

**The Gospel of John (44); The Fourth Discourse:  
Jesus, the Bread of Life (6)**

**Introduction:**

Last week we gave our attention to our Lord's words in John 6:47-59. These were the final words of our Lord in this teaching session before a Jewish gathering in the synagogue of Capernaum. Our Lord pressed upon these people the vital importance that they believe on Him solely and fully in order to receive the gift of eternal life. Our Lord spoke in terms that startled and even offended these people. We will read these words again, in which our Lord drew a conclusion to His sermon to these people. Jesus declared,

<sup>47</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. <sup>50</sup>This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

<sup>52</sup>The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"

<sup>53</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup>Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup>For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. <sup>56</sup>He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup>As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

<sup>59</sup>These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Because of the nature of the language and the history of interpretation, we felt compelled last Lord's Day to address the Scriptural teaching regarding the Lord's Supper, over against those who have twisted this passage to justify their errant belief and practice; namely, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy with their aberrant promotion and practice of the Mass and transubstantiation. I came across comments of **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) regarding this tendency that people have to make carnal that which is spiritual:

The plain truth is that there is a morbid anxiety in fallen man to put a carnal sense on Scriptural expressions, wherever he possibly can. He struggles hard to make a religion a matter of forms and ceremonies,—of doing and performing,—of sacraments and ordinances,—of sense and sight. He secretly dislikes that system of Christianity which makes the state of the heart the principle thing, and labours to keep sacraments and ordinances in the second place. Happy is that Christian who remembers these things, and stands his ground! Baptism and the Lord's Supper, no doubt, are holy sacraments, and mighty blessings when rightly used. But it is worse than useless to drag them in everywhere and to see them everywhere in God's Word.<sup>1</sup>

Because we felt compelled to address those matters last Lord's Day, we were not able to say a great deal about some of the details of these verses before us. We will do so this morning for several minutes before continuing our consideration of the rest of this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 397f.

Verses 52 through 59 may be considered the fourth division of our Lord's discourse with these Jews. We have described this section, that...

#### IV. No one has eternal life except through "feeding" upon Jesus Christ (6:52-59)

As we have already pointed out, the apostle John who wrote this Gospel relayed this account of our Lord's dealings with this gathering of Jews on one particular Sabbath Day in Galilee. Let us consider these verses before us beginning with **verse 52**. It tells of the reaction of the Jews to our Lord's words, "***The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?'***"

This entire discourse has been an exchange between our Lord and "the Jews." With verse 52, we have the sixth and final verbal exchange of the dialogue. Our Lord's words incited a "quarrel" in this synagogue, one which was quite intense. The Greek verb translated in our text as "quarreled" is in the form of an imperfect tense, which should be understood as an *ingressive imperfect*, which simply means that it is "a strong term that depicts a heated dispute."<sup>2</sup> One described the tone of this gathering:

The moment Jesus mentioned His flesh contention arose among His auditors, whom John again designates as "the Jews," a term used by him to indicate their hostile temper. The imperfect ἔμαχοντο (*imachonto*) describes the passionate exchange of words among themselves, no longer spoken in undertones like the previous murmuring mentioned in verse 41, but in open exclamations. The verb shows that they were divided; yet this does not mean that some supported Jesus while others contradicted them, but that some raised one objection while others clashed with them in raising a different objection. Thus there was a battle among them.<sup>3</sup>

And as we pointed out earlier, the way in which John cast this dispute and the manner in which John described these Jews as "quarrelling" and earlier "grumbling", they are set in parallel with the ancient Jews who murmured against Moses in the wilderness, after God had given them the gift of manna, the bread that fed them daily for 40 years.

Like their forefathers, who not only "grumbled" (Exod. 16:2) but also "argued with Moses" so as to put God to the test (Exod. 17:2), these Jews argue and test Jesus. Their question is a final challenge in the form of a mocking rebuke and is rooted in their unbelief. Ironically, however, their question is actually important and provides Jesus with a final explanation about eating His flesh, the living bread.<sup>4</sup>

It is quite interesting to see how our Lord Jesus dealt with this crowd at this juncture. Here they were, their quarrelling becoming more intense, and Jesus seems to provoke the controversy further to a near brawl. We read in **verse 53**, "***Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.'***" The Lord did not soften His words, but He spoke to this gathering in the Jewish synagogue with greater intensity and vividity.

The Jews believed themselves to be the people of God, ones whom God had granted true "life", life in His presence, enjoying His blessing. But Jesus told them that they had "no life" in them, unless they ate His flesh and drink His blood (v. 53). He had earlier spoken of eating His flesh (v. 51), but here He adds for the first time the need to "drink His blood." Jews were forbidden to eat any meat that had not been drained of blood. "If eating flesh was shocking, drinking blood was outright offensive and especially abhorrent to Jews who were explicitly forbidden to partake of blood (cf. Gen. 9:4)."<sup>5</sup> Again, He began to elevate His speech even while they had begun to quarrel among themselves. One can hardly imagine a more volatile statement that He could have uttered at this time, in this place, before this people. He was declaring to them that their

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 488.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 339.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

only hope for life before God was wrapped up in Him, and the blessing of life was only through eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

One might recall that many of the sacrifices of the Old Testament were roasted on the brazen altar and then were given to the priests and their families for food. Of course the blood of the animal was drained and poured out next to the altar just prior to the animal being burned upon the altar. The language that Jesus used of eating and drinking cast himself as a sacrifice for sin on which they were to feast, that is, ingest wholly and completely.

By the way, the Greek tense of the verbs, “eat” and “drink” in this verse is the aorist tense. Here Jesus is expressing a onetime eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood that results in eternal life being received. Here His “flesh” perhaps speaks of His incarnation as the blessed, eternal Son of God assuming our human nature (body and soul), and His “blood” speaks of His death on the cross to pay for our sins. To eat and drink here is to embrace in faith initially and fully who He is as God incarnate and what He did in dying for the sins of His people. As one wrote of these verb tenses, “In the protasis<sup>6</sup> the two verbs “eat” and “drink” are aorists, because only one act of reception secures life.”<sup>7</sup> Here is the concisely stated truth of the matter, again, by **J. C. Ryle**:

The “flesh and blood of the Son of man” mean that sacrifice of His own body which Christ offered up on the cross when He died for sinners. The atonement made by His death, the satisfaction made by His sufferings, as our Substitute, the redemption effected by His enduring the penalty of our sins in His own body on the tree,—this seems to be the true idea that we should set before our minds.

The “eating and drinking,” without which there is no life in us, mean that reception of Christ’s sacrifice which takes place when a man believes on Christ crucified for salvation. It is an inward and spiritual act of the heart, and has nothing to do with the body. Whenever a man, feeling his own guilt and sinfulness, lays hold on Christ, and trusts in the atonement made for him by Christ’s death, at once he “eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks His blood.” His soul feeds on Christ’s sacrifice, by faith, just as his body would feed on bread. Believing, he is said to “eat.” Believing, he is said to “drink.” And the special thing that he eats, and drinks, and gets benefit from, is the atonement made for his sins by Christ’s death for him on Calvary.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus then said further in **verse 54**, “*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*” He claims to be the one who will raise the dead to life on the last day of history. Jesus had taught His disciples this truth earlier. In John 5:26ff He said,

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,<sup>27</sup> and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice <sup>29</sup>and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Jesus declared that He would raise the dead to life “at the last day.” There is one final day of the general resurrection of the dead and the final judgement of all mankind. There are not two different days, one for the resurrection of the just and 1,000 years later another final day for the resurrection of the damned. That is what has been popularized by dispensational end times teaching for the past 100 years or so. There is one “last day” and the Son of Man will raise to life all the dead of all of history and then separate the redeemed from the damned, each group sent to its everlasting destiny. To the redeemed the Lord Jesus will say, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the

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<sup>6</sup> The protasis is the first clause of a conditional sentence. Here the *protasis* is “***unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood.***” The following clause is the conclusion or the *apodosis* of the statement, “***you have no life in you.***”

<sup>7</sup> Lenski, p. 492.

<sup>8</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 398.

world.” But of the damned King Jesus will pronounce the sentence, that they “will go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46).

In this verse the verbs “eats” and “drinks” are not in the aorist tense as in the previous verse. They are both in the present tense.<sup>9</sup> Here Jesus was speaking of continually feeding on Him. This is what Christians do—they continue to believe and entrust themselves to the incarnate Son of God who died for them on the cross.

The essence of faith is exactly this, that we receive from Jesus, that we abandon all else and let Him give Himself to us, His blood-bought merits, His flesh and His blood sacrificed for us... No truer and richer definition of faith can be given than this: faith= to eat Christ’s flesh and to drink Christ’s blood. It is idle to charge that “no sensible man would entertain the thought” that believing can be an eating and a drinking. Like this discourse on the Bread of Life is the word of Jesus in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled: also John 7:37, 38, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that *believeth* on Me,” etc.; also John 4:10, etc. If the point of comparison is asked for, it is simply that eating and drinking, like believing, is a receiving of the most intimate and vital kind. As eating and drinking receive food to be assimilated in the body, so believing receives Christ with the atonement made through His sacrificial flesh and blood. But the figure is less than the reality, for bodily eating only sustains life already present while spiritual eating or believing expels death, bestows life, and sustains life forever.<sup>10</sup>

We then read our Lord’s words in **verse 55**, “*For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.*” The sentence begins with the conjunction, “For.” This is an explanatory conjunction. This verse explains why the previous verse is true. How is it true what Jesus said, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”? It is because He could say, “For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” Actually, the English Standard Version (ESV) is the better translation of this verse. It reads, “For my flesh is *true* food, and my blood is *true* drink.” In contrast to the food and drink of all the Old Testament sacrifices that but pointed to life being given on behalf of and for the benefit of His people, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross to atone for our sins is the true (real) bread and drink that bring to us eternal life.

In **verse 56** we read our Lord’s words, “*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*” What is added in these words is the matter of *abiding* with Jesus. This speaks of a mutual indwelling. There is a union of Christ with His people. We often speak of Jesus abiding in us. Here He declares that those who truly believe on Him also abide in Him.

We will find this idea of “abiding” later in the Gospel. In John 15:4 Jesus will tell His disciples, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” Some translate the Greek word as “remain” rather than “abide.” This is how the New International Version (NIV) translates the verse: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.” This may be a more accurate rendering.

This theme of abiding or remaining is a major one for John’s Gospel.

The term “remain” (μένει) is one of the central terms in the Gospel; the Father “remains” in the Son (14:10), the Spirit “remains” upon Jesus (1:32-33), and believers “remain” in Christ and He in them (15:4). The term is depicting a coparticipatory existence, where the “being” of the believer is determined or regulated by Jesus. It is nothing less than a depiction of an intimate relationship. The apostle Paul considers himself to have shared so deeply in Christ that the crucifixion of Christ was in a real way also his death, with his life being lived (empowered) by Christ in him (Gal. 2:20). This is the first appearance

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<sup>9</sup> Actually they are present tense participles, rather than finite verbs. They describe what characterizes the true Christian.

<sup>10</sup> Lenski, pp. 493f.

of this concept in this Gospel; later in the Gospel Jesus will give further explanation concerning this mutual indwelling (see 8:31-32; 14:20; 15:4-10; 17:21-23).<sup>11</sup>

And then we read in **verse 57** our Lord saying, *“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.”* The common thread here is the matter of life, or living. The Father is “living.” Jesus said that He “lives” (present tense) due to the Father. And the one who believes continually—“feeds” on Jesus “will live” (future tense) because of Christ. The life that God gives to believers in Jesus Christ is Trinitarian in nature. Here the Father and the Son are both living and the believer lives because of this life in the Son. Later we will see that life is also in believers due to the Holy Spirit (John 14:17).

The language of this verse is very precise. It indicates that the life we have is due to the life that God the Father gave to Jesus Christ that He in turn gives to us. But the life that Jesus has in common with the Father is of a different kind than the common life the true believer has with Jesus Christ. God the Father determined that Jesus would have life in Himself (cf. John 5:26), but the life we have is derived from Jesus Christ. With respect to believers, “they live because of the Son’s determination, but unlike Him they never have life-in-themselves, but only in Him. For the Christian, life is always mediated through Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

When Jesus said, “I live because of the Father”, He was speaking of His human nature. Jesus Christ is one person with two natures--one divine and the other human. The life that is in the Father, He caused to be given to Jesus in His human nature, so that He in His human nature might give us life through His life and death. Here are the words of **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732), who gave a sermon on this text of John 6:57 on July 2, 1711.

We have the spring from whence the believer derives this supernatural life of his, in its beginning, progress, and continuation. It is not from himself, he is but a branch, not a root; it is not immediately from God, as Adam’s, but from the Mediator, Jesus Christ. The justice and holiness of God refused an intermediate union with the sinful creature, yet there could be no life but as proceeding from God, the prime fountain of all, and there could be no communication of this life without union with Him; wherefore it pleased God to unite the human nature to the divine in the person of his Son, and so to make Him the Mediator, the mean of the sinner’s union and communion with the Father; that He deriving life from His Father, they might again derive it from Him. This is the import of the former part of the verse, in which Christ shews how He comes to be living bread. 1. He is fitted for giving life, seeing He lives by the Father, deriving life from the Fountain of life. 2. There is a divine appointment of hint by the Father, by which He was ordained and set apart to be life-giving bread to His people.

We have the way how this life is derived from Christ to the soul, and this is by eating Him, that is, by faith. It cannot be understood of a corporeal eating, for this eating would not give life; John 6:63, “It is by the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.” Our Lord Himself determines it to be believing, v. 35, “He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.” The word here used properly signifies a keen appetite, being the same as in Matthew 24:35, and many denote unto us that greedy appetite which the believer has after Christ, his soul-food, and that there is no hazard of excess here, either in the appetite which obtains, or in the continuance at this blessed work; we may eat all the day long, and also in the night, and welcome. Yea, it is remarkable that it is not said, he that hath eaten, that has got a taste of Christ, and is satisfied: but “he that eateth,” denoting a continuing action, such as he that breathes, lives. There must be a constant improvement of Christ as the fountain of life, a living by believing; Gal. 2:20, “And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

The last words that our Lord spoke in this synagogue on this occasion are contained in **verse 58**. Jesus said, *“This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”*

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<sup>11</sup> Klink, p. 340.

<sup>12</sup> Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 299.

This is a narrative, or rather, rhetorical device that concludes his speech. He closes his words with a statement quite similar, even repeating the words with which He had opened the section of this discourse (cf. verse 49). Here He closes His teaching contrasting once again Moses and his giving of the manna to Israel in the wilderness with Jesus giving Himself, the true bread from heaven, which enables the one who believes on Him to live forever. But whereas they died, they live forever who feed in faith on Jesus Christ.

And then this episode concludes with John providing the setting of this discourse. **Verse 59** reads, ***“These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.”***

We now arrive to the fifth and last division of this discourse, which describes the reaction and the response of those who heard Jesus’ teaching. We see from this concluding section that...

## **V. Only those enabled by God’s sovereign grace will believe on Jesus Christ unto eternal life (6:60-71)**

Let us read these verses and then begin to consider them one at a time. We will only be able to begin to examine these today, completing their study at a later time. We read of the consequences of our Lord’s teaching before these Jews in the synagogue of Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup>Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”

<sup>61</sup>When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup>What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? <sup>63</sup>It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. <sup>64</sup>But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. <sup>65</sup>And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

<sup>66</sup>From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. <sup>67</sup>Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

<sup>68</sup>But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>70</sup>Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” <sup>71</sup>He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

We read that our Lord at this point in His ministry had many disciples. He had gathered a following, who had witnessed His signs and heard His teaching. They had believed on Him, at least in a measure. They had enlisted as His followers who were committed to learn of Him and from Him. This the heart of what it means to be a disciple. A disciple is a learner, a follower of another. Jesus had many disciples. But we read that “many” of them were very troubled by His teaching they had just heard. Our Lord’s instruction troubled them greatly, and they told Him so. They said, ***“This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”*** (v. 60).

**Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote of how our Lord welcomed the entire crowd, even though many of them were hypocrites. They had made great effort to follow Him, but before this day was over, they proved themselves to be but superficial followers.

These people appeared afterwards to be unsound, and not actuated by any good principle, and yet were thus zealous. Note, hypocrites may be very forward in their attendance on God’s ordinances. If men have *no more* to show for their love to Christ than their running after sermons and prayers, and their pangs of affection to good preaching, they have reason to suspect themselves no better than this *eager crowd*. But though these people were no better principled, and Christ knew it, yet He was willing to be found of them, and admitted them into fellowship with Him. If we could know the hearts of hypocrites,

yet, while their profession is plausible, we must not exclude them from our communion, much less when we do not know their hearts.<sup>13</sup>

**Matthew Henry** then wrote of these temporary disciples of verse 60.

To some it was a *savour of death unto death*; not only to the Jews, who were professed enemies to him and his doctrine, but even to many of *His disciples*, such as were disciples *at large*, who were His frequent hearers, and followed Him *in public*; a mixed multitude, like those among Israel, that began all the discontents. Now here we have, 1. Their murmurings at the doctrine they heard (v. 60): *This is a hard saying, who can hear it?* (1.) They do not like it themselves: “What stuff is this? *Eat the flesh, and drink the blood, of the Son of man!* If it is to be understood figuratively, it is not intelligible; if literally, not practicable. What! Must we turn cannibals? Can we not be religious, but we must be barbarous?” ...Now, when they found it a hard saying, if they had humbly begged of Christ to have *declared unto them this parable*, He would have opened it, and their understandings too; for *the meek will he teach His way*. But they were not willing to have Christ’s sayings explained to them, because they would not lose *this* pretence for rejecting them—that they were *hard sayings*. (2.) They think it impossible that any one else should like it: “*Who can hear it?* Surely none can.” Thus the scoffers at religion are ready to undertake that all the intelligent part of mankind concur with them. They conclude with great assurance that no *man of sense* will admit the doctrine of Christ, nor any *man of spirit* submit to His laws. Because they cannot bear to be so *tutored*, so *tied up*, themselves, they think none else can: *Who can hear it?* Thanks be to God, thousands have *heard* these sayings of Christ, and have found them not only easy, but pleasant, as their *necessary food*.<sup>14</sup>

Now with this reference of our Lord’s disciples in verse 60, who are said to walk away in verse 66, we need to address and clarify a few matters. First, we need to understand what the Word of God teaches us about being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

## 1. What is a disciple of Jesus Christ?

First, let us be reminded that the Great Commission the Lord Jesus gave His church was to go forth into the world and make disciples. We read in Matthew 28:19 and 20:

<sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:1-20)

Jesus said, “Go therefore and *make disciples*...” We have a responsibility to make disciples. Jesus did not command us to make *proselytes*, but disciples; that is, we are not merely to persuade people to embrace our belief system, making followers of us or of our ways. Nor did Jesus command us to make *believers*; that is, ones who may only embrace truth, but it influences little the way they live. We are to make *disciples*.

Actually, our Lord’s command to us is “to disciple” the nations, for the word, “disciples”, is a verb which gives the force of a command: “make disciples.” Our Lord deliberately used this form of expression to convey the force of a command. He was telling His followers they must begin at once with this task. The Lord was issuing marching orders to His followers.

Since this Great Commission to make disciples is our main task as Christians, we should be purposeful and diligent in this work. But an essential prerequisite to this work is to have a solid, biblical, and precise

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 944.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Henry, vol. 5, p. 956-957.

understanding of what a disciple is. When this is in place, then the way to accomplish our task will become clearer to us. Therefore, let us answer the question, **what is a disciple of Christ?**

The Greek word for “disciple” has a root meaning of being *a learner*; not just in the sense of a student to a teacher, but as an apprentice to a craftsman—*one learns from the Master*, while following His instruction and observing His behavior. And so, a disciple is a *follower* or adherent of another. John the Baptist had disciples (Matt. 9:14). There were disciples of Moses (John 9:28). The Pharisees had disciples (Matt. 22:16). We are concerned, of course, only with what the Bible teaches about being disciples of Jesus Christ. But even this group is not that easily identified in the Scriptures, for the term “disciple” of Jesus is used to describe different groups of people.

1. First, the term is used of any and all who “followed” Jesus, even if for a short period of time, or secretly (Luke 6:17-19; John 6:60, 66; John 19:38).
2. Second, the term disciples is used of the twelve apostles (Matt. 10:1; Luke 22:11).
3. Third, the Lord spoke of “true” disciples (John 8:31; cf. 13:35; 15:8), which suggests that there were some who called themselves His disciples but were not actually.
4. Fourth, the term is also used of those who believed on Him, confessed Him, were baptized, and obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 14:20, 22, 28).
5. Fifth, it is used of “Christians.” “The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch” (Acts 11:26).

What, then, may we posit as a definition of a disciple of Christ?

A disciple of Jesus Christ is a professing Christian, one who has purposed to devote himself/herself to obey the teachings of Christ. A disciple of Christ is one who has purposed to learn and observe all that Christ has commanded of His followers (Matthew 28:18-20).

Only true disciples of Jesus Christ are true Christians and only to them does God grant salvation from sin and the gift of everlasting life. If you are not a disciple of Jesus, you are not yet a Christian, as the Bible defines a Christian. Acts 11:26 reads, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

**What are the characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ?** We read in John 8:31 that our Lord Jesus described the nature of a true disciple. There we read, “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, *‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples’*” (John 8:31). In other words, Jesus was saying that you are only His disciple if you have purposed that His Word will govern your thinking and behavior, and that His Word continues in that role in your life. If we take to heart this statement of Jesus, then how are we to regard the “disciples” of John 6:60 and 66? They were not true disciples, for had they been true disciples, they would have abided in the word that Jesus taught them.

## **2. Temporary disciples are not true disciples of Jesus Christ.**

Our Lord was not surprised when He witnessed those “disciples” walk away from Him. Of them it was said, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (v. 66). We read that this did not surprise our Lord, for in verse 64 we read, *“For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.”*

Jesus was not attempting to retain all of these would-be followers. He was not retain the size of this crowd of 5,000+ admirers and “believers”, who the evening before would have forced Him to become their king (Cf. John 6:15). He intentionally winnowed the crowd to His few, true disciples, who would follow Him wherever He led them and receive from Him whatever He taught them. He desired committed, fully surrendered disciples. And to them and only them, does He give everlasting life.

We do no favor to people by suggesting or promoting a Christianity without them totally yielding of their lives to Jesus the Lord. A true Christian, who is a true disciple of Jesus Christ, is a fully committed learner and follower of Jesus Christ as Lord. And we are to follow our Lord's example of dealing with this crowd before Him. We are to tell the whole truth clearly and fully, even that truth, or perhaps especially that truth that we know will be hard for them to understand and embrace. For it is in that kind of crisis of faith, that the true spiritual condition of a person will show itself. Then you will discover, and he might discover of himself, that he has not truly yielded himself to the Lord, or that he has just been going along, while he perceives matters are going the way that he thinks they should be going.

These people who walked away from Jesus, these temporary "disciples" would be examples of what our Lord taught regarding *the stony soil hearers* in His *parable of the sower*. Let us see how this is the case.

### 3. The Parable of the Sower and temporary believers (Matthew 13:3-9; 18-22)

This is a parable that is familiar to most of us. It is commonly known as the Parable of the Sower. But actually, it might be called the *parable of the soils*, for it is the types of soil that is emphasized. Let us read **Matthew 13:3-9**:

<sup>3</sup>Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Jesus tells of a farmer scattering his seed in his field with the intention of bringing forth a mature crop at harvest time. But obviously, not all of the scattered seed will bring results. Some falls on *the hardened path*, one does not expect this seed even to sprout; the birds quickly take the seed away. And then there is that seed which falls on *soil barely covering rocks*. This seed may grow briefly, but because there is no root system, it cannot be expected to yield a crop. Of course, some falls *among weeds*, it too, will not bring a yield to the farmer. Only that which falls on *good soil*, that soil prepared by the farmer, can be expected to produce the results desired by the farmer; in fact, you can count on it.

The concluding remark in verse 9 is most important: "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*" Essentially the Lord was saying, "*Be careful how you hear, do not be mere nominal or superficial followers of me.*" So He summons people to do more than just hear His words. They must apply them as well. Something must happen in one's life as result of hearing His Word.

Later in verses 18 through 22 we have our Lord explaining the meaning of this parable to His disciples.

<sup>18</sup>"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. <sup>20</sup>But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. <sup>22</sup>Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

In verse 19 we learn that the seed represents “the Word of the kingdom.” This is our responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ: to scatter the seed of the Word of God everywhere possible, in as much quantity as possible. This is the work of the ministry of a local church. In all of our service, in all of our activity, our chief concern and effort should be to sow the Word of God as frequently and faithfully as the Lord enables us. This is always to be the measure. When we are scrutinized and measured, either by others, or ourselves the final issue which we should ask is this, “have we been faithful in proclaiming both publicly and privately, the Word of God, even the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ?” In many things we falter and fail, but we must be right and faithful in this matter.

Our Lord declares that the seed is the Word of the kingdom. In Luke’s account the seed is the Word of God. For us, it is the written Word of God in the Bible, which is the means that God has ordained to accomplish His work. Sometimes a harvest is seen, but sometimes there must first be much sowing, and further watering, before a harvest is realized. The seed is the Word of God, either read or heard, only through the instrument of the Word of God will the work of God be accomplished.

We see in the parable that **the various types of soil are different kinds of hearers (13:19-23)**. Four different kinds of soil are four different kinds of hearers. All four hear the Word of God, only one of these hearers, the last, has salvation. Only the fourth type produces the yield for which the seed was designed to bring forth. Our concern especially is the second kind of soil that our Lord described. **The seed in rocky soil are those hearers who believe for a while** (13:21). Jesus said,

<sup>20</sup>But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while.

The Word has affected this one. He advanced farther than the first, but still, he, too, failed to bring forth fruit. Everyone was hopeful for this person! He became a “believer.” Hear is a very joyous, enthusiastic “believer.” He seemed to grow more rapidly than all about him. But the problem is that he only believed “for a while.” The effects of the Word were only temporary. And there is no salvation for a temporary believer. This is an example of an *apostate*. He seemed so enthusiastic, so responsive, he seemed to be set on fire for the cause of Christ. He had aspects about his faith that we should desire for ourselves! Why surely, a true work of salvation had been done in this man’s heart!

But not so fast. A time of testing and trial comes. Matthew’s account is quite specific that caused this one to stumble. We read in verse 21

But he who received the word in stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For *when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word*, immediately he stumbles.” (Matt. 13:20f)

This describes what happened to all those temporary “disciples” in John 6. “Many” of Jesus’ followers left Him due to the fact they did not like what He was teaching them (cf. John 6:60-66).

The point is this: the stony ground hearer endures only for a while, but his trials lead him to give up; he abandons his faith in Christ and repudiates the Word of God as binding on his life. He ceases to do the Word of God that he has heard. Salvation only belongs to those who continue to hear and continue to order their life according to the Word of God.

It is not that this person lost his salvation; rather, his testing only revealed what was not there from the beginning; there was no real substance to the matter. He had some understanding. His emotions had been stirred. He was enthusiastic. But in reality, it was but superficial from the beginning, and the time of testing only revealed what was already there, or not there.

We may consider *three points* from the example of this hearer in this parable:

**(1) Let us not be so quick to lead people to make “decisions” for Christ, and if they do, do not be too quick to label professors of Christ as numbered among the people of God.** Here are some wise words:

Do not, therefore, consider that soul-winning is or can be secured by the multitude of baptisms, and the swelling of the size of your church. What means these dispatches from the battlefield? “Last night, 14 souls were under conviction, 15 were justified, and 8 received full sanctification.” I am weary of this public bragging, this counting of unhatched chickens, this exhibition of doubtful spoils. Lay aside such numberings of the people, such idle pretense of certifying in a half a minute that which will need the testing of a lifetime. Hope for the best, but in your highest excitements be reasonable.” (Spurgeon, The Soul Winner, p. 19)

And so, yes, be encouraged, but watch over their souls, be in prayer for them, and encourage them in the faith. Continue to sow the good seed of the Word of God.

**(2) How do you know that you are not one of these kinds of hearers?** Answer: you don’t, really, until the testing of the life bears the true nature of your faith (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-9). When you experience a severe trial of your faith but you come through on the other side believing and following the Lord, you will have shown yourself not to be a stony ground hearer.

**(3) We are to preach the whole counsel of God, even the “hard sayings” as a way to determine the true from the false.** If we trim down our teaching of the Scriptures to proclaim and teach only that which we know our people will readily receive, even while we pass over those teachings that we know will upset or challenge them, we are not being faithful to our calling and responsibility as a church. We are to be faithful to those who hear us, just as our Lord was faithful to these hearers on this occasion.

We will consider one more illustration of this principle, and then we will close. In Luke’s Gospel we read of *three would-be disciples* of Jesus Christ. But our Lord did not enlist them immediately to become His disciples. We read of this account in Luke 9:57 and 58:

<sup>57</sup>Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”

<sup>58</sup>And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

This man committed to the Lord to become his follower. But our Lord sought to dissuade him, by telling him of the difficulty that he would face if he would follow Jesus. **Charles Spurgeon** wrote of our Lord’s dealings with this man in a sermon he entitled, “Fickle Followers”:

Does any one here say, “That was rather a hard method of our Lord, to tell this hopeful person that, and so discourage him”? Ah! dear friend, it was a very safe and proper method. Our Lord wants not to gather to His army those who cannot be soldiers. If we cannot endure what lies before us, it is better for us honestly to turn back than to pretend to go forward. If we enlist a man who is not sincere at the first, we are doing him a serious injury; we are doing ourselves an injury; we are doing the whole cause of Christ a solemn injury before the eyes of men; for all they that go back, like dogs to their vomit, bring disgrace upon the good cause. All those who say that they are Christ’s, and then go and live ungodly lives, stain the name of Christ. They do more injury through having made a profession, than they would have been capable of doing if they had never made that profession. Now, as the church hastily counts up her numbers, and says, “So many were converted,” the world has another register, and counts up the apostates, the backsliders, the wanderers; and it is a serious blow struck at the crown and the glory of Christ when the world can say, “Such and such a man bore Christ’s name, but he acted like a servant of the devil.” Hence our Lord was wise, as the great heart-searching Savior, to let this man know the worst side of religion; that, if he did take up with it, he might know what the cost of it would be. So would I say to everyone here, that we want you to come, we want you to join the army of Christ, we want you to be followers of the Redeemer, but not unless you will count the cost first. We beg you not to take the

name of Christ upon you, unless you are truly His in your very soul. Do not dare to be added to the Church of God, unless heart, soul, and spirit, your whole nature goes with your profession, and you become truly and really a follower of Christ. The enthusiastic often comfort a preacher, but they as often delude him. Let him be on his guard, and try well, with searching truth and with the untiring preaching of the whole gospel, those who come to him, lest the great heap on the threshing floor should suddenly prove to be nothing but chaff, when God's great fan comes to blow upon it. We must keep the fan of the gospel going, that the chaff may be divided from the wheat, for God would have us separate between the precious and the vile, and then shall we be as His mouth.

This is what our Lord did before this gathering in the synagogue of Capernaum. He would be certain that His followers would be true disciples, who would stay with Him and committed to Him regardless of the difficulty or confusion that they encountered. May our Lord help our church to be faithful in our ministry of the word to our world in which we live.

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Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,  
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

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