

# Do You Take Offense at This?

*John 6:59-71*

<sup>59</sup> Jesus said these things **in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.**

<sup>60</sup> When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "**This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?**"

<sup>61</sup> But Jesus, **knowing in himself** that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "**Do you take offense at this?**"

<sup>62</sup> Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

<sup>63</sup> 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.

<sup>64</sup> 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.)

<sup>65</sup> And he said, "**This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.**"

<sup>66</sup> After this **many of his disciples turned back** and no longer walked with him.

<sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the Twelve, "**Do you want to go away as well?**"

<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,**

<sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

<sup>70</sup> Jesus answered them, "**Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.**"

<sup>71</sup> He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him. (Joh 6:1-71 ESV)

## Leaving the Faith: An Evangelical Tragedy

The older you get as a Christian, the more things you see. I hadn't seen this occur until I was in my late twenties. But now, unfortunately, I've now seen it several times. Christians, who once dutifully followed Christ, spoke about him openly, confessed faith in him, were members of the church, and told other people to follow Christ, abandon him. In *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*, Michael Horton relates how close he came to doing this,

Reared in a solid Christian home, with the nurture of daily devotions and the simple piety of believing parents, I was offered the warm, supportive, meaningful environment of evangelical Christianity. But during my teenage years, the same clichés, slogans, and experiences that had provided a sense of being “in” and of belonging to a group began to appear shallow and trite, and seemed to embody the contentless trappings of what Francis Schaeffer called the “evangelical ghetto.” The rules I had never questioned began to choke me. My Christian schools became prisons. In the seventh grade, I had a Bible instructor who took particular delight in enumerating the things for which we could be damned. If, for instance, we were to die with an unconfessed sin, we could be eternally lost. The implications haunted me, and I could not understand why my schoolmates were relatively calm, especially since the level of actual law-keeping was so unimpressive among them, too.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, Dr. Horton started reading his Bible, especially the book of Romans, and around the same time he found other Christians that were willing to actually talk about

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back Into Grace*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 20.

what it said. He discovered the Reformation and its teachings on Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, human depravity, predestination, the perseverance of the saints, the priesthood of the believers, covenant theology, and a host of other doctrines that satisfied his questions while bringing peace to his soul because they told him about Christ and the free grace that he gives. That same story has happened to countless people over the centuries, but even these things are not insurance that people will not wander away from the Faith. In fact, it is sometimes the very opposite.

There are lots of excuses people come up with for giving up Christianity, the theme of our passage today (**John 6:59-71**). At the center of our text—in the only 6-6-6 verse in the NT—which I say not because it is a Satanic verse or something, but because it might help you to remember it, it says, “**After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him**” (**John 6:66**). This is a tragic verse, not only because people left him, but because they were his *disciples*. Certainly, the action attributed to them is very satanic. **Calvin** says, “**It is dreadful and monstrous that so kind and friendly an invitation of Christ should have alienated the minds of many, especially those who had earlier been on His side and were even His close disciples. But this example is put before us as a mirror to see how great is the world’s depravity and ingratitude, which heaps up material to stumble over even on the smooth way of life, that it may not come to Christ.**”

## Leaving the Faith because of the Church

I'm going to look at two excuses today. The first excuse people often give for apostatizing is **the church**. I recently heard an ex-Roman Catholic turned nothing (well, maybe turned new-ager or something) say, "**I didn't leave the church; the church left me.**" In other words, it's their fault. Jesus taught his discourse on the Bread of Life in the Jewish church known as the **synagogue** (**John 6:59**). What is it about "church" that makes so many people give up on Christ? There are, obviously, many answers to that question. Here are **three** to think about. The church won't teach enough of the Bible. The church teaches things other than the Bible. The church teaches things in the Bible that we don't really want to hear. I might also add, the church acts contrary to the way it teaches, but I won't focus on this one.

The first one we are seeing happen in Evangelicalism today. Evangelicals are leaving the church in droves because it **refuses to teach them anything substantial**. As someone recently said, "the world doesn't take the church seriously because the church isn't serious." It's mostly just silly. It doesn't answer their hard questions. It refuses to answer their hard questions. It doesn't know how to answer their hard questions. People are by their very nature curious about Christianity. **Augustine** said, "**You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are rest-less till they find their rest in you**" (*Confessions* 1.1). It has been called a God-shaped vacuum. It causes us to ask significant questions,

deep questions, questions about eternity. Jesus teaches a ton of substantial things in our chapter and our passage. We'll look at them later. If Jesus teaches substantial things, why can't the church? It is frustrating and it is eternally damaging to people souls. When the church doesn't say anything meaningful, many leave, never to return. Others flee from one problem to another, which is what we are seeing happening as so many are turning to the mystical traditions of Rome and Orthodoxy.

But both Rome and Orthodoxy teach that human tradition (i.e. church tradition) often takes a front seat to the Scripture. A now dead Roman priest was asked on a radio program if he could give a verse from the Bible that the caller could look up to support his assertion that people of other faiths can be saved if they live good lives (though he asserted that it is Christ who saves them). His response was, "I don't need to. The Bible doesn't contain all of the information we need to know on that topic. That's why we have sacred tradition."<sup>2</sup> This is the second problem. The church **teaches things other than the Bible**. Of course, Evangelicals are not immune to this either, as Horton shows in his quote above. We all have this propensity to go beyond the Scripture and to force people to believe and do things that God has not required in his word. Especially when this centers upon morality, people see the hypocrisy and end up leaving Christianity because of it.

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<sup>2</sup> Father Malachi Martin on Coast to Coast AM, circa late 1990s.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TqtySnOAqM>

But it is the third idea that I want to focus on. The church teaches things in the Bible that people don't really want to hear. This is exactly what Jesus is now doing. He is in the synagogue. As they question him about the Bread of Life, he begins to tell them that he is the very manna that their parents ate in the wilderness. He has "come down" from heaven and now all must feast upon his flesh if they want eternal life. I've been hammering away at this idea that John 6 is deeply rooted in the OT and now we see why. Even Jesus, when he taught in the synagogue, rooted his teaching in the Scripture. He had a text and he expounded it for them (see [Luke 4:16](#); cf. [Matt 4:23](#) etc). He did not just walk into a synagogue on the day of worship and start talking about whatever he felt like talking about. Nor did he claim some kind of super-authority to go beyond the Scripture or to contradict its teachings, even though he of all people could have. Even he did not claim an authority that Popes have claimed. He taught the Scripture (OT) and showed them its true meaning which is found in himself as the Bread of Life. Their response to his teaching of the Scripture was, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ([John 6:60](#)). The Gospel of John, which is itself Holy Scripture is remarkable in how even here it (the Holy Scripture) roots itself in the Holy Scripture, for John links this response directly to the grumbling of those of old ([vs. 61](#)).

Many people today do not like the hard teachings of the Bible to be taught anywhere, especially in Church. All sorts of

excuses are given: They aren't practical, they will bring division, no one can know what it really means so why bother, it won't bring in seekers if you talk about that kind of stuff, etc. But at the end of the day, it really just boils down to the fact that people just don't want to hear it. The Bible has “**hard sayings**” and “**who can listen to it?**” Our job as the church is not to pick and choose what people can or should hear (as they did in the Dark Ages and are doing again today). Ours is to teach **the whole counsel of God** and let the chips fall where they may. But those who know and love the whole counsel of God will be able to handle the sometimes difficult outcomes, because those very teachings that others refuse to teach actually give them the ability to persevere in the face of the very hostility that prevents people from hearing this in the first place.

## **Leaving the Faith because of Christ**

But **what are these teachings that are so difficult?** I can't possibly expound on everything that could be said. But there are many things given in our passage today that help us begin to get a handle on that question. Before I get to them individually, I want to look at them collectively. These teachings are not abstract doctrines or metaphysical ideas. You must forever rid your mind of that notion. No biblical doctrine or teaching ever stands by itself or on its own. They are not abstract, but rather person. That is, they are the teachings of and about Christ Jesus himself. Not all in the

same way of course, but in their own ways, they are about Him and his Father and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the things that we will begin to look at here have their terminus and the focus, not as ends to themselves (as people so often mistreat doctrine). Rather, their whole point is to tell us about God. What is he like? What kind of a person is he? What does he say about himself?

Since Jesus is the revelation of God to man, and anything he says is about God, it is Jesus himself that is difficult to accept. You can blame the doctrine all you want. If you have a problem with a biblical teaching, it is Christ you are having problems with. This is why both the OT and NT refer to Christ as a stumbling stone that people trip over (Rom 9:32-33; cf. Isa 28:16) and foolishness that others won't even listen to (1 Cor 1:18). This is why when they heard the "hard saying" (vs. 60) they stopped following "him" (vs. 66). There is a direct tie between the sayings of Christ, the Holy Scripture, and Jesus the God-man.

You can see this in several ways even here. Notice vs. 63, "... the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Jesus *words* give life and create belief in *him*. Notice the same thing in vs.65, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me..." Or look at vs. 68. When he asked the twelve if they would leave too they said, "You have the words of eternal life." They accepted his words and they kept following the person. So Jesus' words (and the words of the OT and NT) cannot and



must not be abstracted from the person of Jesus Christ, for they are two sides of the same coin. He is the Word and his Words create belief in him. These teachings are there to help you get to know him. Too many people have this propensity to take a doctrine—whatever it may be—and think about it apart from Christ, as if it is an **end unto itself**. This is why people get so hung up on doctrines, and yet seem to miss the whole point. It isn't the doctrine that is the problem. Nor is it thinking and teaching about it. It is the failure to take that doctrine and see how it is about the person and work of the Lord Jesus for you. Let's look at some of these now, for they are every bit as much excuses that people have for leaving the Faith as any we have seen thus far.

### *Christ's Omniscience*

The first one we come to is this idea that **Christ is omniscient**. A man is omniscient? This is foolishness and a stumbling stone. But we see it twice here, even as we have seen John talk about it before. “**Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling**” (**vs. 61**) and “**For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe**” (**vs. 64**). We learn from the first passage that Christ has this knowledge in himself. It appears to be a supernatural knowledge, for we are not talking about the Jews grumbling (**vv. 41, 43**), but his disciples who were trying to keep it from him (because they were his disciples).

The second verse reveals even more. He knows two things here. He “**from the beginning.**” That is, his knowledge comes before any action on our part. He knows before we even think or do. This is called **foreknowledge** and is an attribute of God. The second is that he is **able to discern true from false belief.** That is, he knows the heart. This is a frightening thing for anyone aware of their own sin. The end of the passage explains that he knows that one of the twelve that stay with him will not only betray him, but is actually “**a devil.**”

This is a strong word of condemnation, and Judas at this point in time may not have even known Christ was talking about him, for he doesn't give his name. “Devil” means “accuser” or “slanderer.” In the NT, it refers to Satan himself, who as we know from other places actually enters into Judas to betray Christ. The point is, Jesus knew all along that Judas was not a true believer, yet he put up with it and even loved Judas as one of his own for 3 ½ years.

**Why would omniscience be a stumbling stone** and foolishness? First, because no man has this ability, yet it says that Jesus does. If Jesus is a man, how can he have this ability? This thinking **can't accept Christ's deity**, as we will look at in a moment. Second, if he knows such things, such as betrayal and true belief, why doesn't he do something about it? This question **can't accept the cross**, which we will look at in a moment. On the surface, even Christians want to affirm Christ's omniscience, but what about when that omniscience

reaches into our own hearts? Do you know that Jesus knows your thoughts? He knows your heart? He knows if you truly believe or do not? He knows your real thoughts about all things. Do not let his grace and mercy today be an excuse to be in unbelief or sin. For one day, he will not be patient and he will judge all who have tried to fool him and others. Instead, turn from these in faith and repentance. Confess your sin and he will forgive you.

### *Christ's Direct Questioning and Human Depravity*

A second stumbling block is **Christ's ability to probe** and ask extremely pointed questions, questions that we might not really want to hear. This ability to probe correctly, to ask pointed questions is founded upon his omniscience, so we all ought to beware of trying to "be like Jesus" here, because we aren't omniscient. He **knows our depravity**, "**They were grumbling.**" And because he knows our depravity, he asks us what we think about him and his words. "**Do you take offense at this?**" (vs. 61). He already knows if we do or do not, but he asks the question for our sake, so that we will be confronted with him in our conscious mind and will. But he does not merely leave us to answer that question. Rather, he continues, "**Do you want to go away as well?**" (vs. 67). Now he forces the choice. As we saw last week and later on today, the choice he presents us with is not a matter of being regenerated. It is a matter of faith, and true faith always comes after regeneration. Yet, humans are **responsible agents**, and they must believe and

follow Christ. No true believer refuses to follow Christ. Many who were offended by his words, stopped following him, and that is the monstrous tragedy. In the face of the difficult doctrines I am in the middle of talking about, or in the face of difficulties in your life, you must continually ask, “Do I want to go away as well?” Make sure you ask yourself that question regularly, so that you are not caught off guard by it when it comes. Ask it especially in times of strong faith, so that in weak moments, you will not run from, but turn to Christ.

### *Christ's Pre-existence and Position with the Father*

A third stumbling block and utter foolishness to the natural mind is Christ's pre-existence and position with the Heavenly Father prior to coming to earth. “... to where he was before?” (vs. 62). Can any human mind truly fathom what the Lord is saying here? No, it is mind boggling that he existed prior to coming to earth, for there is no such thing as reincarnation, and human souls do not exist eternally in time, but are created by God. Yet, Jesus existed before coming here, and even had an exalted position in heaven above all others before coming in the flesh.

Vs. 62 can be taken in one of two ways and this is intentional. The people are offended that he says they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. So he offers vs. 62, “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” You can take the verse as increasing the offense, and surely this is how some would take it, especially because all

they could see was that they knew his parents and so he couldn't possibly have come from heaven. He is saying that he came down from heaven? That's just laughable.

### *Christ's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension*

But for others, the question can serve to **take away the offense**. His position in heaven "before" is tied directly to his "ascending." If they see his ascending to where he was before, then they would believe the things he says here. This is God's grace to them and to us. God does not ask us merely to take Jesus at his word (though because he is God that is sufficient). Rather, he provides proof that he is who he says he is. The miracles of this chapter are not enough for God. He wants to give you more proof. So he offers the ascent of Christ to where he was before as proof that you ought not take offense at the things he says. For whatever Christ says is for your benefit, for your life. Therefore, you ought to believe him because he has proven it to you. This is what he will do for the disciples a year from this sermon.

But what is this ascending? It is Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. You ask, "I see one of those, but not the others. Where are they?" The answer is that they are all tied up in this word "ascending." **Vs. 62** says, "**Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before.**" The cross is here. Jesus' death is right here. You ask, "How can that be?" Scholars have associated Jesus' words here with something we have already seen and will see later in the Gospel.

Jesus was talking to Nicodemus and he said that no one has ascended into heaven, but the Son of man has descended. He then immediately says, “**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up**” (John 3:14). This “lifting up” is his first ascension. In 8:28 he speaks similarly, “**When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.**” Again in 12:32, “**When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.**” This lifting up is his being glorified.<sup>3</sup> This cross is an extremely offensive message in so many ways. God must die? God dies willingly? God (the Father) puts God (the Son) to death? God has to die to satisfy some blood lust he has against mankind? God is lifted up as he goes down into the grave? I need for God to do this so that I can be reconciled to him? If I give six reasons why this is offensive to people, they will come up with sixty more.

The cross all by itself would only serve to drive away all of the disciples, which, as we know, is exactly what happened. For three days, all there was was the cross. They scattered. They fled. They abandoned him. They were defeated. They were in despair. They were without hope. They were lost. But the cross is not the only ascension in mind.

The cross is inextricably linked to the **resurrection**, a lifting up out of death to life. And this is unavoidably linked to Christ’s physical **ascension** from earth to heaven in his

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<sup>3</sup> See D. A. Carson, John, *PNTC*, 201.

resurrected body. After rising from the dead Jesus says to the disciples, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). Jesus would show this ascension directly to the eyes of a select few, as they watched him go into the clouds together (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). But he would not show this to everyone. Only a few saw him ascend, not everyone. And thus, for others, the news of his ascension only served to harden already hard hearts. He didn't ascend, because he didn't come from heaven in the first place. Men don't ascend into heaven. It's a clever hoax. And so the verse does exactly what I suggested. It serves as a stumbling stone for some, foolishness to others, but life-giving proof from God that Jesus is who he says he is.

### *Salvation is Christ's Job*

A fifth stumbling block and foolish idea is that **Salvation is Christ's business**, Christ's work, and Christ's gift . Mankind cannot of their own efforts do anything to earn it, to merit it, to work for it, to will it, to gain it, to attain it. It doesn't come from the church, your parents, your pastor, a radio show, books, meditation, chanting, or the link. It is not of him who runs or wills, but of God who shows mercy. This is both Christ's work and the Spirit's work. Vs. 63 says, “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.”

Notice the connection between **Word and Spirit**. The relationship Christ and the Holy Ghost have is like the relationship that exists between spoken words and human breath. The breath is not the word and the word is not a breath. But there is no word without breath. So, the Holy Spirit always works in conjunction with Jesus Christ. When Christ speaks, the Spirit moves in, under, around, over, through, and with the word to create life. When Christ's word goes out through the means of gospel proclamation, the Spirit attends it.

But the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force, and even this is a stumbling block. He is rational, not irrational. He is intentional, not accidental. He is purposeful, not random and meaningless. He moves where he pleases. He searches out a soul. He penetrates the heart and mind. He creates life where he chooses. He does so by the word of Christ. This is the meaning of the Lord's teaching here. But since the Holy Spirit does not create life in everyone, many find this offensive or foolish, and therefore impossible to believe.

### *Election and Effectual Calling*

It is not only the Son and Spirit who work sovereignly in Salvation. It is the Father as well. The Son and Spirit do only what the Father pleases for them to do. Jesus gives another stumbling block and foolish idea when he says, “**This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father**” (**vs. 65**). And again, “**Did I not choose you, the**



Twelve?” (vs. 70). As I’ve witnessed time and again, predestination and election are extremely hard words for many people to hear. Christ chose us, and people don’t like this. The main reason is because it takes away from human sovereignty, the very thing we sought to have in the Garden of Eden. To defend ourselves, we create arguments that seem reasonable but not biblical. If God is good, why doesn’t he save everyone? If God is all-powerful, why can’t he save everyone? It seems reasonable, but it fundamentally fails at the fatal point. It fails to understand the depth of human depravity and the rebellion that all God’s children have committed against him. He does not owe anyone salvation, for we are treasonous against the heavenly crown. He does not have to save anyone, for we all hate God by nature. That’s what sin is. This is an offensive word and a stumbling block that many have against Christ. Thus, they can’t accept his teaching that salvation comes from God and God alone.

### *Human Responsibility in the Midst of God’s Sovereignty*

One final stumbling block is actually the opposite side of God’s sovereignty and it might surprise you that I bring it up. It is **human responsibility**. You say, “Human responsibility is a stumbling block?” Yes it is. And notice, I didn’t say “freewill,” but “responsibility.” Jesus knows “**who it was who would betray him**” (vs. 64). He says, “**One of you is a devil, He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him**” (vs. 70). Betrayal is a *human* action.

It says, “Many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (vs. 66). Turning back on following Christ is a *human* action.

Neither is good or right. In fact, they are wicked acts of treachery. But it is something humans do; God doesn't do it. God's sovereignty does not get anyone off the hook, and the reason is because Christ offers himself to everyone. We have seen this before in our Gospel. He loves the world. He gives himself up for it. That says nothing of the sovereign design of God to save some. It says nothing about human spiritual blindness and deadness and inability to want to come to Christ or to understand spiritual things. It does say something about humans as responsible agents.

It speaks of God's heart, “God does not delight in the death of the wicked” (Ezek 33:11). It speaks of the free offer of the gospel, which would not exist if it weren't offered to everyone. It speaks of Christ's own words in our chapter, where he commands belief by everyone there, where he feeds even the reprobate with bread and fish, and where he gives a sign of himself and his true flesh and blood for all to see.

Human beings are responsible for their actions because they have minds and wills. They can understand words. They are rational creatures. They have feet and legs that can go one direction and not another. Reformed Christians have spoken of this as a natural ability to come to Christ, just like a lion has a natural ability to eat straw (he has a mouth, teeth, a throat,

and a stomach). As we have seen even today, this natural ability gets overridden by **spiritual inability**. They don't like Christ's words because they are offensive, because they are pointed, because they are hard, because they alone give life. So they reject his words out of a **moral failure** to turn from their sin and live. In this sense, no one can come. But the fact that these two things exist side by side is hard for many kinds of Christians and non-Christians to accept. It doesn't seem possible that both could be, and so one or the other often becomes a stumbling block. I suppose a hardened devil like Judas could be sitting there deceiving himself with God's sovereignty, thinking he has been chosen, but that he does not have to have any kind of an inward turning from his sin and trusting in Christ.

## **What Will You Do?**

That brings us to the end today. One of our Lord's most forceful and pointed questions is found in **vs. 67**. The question lays bare your soul. "**Do you want to go away as well?**" That is the question, isn't it? In all of life's trials and tribulations you are constantly confronted with it. Beware of your own soul. Eternity is constantly at stake. Each time we sin, we in fact turn from God a little bit. That is what sin is, a turning away from God.

Now, from the perspective of heaven and God's omniscience, true Christians can never *fall* away entirely. And this is a great comfort to you. God will preserve you, even as

he did his core disciples here. And you are allowed to know that you have eternal life and that this comfort can be yours. You know because you remain in the Faith. You know because you look to Christ. The one who stops looking to Christ has no biblical justification for having any security whatsoever. God may bring them back, proving that it was a time of testing and not of spurious faith. But you can't count on that.

Therefore, finish the race you have begun. Compete so as to win the prize. Beware your affections towards Christ, which can turn cold in a heartbeat, especially when you sin against him. Rather than fall away, fall back upon the Word of God, proven in the works of God the Son, and his words of life and spirit. Beware of your heart and its power of deceive you, especially in times of fiery testing, great sufferings and/or sins, and the hard sayings of God's word. You must not linger in a lukewarm place, with a cold heart towards God or your neighbor, else Christ will spit you out of his mouth. It is not safe to be there. Instead, follow him and do not turn away. Taste of his flesh and drink of his blood that you may have life. Taste and see that the Lord is good. His love and his mercy endures forever and he alone has the words of eternal life. He alone is the Holy One of God come down for our salvation, proving it by rising from the dead and ascending to the Father in heaven. And one day very soon, he will return to judge the living and the dead.

