

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-4-11 AM NOTES
"RESPONDING TO THE HARD TEACHING OF CHRIST"
JOHN 6:52-71
#26 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through John"

John 6:35 (NKJV) "And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'"

"I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His person can be so presented as to offend nobody. We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, was so stiff in His opinions and so inflammatory in His language that He was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted [to expose to public scorn] as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever His peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference."
—Dorothy Sayers

I. The Hard Teaching (vv. 52-59)

A. The Problem of the Hearers (v. 52)

John 4:15 (NKJV) "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

Reasons this passage cannot be referring to communion:

1. A different term is used for what is eaten. In the passages where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the Greek word translated "body" is *soma*. The Greek word translated "flesh" in verse 52 is *sarx*.
2. Jesus would not be discussing something as precious as the Lord's Supper (communion) with disagreeable unbelievers when He had not yet even given this ordinance to His disciples.
3. Jesus made this eating and drinking an essential for salvation and the Lord's Supper was not given for salvation.
4. The verbs in verses 50, 51, and 53 indicate a one-time act (aorist tense) and the Lord's Supper is an ordinance that is to be repeated.

B. The Promises for Eating and Drinking Christ Jesus (vv. 53-59)

1. He Promises Eternal Life (vv. 53-54, 58)

Leviticus 17:10-11 (NKJV) "¹⁰ And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. ¹¹ For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul."

2. He Promises Union With Christ (vv. 55-57)

II. Three Types of Responders Revealed (vv. 60-71)

A. The Frivolous (vv. 60-63, 65-66)

2 Timothy 3:5 (NKJV) “having a form of godliness but denying its power.”

1 John 2:19 (NKJV) “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”

John 6:51b (NKJV) “...and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

John 6:63a (ESV) “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.”

1 Corinthians 2:14 (HCSB) “But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually.”

B. The Faithful (vv. 67-69)

C. The Frauds (vv. 64, 70-71)

Why did Jesus choose Judas?

1. It was a fulfillment of prophesy (Psalm 41:9, Zechariah 11:13)
2. It was to encourage us
3. It is a warning to be on guard against false prophets and false teachers

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When you carefully read the Gospel of John, you can logically believe only one of three things about Jesus Christ. Either He was God in a body as He claimed, or He was a very mentally unbalanced and deluded man who thought He came down from heaven and was one with God the Father, or He was a deceiver who told people He was God when He knew He wasn't. Logically, those are the only three choices you have when it comes to the person of Christ Jesus. It is illogical and foolish to say that He was a wonderful man and a great teacher, but was not God in a body. John is on a mission to give us the evidence that Jesus was and is God in a body just as He claimed to be.

Let me give a short summary of John 6 – one of the most important chapters in the Bible. Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children with a boy's lunch consisting of some barley bread and small fish. He uses that physical miracle to move from the physical to the spiritual. Just as people need food for their body (which Jesus supplied), they also need food or bread for their soul – spiritual food. God sent the physical food and God also sends the spiritual food. Jesus is that spiritual bread that has come down from heaven sent by God. After the initial miracle in 6:1-15, Jesus begins to draw them away from the physical need for food to the spiritual need for food (bread) and presents Himself in **John 6:35 (NKJV)** “And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’” In verse 50, Jesus takes things to another level. He begins to illustrate how the bread of life must be appropriated in order to satisfy the needs of the soul. To illustrate appropriating the provision for the soul, He uses eating and drinking. That was too much for many of those who were following Him. Jesus starts chapter 6 with 5,000 men following Him (plus the women and children with those men) and ends with eleven. His teaching was called “hard” by the hearers, and they began to dwindle away. When we teach what Jesus taught and the other writers of the New Testament taught, we should expect controversy and many being turned off by it. Dorothy Sayers summarized the Jesus of Scripture and His controversial message well: “I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it. Seeing that Christ went about the world giving the most violent offense to all kinds of people, it would seem absurd to expect that the doctrine of His person can be so presented as to offend nobody. We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, was so stiff in His opinions and so inflammatory in His language that He was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted [to expose to public scorn] as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever His peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference” [Quoted in John MacArthur, “The Jesus You Can't Ignore”, Page 163]. When we began The Kingdom Challenge last year, I started it with a lengthy series entitled, “The Extreme Teaching of Jesus”. I gave a warning that the Kingdom Challenge and the extreme teachings of Jesus that laid the foundation for it would not be popular to everyone in our church and that the enemy would not stand idly by without stirring things up. Looking back over the last year, I wish I could say that I was wrong in that prediction, but I was not. In some ways some things have been worse than I ever imagined.

Let's finish this amazing chapter in the Gospel of John this morning.

I. The Hard Teaching (V52-59)

In verse 50 Jesus introduces the analogy of eating and later drinking to communicate appropriating Him as the bread of life. So many people analyze and eulogize Christ, but never eat. At the conclusion of the last message I gave some ways that eating becomes a great analogy for believing and appropriating Christ. Let me review. First, eating is a necessary act if I am to receive any benefit from the bread. I may analyze the bread, philosophize about the bread; I may pick up the bread and handle the bread, but unless I appropriate the bread by eating it, I am not going to be nourished by it. It is the same with Christ. He

must be appropriated by faith. Second, eating is responding to a hunger. Once God does a work in us to convict us of sin and to open our eyes to the truth, we begin to hunger and thirst for Him. Third, eating is a very personal act. No one can eat for me. If I am to be nourished, I must take food and eat it myself. In the same way, no one can believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for you.

A. The Problem of the Hearers (V52)

As was often the case, Jesus' hearers tried to give a literal interpretation to an analogy Jesus was using. For instance, when He told the woman at the well about living water that when one drank, they never thirsted again, she took it to mean literal water. At first, she failed to see that the living water was an analogy, a picture of Jesus and the salvation He provided that meets our deepest need (needs which are spiritual and not physical). Her response was **John 4:15 (NKJV)** "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." These hard hearted, spiritually blind people in John 6 equated what Jesus was saying as cannibalism. This same kind of mistake is made today in Roman Catholic churches when they interpret this eating and drinking in chapter 6 as taking communion. The doctrine they teach, called "transubstantiation" says that in communion at a point in time when the priest blesses the bread and wine, it literally becomes the body (the literal body) of Christ and the juice becomes His blood (the literal blood). Roman Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott writes, "The body and the blood of Christ together with His soul and His divinity and therefore the whole Christ are truly present in the Eucharist" [Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, Page 382]. There are several reasons that this passage cannot be referring to communion.

1. He uses a different term in referring to what is eaten. Here chapter 6, it is the Greek word "sarx" which is flesh. When He instituted the Lord's Supper it was the Greek word for body, "soma" and the two words aren't related.
2. Why would He discuss the Lord's Supper with a group of disagreeable unbelievers? He hadn't even given it to His disciples yet.
3. Jesus made this eating and drinking an essential for obtaining eternal life. That would mean that the Lord's Supper would be essential for salvation and that would contradict hundred's of other Scriptures.
4. The verbs in verses 50, 51, and 53 indicate a one time act (aorist tense) and the Lord's Supper is an ordinance that is to be repeated.

In verse 63, Jesus makes it clear that He is not speaking in literal terms, but in spiritual terms.

B. The Promises for Eating and Drinking of Jesus (V53-59)

Jesus doesn't attempt to correct their interpretation of what He said about eating His flesh. He doesn't cater to willful unbelief. Jesus promises two things to those who eat of His flesh and drink of His blood.

1. He Promises Eternal life (V53-54, 58)

If the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ does not refer to communion, what is it talking about? It is saying that we must believe on Him to experience all that He is for the satisfaction of every **God installed need** in our life. Because the Jews took Him literally, they had a mega problem. The eating of His flesh was bad enough, but now He adds the drinking of His blood. To the Jews, the drinking of blood was horrible beyond description. **Leviticus 17:10-11 (NKJV)** "¹⁰ And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. ¹¹ For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul." They failed to get the truth Jesus was communicating that His flesh was who He is – God in a body, and His blood was His poured out life that was offered as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross. To eat and drink is to believe, to savingly believe on Christ, the Son of God who shed His blood for our sin. Compare verse 54 with verse 47 and you will see what eating refers to. Augustine said, "Believe and you have eaten" ["In Johan", Tract, xxvi, 1]. What happens when we believe that all our sins were imputed to Jesus (who is God in a body) and His shed blood was an acceptable sacrifice to the Father for our sins? We receive eternal life! Included in eternal life is the assurance that we are saved and secure. Some who don't believe in the eternal security of the believer

emphasize that eternal life is a quality of life, not duration of life. They then will many times talk about how we can lose this quality of life, this eternal life. Certainly eternal life is a quality of life, but it is also a life of eternal length. Eternal life is the life of Christ that we are united to. Christ's life is without end because He is without end! Jesus affirms this assurance when He says in verse 54 that He will raise up on the last day all who have this eternal life. What a glorious promise – eternal, eternal life. What a wonderful thing to know that nothing can ever separate us from Him.

2. He Promises Union with Christ (V55-57)

When we are told in verse 55 that His flesh is food indeed and His blood is drink indeed, He is saying physical food is not true food because it doesn't give new life with a new identity. When we eat and drink of Christ, we are placed in union with Him. We know from other Scriptures that this union with Christ is accomplished through the baptism by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation when He unites us with Christ as a part of His body. That phrase in verse 56, "abides in me" means "is united with me".

What does it mean to be united with Christ? It means that we have a new identity. We are no longer in Adam's family; we are "in Christ" and thus the family of God. We are no longer at the core of our being sinners who practice sin; we are saints who constantly struggle with the power of sin, but we are not defined by our sin and we cannot continue in it. We are no longer possessors of Adam's nature which strives to be our own God. We are now what 2 Peter 1:4 calls "partakers of the divine nature". We are no longer estranged from God; we are now in Christ reconciled and accepted by God. We are no longer condemned, but forgiven. We could go on and on with the results of our union with Christ when we eat and drink of Christ.

It is interesting that man spiritually died by eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and that man is made spiritually alive by eating of the One who is the bread of life!

II. Three Types of Responders Revealed (V60-71)

What was the response to this "hard" teaching of Jesus? We can divide the responders to this hard teaching into three categories.

A. The Frivolous (V60-63, 65-66)

Let me give you a caution about the word "disciple" in this passage. The Greek word translated "disciple" simply means one who attaches himself to a teacher as a student or learner. The word itself doesn't say anything about the person's devotion or sincerity. Jesus spoke in John 8:31 of those who were His "disciples indeed". John is including in the word "disciple" those large crowds that followed Jesus because of His miracles. We can't really know at any point in time who the frivolous disciples are. Only God knows a person's heart. The frivolous are revealed in that they fall away from following Jesus. True disciples are evidenced by their continued pattern of faithfulness. Frivolous disciples are described in **2 Timothy 3:5a (NKJV)** "having a form of godliness but denying its power." Their leaving from following Christ gives evidence that they were never "disciples indeed". John gives us this truth about frivolous disciples in **1 John 2:19 (NKJV)** "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." I repeat that while God knows who is a disciple indeed and who is a frivolous disciple, it takes time for us to observe.

Let's look at the frivolous disciples that followed Jesus for a time. In verse 60, they complained that Jesus' teaching about eating His flesh and drinking His blood was "a hard saying". The word "hard" is the Greek word "skleros" that we get the word "sclerosis" from. It does not mean hard to understand; it means hard to tolerate. These frivolous disciples were thrill seekers, not truth seekers and when the truth was hard to tolerate, they turned away from following Jesus. Why was the truth that Jesus taught in John 6 hard to tolerate? First, there was the teaching that He came down from heaven which they rightly understood was a claim to deity. This was hard for them to accept just as it is for many today. Second, Jesus was teaching that He must go to the cross. That is clear in **John 6:51b (NKJV)** "...and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." This dying in shame for others was foreign to their thinking and also foreign to their view of the Messiah. To the Jews of Jesus' day,

salvation was something to be earned. For a substitute to die that others might have life was a hard teaching. The third reason that this was a hard teaching is that Jesus said that it was impossible to come to Him unless the Father drew them. This meant that they weren't sovereign and to tell people that only God is sovereign is always a hard teaching. The reaction of these frivolous disciples is consistent with those of today. They were more interested in what Jesus could do for them than they were interested in hearing His words and knowing Him.

Notice Jesus' response to their complaint. In verse 61 we are reminded that He knows the heart of every person. The word "offend" is the Greek word "skandalizo". It is the word from which we get "scandalize". The true gospel is that Jesus, who is God in a body, gave His body for us and shed His blood for our cleansing and that we must eat His flesh (believe who He is) and drink his blood (believe that His atonement on the cross is sufficient for our salvation) to appropriate salvation. That is scandalous to the world! That is offensive to the world. Another thing that was a scandal to them is that Jesus claimed to have come down from the Father. In verse 62 Jesus tells them that the day is coming when He will go back to the Father in heaven. He was speaking of His ascension.

In verses 63, 65, and 66 Jesus speaks plainly to these flesh empowered frivolous disciples. Their problem was the same problem that frivolous disciples still have today. They approach everything with a "me-centered" perspective and they try to accomplish what they want to accomplish in their own power. In verse 63, Jesus tells them that the flesh profits nothing. I like the ESV translation of **John 6:63a (ESV)** "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all." Frivolous disciples in our setting are those that have attached themselves to the church but have turned back from following Christ. The reason they do not follow Him is that they never savingly knew Him. Everything they do is flesh. They don't understand the Lord's words that are spirit and life. We see the frivolous disciple's problem in **1 Corinthians 2:14 (HCSB)** "But the natural man [including the frivolous disciple] does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually." Jesus tells them that His words are spirit (spiritual) and the Spirit uses them to impart life.

In verse 65 Jesus reminds them of what has been said several times in this chapter. All mankind is spiritually dead and God must do an awakening work, a drawing work to enable them to come to Him. Notice that Jesus does not say that no man "will come to Me"; He says that "no man can come to me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

We see the result of Jesus refusing to compromise or make His teaching more "seeker friendly". They turned away from Him. That is the response of the frivolous.

B. The Faithful (V67-69)

I find verse 67 one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Peter speaks for the others in verse 68-69. Here is what I want you to notice. The true faithful disciples had moved beyond the miracles. They were His disciples because of His words and His person. True disciples are moved by what Jesus said and who He is, not the "miracle" He might perform for them. Peter said, "We follow you because of who You are and the words that You teach concerning eternal life."

C. The Frauds (V64, 70-71)

The frivolous thought they were His disciples, but when the teaching was hard and confronted their flesh powered me-centered lives, they turned back. Judas represents those who are frauds and know that they are not true disciples. Verse 64 tells us that Jesus knows who the frauds are. Judas is the greatest fraud in History. Jesus knew when He chose Judas that he was a fraud and would betray Him. That raises a question. Why did Jesus choose Judas? Let me share some of the reasons why. First, it was a fulfillment of prophecy. Psalm 41:9 and Zechariah 11:13 prophecy the Messiah's betrayal by a familiar friend and Zechariah even gives the betrayal price. The second reason Jesus chose Judas was to be an encouragement to us. He knew that in His church there would be frauds. There was one in Jesus' twelve disciples, but the rest of the disciples didn't quit or get discouraged. They continued on with the mission He gave them. It may be that some fraud in the church has hurt you. Don't let that be an excuse to pull back. The third reason Jesus chose Judas is that it serves as a warning that the devils men will always be in the church. God's shepherds must be vigilant in guarding against false teachers and false prophets.

CONCLUSION

If you don't find some of Jesus' teachings to be hard, either you don't know them or you don't understand them. When it comes to the three types of responders to the teaching of Christ, where are you. Are you faithful, frivolous, or a fraud? (3416)