

John 6:60-69

Theme: Does this teaching offend you?

- 1) *Many “Christians” can’t stand Christ’s teachings.*
- 2) *Blessed are they that believe!*

⁶⁰ *On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”* ⁶¹ *Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you?”* ⁶² *What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!* ⁶³ *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.* ⁶⁴ *Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”* *For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.* ⁶⁵ *He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”* ⁶⁶ *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* ⁶⁷ *“You do not want to leave too, do you?”* *Jesus asked the Twelve.* ⁶⁸ *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.* ⁶⁹ *We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”*

What do you think is the most offensive teaching of the Bible? Is it that homosexuality is a sin? How about closed communion and Church fellowship? How many of you cringed when you heard the second lesson: *“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything”*? (Ephesians 5:24)

Actually, the most offensive teaching of the Bible is this: that we are saved alone by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. That’s right: the teaching we treasure is the most offensive teaching in Christendom. And why? Because when you confess Christ as your Savior, you are also confessing that you need to be saved. No one likes hearing that they are so sinful that - in the eyes of God - they deserve hell as much as Osama bin Laden! No one likes hearing that babies deserve to be damned because of the sinful nature they inherited from their parents.

And then there is Jesus! Virgin born? True God and true man? Crucified and resurrected? And faith in him saves? On top of this, there is the teaching that Jesus died for all! When talking about God’s grace, I have been often asked: “Do you mean to say that if Hitler repented before he died, he’d be in heaven?” When I say yes, I usually get a response like: “How could God save a wicked man like him? I just can’t believe it. I don’t want to believe it!” And yet, it is precisely because Jesus died for a man like Hitler that any of us can be saved.

In our sermon text for today, we see followers of Jesus fall away from faith. And why? Because they were offended by Jesus’ claim to be their Savior. And so, let us ask ourselves: **Does this teaching offend us?** 1) *Many “Christians” can’t stand Christ’s teachings.* 2) *Blessed are they that believe!*

Part One: Many “Christians” can’t stand Christ’s teachings.

In order to understand our sermon text, let us review the event that led up to it. Jesus feeds a crowd of over 5000 people. This same crowd wants to make Jesus king by force – not because they believed He was the Messiah, but because they ate and had their fill. They want a “bread-king” - someone who would provide for their every earthly need.

Jesus rebukes their attitude by saying: ²⁷ *Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”* ²⁸ *Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”*, or in other words, “how do we get eternal life.” ²⁹ *Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”* (John 6:27-29). They demand a miracle, citing the example of Moses and manna in the desert. Jesus uses their example to show that he is the true spiritual bread of life that came down from heaven. Through faith in the sacrifice of his flesh and blood they would be saved. Even though Jesus’ picturesque language seems confusing, the crowd understood his meaning perfectly well. We read: *The Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”* ⁴² *They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”* (John 6:41-42).

The Jews refused to believe Jesus is the Savior. Sadly, they weren't the only ones that took offense at Jesus' claim. Our text begins by saying: *On hearing it, many of his disciples [not the twelve, but other believers that followed Jesus] said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"*

Just think: Some of Jesus' most dedicated followers had a problem with what Jesus was teaching. They understood that He was claiming to be the Son of God. They understood that he was claiming to forgive sin, and that no one can get to heaven except through faith in him. They understood what Jesus was saying, but they didn't want to accept it.

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?" Jesus was basically asking his disciples whether or not his teaching was causing them to fall from faith. Truth be told, it was!

Jesus said, *"What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?"* Jesus is reaching out to these disciples by telling them what would happen in the future. If they refused believe Jesus' words, his miracles, and the testimony of Scripture, would they believe anything? Would they believe if they saw his death, resurrection and ascension – which they would see if they remained his disciples?

Jesus continues: *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.* What Jesus means is this: mere human flesh - separated from the divine spirit - can't do anything to save or give life. It is the divine Spirit of God alone that creates and gives life. Because Jesus is not just mere flesh, but the God-man in whom the divine Spirit lives, Jesus' can offer us true life. This is why faith in Jesus saves.

"Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." Salvation and faith are not a product of what we do for God, but of what God has done for us. And it was precisely this point the Jews and these disciples did not want to believe. They did not want to believe they were so horribly corrupt with sin. They did not want to believe that Jesus, who looked so ordinary, was their divine Savior. Jesus called out to them, but, like so many on this earth, they refused to listen. They took offense at Jesus. And so, *from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*

Do you know what the saddest part of this whole account is? These "Christians" rejected Jesus as Savior. They wanted a bread king, a political Messiah, a "here-and-now" Jesus. And because Jesus did not fit their notions as to what kind of Messiah he should be, they lost him and the salvation he offers.

The sad truth is that this is the state of many Christians today. Many Christians are offended not only at what the Bible teaches regarding the roles of man and woman, homosexuality, and creation, etc. etc. No. One of the greatest rejections is that of grace. I will give you an example: the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church - the largest Christian church in the world - refuse to believe that we are saved alone by God's grace, through faith, apart from works. Listen to Canon 12 adopted by the Council of Trent, which still stands as official Catholic teaching on justification: "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema." (Anathema means: "Eternally condemned")

But not only the Roman Catholic Church has this problem of rejecting salvation through faith in Christ. Most protestant churches have also abandoned it by making salvation contingent on what we do. They demand a decision for Jesus, stumbling over Christ's clear words: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you,"* (John 15:16) or what Paul writes in Ephesians: ⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Liberal Lutheran churches – like the ELCA - claim that Christ came to promote socio-political justice and equity. This theology is nothing less than turning Jesus into a "bread king" - a political Messiah, and not a Saviour from sin.

Truth be told: most Christians in America cannot stand Christ's teachings about sin and salvation. Much of Christianity has become like the disciples that fell away.

Part Two: *Blessed are they that believe!*

But what about us? Just as Jesus asked the twelve, so He asks us: "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" Why do you follow Jesus? Is it merely to have a blessed physical life? Is it because his rules for living make us feel good about ourselves? Is it to earn salvation?

I hope these aren't the reasons you follow Jesus, because they are missing the essential point of discipleship. Then why do we follow him? Peter answers for all of us: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*"⁶⁹ *We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*" Why do we follow Jesus and hold every single teaching of his as precious? Because we recognize with Peter that the Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.

If we did not follow Jesus, where would we go? We are sinners. We can't save ourselves. Where could we go to find reconciliation with God? The answer is nowhere.

Thankfully the Holy Spirit has graciously brought us to the conviction that Jesus has the words of eternal life. And he not only has eternal life, he also gives it to us freely through faith in him! Look at how blessed we are! Through faith in Jesus we have become sons and daughters of God. We are clothed in Christ's righteousness and free from all sin. Heaven is our home. The LORD himself is our inheritance

And the blessings we have from believing in Jesus are not just restricted to the life to come. Through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit gives us a unique and special understanding of God's Word that no unbeliever can have. We understand the origins of this world, the providence of God, and the love he has for all. We grow in appreciation of the teachings that others stumble on. For example, we realize that God's teaching regarding Church fellowship and closed communion is meant to protect us from falling from faith. The unique roles of men and women are meant so that we can glorify God by showing proper love to one another. We find beauty in these teachings, where the world finds offense.

As we follow Jesus in faith, we grow in understanding that God works in all things for our good. God himself is holding us in the palm of his hand and watching over our every step. He protects us from all evil. And even if, according to his grace, He allows trial or hardship in our lives, we can be confident that he is using it for our eternal good – to protect and preserve the eternal life we possess by faith.

Do Jesus' teachings offend you? I pray not. But if you are tempted to find offense (and who of us is not tempted) simply pray: "I do believe, Lord. Help me with my unbelief." And the Holy Spirit will help you. Recall all the blessings that are ours through faith in Jesus. Listen to Christ, and you will hear the words of eternal life. This will help you find joy in Jesus and all his teachings. Amen.