

Greetings, we are in John chapter six verse 59 which says, "He said these things in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum."

This is our reference that lets us know this entire conversation is taking place on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Capernaum. So the regular synagogue goers are there and many of the Lord's disciples are there and the people who came late via boat who had eaten of the 2 fish and 5 barley loaves and wanted to force him to be king are there. They just heard Jesus tell them that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to receive eternal life.

Vs.60: "Therefore many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying! Who can listen to it?"

A hard saying is something spoken that is insufferable, intollerable or harsh. The question, "Who can listen to it" means who can abide by it, or who can accept or even who can believe it?

This was a cross-road for all who were listening, and it is important for us to understand and is why we are delving so deeply into it. Some teachings are hard to understand, some teachings if misunderstood, or untruthful can be divisive. Jesus prayed that his followers would not be divided, so that's why we give extra attention to the hard teachings, so that we are all on the same page. Jesus just gave them a piece of 'true meat' to chew on. They didn't understand it *and* thought it was a false teaching since they rejected it. We could understand if the Pharisees and rulers of the synagogue rejected it, but these are his disciples saying this.

So we too need to understand this lesson, if it divided the followers of the Lord while Jesus was right there in front of them, it can and does divide us today. Verse 63 is key to our understanding, we'll get to it in a bit.

Peter and the apostles were listening intently, they heard the Lord speak, they heard the comments and objections from the others and were now hearing people from their own number murmuring. They may have been trying to understand but ended up saying that it was just too much for them, and they decided to give up following, to quit, to throw in the towel.

None of the twelve voiced this opinion except maybe one thought it, but MANY of the disciples, perhaps some of those of the 72 that had gone out preaching about the kingdom and had the Holy Spirit for the time were some of those making this complaint grumbling amongst themselves!

It was a hard saying indeed, and they couldn't wrap their heads around this lesson, they could only see the exterior of the lesson, and they perceived if followed, it would ask them to disobey the law of Moses by eating human flesh and drinking blood! And if they tried finding a deeper meaning to the teaching, well, they just couldn't see it, they didn't see the spiritual lesson and they didn't want to hear anymore.

The misunderstanding of this hard teaching from the Lord even confuses people today.

A particular false teaching that arose from the mid 1200's put forth by the catholic church and adopted by many protestant churches and continues to this day, is the heretical teaching of trans-substantiation. It is the absurd notion that the bread actually transforms into the actual body of Jesus inside of the believers mouth, -

and that the fruit of the vine actually turns into the physical blood of Jesus miraculously in the mouth of the partaker.

As stated earlier in our study, the only burden placed upon the gentiles, which was both approved by the Holy Spirit, and the leaders of the church (elders and apostles) from the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 was that the gentiles were to abstain from; things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from fornication. There is no stated exception to the command to abstain from blood.

So our Lord would not command us to break a command, do you see the logic in that? So the bread could not literally turn into the body of Jesus and the fruit of the vine could not literally turn into the blood of Christ, he's speaking metaphorically.

What we can take away from this teaching is that Jesus died for every living soul; his blood was poured out and his body was broken on the cross in our place to take our sins away. We must have faith that he is the Son of God. We must accept the terms of salvation established by God; his holy life that he willingly gave up in place of our own sinful life, his life for ours, and remember, we were under a death sentence because of our sins, and his death on the cross if we accept it by faith, is a payment in place of us dying, that is what a vicarious atonement for sin is. Like the song goes, "Jesus paid it all..."

If we eat his flesh and drink his blood (our obedient belief in him), we will have his life in us (his Spirit, word and love) and that will let us be part of the resurrection of life. We've been bought with a price so we are no longer our own, we are his and that purchase price was the precious blood of Jesus. So the life we live, we live now for Christ, putting him first in our lives.

Those who heard Jesus speaking in the syagogue didn't know about types. They couldn't possibly know that Jesus would establish a special memorial of his sacrificial death known as the Lord's Supper. The eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood would in addition to believing what Jesus says, be the consuming of the bread and the fruit of the vine of the Lord's Supper. Jesus flesh and blood being the antitype and the bread and the fruit of the vine being the type. Once again God provided a substitute. But remember that in the text, the primary idea about eating his flesh and drinking his blood is accomplished by believing in him.

Vs.61: "But Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?""

Many there had erroneous preconceived ideas about what the plan for the Messiah was to be. They thought he would re-establish the Kingdom of David and be an earthly ruler. What Jesus was saying to them did not fit the mold they imagined he would fill.

Jesus' omniscience let him know what they were thinking and whispering. They were complaining about the words he spoke, so he asks them outright, "Does this cause you to stumble?" The Greek word for 'stumble' is; Skandalizo, something scandalous you take offense to and show displeasure at, an occasion to fall, to trip up or stumble.

Vs.62: "Then what if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"

Jesus was going to die on the cross, rise from the dead, ascend into heaven and then send Holy Spirit to seal and aid the fledgling church. Jesus couldn't come right out and explain what it all meant.

So to tell the people in simple understanding words could endanger both he and his disciples lives. Because the human and spiritual enemies of the cross would then work to prevent that from happening.

Part of what they took offense at besides the eating and drinking was what he said in verse 51 where he said he was the Living Bread which came down out of heaven, suggesting he was God. Also from verse 32 that he was greater than Moses, whom they truly revered. Here Jesus prophesies about his ascension back to heaven where he came from, emphasizing his point of origin. What his question to them was asking was, "If you don't believe what I've told you already, how can you believe any of the wonderful things I will be telling and showing you later? Now finally in the next verse he gives us the key to understanding this hard lesson.

Vs.63: "It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life."

You can see verse 63 is made up of three parts and depending on the version bible you are using it is split up in either three phrases making one sentence or three small sentences.

With that in mind, what our Lord just said in verse 63, if you look at the second part of that verse, "the flesh counts for nothing", Jesus is telling them that he is not speaking carnally. It's not about eating and drinking of his physical body as the people in the synagogue assumed. So what does this verse say to affirm what I've been hammering away at? The answer is in the first and third part of the verse.

Before we look closer at those, let's examine the word 'spirit' which is used twice in those phrases.

The Greek word for spirit here is Pneuma, which can mean: breeze of air, breath, spirit, rational human soul and vital principle. I believe it is the last definition that best explains our text. So what is a vital principle? It is where we get the idea of the term, 'spirit of the law.' The spirit of the law is the; intent, purpose or aim of the law.

The first part of verse 63 states, "The spirit gives life." Depending on which version bible you use, or another way to put that is; depending on who translated it, the 's' in spirit is either capitalized meaning the Holy Spirit, or it is spirit with a lower case 's' meaning 'what is being said gives life'. Both statements are true, the Holy Spirit does give life and the spirit of Jesus words, their vital principle can give life too.

If Jesus words were recorded in the Hebrew language there would be no debate as to what is meant because the Hebrew word for Holy Spirit is Ruach Hakodesh, it *only* means Holy Spirit, the Holy Being that makes up one third of the Trinity. The apostle John wrote these words using the common Greek language and Pneuma has several definitions that we have to figure out which one is the best fit.

So you can see because of the Greek language this text is open for interpretation and that is why half of the versions use Holy Spirit and half use spirit. As I said though, I believe that one is more correct than the other, though both work wonderfully. So to figure that out we should now look at the third part of this verse and it reads, "the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

When parts 1 & 3 are combined; "The spirit gives life...the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

So to be consistent, what Jesus is saying in the first part about the spirit must be the same subject matter in the third part. It is a vital principle that our Lord is trying to get across to them; you must take what he is saying into you, assimilate them, give careful consideration to them and believe both his words and in him as your savior in order to have eternal life.

Even as the Holy Spirit; God's Breath of Life gives life to our bodies, because the body without the spirit is dead, so does Jesus' words when combined with our faith gives us life. So in this verse we see; spirit = life = Jesus' words. When combined with our faith = eternal life for us.

So both statements are true but is one more correct than the other. Vs.63 clearly explains we are not to physically eat Jesus body or drink his blood. What Jesus is doing is preparing the people to enter a spiritual kingdom, he is teaching them spiritual lessons.

Remember what he said to the Samaritan woman in chapter 4:23-24, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

It is also a vital principle that Jesus is establishing a spiritual kingdom, and his followers must be spiritual. Later, when asked by some Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say here it is or there it is, because the kingdom of God is within you." Jesus will reign in his believers hearts.

Paul echos this idea as well, listen to his words from the Corinthian letter. 2 Cor. 3:2-6

"You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being revealed that you are a letter of Christ, served by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in tablets that are hearts of flesh. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God; not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as servants of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Jesus' talk about eating his flesh and drinking his blood were a very graphic metaphor for how deeply and seriously we must believe in him and what he tells us. That it gets assimilated into our very being, to nourish and guide our souls through life, just the same way that food assimilates into us and nourishes our physical bodies giving it health.

So in the second sentence of verse 63, Jesus tells them, "The flesh profits nothing." It is of no value because it is the spirit of what he says to us that gives us life. They filtered what Jesus said through legalistic eyes. They were 'letter of the law' people rather than spirit of the law people.

The spirit of the law is in contrast to 'the letter of the law'. The letter of the law is following the law verbatim, or, legalistically, to carry it out without concern for what the author or authors of the law intended the law to mean. It is important to understand the intent or purpose of a law to better interpret and enforce the law fairly.

The Jews followed the letter of the law without concern for what God purposed the law for. As an example, think of Jesus healing on the Sabbath and the Jews wanting to stone him for doing that because through their legalistic lens they thought he was breaking the law.

They were more concerned for the legality of the law rather than knowing the spirit of the law. Jesus had to teach them the spirit of the law. He told them that the Sabbath law was made for the good of man, not man for the Sabbath law. So they were in contrast to the intent of the law. Jesus being the Lord of the Sabbath showed them it was ok to do good for someone on the Sabbath Day.

I think these verses also written by Paul will help us in our understanding of the idea of the spirit of the law versus the letter of the law. Romans 2:27-29 (NASB77)

“And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter *of the Law* and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

Do you see the contrast between the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law? Again, as in John 6:63, spirit here is the idea of a vital principle and not Holy Spirit. The discussion is about the old and new covenants. The old covenant brought death because man couldn't keep the law, only Jesus kept the law. We can follow the new covenant because it's a matter of belief in Jesus who kept the old law. A belief in Jesus that he is the Son of God, the Messiah, and our Savior. The spirit of the new covenant brings life because the new covenant is based on the promises of God through faith in Jesus. That is why Paul can say in Romans 8:1-2 (NASB77) “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are

in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

We are in covenant with God because of our belief in his Son. This new covenant is a Spirit led life in Christ Jesus. It's our obedient belief in his words that brings eternal life. In this life and the next, flesh is of no value, it's what Jesus says that is of value. In Jesus sermon on the mount he touches on the idea of the flesh counting for nothing, listen to his words, Matthew 6:25-33, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? "And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

So the flesh counts for nothing, God will provide for the things we need for this life to maintain ourselves. What God wants us to do is found inverse 33 'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness', in other words seek the spiritual,

seek to understand what Jesus is saying and put those things into practice and God will bless your life.

Vs.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 it was that would betray Him."

Jesus confronts their disbelief. By his omniscience he knows who believes and who doesn't. The word 'they' in the text means there was more than one who didn't believe, and from the preceding verses there were 'many'. So this whole exercise he puts them through was to test their belief. To sift out those who actually weren't drawn by the Father but may have been there for reasons other than wanting to be fed by the bread Jesus was giving them. He also through his omniscience knew that Judas Iscariot would betray him.

Vs.65: "He said, "For this cause I have said to you that no one can come to me, unless it is given to him by my Father."

He is referring to verse 44. The Father can see what's in the heart of man and if that man's heart is willing to believe, if it's fertile soil or not. Part of the Father's draw are the many graces that are in Christ's teaching, forgiveness of sins, vicarious atonement, spiritual blessings, and eternal life to name a few of them, the heart that is moved by these graces are feeling the drawing force of the Father, those who are cold and callous to the teaching, those who are not moved by what Christ says, the non-believers, won't be drawn by the Father because their heart is not right as yet, though the gift of salvation continues to be held out for all of them to accept. That's the beauty of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Whoever is everybody, everyone, all mankind is offered eternal life, no exclusions. The 'chosen', or 'elect', are they that have accepted the free gift of salvation that God holds out and offers to all.

It has been predestined, or, predetermined before time began by God that those who accept his gift of salvation are his chosen, his elect. The hearts that are sensitive to his love, to his calling, to that unheard gentle voice that whispers upon the heart when his word is listened to, are they who believe and take this precious gift from him and make it their own.

Vs.66: "At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

A large chunk of the crowd in the synagogue left. Probably most of those were the ones who wanted to make Jesus king by force. Those who left had no faith.

Vs.67: "Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You don't also want to go away, do you?"

Ouch! That question had to hurt them nearly as bad as the look Jesus gave Peter when he denied him three times. Jesus didn't ask this because he thought they were going to walk away, he gave them pause to think about what happened, and to make comment on what transpired.

Vs.68-69: "Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus couldn't have asked for a better endorsement or testimony from one of his believers, Peter's answer shined like a bright star in a black sky! To whom would we go? It's like Peter's saying, 'There is no other person who says what

you say and does the miracles you do and fits the role of Messiah as well as you! If not you-WHO?' Their belief is so solid they can say with certainty- we know you have the words of eternal life.

This confirms they understood the hard lesson to be a spiritual lesson, and by Peter knowing that sort of condemns those who turned their back on the Lord because the lesson could be understood.

Vs.70-71: "' Jesus answered them, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the twelve.'

At this point all 12 of the disciples were believers, but through his omniscience he knew that Judas Iscariot would betray him in the future. Jesus prayerfully picked these men and through this hard lesson, their faith didn't waiver. He chose well.

This concludes our study of Jesus statement, "I AM the bread of life". I hope it was enlightening for you.

Invitation