

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
6:66-71

66. From that *time* many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. 67. Then Jesus said to the twelve, Will ye also go away? 68. Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69. And we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God. 70. Jesus answered them, Have I not chosen you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? 71. He spoke of Judas Iscariot, *the son of Simon*, for he it was who should betray him, being one of the twelve.

66.-[*From that time.*] It is doubtful whether the Greek words here might not have been better translated, "Upon this," "After this conversation."

[*Many of His disciples.*] This expression shows that the number of persons who followed our Lord about, and professed themselves His disciples, must have been large.

[*Went backward.*] This is a metaphorical expression, signifying "retreat, desertion, forsaking a position once occupied." It is the same that is rendered in the account of the Jews coming to take our Lord in the garden, "they went backward and fell to the ground." (John xviii.6.)

[*Walked with Him no more.*] The simplest view of this expression is that these deserters from our Lord walked no longer in His company as He went about teaching, as they had done, but returned to their own homes. No minister of the Gospel should feel surprised if the same thing happens to him.

Not a few of these very "disciples" probably had been forward in wishing to make our Lord a "king," the day before. Such is popularity: here today and gone tomorrow!

67.--[*Then Jesus said...go away?*] We cannot suppose that our Lord asked this as if He did not know what the Apostles were going to do. We may be sure that He who "knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe" (verse 64), knew the hearts of His Apostles. The question was evidently asked to prove His chosen followers and to draw forth from them an expression of feeling. (See John vi.6.)

The word "will" here would be more accurately rendered, "Do you wish?" "Have you a will?"

We should note that this is the first time St. John speaks of "the twelve." We know, from the other Gospels, that "the twelve" were employed in distributing the loaves and fishes to the five thousand. (Luke ix.12,17.)

68.--[*Then Simon Peter answered Him.*] The fervor and impetuosity of Peter's character comes out here as in other places in the Gospels. He is the first to speak, and to speak for his brethren as well as himself. Only

the night before this very scene, he had been the first, in the storm on the lake, to say "Lord, if it be You, bid me to come to You on the water." (Matt. xiv.28.) And here, in like manner, he is the first to profess loudly his determination not to go away, and his faith in Christ.

[*To whom shall we go?*] This question is a strong burst of feeling. "To what teacher, to what master, to what leader shall we go, if we leave You? Where are we to find anyone like You? What could we gain by leaving You?" The question was one which might well be asked, when we remember the state of the Jewish nation and the universal prevalence of Pharisaism or Sadduceeism. But this is not all. It may always be asked by true Christian men when tempted to give up Christ's service. True Christianity undoubtedly has its cross. It entails trial and persecution, But to whom shall we go if we give up Christ? Will Infidelity, Deism, Socinianism, Romanism, Formalism, Rationalism, or Worldliness give us anything better? There is but one answer: They cannot!

[*You have the words of eternal life.*] This would be more literally rendered, "You have words of eternal life." "You possess instruction about everlasting life such as we can hear nowhere else, and such as we find soul-comforting and edifying. The sayings that fall continually from Your lips, about eternal life, are such as we cannot leave." Our Lord's expression should be remembered, "I have given to them *the words* which Thou gavest Me." (John xvii.8.)

69.--[*And we believe and are sure.*] This would be more literally rendered, "We have believed and have known." Moreover, the "we" is emphatic. "Whatever others may please to think, however many may go away and forsake You after following You for a little, it is not so with us. We have believed and known, and do believe and know."

[*You are that Christ, the Son of the living God.*] This might equally well have been rendered, "You are the Christ." The sentence is a noble confession when we remember the time in which it was made and the universal unbelief of the leaders of the Jewish nation. We may remember that it is precisely the same confession that is recorded to have been made by Peter, after which our Lord said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. xvi.17.)

We must not, however, misunderstand the extent of Peter's confession. He declared his faith that our Lord was the Anointed Messiah, the Son of the living God. The Messiahship and divinity of Christ were the points on which he and the other apostles laid firm hold. But the sacrifice and death of Christ and His substitution for us on the cross were not things which he either saw or understood at present. (See Matt. xvi.22,23.)

(a) We should notice that a man's heart may be right towards God while he remains very ignorant of some great doctrine of the Christian faith. It certainly was so with Peter and the apostles at this time.

(b) We should also notice that there is nothing man is so backward to see as the sacrifice of the death of Christ, the substitution, and the

atonement. It is possible to be right about Christ's divinity and Messiahship and yet be in the dark about His death.

(c) We should notice how ignorant Christians often are of the state of others' souls. Peter never suspected any one of the twelve to be a false apostle. It is a fearful proof that Judas must have been, in all outward demeanor and profession, just like the rest of the apostles.

70.--[*Have I not chosen you twelve?*] I do not think that the "choosing" here spoken of means anything more than selection for office. The word is evidently used in this simple sense in Luke vi.13: "Of them He chose twelve, whom He called apostles." Acts vi.5: "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith." Acts xv.22: "It pleased the apostles...to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch." I say confidently that in each one of these cases the Greek word rendered "chosen," the very same word that is used here, can mean nothing more than "chosen or selected for an office." This I believe, with Poole, Henry, and Hutcheson, is the meaning here.

I disagree with Alford's remark that "the selection of the twelve was the consequence of the giving of them to Him by the Father," and that Christ's "selecting, and the Father's giving, and the Father's giving and drawing, do not exclude final falling away." This remark is built on the gratuitous assumption that Christ's "choosing," here spoken of, is the same as that "choosing unto salvation" which is the special privilege of believers. Of that "choosing unto salvation," our Lord speaks in another place, where He carefully draws the distinction between the true disciples and the false: "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen." (John xiii.18.) Of that choosing unto salvation, Judas was not a partaker. Of the other choosing unto office, as in the verse before us, undoubtedly he was a partaker.

Burton and many others agree with Alford and dwell on the expression before us as an apparent proof that men "chosen to salvation" may fall away. But their reasoning appears to me inconclusive.

Even Quesnel, the Romanist Commentator, remarks: "The being duly called to the ecclesiastical office is not sufficient, if a man live not suitably to that holy vocation." Toletus, and Spanish Jesuit, says much the same.

[*One of you is a devil.*] This is a singularly strong expression and gives an awfully vivid impression of the wickedness of Judas. Of course, he was not literally and really "a devil," but a man. The meaning is: "One out of your number is so completely under the influence of the devil, such a servant of the devil, that he deserves to be called nothing less than a devil." Our Lord, in another place, says of the wicked Jews, "Ye are of your father, the devil." (John viii.44.) So St. Paul says to Elymas, "You child of the devil." (Acts xiii.10.) When we read at a later period, "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him" (John xiii.2), it must mean the final working out of a wicked purpose, which under the influence of the devil Judas had long had in his heart.

Let us note that even now Judas is called "a devil," long before our Lord's betrayal and crucifixion. This helps to show that he never was a faithful

disciple, even from the first.

Let us note that the only other expression of our Lord which at all approaches the one before us in strength, is the one which on another occasion our Lord applies to His zealous apostle Peter: "Get you behind Me, Satan." (Matt. xv.23.) While we condemn the wickedness of Judas, let us not forget that even a true-hearted apostle may so far err and be mistaken that he needs to be sharply rebuked and called "Satan." A thoroughly bad man is "a devil," but even a good man may need to be called "Satan!"

Rollock observes that Jesus never used so strong an expression about His open enemies who went about to slay Him. It was a hypocrite and a false apostle whom He called "a devil." Nothing is so wicked as false profession.

71.--[*He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.*] The word "Iscariot," according to some, means "a man of Kerioth." Kerioth was a town of Judah. (Josh. xv.25.) According to others, it means "a man of Issachar." According to Lampe and others, it is a Syriac word meaning "the bearer of the purse." We are told that "he had the bag." (John xiii.29.)

It is remarkable that four times in his Gospel St. John calls Judas "the son of Simon." We do not exactly know why, unless it is that Simon was a person well known by name, or that St. John wished to make it quite clear that Judas Iscariot was not St. Jude, the faithful apostle and cousin of Christ, by naming his father. There is no proof whatever that Judas was the son of "Simon the Canaanite," the apostle; though it is somewhat curious that in the list of apostles given by Matthew and Mark, Simon and Judas Iscariot are named in close juxtaposition. (Matt. x.4, Mark iii.18.)

[*It was he who should betray Him.*] This would be more literally rendered, "He was about to betray Him." The expression seems to imply that to betray such a master as Christ was so eminently a work of the devil, that the betrayer ought to be spoken of as "a devil."

The frequency of our Lord's warnings and hints addressed to Judas Iscariot is very remarkable. Rollock observes what an awful proof it is of the hardness of the heart that a man so warned should not be conscience-stricken and repent.