

## JOHN 6:60-68

### SELLING THE SIZZLE; TOSSING THE STEAK

“When many of his disciples heard [Jesus’ teaching], they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, ‘Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.’

“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So, Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’”<sup>1</sup>

“**S**ell the sizzle, Not the Steak,”<sup>2</sup> is a concept coined in the 1930s by legendary ad copy writer, Elmer Wheeler. Stockbrokers, during the 1980s, resurrected the term as a means of promoting financial products. These marketers reasoned that people would be motivated to buy based on excitement rather than basing their purchase on facts. Marketers could build demand for a product through advertising. What is important to note is that marketers were not selling the product itself! They were building demand for the product. By selling the sizzle, almost anything could be marketed.

The crowds that followed Jesus wanted sizzle—He offered them steak. Perhaps those people would dissent from that characterisation if they were around today, but the evidence is pretty clear. Jesus’ teaching was not welcomed by the masses following Him. So long as Jesus performed miracles, made listeners feel good about themselves, rebuked religious elites or spoke parables that were not always understood, the crowds loved Him.

Nothing much has changed in the intervening centuries; contemporary church goers are still motivated by excitement—solid meat is far less exciting to the average church goer. In rejecting the meat of sound teaching, contemporary disciples prove they are spiritual descendants of those who clamoured for Jesus to perform a miracle or to entertain them with a sign.

Choking on solid food is not a new phenomenon. A missive penned to early adherents of the Faith contains a bruising censure. After speaking of Christ’s kingship, an ancient writer penned his assessment of his readers, “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” [**HEBREWS 5:11-14**].

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> “Elmer Wheeler – Don’t Sell the Steak, Sell the Sizzle,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUmxGqsuKmY>, accessed 26 September 2017; Attila Sary, “Sell the Sizzle, Not the Steak,” March 1, 2015, Bandwidth Productions, <http://bandwidthproductions.com/blog/2/sell-the-sizzle-not-the-steak>, accessed 26 September 2017

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Contemporary church growth experts promote techniques “guaranteed” to grow a congregation; and church members are notorious for demanding leaders who will “grow” the congregation. Church growth experts, whether consciously or unconsciously, are training church leaders to sell the sizzle. If the pastor is unable to make the church grow, the congregation can fire him and hire someone who will do whatever is necessary to make the church grow. After all, church growth is more important than the spiritual growth of disciples. This makes it easy to imagine the pressure pushing pastors to perform according to the expectations of parishioners. What is important to the average church goer is the excitement generated in the service. Something to make her feel good about being part of divine work will surely keep her happy.

“**WHAT HE SAYS IS HARD TO ACCEPT. WHO WANTS TO LISTEN TO HIM ANYMORE?**”<sup>3</sup> The English Standard Version that I use translates the response of the crowds literally. Other translations, attempting to capture the thrust of what was being said, emphasise the refusal of the crowds to listen to Jesus’ teaching. So long as Jesus performed miracles, or delivered sermons that attacked the religious elite, the crowds were enthusiastic. However, when Jesus called for devotion to Himself, the same crowds were insulted. One recent translation translates the response of the crowd, “What He says is hard to accept. Who wants to listen to Him anymore” [**JOHN 6:20 GOD’S WORD**]? “Who wants to listen to Him anymore?” Imagine!

What had Jesus been teaching that proved so distressing to the crowd? You will recall that Jesus had provided food for a large crowd that had followed Him across the Sea of Galilee. The people had witnessed His miracles as He healed numerous sick people, and they followed Him. Jesus was informed that a mother had prepared a lunch for her son so he could go to hear Jesus without missing a meal. She made him a lunch with five small biscuits and a couple of small fish. Jesus, revealing compassion for the people, used that boy’s lunch to feed a crowd that included at least 5,000 men, as well as numerous women and children [see **JOHN 6:1-14**].

The mob, enthused by what they had witnessed, were prepared to use force to compel Jesus to become their king. Jesus, knowing what they had in mind, went up into the mountain by Himself so He could pray. His disciples, in the meantime, went down to the boats to begin rowing to the other side of the lake, toward Capernaum. Meanwhile, Jesus walked down to the water before He began walking on the water until He drew abreast of the boat. The disciples took Him into the boat, which was immediately transported to the other side [see **JOHN 6:15-21**].

At some point the next day the people realised that Jesus was no longer on that eastern shore; so, they set off to search for Him. They had seen the disciples get into the boat, but Jesus had not gotten in with them. No one had seen Him since He went up on the mountain, so, many of them climbed into other boats and made the journey of three or four miles to Capernaum. They were looking for Jesus, and they were determined to find Him [see **JOHN 6:22-24**].

Jesus didn’t hide Himself; He was easy to find; Capernaum was a centre for His work. When they found Him, people kept asking, “Rabbi, when did you come here” [**JOHN 6:25**]? The Master answered them by exposing their self-serving motive. “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal” [**JOHN 6:26, 27**].

Jesus’ answer elicited what was a rather obvious response to His words. Jesus had challenged the crowd that any work they performed should be for eternally satisfying food. Genuinely perplexed, they asked, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God” [**JOHN 6:28**]?

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<sup>3</sup> **JOHN 6:60, GOD’S WORD TRANSLATION** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids MI 1995)

The crowd filtered Jesus' words through their own superficial understanding. Their response was identical to the response of another individual who came to Jesus on one occasion. You will perhaps recall the man who came to Jesus, asking, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life" [MATTHEW 19:16]? Like many religious people to this day, this young man wanted to be forgiven, he wanted to be accepted by the Living God, he wanted to be saved. What he didn't want was to be transformed—he was happy the way he was. It would be okay for God to perform divine surgery after he was dead; for now, he was happy just as he was.

To this point, Jesus' words had elicited a natural curiosity from those listening. Most imagined that He would make them feel good about themselves. Things were about to take a dramatic turn from where they imagined He would go to something unanticipated. Jesus responded, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" [JOHN 6:29].

That the crowd had failed to grasp what Jesus meant becomes obvious by their response to His call for them to put their faith in Him. "They said to him, 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat"'" [JOHN 6:30, 31]. Feed us! Show us a miracle! Entertain us! We want a show! Clamouring for a sign, they sounded strangely like many professed Christians in contemporary churches. People won't go to church if we don't provide something exciting for them when they come. People want entertainment.

The response wasn't all that different from the response of Herod after Pilate had tried to rid himself of the distressing dilemma standing before him by sending Jesus to Herod for judgement. The incident is recorded in Luke's Gospel. "When [Pilate] learned that [Jesus] belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him" [LUKE 23:7, 8].

The desire of the crowd was like that of the scribes and Pharisees who contended that if they could only see the right sign, they could believe. We read, "Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered [Jesus], saying, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you'" [MATTHEW 12:38].

***The natural mind thinks that seeing is believing; the spiritual mind understands that believing is seeing.*** After Jesus had cursed a fig tree, the disciples were amazed. We read, "When the disciples saw [that the fig tree had withered], they marvelled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once'" [MATTHEW 21:20]? Take note of the Master's answer to the astonishment of the disciples. "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" [MATTHEW 21:21, 22]. ***Believing is seeing!*** How many blessings do we forfeit because we do not believe! How puny is our impact on a dying world because we do not believe!

Jesus persisted in refusing to entertain those demanding that He accede to their fallen desires. He sought to bring them back to reality when He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" [JOHN 6:32, 33].

Well, that got their attention, but it surely didn't qualify as attention to eternal matters! "Sir, give us this bread always," they demanded [JOHN 6:34]. What is apparent is that this crowd was still focused on their own fleshly desires. "Wow! Just think! We will never have to bring another lunch." No one can rise higher than his or her spiritual consciousness; and the person who has never received the Holy Spirit is still spiritually dead.

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Listen to the Master's teaching—teaching that irritated the crowd. “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” [JOHN 6:35-40].

That became the tipping point for them. “The Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, “I have come down from heaven”?’” [JOHN 6:41, 42]? They knew all about Jesus! He was too familiar to be someone important!

Listen carefully to Jesus' response to them. “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” [JOHN 6:43-51].

This revelation of His divine origin and purpose only invited open rejection by the Jews. “How can this man give us His flesh to eat” [JOHN 6:52]? This question is derisive; it was never meant to be interrogative. They are ridiculing the very suggestion.

Listen to what follows. “So, Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, 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 feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.’ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum” [JOHN 6:53-59].

It was this final divine instruction that brought his interlocutors to the point of saying, “This is more than we can stomach! Why listen to such talk” [JOHN 6:60 NEB]? Here is what is startling: those rejecting what Jesus was teaching are identified as disciples. These were individuals who had previously made an open commitment to follow Him. At least superficially, they were followers of the Christ. Now, as the realisation that commitment to Him demands that He actually reign over life was more than they could handle. They were quite willing to identify with Him, but they were unwilling for Him to actually be in control over their lives!

Is there a corollary with contemporary Christendom? I suggest that there is a corollary! Professing Christians are quite comfortable joining a church, even giving a dollar or two on the few occasions they show up to a service of worship. Usually those appearances revolve around Christmas and Easter. It is sometimes said that the modern church is available for hatching, matching and dispatching. Should the preacher present a call to commitment, it is fascinating to witness the response of many contemporary Christians. We expect little, and we are not disappointed in our expectations.

“**DID WHAT I SAY MAKE YOU LOSE FAITH?**”<sup>4</sup> Philipps captures the thrust of what was said by translating: “Is this too much for you?”<sup>5</sup> Can an individual really lose faith? I would accept that someone can be led to doubt, be led to question, be led to move cautiously; I’m not prepared to say that someone can lose faith. Having believed in the Christ, we are born from above and into the Family of God. As twice-born children of the Living God, we are secure in Christ Jesus.

Jesus’ words illustrate a serious dichotomy that must be recognised. Is our faith in an action or in a Person? Is it Jesus’ miracles that brings us to faith or is it what He taught? The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well believed the words that Jesus spoke. We read, “The woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’” [JOHN 4:28, 29]? Her testimony of what Jesus had revealed about her compelled the townsfolk to hurry out to the well to hear for themselves what this individual would say. Listen to their testimony after hearing the Master. “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So, when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed *because of his word*. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for *we have heard for ourselves*, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world’” [JOHN 4:39-42]. Scope in on that final affirmation from the people of the town: “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

What a rebuke Jesus delivered soon after this as He challenged the crowd following Him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” [JOHN 4:48]. The voice of unbelief demands a sign. When the people in our text looked for Jesus, they were seeking a sign. Therefore, they asked, “What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform” [JOHN 6:30]? “Show us a sign” is the rather tedious plea of unbelief. After the first time Jesus drove the livestock vendors and the money-changers from the Temple, the Jewish leaders insisted, “What sign do you show us for doing these things” [JOHN 2:18]?

Even as Jesus neared the end of His service immediately before His Passion, we read, “Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you’” [MATTHEW 12:38]. With these repeated requests the religious leaders were not building faith or creating faith, they were attempting to discredit Jesus. On one occasion, we read, “The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven” [MATTHEW 16:1].

When Jesus was charged with working in collusion with the devil, we witness a most interesting revelation of the heart of fallen mankind. “Some of [the religious leaders] said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,’ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven” [LUKE 11:15, 16].

Seeking a sign is not solely the purview of religious frauds, it can be entertainment for unbelievers. Pilate wanted to wash his hands of Jesus, so he sent Him to Herod. Thus, we read an insightful account of what happened when Jesus was sent to Herod. “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him” [LUKE 23:8]. “Entertain us,” is the cry of a despicable segment of lost humanity. Religion is reduced to a show much like what one would see when a street magician displays magic tricks or when we pay admission to a show of legerdemain.

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<sup>4</sup> JOHN 6:61, **God’s Word**, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., Glasgow 1960, 1970)

Individuals, especially individuals who insinuate themselves among the faithful, insisting that signs will be necessary for faith, need to hear the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles. “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:20-25]. Counting oneself among those seeking a sign is not the wisest placement one could seek. In fact, to so position oneself is tacit admission of unbelief! What is transformative is receiving the Word of God as declared by one whom God has appointed to speak on His behalf. That one may be a preacher, but that one will assuredly be a twice-born believer who speaks the truth because he or she has been energised by the Spirit of Christ Who dwells within the life of that follower of Christ.

What is interesting about Jesus’ challenge to those who chose to leave after He spoke is to note that He had called people to invest themselves in Him just as He came to invest Himself in mankind. The call to identify as a follower of the Christ is a divisive call. I remember a man who started a church in a mountain village in Mexico. This particular village was populated predominantly by Indians; and many of these natives did not speak Spanish. This missionary had purchased a hand-cranked record player on which he would play seventy-eight rpm recordings of native speakers reading portions of the New Testament. Seating himself in the town square, he would crank his record player and play a record before attempting to strike up a conversation in broken Spanish with those who gathered to see what was going on.

In time, a small number of enquirers and converts had been organised into a church at considerable personal cost and with severe persecution for his family and for those coming to Christ. Some converts had been savaged, others had lost their houses to mobs raging against the faithful, many had been beaten and even pelted with stones; at least one of the new believers murdered when he was seized, tied to a tree and then hacked to death with machetes. To teach the believers, Marshall would preach in Spanglish, and a translator would translate what he said into Spanish before yet another translator would render what was said into the native tongue. It was cumbersome, though it did work. Without a doubt, this made for some fascinating services. After some months, the small congregation decided to erect a church building. As he related the story to me, Marshall commented that they had not built a baptistry in the building. I found that revelation somewhat strange, so I inquired as to the reason for this omission.

Marshall explained that there was only one place nearby with enough water to baptise, and that was a river flowing near the edge of the village. The only way to reach that particular stretch of river was to walk through the town, right past the large cathedral situated on the village square. As the candidates for baptism would walk to the river, jeering mobs gathered to pelt the procession with rocks and rotted vegetables, always acting under the approving gaze of a priest. Because of this opposition, Marshall stated that only those willing to make a break with the past would follow the Saviour in baptism. These believers had to be serious about their new faith.

Faith does not require justification, though God may graciously give justification. Faith has its own validation, which is the presence of the Spirit of Christ. The one who believes will believe because God has called and not because that one has witnessed a sign. The believer will follow the Saviour because He is the Saviour and not in order to be amazed by signs and wonders. The one who follows the Christ follows Him because He is the Christ.

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The words with which Paul cautioned the Christians of Thessalonica should caution us. “The mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:7-10]. Those seeking to be entertained and awed by signs and wonders will likely discover what they seek. However, what they find may not be what they imagined. Their entertainment may well become their condemnation.

The Apostle informs us that signs and wonders can, and often do, lie within the purview of the evil one; and in due time, it will be his “signs and wonders” that will deceive people to turn them from seeking after the Saviour. When people begin to crave awe-inspiring signs, it may be that God is permitting them to be deluded, just as the Apostle made evident in this same portion of the Second Letter to the Saints in Salonica. “Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:11, 12]. “Therefore,” because they want to be entertained, “God sends them a strong delusion,” and He does this for a stunning reason—“so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth.” Religious people in that dark day will want to be awed, and God will give them what they seek! That is truly frightening.

Among the Psalms, there is one which provides a deeply disturbing example of such craving that was divinely satisfied; however, the concession led to death. This Psalm to which I refer you is the seventy-eighth Psalm. Consider just a portion of what Asaph wrote in that particular Psalm. I am reading the eighteenth through the thirty-first verses of the Psalm.

“[Israel] tested God in their heart  
by demanding the food they craved.  
They spoke against God, saying,  
‘Can God spread a table in the wilderness?  
He struck the rock so that water gushed out  
and streams overflowed.  
Can he also give bread  
or provide meat for his people?’

“Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of wrath;  
a fire was kindled against Jacob;  
his anger rose against Israel,  
because they did not believe in God  
and did not trust his saving power.  
Yet he commanded the skies above  
and opened the doors of heaven,  
and he rained down on them manna to eat  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance.  
He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,

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and by his power he led out the south wind;  
he rained meat on them like dust,  
winged birds like the sand of the seas;  
he let them fall in the midst of their camp,  
all around their dwellings.  
And they ate and were well filled,  
for he gave them what they craved.  
But before they had satisfied their craving,  
while the food was still in their mouths,  
the anger of God rose against them,  
and he killed the strongest of them  
and laid low the young men of Israel.”

[PSALM 78:18-31]

This Psalm is stunning and deeply humbling as we think that God deigned to grant Israel’s requests, using their cravings to lead them into divine judgement and subsequent grief. The same dark truth serves as a warning to this day. We would do well to learn to pray after the manner of Jehoshaphat when he faced the combined might of the armies of Moab and Ammon strengthened with Meunites who were seeking to destroy Judah. Jehoshaphat prayed, “O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” [2 CHRONICLES 20:12]. Imagine a national leader or even by a church leader, offering such a prayer today!

The Word of God is sufficient for creating faith. We do not believe in the Bible; we believe what the Bible says when it instructs us. Our faith is in the God Who gave the Word. In almost every message I will cite a particular passage written by the Apostle Paul. I do this to encourage listeners to place their faith in the Risen Christ. Most of you will recall Paul’s words, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13].

Now, listen to what follows that particular portion of the Word. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” [ROMANS 10:14-17].

The Word of God does not cause people to lose faith; the Word of God exposes the superficial faith with which sinners are satisfied. The Word of God offends the natural heart because it exposes the reality that “self” is seated on the throne of life; the Word reveals that the Living God is not a factor in the supposed faith of the wicked individual. Thus exposed, the natural heart rages against the Word that exposes it. The chains of greed and lust are exposed, and the sinful person is angered that her evil can no longer be hidden. Rather than seeking freedom from the bondage of her soul, she rages against the light that shows her pitiful condition.

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This is the pitiful condition about which John has written when he writes, “This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” [JOHN 3:19-21].

“**DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE ME TOO?**”<sup>6</sup> Jesus’ question of the Twelve was neither a cri-de-coeur nor a snivelling whimper; when the Master asked His disciples if they wished to leave, He was confronting their commitment to Him and to the cause of spreading His message. This confrontation was meant to put steel in their spines. People desert the Faith for any of a number of reasons, but the primary reason for deserting the Faith arises from failure to commit oneself to what is taught. People who hear hard teaching will respond in one of two ways, depending upon what they have embraced. Those who have embraced the self, whether for personal comfort, for personal advancement or for personal exaltation, will be deeply offended by teaching that challenges. Those who have committed themselves to the Faith of Christ the Lord will hear the same challenging teaching, incorporate it into their lives and endeavour to honour the Master.

It is essential that those thinking of coming into a relationship within the fellowship of believers understand that this is not an organisation with which they unite. The congregation of the faithful is a living entity in which each member is assigned to perform an essential role. Too many see the community of faith as a convenience which can be used as individuals think best. Some see the church as a source of support during trying times. Some think of the congregation as a centre for social relationship—sort of a religious Facebook or Twitter relationship. Yet other individuals imagine the assembly of the righteous to be a means of obtaining control over people. Tragically, when these supposed functions no longer meet the expectations of those uniting for less than honourable reasons, those offended souls will cease participation.

Jesus was teaching that He must be central to the life and service for any who will follow Him. Of course, His insistence proved offensive to those seeking something for themselves. Jesus was teaching that following Him provides opportunities for His followers to humble themselves through serving others. Many of those whom His followers are called to serve have nothing to offer those who serve them; and sinners can be abrasive, even offensive in their conduct toward those who serve Christ. Jesus turned the view of this dying world upside down, teaching that one became great through seeking the benefit of others rather than seeking his or her own welfare. When such teaching is applied to the ministry of the congregation, it will inevitably offend those who have seated themselves at the centre of life. Such individuals will soon say that God is directing them elsewhere that they imagine will be more fulfilling.

It is disheartening when people cease walking with us in our service—it hurts. The Lord has spoken of such individuals when He instructs us in the Word, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. 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 it might become plain that they all are not of us” [1 JOHN 2:18, 19].

Such events reveal the reality of the prophecy given by the Apostle Paul, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” [ACTS 20:29, 30].

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<sup>6</sup> JOHN 6:67, **GOD’S WORD**, op. cit.

I read the verses preceding Paul's account of the expected conduct at the Lord's Table with consternation and dismay because it so precisely exposes contemporary church life. "In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognised" [1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-19].

Scope in on that nineteenth verse for a moment. Listen as I read it from another, recent translation. "Divisions are bound to arise among you if only to show which of your members are genuine"<sup>7</sup> [1 CORINTHIANS 11:19]. The thought conveyed is that the response of individuals to division, dissention, arguments, quarrelling reveal who they are, who they serve and who controls their lives. If self reigns over our life, we will react with choler toward those who disagree with us. It is possible that those who cause divisions, those who generate dissention, fall under the condemnation of which Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy. The Apostle warned Timothy, "The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons" [1 TIMOTHY 4:1].

When an individual threatens to cease participating in the services, threatens to withdraw support for the advance of the Faith through investment of goods or spiritual gifts, threatens to quit praying for the welfare of those who gather for worship, that person is exposing herself as a fraudulent follower of the Master. Perceptive members of the assembly will recognise what she has in fact always been. If the assembly will honour the Master, they will refuse to follow the lead of such an individual to focus again on those actions and attitudes that glorify the Master.

One can only imagine how modern church growth experts would have counselled Jesus. "Listen! You're never going to go anywhere if you don't make your message exciting. Maybe you should spice up your routine. How about a different praise band? Better music? Perhaps your Apostles should be more stylish in their dress. You need to get with the times! You have to quit insulting people by demanding that they sacrifice; You'll need to give them something." Jesus could have had some great crowds if He had only listened to the counsel of the devil. Remember, "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me'" [MATTHEW 4:8,9]. I am glad Jesus didn't take the devil's advice.

Jesus didn't come to make us better people; Jesus came to redeem us from our sin. When we look to Him, we are transformed. The process will require a lifetime, but it will be a thorough process. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" [ROMANS 12:1,2].

Christ offers steak; the world offers sizzle. Tragically, the self-centred and the unwary always look for sizzle, tossing the steak. When hard times come, and hard times always come, the unthinking individual will turn aside, seeking an easier path, seeking a more pleasant life. Let us not fall under the condemnation that says, "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" [HEBREWS 5:12-14]. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> The Revised English Bible (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York, Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; São Paulo; Delhi; Dubai; Tokyo 1996)