

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** The Disciples started to argue with one another as to what Jesus was teaching, thinking about and taking Jesus' words literally whereas He used parables, allegories, and word pictures to make His point. So, they turned off their brains and chose to argue instead of understanding or seeking help in understanding, just like so many of us do today. Jesus was teaching in the Synagogue in Capernaum, and the Disciples asked, *how can Jesus give us His flesh to eat?* Jesus answered them with more allegory: *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you cannot receive eternal life; for those who do remain in me will receive the just inheritance as I will remain in them. I live by the power of the living Father who sent me, as it is for those who trust and obey by partaking in me. I am the true bread; and as I live forever, so will you.* This was too hard for many to understand so they started to leave Jesus. They could not accept nor were they even willing to try to understand; instead, they chose to complain and fret when they could have had it all. Jesus asked, *does my teaching offend you? Human efforts to save accomplish nothing; only the Father can bring people to me! Do you think you can save yourselves? When I will show you by returning to heaven that what I have said is true, you must believe.* But, many would refuse and some would betray Him. Then, Jesus challenged the faith and loyalty of the Twelve. *Will you too abandon me?* Peter responded; *Lord, where would we go to gain eternal life? We believe that you are indeed the Holy One of God.* Jesus responded: *I chose the twelve of you, but one is the devil who will betray me.*

### Contexts and Background:

This is one of the famous "hard sayings of Jesus." Many great philosophers and pious Jewish teachers would intentionally make their lessons hard to understand to weed out the pretenders and prideful. Jesus was and still is seeking genuine followers, not shallow consumers! This passage centers around Jesus' great miracles of the feeding of the multitudes and then His walking on water. Now, He gives a teaching that seems repulsive or impossible. The greatest cultural taboo in Greek or any civilized culture was cannibalism. Obviously, Jesus is not saying this, but rather is using an illustration to get them to think and go beyond their literal understanding to make a deeper existential connection with God. The meaning here was that to grow in Christ, we have to move from what we perceive in the concrete, what first comes to our minds, or is found in our own ideas and experiences, and move to the abstract, making a deeper connection with the principles of God's Word to our lives, thinking, and behavior. We are enabled to grow when our lives are transformed because we feed off Christ's precepts and life and get away from our self absorption and distractions to apply ourselves to Him as He applied Himself for us. Whereas, if we remain in the concrete thinking, only seeing what affects us personally or what hinders us or not seeing above and beyond where we are, we will remain in the world of selfishness and absurdity, as life will not make sense so that all we retain will be stress, despair, anxiety, and boredom. All this will be attributed to our alienation from God and/or our refusal to put our faith into practice when we do know Him. When we feed on our Lord, we will live an abundant and fulfilling life; then, we can cross the obstacles and overcome life's ills and sin.

### Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Argue sharply.* The people could not separate their contemporary thoughts of what a Messiah should be from what was revealed in the Scriptures—One who would make of Himself a sacrifice. These people wanted a show, not to hand over their will for His caring and careful control! These people were all so stuck on their problems and mindsets that they jumped to a literal understanding when they knew better. People want a god who meets their needs and ideas, which is why there are so many religions and idols, and why real and spiritual needs are not met (Lev. 17:10-11; Acts 17:1-3).
- *Flesh to eat?* Just as we consume food to build a healthy body, we need to ingest what Jesus gives us—His plan and principles—so He becomes a part of us. For the Jew, this meant taking the blood which was strictly forbidden. However, in Christianity, as we will see later in John, this will mean Christ's blood pays the cost of sin and redeems us. We do not take it literally although He shed it for us literally (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26-27; 17:10-14; Deut. 12:23-24; Acts 15:29).

- *I tell you the truth.* Meaning true faith; these people had a hard time thinking their faith needed more than a mild edit—much less a complete rewrite—to be converted! Real Truth does not make sense to someone who is not in Christ. Jesus was calling attention to what is important, right, and true. Jesus is challenging the status quo belief that good works and the righteousness of Moses is all a Jew needed then. Righteousness can only come from God—that is, by Christ's work, who offers us the real true Truth (John 1:52; 3:1-11; 8:34).
- *Unless you eat.* Jesus' sacrificial death was necessary for our redemption and we need to accept Him for our salvation. What Christ gives us is given not by merit, but by grace; however, we still have to reach out and receive it. Our union with Christ hinges on our responsibility, and this can't be done without the Father's choosing, the Holy Spirit's intervention, and Christ's work.
- *Eat the flesh.* This is, of course, an allegory; Jesus is the Substance who becomes our nourishment and His life gives as well as sustains our lives. We take and consume who and what He is for our Spiritual Growth, just as food nourishes the body for physical growth.
- *The flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood.* Jesus did not correct their misunderstanding, because He was testing their hearts and minds. How one thinks and processes information will help him/her understand and grow. God gives us the mind and ability to do this, unless one is mentally retarded—and then, He has grace for him/her too. We are responsible to know what we can understand, as each of us has different abilities in this area, and that is OK. There is no excuse not to understand and apply God's Word. All one has to do is make the effort, as one would do in any necessary situation in life. Christianity is not merely academic; it is real and must be functional in us so others will know it is real.
- *No life in you.* Without Christ we have no life or eternal place; He is our all in all!
- *Real food.* Feeding on Christ means we consume His work and principles both for living now and for eternity. This helps us have real meaning and a purposeful life. The Romans and other groups would also misinterpret this and use it to persecute Christians, but Christ used these situations to prove faith.
- *Remains in me.* Theologically, this refers to our "Mystical Union in Christ," our relationship with Christ that transcends our comprehension; we have a relationship with God that we do not deserve by means we cannot fully understand. This is also an illustration of the intimacy we have in Christ; He gives Himself totally to us. He shed His Blood and gave His life so we can have life—new life (John 15:1-8; Gal. 2:20-21; Eph. 1:3-14).
- *Living Father.* He is God and sovereign who is active and involved! This refers to the holiness, mightiness, omnipresence (He is everywhere transcending time and space), and omnipotence (All powerful) of God. He is the Holy Judge, Creator, Savior, and Sustainer of all things. So, we are commanded to keep His name holy, as decreed in the first two commandments. In Jewish teaching, right living declared God's name as hallowed (Isa. 5:16; 29:23; Ezek. 36:23; 38:23; 39:7, 27; Zech. 14:9; also in the New Testament—Matt. 6:9; 2 Tim. 1:2; James 1:17)! If they lived profanely, it made God's name profane amongst the nations; this resulted in their misunderstanding of Jesus and why they attacked Him—even when they realized who He was and still attacked Him to protect their positions (Ex. 20:7; Jer. 34:16; 44:25-26; Ezek. 13:19; 20:14; Amos 2:7; John 20:17)!
- *Feeds on me.* The context is about what is true; being in Christ means what is forever, everlasting, unbreakable, and real in contrast to what is fleeting, temporary, and shallow. Here, the image is that manna, even though it fed the Israelites for forty years, was still perishable and did not last. What Jesus gives is far more important.
- *Bread that comes down from heaven.* Referring to the manna, the bread that came down from the sky that miraculously fed the Israelites, perhaps 600,000 or more, for over forty years.
- *Bread will live forever/does not perish.* The contrast is that manna spoiled the very next day, while what Christ gives us is eternal, everlasting, and not just physical for now; He is forever and asks us to

partake of Him. This also alludes to our Lord's Supper, but this would be instituted later. The reality is that our spirituality is totally dependent on His Work and sacrifice so we can have union with Him, a personal relationship for now and eternity.

- *Hard teaching.* We have a call to heed the simple message of the Gospel. Jesus also helps us infer *indirectly* who and what He is and does *directly*. That is, that we capture a parable, then ponder on it and then see how our lives can conform to His Truth. All too often, we can't understand or we confound the simple or fail to see what is important because we do not want to in our overly busy and what we think is important lives.
- *Who can accept it?* The response of the Gospel was met with open hostility. After this event, Jesus was followed by fewer people—but they were those who really wanted to learn and grow (Ex. 16:2).
- *Offend you?* Walking away from Jesus is apostasy; rejecting what He gives is the very worst thing one could do (John 2:23-25).
- *Ascend.* Meaning lifted up—pointing to the crucifixion and His ascension. Christ will be the bread that is broken and the wine is the blood that is spilt out for the payment of humanity's sin. Our redemption is by His sacrifice that made atonement for us (John 3:14; 12:32-33).
- *Many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* The crowd of people who were so excited, just as quickly started to vanish because they did not want conviction. Our sinful nature hates and fears true Truth, loves what feels good and is easy, and has a hard time trusting what is not tangible and believing in what is not clearly seen, which is what faith is all about. Yet, God demands a belief that is trusting and that is followed by obedience so we can overcome sin and receive His Redemption. Ironically, what Christ offers is the easiest of all; He does all the work and we respond with our trust. The hard part is our pride (1 Pet. 2:6-8; 1 John 2:19).
- *Leave too.* Jesus was seeking a response of faith—a profession of belief—and Peter responded. God approves of man's efforts put into faith and the obedience that comes from belief that builds confidence and trust.
- *Whom shall we go?* They, of course, could have followed the crowd and gone back to their jobs and families, for they were not too far away; but, they did not. The Twelve held fast to their belief and trust in Christ when the crowds faltered and fled (Matt. 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-29; 12:28-30; Luke 9:18-18-20).
- *Holy One of God.* God's Sovereignty. He chooses us and we respond; there is no work or pretentiousness that can influence Him! And who better than the One who created and truly loves us to make that choice, versus our sin, false thinking, misplaced agenda, and insincerity.
- *Devil.* Meaning one who slanders and accuses falsely. Even God, the Perfect One, has His staunch enemies and those who seek to betray for selfish endeavors and pride. This is also a call to examine our mindsets and see how we might be betraying Christ. Are we loyal and trustworthy with what He has given (Mark 8:33; Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27)?

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

After Jesus' miracles and teachings, the multitude of people started to leave, going back to their lame lives and missing the greatest opportunity in human history—time and relational connection with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The God whose Hand is out was not received, and was even bitten by man's pride and selfishness. These people could not get beyond the literal meaning of Jesus' teachings; they wanted a show or easy *belief-ism* or just help for today with no hope for tomorrow. This thinking leaves behind a great spiritual substance that would last for eternity for something that is fleeting or blocked by our hurt feelings or the complaint that He did not meet their expectations.

For us to develop trust and break down those barriers that hinder us, we must grow deeper in Christ; we have to realize what He is doing and trust Him. We have to see that His truth, which is for us today, and His work, will continue; allow it to give us hope. God is working; He is willing and able to work

in you! He is working in our internal lives and external events; He is working through the pressures and problems that come to each one of us; He is working in the very circumstances in which you find yourself today, whether at home, work, school, or in relationships. What you need to know is where God is moving in your life, and then work with Him. Allow Him to carry you over your pride, hurts, fears, circumstances, anxieties, or any other barrier so you can be His instrument to yourself and others. Then, allow this choice to endure—to be in line with what God does. Only God's work will last. He desires for us to become good and to grow, and He provides the means for us to do so!

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. What do you like to argue about—sports, politics, or? How does the way one argues show one's faith and fruit?
2. Why did the people argue with one another? Why do you think Jesus uses parables, allegories, and word pictures to make His points?
3. The Disciples could have easily gotten up and followed the crowd and gone back to fishing; why didn't they?
4. Why would good teachers make their lessons hard to understand? Why do we need to think and go beyond our literal thinking to make a deeper connection with God?
5. How have you seen people argue rather than trying to understand or seeking help in understanding a spiritual truth?
6. Do you think what Jesus is saying is too hard for people to understand? Do you understand it? Why did the people start to leave Jesus?
7. When did you first realize and believe that Jesus was indeed the Holy One of God?
8. Jesus calls us to examine our mindsets and see how we betray Him. Are you loyal and trustworthy with what He has given?
9. How do pretenders and those who are prideful hinder the work of the Kingdom?
10. What does it mean to you that Jesus is seeking genuine followers—not shallow consumers who just fill pews?
11. How has Jesus challenged your faith and loyalty? If he did now, what would He find? What do you need to do?
12. How one thinks and processes information will help his or her understanding and growth in Christ. Why is there no excuse for not understanding and applying God's Word? How would this help you build a better faith and life?