

# TRUE AND FALSE DISCIPLES

## **John 6:60-71**

Have you ever noticed how much attention Jesus gave to the issue of false discipleship? I am not speaking so much of those who are pretenders and who present themselves under false colors as much as I am describing those who have deceived themselves.

- The parable of the sower describes one seed that has no growth and another that has wonderful fruit-bearing growth, but it also depicts two sorts of ground that have an initial period of growth but which are then stopped short by other factors. The point is made that the good ground is ground that endures.
- The parable of the wise and the foolish virgins speak of two groups of people, both of whom are awaiting the coming of the bridegroom.
- Jesus spoke of how there will be some who will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” Jesus will say to them, “I never knew you.”

It is one thing to outwardly reject Christ, but it seems to me a much more dangerous thing to have thought you were saved and secure in His kingdom while being self deceived.

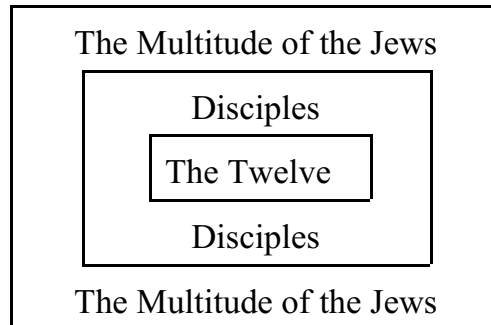
## **A CAUSE FOR STUMBLING**

*60 Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"*

*61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? 62 What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 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 it was that would betray Him. 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."*

*66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. (John 6:60-66).*

There were three groups of people who have been present with Jesus throughout the dialogue in this chapter.



Everyone present was a part of the Jewish multitude. There is no mention of any Gentiles present. John 6:59 tells us this teaching took place within the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum.

Within that Jewish multitude, there were some who had become disciples of Jesus. They had left their homes and their families to come and to learn from Him. They had a deeper level of commitment than the multitude, but it was not deep enough to hold them.

Within the disciples, there was a much smaller group made up of the Twelve. These were the ones who had been commissioned by Jesus to be apostles. They had been given authority from the Lord. Yet we are going to see that even within this group, there will be a further division between those who are true disciples and one who is not.

The first thing we ought to note is that it is not just the multitude, but that these were DISCIPLES who were grumbling. They were people who had made an initial commitment to following Jesus.

1. They fell away because the words of Jesus were difficult: *Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" (6:60).*

The word translated “difficult” in this passage is the Greek word σκληρος. It is found several times in the New Testament and never has the idea of that which is difficult to understand, but rather describes that which is offensive and difficult to accept.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These are the uses of σκληρος:

- Matthew 25:24. *And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a **hard** man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed.'*
- Acts 26:14. *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is **hard** for you to kick against the goads*
- James 3:4. *Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by **strong** winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of*

It was not just that the words of Jesus were difficult to comprehend, but that it was difficult for these disciples to hear those words. His teachings were like the sound of a fingernail on a chalkboard to their soul.

I have often been confronted with this type of response when I share the gospel. It is not that people do not understand what I am saying. It is that they understand all too well and they do not agree with it.

The message of the gospel will always bring about one of two results. Either you will hear it and react with a yearning in your soul to believe and to partake of it or else it will bring about an affront and an ever-growing hostility. The one thing it will not permit is neutrality.

2. They fell away because they did not believe Jesus came from heaven: *What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before? (6:62).*

The words of Jesus were difficult because the people were operating under a wrong presupposition. They were presupposing that Jesus was just another man. Perhaps a good teacher. Certainly a miracle worker. But no more. They had not come to terms with the fact that He had come from heaven.

Jesus will not allow you to accept Him as merely a good man. The things He said about Himself could not be said about a normal man. You must either crucify Him as a blasphemer or else you must fall down and worship Him.

3. They fell away because they were operating under the flesh rather than under the Spirit: *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life (6:63).*

These disciples were more interested in the flesh than in the spirit. They enjoyed the bread and the fish but had not given as much concern to their spirituality. It is not that the flesh is unimportant, but the spirit is more important. The body without the spirit is merely food for worms. This body will last 70 or 80 years if you take care of it. The spirit lasts forever.

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*the pilot desires.*

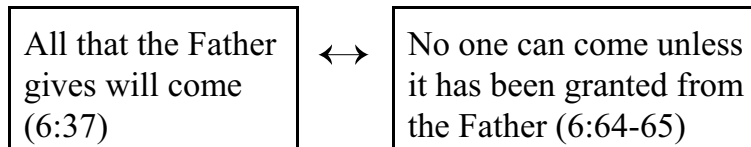
- Jude 1:15 *...to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the **harsh** things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*
- Romans 2:5. *But because of your **stubbornness** (uses the related σκληροτης) and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

How do you feed your spirit? What kind of health food do you give it? You give it the word of God. But it is not merely reading the Bible that results in such spiritual health. It is possible to be a Bible scholar, to study the word in its original languages of Greek and Hebrew and to thoroughly understand its meaning, but unless the Bible studies you through the ministry of the Spirit, it is to no avail.

Here is the point. The very words over which the disciples were stumbling were the words that lead to eternal life.

4. They fell away because they had not been brought by the Father: *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 it was that would betray Him. 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." (6:64-65).*

Jesus had introduced this concept earlier in the chapter when He taught that all who are given by the Father would come. This time we see the opposite taught. This time we are told that no one can come unless it has been granted from the Father.



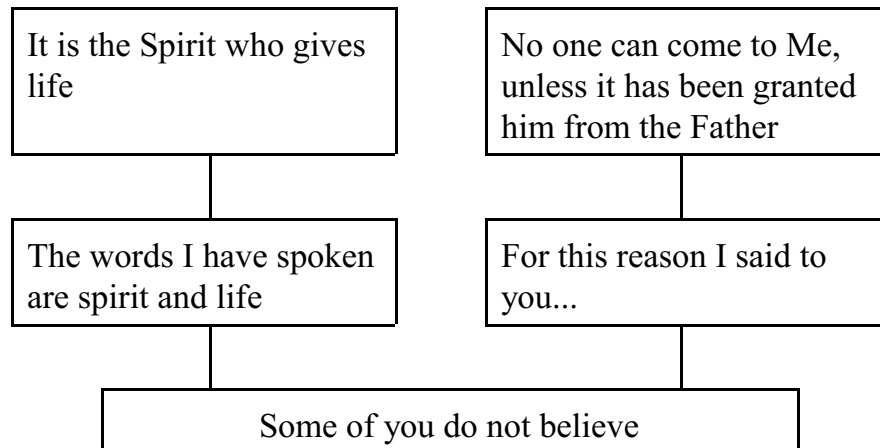
Jesus makes this point to explain the presence of one of His apostles who would eventually betray Him. Though this passage does not name him, we know that it was Judas Iscariot. Here is the point. The presence of the betrayer did not catch Jesus unawares. He knew about the unbelief of the crowd and He knew about the unbelief of His disciples and He knew about the betrayal of Judas.

This is not to say that Judas wished to come and was being prevented by God. It was not within the desire of Judas to come to Christ. His own free will acted in such a way as to lead him away from Christ.

Let us suppose that I offered you a choice between two meals. The first was composed of the most delightful cuisine, smothered in rich spices and served to perfection. The second was a smelly, spoiled, maggot-ridden mess. You are told that you can exercise your own free will to choose between the two meals, yet no one is surprised when you consistently choose one over the other.

By the same token, the natural man wants nothing to do with the things of the Spirit of God. He is, by his very nature, a rebel to the cause of Christ and he will always choose in conformity to his nature.

It is not that the natural man is lacking the intellectual capacity to understand the things of the Spirit. Salvation is not a question of intelligence. Even little children can hear and believe. It is a question of faith and that necessary faith is granted from the Father. The progression of this passage is seen in this chart.



Notice that Jesus comes full circle to start and to end with the truth that our spiritual life begins, not with our decision, but with the action of heaven.

The direct result of this teaching was that *many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore*. There was a mass exodus. Does this mean these disciples lost their salvation? The passage does not say. What John DOES tell us elsewhere is that those who leave do so because of an lack of connection.

*They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19).*

One of the signs of a Christian is PERSEVERANCE. A true disciples is one who endures to the end. He sticks it out. He passes the endurance test. In doing so, he demonstrates that he really has become a partaker in eternal life.

## THE TESTING OF THE TWELVE

*67 Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"*

*68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 69 And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."*

*70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" 71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon*

*Iscairiot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him. (John 6:67-71).*

As the rest of the disciples leave, only the Twelve remain. Jesus turns to them and questions them. Jesus has seen the results of His preaching turn around and walk away, offended at His message. He turns to His disciples and asks, "Are you leaving, too?" Why does He ask this question? There are two possibilities.

On the one hand, I believe this question was asked amid great pathos. It is possible that Jesus was feeling low emotionally. He had just seen His ministry go from 5,000 to 12 in a single day. He looks out to the departing crowd and all He can see are heels and elbows.

At the same time, John will tell us in verse 64 that Jesus already knew who would stay and who would leave and who would betray Him. The departure of the multitude and of the uncommitted disciples came as no surprise to Jesus because *He knew what was in man* (John 2:25). This teaches me something about the Lord. Foreknowledge does not preclude care and concern. We ought never to take a view of the sovereignty of God that disallows the grief of God over the sinner. The Lord tells us that He takes no delight over the punishment of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32).

At the same time, Jesus also asks this question in order to test the Twelve. He wants to challenge their belief. Why? Because it is in the testing and exercise of our faith that our faith grows stronger: *knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance* (James 1:3). Trials come for a reason. They are not an end to themselves. They are designed to bring something new into our life.

1. Testing Confirms our Commitment: *Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (6:68).*

When I was in high school, I went out for the cross country track team. I learned very quickly that you cannot build up endurance for running long distance in a single day. Endurance can only come through daily practice. The Christian life is not a sprint; it is a marathon and that takes endurance.

The testing of your faith produces endurance. What is endurance? It is a quality of the mature. Children are noted as early quitters. Give a child a present and he may spend 15 minutes playing with it, but after that, he is off doing something else. His attention span has no endurance.

That is the same quality with which children wrestle when it comes time to do their homework. The least little distraction can capture their attention. Endurance cannot be taught in a classroom. I cannot preach a sermon on endurance and thereby impart that quality to you. Endurance only comes through trials.

When I think of an enduring dedication and commitment, I think of the Spanish conquistador Cortez burning his ships on the coast of Mexico so that his men would have no option but to go forward. We are called to do the same thing. There is nothing worse than a disciple who has begun to follow Jesus and who then changes his mind and falls away.

Peter's question brings this to the forefront. He asks, "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*" The question itself is illuminating. The truth is that you always go to someone. Either you are going to the Lord or you are going to someone else. When people turn away from the Lord, they will find the silliest things to follow. All you have to do is to look at the cults and philosophies that abound in the world today. Why do people turn to such things? Because there is something within man that calls for faith. The one thing you cannot do is to believe in nothing. Pascal called this the "God-shaped vacuum."

2. Testing Defines our Devotion: *You have words of eternal life (6:68).*

<p>Jesus has a monopoly on eternal life. If you have not yet seen that about Him, then you have not really come to follow Him.</p>
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Peter has come to realize that following Jesus has eternal ramifications. He shows a change in his thinking from the secular to the sacred. Our word "secular" is taken from the Latin word *saecularis*, "of an age." It points to the idea of looking at life in this temporal age. That is the difference between the secular and the sacred. The secular mindset looks at life in the present age with no thought of the future. The sacred mindset takes eternity into account.

The secular mind is only concerned with the immediate. The mind of a child is like that. He only is interested in the now. He has no sense of tomorrow. He wants immediate gratification. You can tell him that it is better for him if he eats his food instead of candy, but he does not care. You can tell him that he will feel better tomorrow if he goes to bed instead of staying up too late, but he does not care. He wants what he wants and he wants it right now.

We act like children when we take too short a view of life. We act like children when we do not take eternity into account. What is the 70 or 80 years that we have here compared to eternity? It is a mere vapor that is seen for a moment and then vanishes.

3. Testing Enlightens our Understanding: *And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God (6:69).*

Testing and pressure sometimes bring about a clarification of what we believe and understand. It is in those times that you come to understand what is really

important.

The theology of the church has always been clarified in times of challenge and testing. It is when it was challenged either by the forces of Rome or by the false teachings of heretics that it was clarified.

4. Testing Uncovers our Duplicity: *Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"* <sup>71</sup> *Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him (6:70-71).*

When the pressure is on, the real person comes out. One of the twelve disciples looked and acted the part of a follower of Jesus, but there was something within him that would eventually come to the forefront. His was the heart of a betrayer. Though he had remained physically when the others left, his heart had already departed.

Notice that Jesus does not say that Judas had been a devil when He chose him, but that he is one now. I do not know this for certain, but I think it possible that Judas had uncertain motives in the beginning. Like the multitudes, he was drawn to Jesus by the miracles and by His loving personality. Perhaps he felt good when he heard Jesus teach. He followed Jesus and he became a disciple and he healed and he cast out demons and he proclaimed the message of the kingdom.

Then something happened. The truth that Judas sought to practice on the outside never took root within his heart. He found himself doing all the outward things the other disciples did, but inside there was no life. There was only a slanderer -- that is the meaning of the word "devil" used by Jesus in verse 70 to describe him.

Peter and Judas stand in contrast within this passage. It is Peter who speaks out, but it is Judas who is mentioned in the reply of Jesus.

<b>Peter</b>	<b>Judas</b>
He is a believer	He is an unbeliever
He is outspoken	He is silent
He would deny Christ	He would betray Christ
He would repent and go on to be a great leader in the church	He would feel sorry for what he had done and would go out and hang himself

What made the difference? Was it that Peter was a good man while Judas was a bad

man? No. They were both bad men. They both were in need of a Savior. They were both chosen by Jesus to be apostles. One was drawn to Christ. The other turned away from Christ. One drank deeply of the grace of God. The other did not.

With which of these two men are you most able to identify? It does not matter, for you are in the same situation as both of them. You are in need of a Savior. Christ calls you to come and to follow and He calls you to continue to follow. It is a call for continuing repentance and continuing faith in Him.