency of his own thoughts to wander as he prayed.

When someone rebuked him for letting that happen,

Bernard said, “I will give you a test. I will give you a horse if you can say the Lord’s Prayer and think of nothing else.”

So the man began, “Our Father which art in heaven,” then suddenly he stopped short.

He opened his eyes & said to Bernard, “But you must give me the bridle to get him home with.”

God is the object of our love/devotion, but it’s just that hard to keep our easily-distracted minds focused on Him.

When our prayers are fleshly from the start, expressions of our love for the things of this earth, not those of heaven above, there’s nothing real or spirit-to-Spirit about them.

But when our prayers reflect Jesus’ own thoughts/words, & are spoken in humble yieldedness to the H.S., seeking God’s will, they become powerful expressions of our eternal-life and renewed spirits.

They please/glorify God, & they have substantial impact.

But Jesus’ point in verse 63 is that everything done by false disciples, in the supposed power of human flesh (including their prayers) is completely powerless/profitless—and therefore pointless.

And some (if not many) of those listening to Jesus that day, were false disciples who didn't really believe in Him.

[Verse 64] (Jesus)=> “*‘But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, & who it was that would betray Him.*”

Here is an amazing fact=> Jesus, in His grace, is teaching these incredible truths to people whom He already knows will reject what He is saying.

*It's almost as if those who would believe have orange faces, and those who don't/won't are green.

And as Jesus looks out on the crowd, I sees a sea of green faces w/ only a smattering of orange faces.

Jesus even knows that 1 of them—Judas Iscariot—will betray Him.

He had known that from the beginning, when He spent a whole night praying for guidance before He selected His Apostles.

**And yet, in spite of the seeming hopelessness of it all, He keeps faithfully teaching all these people.

I'm thankful as a preacher, I don't know which listeners are hopelessly lost; but that I can proclaim God's Word in the hope (even if it's a false hope) that you'll all listen/believe God's Word.

Unbelief was the cause of X's false disciples' rejection of Him.

That was the answer to Jesus' own question, “*Does this [Jesus' own claims about Himself] cause you to stumble?*”

No, they had stumbled because of their own unbelief.

It was their fault, not His lack of persuasive argument or evidence, that would destroy (and was now even destroying) their souls.

And God would hold them responsible for it, as their own affirmation of Adam/Eve's original refusal to believe what God had told them, in the Garden of Eden.

When people do not combine faith w/ Jesus' words, those words of are no value/profit to them.

[Verse 65]=> *“And He was saying, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.’”*

Now Jesus gives them the other half of the answer, to the question of why they had rejected His words=> No one can come to Him & become saved, unless it has been granted to that person by the Father's sovereign choice.

If you believe that man is saved strictly by virtue of his own free will, I would ask you to think carefully about this verse.

Also vs 37=> There Jesus said that all those whom the Father gives to Him will come to Him—again, God's sovereign choice.

And vs 44 where X said=> *“No one **can** come to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws** [drags, tugs-on] him.”*

While verse 64 portrays salvation from the viewpoint of man's responsibility to believe.

Verse 65 portrays it from the viewpoint of God's
sovereign/unconditional election.

Commentator Don Carson (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

writes=> "However much men & women are commanded to believe, &
are held accountable for their unbelief, genuine coming to faith is never
finally a matter of autonomous human decision."

**If you are an unbeliever, the message you can take from this
depends on what type of unbeliever you are.**

* Some have no saving faith, but anxiously wish that they did.

They feel their need of X, hate their sin & yet have no faith.

They might ask, "Can I believe? What if I'm not chosen
and given to X by the Father?"

The answer to them is, Of course you can believe, & X has
even commanded you to do so.

Just make up your mind to believe, and turn the rest
of the issue over to the H.S., resting in God's
grace.

Accept your own desire to believe as sufficient proof
that God has chosen you, and has even placed
that desire to believe in Jesus, into your heart.
I.e., that He is already at work in your life,
drawing you to X.

* Some, like the false disciples in our text, have willfully chosen
not to believe, trusting in their own judgment about Jesus.

The answer to them is, “As long as your pride considers your own thoughts to be of equal/greater value than Jesus’ words, you will never believe in Him.”

Pray the Spirit will bring you to the realization that your pride is sinful/wrong, & that Jesus’ words are intrinsically right.

Then repent of it, mourning over it, and asking Jesus to forgive you of your pride, a/w/a all your other sins.

X said=> “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. / Blessed are those who **mourn**, for they shall be comforted*” (Mt 5:3f).

* Some are thoughtless/indifferent & really don’t care at all.

For them, death/hell are unreal, & heaven is a myth made up by weak people w/ nothing else to look forward to.

Their attitude—“Enjoy this life to the max; it’s all there is.”

They are indifferent to the welfare of their eternal souls.

My response to them would be, The Bible is eternally true, & you should trust it’s warning that there is a real heaven to gain, & a real hell to shun—forever.

I am concerned for your soul, even if you are not.

Even now you are already under God’s wrath.

I pray the H.S. will bring these truths home to your heart today.

“Disciples Who Don’t Believe”

January 19, 2014

Text: John 6:59-65

1. Is it possible to be an active, professing Christian, and not be saved? [8 Yes].
II Cor 13:5; Rev 3:1

2. It’s good for all of us to examine our hearts from time to time making sure our hope is settled on genuine [14 saving] faith.

In today’s text, Jesus’ false disciples will grumble in unbelief. He will ask them a question (why they don’t believe). Then He will answer His own question for them...

*** The Disciples’ Unbelief**

[John 6:59]

Jn 6:41

3. “*These things*” (verse 59) probably included all that Christ had [14 taught] them.

[Verse 60]

4. These “*disciples*” will decide that Jesus’ statements have been so unpleasant and hard to accept that they are [6 no] longer willing to listen.

Jn 6:66; 8:31

So what does this teach us?

*5. There are disciples of Jesus who neither [8 eat] His flesh nor drink His blood.

*6. There is also a different kind of disciple, who is for [10 real].

Jn 6:68-69

*** Jesus’ Questions**

[Verse 61]

7. The reason people like this stumble over Jesus is that they cannot squeeze [8 Him] or Christianity into their predetermined mold.

[Verse 62]

8. Jesus’ claim to have come from heaven was central to their rejection of Him as the One who can [10 give] eternal life.

Lk 16:31

9. Jesus' false disciples' lack of faith had [16 nothing] to do with a lack of evidence.

* **Jesus' Answer**

[Verse 63]

Jn 6:54; 3:6, 8

10. Man acquires spiritual life as a gift from the Holy Spirit, not through his own [12 human] evaluation of the evidence.

11. Many of our prayers are prayed with our spirits completely disengaged as our [12 flesh] is going through the motions of praying.

12. Everything done by false disciples in the supposed power of human [12 flesh] (including their prayers) is completely profitless.

[Verse 64]

13. Unbelief was the cause of Christ's false disciples' [20 rejection] of Him.

[Verse 65]

14. No one can come to Him and become saved unless it has been [16 granted] to that person by the Father's sovereign choice.

Jn 6:37, 44; Mt 5:3-4

15. The Bible is true; trust its warning that there is a real heaven to gain and a real hell to shun—[16 forever].