

He Kissed Jesus Goodbye!

John 6:66-71; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; 8-4-19

The Context

In John 6 ...

- Jesus feeds the 5,000.
- Jesus walks on water.
- The crowds follow Jesus wanting more free meals.
- Jesus tells them that He is the Bread that has come down from heaven.
- Jesus tells them they must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life.

The Text

⁶⁶ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

⁶⁷ So Jesus said 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 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 Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

The Joshua Harris Instagram Post

Who is/was he?

- The son of Greg Harris, a Christian homeschool leader (70s, 80s, 90s).
- The author of *‘I Kissed Dating Good-bye’*. (1997 at 21 years old)
- A leader in the courtship and purity movement.
- The author of *‘Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship’*. (2000 at 24 years)
- The author of *‘Not Even a Hint: Guarding Your Heart against Lust’* (2003)
- A pastor of a Sovereign Grace Church mega church. (2004-2015 at 28 years)
- A disciple of CJ Mahaney.
- The author of *‘Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Family of God’* (2004)
- A well-known and widely respected young evangelical leader.
- Held some conferences called New Attitude.
- The author of *Dug Down Deep*. (loving theology) (2010)
- 2015 – Resigned from his church and went to seminary at Regent in Canada.
- 2018 – apologized for the approach in *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*.
- July 2019 – announced his divorce of his wife
- July 2019 – announced that he was no longer a Christian

‘My heart is full of gratitude. I wish you could see all the messages people sent me after the announcement of my divorce. They are expressions of love though they are saddened or even strongly disapprove of the decision.

‘I am learning that no group has the market cornered on grace. This week I’ve received grace from Christians, atheists, evangelicals, ex-evangelicals, straight people, LGBTQ people, and everyone in-between. Of course there have also been strong words of rebuke from religious people. While not always pleasant, I know they are seeking to love me. (There have also been spiteful, hateful comments that angered and hurt me.)

‘The information that was left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I’m not there now.

‘Martin Luther said that the entire life of believers should be repentance. There’s beauty in that sentiment regardless of your view of God. I have lived in repentance for the past several years—repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few. But I specifically want to add to this list now: to the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me.

‘To my Christians friends, I am grateful for your prayers. Don’t take it personally if I don’t immediately return calls. I can’t join in your mourning. I don’t view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful. I believe with my sister Julian that, “All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

What did he do?

- Announced his divorce from his wife.
- Announced his no longer considering himself a Christian.
- Announced his repentance for anti-LGBTQ stances, women in ministry stances, etc.
- Exalted the wonder of grace through atheists, ex-Christians, and others.
- Rejected the idea that all this calls for any mourning.
- Expressed the confidence that all will be well.

What should this provoke in us?

- Shock
- Sadness
- Seeking mercy (for them in prayer)

‘We’ve known Josh for almost 15 years. We’ve been with his family. We’ve been in his home. We’ve been to his church. At one time, we were fairly close, as a group of us (then) young men gathered semi-regularly for prayer, for encouragement, and for just hanging out. While we don’t know what Josh might think of us—it’s been several years now since we were closely in touch—we remember Josh as perpetually friendly, warm, engaging, and sincere. ... That’s why we are holding out hope that the faith we saw in him and heard from him was not spurious. It would give us great joy to see our friend return to the gospel he proclaimed, the Bible he affirmed, and the Jesus he held out to others. ... While we grieve Josh’s decision (and have told him as much), we are not without hope (and we’ve told him that as well). We will continue to call on the God of sovereign mercy, the God Josh once extolled and the God who still sits on the throne. We pray for our friend, for our churches, and for ourselves—that we may keep ourselves in the love of God ([Jude 21](#)), as God keeps us from stumbling ([Jude 24](#)). – Kevin DeYoung, Greg Gilbert, Collin Hansen, Justin Taylor, *On Caution and Keeping: Friends Reflect on Joshua Harris’s Deconversion*

- Soberness (reverent fear)
- Serious reflection

Some may want to simply write a blogpost entitled, “Josh Harris Kissed Jesus Goodbye!” and quickly dismiss the whole thing as simple by saying, ‘Well, he obviously wasn’t a Christian! So next topic ... !’ I would argue that this should provoke some serious reflection and wrestling before we move on.

‘He said, again, "The popular phrase for this is deconstruction. The biblical phrase is falling away. By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian." Those are absolutely stunning words. They would be stunning and incredibly troubling coming from anyone, but from the former pastor of a mega-church and from someone who has had a very significant influence in the evangelical world, this is truly a milestone event. It also demands a good deal of thinking and very honest reflection on the part of American evangelicals. ... The headlines concerning Joshua Harris—indeed, concerning both Joshua and Shannon Harris—are deeply humbling to American evangelicalism. They should be very sobering. They should make us pray for the Harrises and for our churches. They should lead us to a deeper understanding of the gospel and exultation of the gospel of Christ and simultaneously, an introspection concerning our biblical fidelity and the depth of our commitment to Christ and to biblical Christianity. But this heartbreaking headline also reminds us that we can place our trust in no sinful human being, but in Christ alone, the one who alone is worthy of our trust. – Al Mohler, *The Tragedy of Joshua Harris: Sobering Thoughts for Evangelicals*

The latter is why I’m preaching this morning from John 6.

Apostasy

There is a truth in the Bible called the doctrine of apostasy:

From the Greek word: *αποστασια*

Which means to forsake or fall away

This Greek word has the same root as a word for divorce: ἀποστασιον

The root of both Greek words means to ‘depart or withdraw.’

Apostasy is when a believer walks away from the faith or divorces himself from Christ.

The Bible talks about three kinds of apostasy:

- Temporary
- Final
- Mass

There are, at least, three major tenets of this doctrine:

The Bible teaches that some believers will walk away from the faith.

God will not let His children ultimately walk away from the faith.

You are to do all you can not to walk away from the faith.

Why I say this from Scripture:

- Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, - 2 Thessalonians 2:3
- But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will **fall away** from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, - 1 Timothy 4:1
- Those on the rocky *soil are* those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. – Luke 8:13
- ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. – John 10:27-29
- Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that **falls away** from the living God. – Hebrews 3:12
- You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried **away** by the error of unprincipled men and **fall** from your own steadfastness, - 2 Peter 3:17

So how does this passage help us to think about people walking away from the faith?

1. Apostasy comes from within the Church.

‘For he, *one of the twelve*, was going to betray Him’ – 71

The Bible talks about believers walking away from the faith:

Demas ...

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also Demas*. – Colossians 4:14

for **Demas**, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. – 2 Timothy 4:10

as do Mark, Aristarchus, **Demas**, Luke, my fellow workers. – Philemon 1:24

Hymenaeus and Alexander ...

¹⁸ This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my* son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. – 1 Timothy 1:18-20

Anti-Christis ...

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ 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*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. – 1 John 2:18-19

Elders ...

and **from among your** own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. – Acts 20:30

Professing Christians ...

²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. – Matthew 13:20-21

¹⁶ In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. – Mark 4:16-17

Those on the rocky *soil* are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. – Luke 8:13

Judas ...

Title of the Message

I'm talking primarily about Judas but also about the many who walked away from Jesus then and those who walk away from Jesus in our day.

²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.” ²² The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss *to know* of which one He was speaking. ²³ There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ So Simon Peter *gestured to him, and *said to him, “Tell *us* who it is of whom He is speaking.” ²⁵ He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, *said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus then *answered, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He *took and *gave it to Judas, *the son* of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus *said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” – John 13:21-27

²⁰ Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining *at the table* with the twelve disciples. ²¹ As they were eating, He said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.” ²² Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³ And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. ²⁴ The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” ²⁵ And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus *said to him, “You have said *it* yourself.” – Matthew 26:20-25

Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him.” Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and kissed Him. – Matthew 26:48-49

⁴⁴ Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, “Rabbi!” and kissed Him. – Mark 14:44-45

⁴⁷ While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd *came*, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. ⁴⁸ But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” – Luke 22:47-48

2. Apostasy comes after experience and faithful ministry that appears to others like the real thing.

‘For he, one of the twelve, was *going to betray* Him. – 71

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ – Matthew 7:21-23

⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. ⁷ For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸ but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. ⁹ But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. ¹¹ And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. – Hebrews 6:4-12

‘It has been said that there is no more powerful or detailed description of the true Christian in the New Testament than in the words of Hebrews 6:4–6. That is surely a breathtaking statement in the light of what is said about the first readers a few verses later. The author is confident of something “better” in them—the very things that accompany salvation (6:9). The implication is that, however powerful the experiences described in 6:4–6 may be, these are not the definitive marks of a Christian. They may be present when genuine faith is absent. In fact, Hebrews is telling us that which is possible to experience without actually being a Christian. Something must be missing therefore from this list of influences and experiences. What Hebrews has already said about an earlier generation brings it to light: “the gospel was preached ... to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith” (Heb. 4:2 NKJV). There was no real trust in Christ, the crucified, risen, and reigning Savior. – Sinclair Ferguson, *Apostasy and How It Happens*

3. Apostasy, most surprisingly, can come from those we would least expect it.

‘*Did I Myself not choose you*, the twelve and yet one of you is a devil?’ - 70

At a loss to know who would betray Jesus ...

²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.” ²² **The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a**

loss to know of which one He was speaking. ²³ There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ So Simon Peter *gestured to him, and *said to him, **“Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.”** ²⁵ He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, *said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus then *answered, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He *took and *gave it to Judas, *the son* of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus *said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” – John 13:21-27

¹⁹ And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁰ And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. ²¹ But behold, **the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table.** ²² For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” ²³ **And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.** ²⁴ And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. – Luke 22:19-24

¹⁷ When it was evening He *came with the twelve. ¹⁸ As they were reclining *at the table* and eating, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that **one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me.**” ¹⁹ **They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, “Surely not I?”** ²⁰ And He said to them, “*It is* one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. ²¹ For the Son of Man *is to* go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* good for that man if he had not been born.” – Mark 14:17-21

²⁰ Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining *at the table* with the twelve disciples. ²¹ As they were eating, He said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.” ²² **Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?”** ²³ And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. ²⁴ The Son of Man *is to* go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” ²⁵ **And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus *said to him, “You have said *it* yourself.”** – Matthew 26:20-25

‘There are those who are chosen by Christ to special services who yet prove false to Him.’ – Matthew Henry

4. Apostasy, like faithfulness, always has its reasons.

‘as a *result*’ – 66

‘devil’ (70) = diabolos = slanderer or false accuser! (common Greek); in the NT is a reference to the Prince of Darkness who fell away from God

What might tempt us to walk away from Christ?

- Hard doctrine.

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” – John 6:60

□ False Doctrine

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will **fall away** from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, - 1 Timothy 4:1

□ Hard trials.

¹⁶ In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. – Mark 4:16-17

‘Cable television mogul Ted Turner criticized fundamentalist Christianity and said Jesus probably would "be sick at his stomach" over the way his ideas have been "twisted," the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported. Turner made his remarks Friday evening at a banquet in Orlando, Fla., where he was given an award by the American Humanist Association for his work on behalf of the environment and world peace. Turner said he had a strict Christian upbringing and at one time considered becoming a missionary. "I was saved seven or eight times," the newspaper quoted him as saying. But he said he became disenchanted with Christianity after his sister died, despite his prayers. Turner said the more he strayed from his faith, "the better I felt." - *Spokesman-Review*, May 1, 1990.

□ Persecution.

¹⁶ In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. – Mark 4:16-17

³² But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. ³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. ³⁷ FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. ³⁸ BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. – Hebrews 10:32-39

□ Pleasures of this world.

for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. – 2 Timothy 4:10

- Offenses and unforgiveness.

¹² Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. ¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. – Hebrews 12:12-17

Should we say, if I am not afraid of what I might do apart from the grace of God, including walking away from the faith, then I am foolish and proud?

5. Apostasy may influence others to do the same.

‘You do not *want to go away also*, do you?’ – 67

The Question of the Day

The pressing question for all of us is:

Will You Walk Away Too?

Paula Bolyard

‘Expect to see more and more of these defections in the coming years as Christianity wanes in popularity and influence and it becomes increasingly costly to remain a follower of Christ. There will be a high price to be paid for those who remain faithful to Christ and the teachings of the Bible. People will lose their jobs, they’ll be denied professional credentials, they will be banned from popular social media platforms and essentially exiled from polite society. Christians will no longer be able to “hide in plain sight” (a phrase recently highlighted by Rod Dreher in describing how all Christians will soon be forced to publicly declare their views on LGBTQ issues). We’ll be asked at work, at our kids’ schools, at Boy Scout meetings, and even in some churches as the culture rallies around sexual minorities, elevating their rights above all others and quashing religious liberty in the process. There will be severe consequences for those who give the wrong answer.

‘When all is said and done, years from now we will point to some fads that became widespread in Christianity in the 90s and early part of the 21st century (particularly in evangelicalism) that contributed to the falling away we’re seeing: Seeker-sensitive church growth models, Christian celebrity culture, and the prosperity gospel to name a few, along with the rise of social media and the militancy of the LGBTQ movement. The generation coming of age now, for the most part,

has not been taught a robust theology that urges them to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Instead, they've been taught to elevate their feelings over doctrine (which, they're told, divides), to satisfy their felt needs over and above obedience to Christ, and to embrace the world rather than reject it in pursuit of holiness. American churches—packed out with kids who walked the aisle and repeated a prayer and were told they were saved—sent a whole generation out ill-equipped to forsake the world and suffer for Christ. The whirlwind we're reaping will be borne out in empty churches and increasing apostasy.

Serious ...

and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. – Hebrews 6:6

Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly. – Proverbs 26:11

²¹ For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. ²² It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,” and, “A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire.” – 2 Peter 2:21-22

Something so serious needs to be seriously fought. How?

6. Apostasy is thwarted by a lack of real options.

‘Lord, *to whom shall we go?*’ -68

If you think you have real options, then you are a candidate for apostasy!

‘Those who would leave Christ would do well to consider to whom they will go. Shall we make our court to the world? It will certainly deceive us. Shall we return to sin? It will certainly destroy us. Shall we leave the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns? The disciples resolve to continue their pursuit of life and happiness and will adhere to Christ as their guide. Let those who find fault with this religion find a better before they quit it.’ – Matthew Henry

7. Apostasy is thwarted by the conviction of the truth of words.

‘You have the *words of eternal life.*’ -68

“Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true, when their persuasion is not at all built on evidence, but altogether on education, and the opinion of others; as many Mahometans are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Mahometan religion, because their fathers, and neighbors, and nation believe it. That belief of the truth of the Christian religion, which is built on the very same grounds with a Mahometan’s belief of the Mahometan religion, is the same sort of belief. And though the thing believed happens to be better, *yet that does not make the belief itself to be of a better sort*; for though the thing believed

happens to be true, yet the belief of it is not owing to this truth, but to education” (emphasis mine). – Jonathan Edwards

‘Edwards makes a vital distinction here between two kinds of belief. There is a way to “believe” in Christianity that is not genuine saving belief. You can believe in Christianity because you are educated in it, because those around you believe it, and because you are genuinely convinced in your mind that it is a true religion. You can be convinced of and committed to Christianity in the same way you can be convinced of and committed to false religions or sports teams or opinions about which James Bond movie is the best. And yet this is not saving faith, no matter how committed it looks on the outside. This is a kind of belief that can be altered or even abandoned. True saving faith, as Edwards explains, looks like this:

“A *spiritual* conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel, is such a conviction, as *arises from having a spiritual view or apprehension of those things in the mind*. And this is also evident from the Scripture, which often represents, that a saving belief of the reality and divinity of the things proposed and exhibited to us in the gospel, *is from the Spirit of God’s enlightening the mind*” (emphasis mine).

‘True saving faith is not being exposed and educated in the Christian religion and coming to a conviction that such things are true. True saving faith happens when God by His Spirit enlightens the mind and helps us see not only the truth of the gospel but the loveliness and divine nature of it. It is beholding not only the truths of the gospel but also having God work on our souls to rejoice in the glory of God as He is revealed in these truths. True conversion happens when God shines “in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of *the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:6, emphasis mine). It is a divine work done by a God who never changes His mind or alters His purposes in history. And thus it will always, always persevere. – Dustin Coleman, *Derek Webb, Wrestling with the Category of “Ex-Christian,” and the Nature of True Saving Faith*

8. Apostasy is thwarted by a faith grounded in seeing Jesus for Who He is and loving Him.

‘We have believed and have *come to know that You are* the Holy One of God.’ – 69

⁹“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. ¹⁰ At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. ¹² Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. – Matthew 24:9-12

Polycarp (69-155 AD)

Warned that his arrest is impending, elderly Bishop Polycarp has left Smyrna and hidden in a farmhouse. The threat on his life is real; Smyrnans have recently executed several Christians for their faith. Now a pagan mob is demanding the bishop’s life. Smyrnans are fiercely loyal to Rome and to the old gods. “Kill the church leader,” they reason, “and his church will die.” The governor dispatches soldiers to track down the old man, who has the distinction of being one of the last churchmen who actually studied at the feet of one of the Lord’s apostles—the long-

lived John. The soldiers care nothing about this. Intent on locating him, they torture witnesses, who reveal Polycarp's whereabouts. His hiding place betrayed, Polycarp moves to another. One must face martyrdom boldly when it comes, he believes, but no one should seek it. The authorities discover where he is hiding, and soldiers arrive to arrest him. He welcomes them as if they are old friends and asks that they be served food and drink, requesting only an hour to pray before being marched to the arena. They agree. Overhearing his godly prayers, the soldiers wonder why they are arresting him. Surely this is a good man! They allow the hour to stretch into two. Finally, they can delay no longer. They haul Polycarp in. When he nears the city, a heathen magistrate approaches in a chariot and takes Polycarp into it. The magistrate tries to persuade the Christian to sacrifice to the gods, but finding that he can make no headway with him, pushes him out of the conveyance so roughly that he falls and scrapes open the flesh on his shin. Showing as little pain as possible, the elderly bishop limps behind the soldiers into the amphitheatre where great numbers of people are gathered. At sight of him, the mob sets up loud cries of rage and savage delight, but Polycarp hears a voice telling him, "Be strong and play the man!" Consequently, he does not allow the spite of the crowd to trouble him. The governor asks him to deny Christ and promises that if he will, his life will be spared. But the faithful bishop answers, **"Fourscore and six years have I served him, and he has never done me injury; how then can I now blaspheme my King and savior?"** When Polycarp rejects further pressures to deny Jesus and save himself, the governor threatens to burn him. Polycarp turns the tables and warns him of eternal fire. The governor ignores the warning and orders the execution to proceed. The soldiers prepare to nail Polycarp to the stake, but he assures them nails won't be needed, so he is tied instead. The fire is lit, and the flames rise around him. But what is this? The fire parts around Polycarp! It is as if the flames avoid him; eyewitnesses will claim his body glowed like gold in the fire. Finally a soldier, whose usual task is to put wounded animals out of their misery, executes the bishop with a sword. The good old man is dead, an inspiration to others who will perish in similar circumstances for centuries to come.

—Dan Graves

Conclusion: **'I've Seen Too Much'** Song by Andrew Peterson

I know it sounds crazy
But I know what I saw
When the sun came up on the brightest day
From the darkest night of all

I saw the Man die
They laid Him in the tomb
And I know 'cause I saw it with my own two eyes
When He stepped into the room

And I've seen too much, too much to deny
I've seen too much, too much to say goodbye

So we scattered to the four winds
To tell them what we know

But I get so tired and the doubt creeps in
And the doubt won't let me go

And it's all I can do to get up in the morning
All I can do to stand up in the storm
When all I remember's the passing form
A glimpse of the glory before it was gone
And I get so tired of this ridicule
But I cannot deny what I know to be true
'Cause I've seen too much
What else can I do?
Where else can I go, Lord?
Where else can I go... but to You?

I've seen too many faces
All shining like the sun
I've seen too many skies on fire
Like the face of the Holy One
I've seen too many eyes wide open
That once were so blind
All burning with the beauty of the same love
The same love that opened mine

And I've seen too much, too much to deny
I've seen too much, too many points of light
I know too much, I saw the scars and touched His skin
That's how it was, and I cannot hold it in

I've seen so much that cannot be explained
And I realize it's a mystery of faith
But my friend was dead and He walked out of the grave
And I knew the world would never be the same
I saw too much, when I looked into the eye
Of the One I love and the One who loves me
And there was nowhere left to hide

I've seen too much, too much to deny
I've seen too much, too much to say goodbye
Too many points of light, too much to say goodbye