

The Gospel of John

Chapter 6:52-71

April 20, 1997

- **The Gospel of John Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Our Lord is the Word, the Light and the Life
- Chapter 2 The Lord of the Wedding Feast; Zeal for the purity of the temple
- Chapter 3 Spiritual Birth, Belief and Salvation vs. Unbelief and Condemnation
- Chapter 4 The Ministry in Samaria, The Harvest, The Faith of the Nobleman
- Chapter 5 Paralytic man healed on the Sabbath, Unity of The Father and Son
- Chapter 6 The Bread of Life

- **Review and Introduction**

We continue in of the section of this book where Jesus is addressing the multitude in Capernaum. Initially, the crowd seeks Jesus because they were wanting to find food. However, Jesus perceives this and admonishes them to seek after eternal food, not food which perishes. The crowd struggles with Jesus' identity since they were familiar with Joseph and Mary and His own life and they struggle with His teaching.

Here, Jesus continues His declaration that in order to have the food which will not perish they must eat His body and drink His blood. Their minds being constrained by the temporal, many will ultimately abandon Christ and find food elsewhere.

- **Exposition of John 6:52-71**

52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" ⁵³ 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.

- Still struggling with trying to use temporal thought to understand spiritual truth, the multitude cannot reconcile Christ's statement of eating His flesh. Jesus explains the problem to those who were Spiritual by teaching that unless they were to partake of Christ they were dead. Even though we are physically alive, unless we are in Christ, we cannot be Spiritual nor can we understand the Spiritual realm. In addition, despite our physical life, without Christ we are doomed to eternal destruction and are as good as eternally dead right now.

54 "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."⁵⁵ "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed."⁵⁶ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

- Not only did this teaching confound the multitude listening to Christ's teaching, there has been much controversy in the Church for centuries. However, the same situation which prevented the original hearers from accepting the teaching still plagues us today—attempting to understand the Spiritual as temporal beings. It is only in Christ and by the Spirit which He grants us that we can adequately comprehend this instruction.
- This instruction would not reach its full revelation until Christ and His disciples were in the upper room celebrating the Passover. We are taught by Paul that Christ was our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). This becomes evident when we read of the various accounts of the Supper. But in these verses, Jesus is not talking about simply partaking in Communion rather He is talking about believing in Him, being sustained by Him and having our sins covered or washed away by Him. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was instituted as a celebration of Christ's atoning sacrifice; a blessing for Saints as they commune with Christ and each other; a declaration of Christ's victory over sin and death; a reminder of the feast we will one day partake of with our Lord.
- **Transubstantiation**—During the ninth century there was a fair discord in the church and a fellow named Radbertus who, given to the mysterious, introduced the teaching that during the Lord's Supper, the elements (bread and wine) actually became the flesh and blood of Christ. This teaching declared that the bread and wine were fully replaced by Christ's actual flesh and blood yet the accidents remained unchanged. Although not widely accepted at first, by the eleventh century this position had become the official doctrine of the Church. Later, in the thirteenth century, the theologian Thomas Aquinas, who being very influenced by the philosophies of Aristotle, further defined and clarified the teaching adding such things as 1) concomitance and withholding the cup from the laity; 2) words of consecration; 3) recurring, propitiatory sacrifice of Christ; 4) consecrated elements may be reserved for later use; 5) such elements should be treated as the living Christ.
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- **Consubstantiation**—This view introduced later by Luther affirmed the conversion of the elements into the body and blood of Christ but denied that the substance of the element departed. This teaching primarily held that the substance of the elements and the body and blood of Christ, coexisted simultaneously while the accidents remained the same. Although it may appear this portion of the teaching did not differ much, Luther did vehemently (and rightly so) deny the sacrificial

aspect of the Lord's Supper. He held that this teaching of Christ's body being sacrificed each time the Eucharist is held was destructive and ultimately led to gross idolatry.

- **Memorialist**—This position was primarily propounded by Luther's opponent Ulrich Zwingli. He taught that the elements were only spiritually the body and blood of Christ and that there was nothing at all special about the elements. In addition, He denied any presence of our Lord in the partaking of the Lord's Supper.
- **Classical Protestant**—The most scripturally accurate position is somewhere between Luther and Zwingli. This position was introduced by Calvin and is really the early historic and Augustinian position. In it there is an acknowledgement of the Spiritual presence of Christ during the Lord's supper by faith; the blessing of unity to the Saints as they partake and the retention of attributes of the elements.

57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me."⁵⁸ "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."⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

- Jesus concludes His plenary teaching by restating that if the people seek the kind of bread that God provided their fathers in the wilderness, then just like them they will die. The true nourishment or sustenance was to be found by being in Christ. This verse does not state that eternal life comes through partaking in the sacrament of communion. Rather, eternal life comes by faith through our being covered by the atonement of Christ.
- Just as when we were physically born, we then require regular nourishment in order to sustain our lives likewise when we are born spiritually, it is necessary that we are fed and nourished so that we may grow and mature. This food is provided by the sanctifying work of the Spirit and the blessing of being covered by the shed blood of our Lord.

60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"⁶¹ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"⁶² "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?"⁶³ "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."⁶⁴ "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.⁶⁵ 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."

- The crowd rightly acknowledges that Jesus' teaching was difficult (albeit impossible without the Spirit) to understand and as a result they decided to abandon Him. Perhaps when it became clear enough that He was not going to provide them breakfast and the idea of eating His flesh and blood were not pleasing that the masses decided to find food elsewhere.
- It is quite ironic that the hundreds of years of debate over the physical presence of our Lord's body in the sacrament was actually answered by our Lord. The flesh (physical) profits nothing but the Spirit gives life. Jesus declares that He was speaking of spiritual things not physical. When Christ said that they must eat His body and drink His blood He was not speaking about His physical flesh and blood, rather, Jesus was telling them to believe in Him and by faith receive His body and blood as a sufficient atoning sacrifice.

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.⁶⁷ Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."⁶⁹ "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?"⁷¹ He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve. NKJV

- Although the disciples continue to follow their Lord, they certainly did not all at once comprehend all of the things Christ had just taught. The point of Christ's reply to them is that despite the fact that the large crowd has gone away and has dwindled down to the Twelve, they should not lose heart or think that losing some was unexpected by Christ. Not only did the multitude abandon Him, so too even one of the handpicked disciples would abandon Him as well. Don't confuse this with Judas being part of the Elect who will inherit salvation. Jesus picked Judas not as an Elect one, but rather for the very purpose of betraying Him.