

Bible Commentaries

Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible ▾

John 6 ▾

Verse 1

Christ the Bread of Life is the theme of this grand chapter. First, there was the fourth great sign (**John 6:1-14**), then the people's efforts to make him King (**John 6:15**), the fifth of the seven signs (**John 6:16-21**), next the discussions on the other side of the lake and the extended metaphor of the bread of life (**John 6:22-51**), then the "hard saying" regarding the eating of his flesh, etc. (**John 6:52-59**), and also the turn downward in the Lord's popularity (**John 6:60-71**).

THE FOURTH SIGN

In the feeding of the five thousand, we have a miracle ranking with the resurrection itself as the only wonders recorded by all four Gospels. From the synoptics, it is clear that John passed over practically a full year of the great Galilean ministry which lay between the second and third Passovers. The synoptics record this sign as the culmination of a series of wonders, but John seems to have presented it for the sake of the discussions that flowed out of it; and it also fitted his design of stressing Jesus' deity.

Regarding the allegation of discrepancies between John and the other Gospels in the narration of this wonder, it should be remembered that if the Gospels had been mere verbatim accounts there could have been no advantage of four independent witnesses. All of the alleged "contradictions" are easily explained through a little study, or would disappear completely if all the circumstances were known. As William Taylor's quotation from Alford indicates:

I repeat the remark so often made in this commentary, that if we were in possession of the facts as they happened, there is no doubt that the various forms of the narratives would fall into their proper places, and the truthfulness of each writer would be apparent The humble and believing Christian ... will admire the gracious condescension which has given us so many independent witnesses whose very difference in detail makes their accordance in the great central truths so much more weighty ... That every detail related had its ground in historical fact we fully believe. It is the tracking it to this ground in each case which is now beyond our power; and here comes in the simplicity and reliance of faith.【1】

In this connection, a sharp differentiation should be made between the natural variations in narratives by independent witnesses, and contradictions. Variations there are; but contradictions there are not.

Verse 2

And a great multitude followed him, because they beheld the signs he did on them that were sick.

Insatiable human curiosity combined with the holiday atmosphere of the Passover season (**John 6:4**) to bring great throngs of people to Jesus. None knew any better than the Lord the undependable nature of such crowds and the essentially mundane motives and aspirations of the people. Regardless of their shortcomings, Jesus loved them, a fact very evident in what followed.

Verse 3

And Jesus went up into the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

The great crowds did not honor Jesus' wish to retire for a rest and recuperation with his disciples, but simply ran around the north end of the lake and gathered around him at Bethsaida Julius.

Bethsaida Julius and Bethsaida of Galilee, although in two provinces, were separated by a narrow stream and were practically one town, situated on both sides of the Jordan as it enters the sea of Galilee on the north On the plain of Butaiha, a mile or two to the east, the five thousand were fed.[3]

The mountain ... refers to the massive headland overlooking the grassy slopes where this sign was wrought.

Verse 4

Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

This is the key to the chronology of the chapter and shows that about a year had elapsed since the healing at the pool of Bethesda, just mentioned in the preceding chapter.

The passover ... explains the great throngs of people and also points to the Exodus when the Passover was set up, and making it an extremely appropriate time for the teaching on the bread of life, contrasting with the feeding of the people in the wilderness.

Verse 5

Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread that these may eat?

In the synoptics, it was recorded that the disciples approached Jesus with this problem, but that was probably at a much later hour. Why Philip was confronted with the problem may be seen in Jesus' desire to help that disciple to greater spirituality in his thinking. Philip, however, does not appear to have benefited much. This same disciple showed the same lack of perception later (**John 14:8**).

Verse 6

And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

John did not wish to leave an impression that Christ needed to ask such a question merely for information, hence the explanation. The Lord discerned the thoughts of all men; and one evident purpose of this Gospel is to bring into sharp focus the divine, supernatural character of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 7

Philip answered him, Two hundred shillings' worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little.

This coin was worth about eight pence half-penny, or nearly seventeen cents (the English Revised Version's margin); but the true value more accurately appears in the coin's being the amount of a day's wages (**Matthew 20:9**). Even a partial supply of bread for so many would have required the amount of money a man might have earned by 200 days' labor!

Verse 8

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, who hath five barley loaves, and two fishes; but what are these among so many?

The finding of this lad with his small supply did not take place until after Christ had commanded the disciples to feed the people (**Matthew 14:16,17**); and even that they did not bring to Jesus until commanded to do so. Barley loaves were not the bakery-size loaves of our own times, but small flat cakes associated with the diet and eating habits of the poor. The small fishes were used as a relish with the bread.

Andrew ... shines in the New Testament as the apostle who "brought to Jesus" the loaves and fishes (as here), his own brother (**John 1:41**), and the Greeks (**John 12:22**). His key role in this sign was important. Many a difficult problem has been solved by bringing it to Jesus.

But what are these among so many ... is a plaintive plea to the effect that it was impossible for them to feed the crowds as Jesus had commanded. Human resources were not sufficient to meet the tremendous need before them; and it is a rare disciple of Christ who has not similarly

felt the utter lack of human ability to carry out the Lord's commands, especially in such an area as evangelizing the whole world. Their perplexity was like that of Moses:

Moses said, the people are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered for them, to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not (**Numbers 11:21-23**).

See under **John 6:14**, below.

Verse 10

Jesus said, Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

Regarding the abundance of green grass in a "desert" place, see my Commentary on Matthew, **Matthew 14:13**. It was a manifestation of faith that they all sat down with no visible store of food in sight. The Lord's simple command was a sufficient reason for their obedience.

Verse 11

Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down; likewise also of the fishes as much as they would.

Having given thanks ... emphasizes the need for giving thanks at meals, such a duty being constant; nor is the widespread neglect of it any excuse for omitting it.

He distributed to them that were set down ... suggests that only those who sat were fed. It is not recorded that any refused to sit down, but it may be received as true that if any had refused to obey the Lord's command, they would have forfeited the blessing. Note that Christ was not the waiter on that occasion, but the provider. All spiritual benefit of all ages comes, like that bounty came, from Christ the provider **THROUGH HIS APOSTLES** (2 Peter 3:2).

Verse 12

And when they were filled, he saith unto his disciples, Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost.

That nothing be lost ... If Jesus was solicitous regarding the mere crumbs left over from his creation, how much more would he desire that no human soul whatever should be lost.

Broken pieces ... refers to crumbs as well as larger pieces. Thus Jesus disregarded the popular superstition of the times that demons lurked in crumbs.

Verse 13

So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which remained over unto them that had eaten.

For a fuller discussion of this and related material from the parallel account in Matthew, see my Commentary on Matthew, **Matthew 14:13-36**.

Verse 14

When therefore the people saw the sign which he did they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world.

Nothing sheds any more light on the wonder recorded here than this deduction from it by the people who saw it. The prophet (**Deuteronomy 18:15f**) with whom they identified Jesus is the Christ. This perception of the multitude exposes the fraudulence of rationalistic "explanations" of this event. One device of the rationalistic commentators is to make the entire thing a psychological experience! Jesus, so they say, took a lad's contribution, pointed out his willingness to share with others, and thus shamed them into sharing whatever they had with others. The good will spread like a contagion; and suddenly they all had a feast out of what they already had! Those unbelievers who offer such an "explanation" deny the sacred record.

TWO WAYS OF MEETING A DIFFICULTY

I. The difficulty analyzed. An immense throng of five thousand men, besides women and children, had followed Christ to an uninhabited area on the northeastern shore of Galilee. A. The situation was aggravated by the absence of markets and insufficient money. B. The Saviour's bold claim that he was indeed "that prophet like unto Moses" had provoked the memory of how God had fed Israel in the wilderness; and that memory turned all eyes upon Christ with the question, "Could he do it?" C. Bitter enemies of the Lord hoped for his downfall; and they must have gloated that he had at last been trapped into a situation from which there could have been no recovery. D. Added to all this was the wavering attitude of the apostles themselves who seemed to hold the solution impossible.

II. The human method of meeting the difficulty. A. The first human proposal was made by Christ to try the apostles. Whence should they buy bread was his question. Whence indeed, if not from God? Whence cometh all things? B. The next proposal was: "Send the multitude away" (**Mark 14:15**). That is the usual human proposal for solving difficulties. Send it away! Thus America solved the Indian problem, the slave problem, and the Mormon problem; and now the Mormons are sending missionaries to us! C. The next approach was to count the pennies and declare the project impossible (**John 6:7**). Where is the money coming from? was a cry that rang harshly enough on the ears of five thousand hungry men on the slopes of Butaiha, and time has not mellowed the cry. As Spurgeon said:

Some men are always ready at counting the pennies they do not have. Whenever there is a holy deed to be done, our mathematically minded unbelievers are prompt with their estimates of the cost and their prudent forecasting of grave deficiencies. We are great at calculations when we are little at believing. How can the needful amount be raised? It is so much a head among so many members. But the heads do not yield the poll tax, and the money does not come, and confidence in man leaves us weeping by the broken cistern. Alas for these calculations about pennyworth!**[4]**

Philip's calculations resulted from his failure to believe that Jesus could handle the situation. Thus he failed the test the Lord gave him. D. Belittling the known resources: "What are these among so many?" was the next approach (**John 6:8,9**). How long will it be before men learn that a little consecrated to the Lord is more than enough for all their needs? Christians need to remember the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil (**1 Kings 17:16**); and the lesson is reiterated in the wonder recorded here.

III. The divine way of meeting the difficulty. A. First, the responsibility for meeting it was fixed: "Give ye them to eat!" (**Matthew 14:16**). "Go ye into all the world" (**Mark 16:15**). B. Next, there was an inventory of resources. The disciples could think of nothing that could be done, but Jesus asked, "How many loaves have ye?" (**Mark 6:38**). God helps only when men have gone as far as they can themselves. Like the apostles of old, many have found that their resources were greater than they thought. C. "Bring them hither to me ..." (**Matthew 14:18**). A little with Jesus is always enough, provided only that it is given to him in absolute trust D. Command the multitude to sit down, and go forward with the feast! It is always in doing that strength is increased; it is in giving that the wherewithal to give is multiplied.

Verse 15

Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone.

No rationalistic explanation of this sign could account for such a reaction on the part of the multitude. They were fully convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and they proposed to make him king and move against the Romans! With the Messiah feeding them, as God had done so long ago, the problem of the quartermaster was solved! It was time to throw off the yoke of Rome; and they would have violated the sacred wishes of Christ himself to further their own schemes. Israel never learned in the long pre-Christian ages, nor in the times of Christ, that an earthly kingdom was never in God's plans from the very beginning, nor then, nor ever. Yes, they had been granted an earthly state with a king; but at the moment of its inception God had warned them:

And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign (be king) over them (**1 Samuel 8:7**).

Throughout the ages, the earthly monarchy of the Hebrews was their project, not God's; and, although God accommodated himself to it, it was never his will. Ironically, that same obsession for their earthly kingdom was what blinded their eyes to the Messiah when he came. The great sign

just done before the people, instead of setting their hearts upon the Messiah's teachings, only set on fire their earthly ambitions for the restoration of Solomon's throne, a project that was never for one moment contained in the purpose of Christ.

Christ had been fully aware all that day of what was going on; and there is more than a possibility that the apostles themselves had been infected with the virus that had seized the crowd. The Lord counteracted it by compelling the disciples to get into the boat, despite threatening weather, and go back to the other side of the lake (**Matthew 14:22**). Jesus rejected the efforts to make him king, by sending the apostles away and then withdrawing up into the mountain, leaving the vain frenzy of the mob to frustrate itself in the gathering darkness.

Verse 16

And when evening came, his disciples went down into the sea; and they entered into a boat, and were going over the sea to Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

THE FIFTH SIGN

Here, and through **John 6:21**, is recorded the fifth great sign, that of Jesus' walking on the sea. In a sense, the trouble in which the apostles soon found themselves was of their own doing. If they had been less inclined to cooperate with the unspiritual mob in their efforts to crown Jesus king, it is not likely that the Lord would have sent them away. It is clear that they did not wish to leave (**Mark 6:45**). Mark mentioned their going to Bethsaida, but that was a suburb of Capernaum, and the direct route lay through the latter.

And Jesus had not yet come to them ... suggests that the Lord had promised to join them, but it is not stated where or when he had planned to do so. In any event, they were surprised at the manner of his joining them.

Verse 18

And the sea was rising by reason of a great wind that blew.

The weather which had resulted in the great wind could have been anticipated by the disciples and thus have reinforced their wish to remain with Jesus; but their sympathies with the "king" movement made it absolutely mandatory that they be sent on ahead.

Verse 19

When therefore they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they beheld Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the boat: and they were afraid.

About ... reveals that the Holy Spirit did not supply technical data, such as the exact distance, but gave only such information as men needed. A furlong was approximately twice the length of a football field (582-600 feet) or 0.11 mile. Thus the distance the apostles had rowed was between 2.75 miles and 3.3 miles, or, with reference to the size of the lake, about halfway across.

Jesus walking on the sea ... Moses, as God's servant, divided the sea; Jesus, as God's Son, walked upon it! Of course, rationalism refuses to accept this, saying, "There was really no miracle; the disciples were mistaken; the Lord was only walking on the shore near the vessel; and the superstitious fear of the disciples made them think he was walking on the sea; and that they put ashore and took him on board, etc., etc." Such views are impossible of reconciliation with the New Testament records of what happened. Three New Testament writers recorded this miracle, John and Matthew having been eyewitnesses of it; and Mark was very close to Peter who also had witnessed it and even participated in it himself! See parallel account in Matthew for this writer's comments on this miracle, Commentary on Matthew, **Matthew 14:13-36**.

As Ryle stated:

If the disciples were in "the midst of the sea" and two or three miles from shore, how could they possibly have seen the Lord walking on the shore at night and during a storm? They would not have distinguished anyone on shore, even supposing they were not two miles off It is absurd to suppose they could have held a conversation with anyone on shore.**[5]**

Unless people are prepared to say that Matthew, Mark, and John gave inaccurate and fraudulent accounts of that evening's events, it is impossible for honest and unprejudiced minds to escape the conclusion that a mighty miracle actually occurred. And, if those sacred writers gave fraudulent and inaccurate accounts of this sign, they are not to be trusted anywhere; and their recorded testimony of Christ is worthless. As Ryle said, "If a man begins with throwing overboard the miracles, he cannot stop logically until he has given up the Bible and Christianity."**[6]**

And they were afraid ... The fear of the apostles sprang not merely from the weather and the dangers of the sea but also from their lack of harmony with the Lord. It was thus intensified when they saw him approaching the vessel.

[5] J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), p. 344.

[6] Ibid., p. 345.

Verse 20

But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. They were willing therefore to receive him into the boat; and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going.

John abbreviated this wonder by omitting Peter's walking on the water to go to Jesus (**Matthew 14:28-31**), and also Mark's record that the apostles' "heart was hardened" (**Mark 6:52**), a remark that proves the conflict between Christ and the apostles over the events on shore. Matthew gave the happy ending of the brief estrangement in his account of how the apostles confessed him and worshipped him after he came aboard (**Matthew 14:31-33**).

And he would have passed them by ... (**Mark 6:48**) is another detail omitted by John, but it shows that Christ will always pass his disciples by unless they call upon him. It was this same character of withholding a blessing until it was requested that appeared in Jesus' refusal of the plea

of the Canaanitish woman (**Matthew 15:23**), and when he "made as though he would go further" (**Luke 24:48**) while walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

It is I; be not afraid ... There are deep spiritual overtones in both the wonders recorded in this chapter, as is true of all Christ's miracles. Richard Trench noted:

Nor should we miss the symbolical character which this whole transaction wears. As it fared with that bark upon those stormy billows, so fares it oftentimes with the church, tossed to and fro upon the waves of a troublesome world. It seems as though the Lord had forgotten it, so little is the way it makes; so baffled is it and tormented by hostile forces on every side. But his eye is on it still; and he is in the mountain apart praying; ever living, an ascended Saviour, to make intercession for his people. And when at length the extremity of the need has arrived, he is suddenly with it, in marvelous ways past finding out; and then all that was before so laborious is easy, and the toiling rowers are anon at the haven where they would be. [7]

Be not afraid ... is the constant admonition of faith. This was the word of angels to the shepherds the night our Lord was born; it was the repeated word of our Saviour's ministry; and in John's final vision of the Christ, it was the word that led all the rest (**Revelation 1:17,18**).

Timidly, and with much apprehension and fear, men daily confront the changing scenes of life; and no word could be more helpful than the Saviour's "Fear not!" And why should men not fear? Because, regarding the Christian, nothing can happen to **HIM!** Disease may ravage his body, misfortune sweep away his wealth, and time erode his every strength; but he himself is secure. All the problems of earth shall at last be solved in the light and bliss of heaven; and even the calamities of life shall be laid under tribute to enhance the power and beauty of the soul that relies on the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were willing to receive him ... These words show that the disciples were so out of harmony with the Lord that, at first, they did not wish him to come aboard. They had strongly resisted Jesus' will in that twilight by the lake when Jesus compelled them to take passage without him. However, the Master's reassurance overcame their fears, and he was received aboard.

And straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going ... "Straightway" is a far different thing from "instantaneous," and commentators have thus concluded that no further miracle is in view here. However, this sign is a whole complex of supernatural occurrences: (1) Christ's knowledge of the disciples' condition, (2) his "seeing them" at night in a storm (**Mark 6:48**), (3) Jesus' walking on the sea, (4) Peter's walking on the sea, (5) Christ's rescue of Peter, and (6) the sudden cessation of the wind. This interpreter supposes that it is fully in keeping with the whole episode to construe this place as teaching that the boat instantaneously, or nearly so, came to its appointed haven. One more supernatural element in an episode with so many others could do no harm.

This wonder contrasts dramatically with another wonder of stilling the tempest (**Matthew 8:23-27**). In that situation, Christ was on board; here he was not. There he was asleep; here he was in the mountain praying. There they were afraid of the winds and waves; here they were afraid of Jesus. There he rebuked the winds and waves; here they responded to his will without an audible command. In both situations, the only safety of the disciples was in the will of Christ.

Verse 22

On the morrow the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, save one, and that Jesus entered not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples went away alone (howbeit there came boats from Tiberius nigh unto the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks).

The next day, a part of the multitude who had partaken of the loaves and fishes confronted Jesus on the western shore, near Capernaum; and they first demanded to know how Jesus had gotten away from them. They knew that there had been only one boat and that he had not entered it. John's mention of the boats from Tiberius in this place is a reference to taxi boats which, after the storm subsided, had gone to Bethsaida Julius in search of fares. Some of the crowd had probably used the taxis as a means of catching up with Jesus.

Verse 25

And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

They were burning up with curiosity as to how Jesus had eluded them; but he did not give them an answer, moving at once to correct their spiritual condition.

Verse 26

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled.

The Lord had overcome the temporary hardening of his apostles' hearts, but it would prove impossible to change the adamant position of the unspiritual multitude. True, they had seen the great sign; but instead of its opening their eyes to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, they had at once contrasted it unfavorably with the feeding of Israel for forty years in the wilderness. They wanted him to do something like that, thus subsidizing their scheme of chasing out the Romans. They were not looking for a spiritual leader; all they wanted was a military and political victory over their enemies. Their presence on the western shore, as appears later, was geared to that secular hope, and to their intention of compelling Christ to conform to it if possible.

The temptation still exists for men to view holy religion as primarily concerned with the economic sector. But when preachers forsake the spiritual aims of the church and pander to the economic and social desires of the people, they succeed only in arousing hopes and ambitions that are doomed to frustration. Let any church start a literal feeding of the multitudes; and it will be found, as it did here, to tend in the direction of some kind of social upheaval, and not in the direction of any moral and spiritual betterment. Look what happened when Christ fed the multitudes: far from taking this as proof that a Saviour from sin had arrived, they at once supposed that he should feed them three times a day for forty years, thus releasing them to dedicate their full energies to destroying the Romans! When Christians or churches seek to provide for men what men should provide for themselves, the hopes and ambitions released by such efforts are just as sinister as those released so long ago on the grassy slopes of Butaiha.

Verse 27

Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed.

Work not for the food which perisheth ... The great passion of men should not be for material, secular, and earthly things; but these should be subordinated to the far greater goal of procuring food that gives eternal life. This does not mean, "Do not work for your daily bread." The very opposite is commanded. Even in Paradise, Adam was commanded to labor; and toil was ordained as man's occupation after the fall. No man need be ashamed to work; our Lord himself spent the greater part of his earthly sojourn in a carpenter's shop; Paul the apostle sustained himself as a tentmaker; and the admonition here does not forbid work as the normal employment of a Christian's time. The injunction here is an order to keep first things first and secondary things secondary. The church in general, at this juncture in time, needs this instruction no less than the unspiritual crowd that gathered around the Lord in Capernaum.

CHRIST AND THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Two kinds of food are under consideration here: that which perishes, and that which abides unto eternal life; and the problem of keeping these separate and distinct needs in the proper focus is one of the great challenges confronting Christianity today.

The great concern of true religion is in the realm of the moral and spiritual; and the consideration overriding all others is that of the final attainment unto eternal life. To that glorious goal of Christian faith absolutely everything else must be subordinated. It was this very thing that came into focus in the Saviour's wilderness temptation when Satan proposed making bread out of stones (**Matthew 4:4**). And why not? Such would have solved the economic problem absolutely. From the miracle here recorded, it is clear that Christ could have done it. He could have made enough bread for all who ever lived or ever would live on earth. Why didn't he do it? Jesus would have done it if miraculous bread had been the correct answer, either for Jesus' own personal need, or for the needs of all human beings. In rejecting Satan's proposal for himself, Jesus also rejected it for all people. Bitter as the truth might appear in some circumstances, there are other things more important than bread. It is the failure of people to receive this truth, and in some instances, the failure of the church itself to receive it, that requires attention.

Organized Christianity in our day has been swept far out to sea in the inordinate stress of material and social improvements, while neglecting to love and preach that sacred body of truth which can alone endow the church with any true meaning. W. F. Howard wrote:

That is a caution much required when what many call their Christianity is not easily differentiated from mere humanism, and not a few are preaching social reform instead of the salvation of men's souls. Dostoevski was of the opinion that humanitarianism is the form of atheism most to be dreaded, the greatest anti-religious force in Europe; so he confidently laid it down.**[8]**

In this connection, Maurice Maeterlinck warned:

Let us beware lest we act as he did in the fable, who stood watch in a lighthouse, and gave to the poor in their cabins about him the oil for the mighty lanterns that serve to illuminate the sea.**[9]**

What vexes Christ the most in the economic situation is not that material things are so badly distributed, but rather that they are so grossly overvalued. In his standard of measurement, they rank very low indeed. And he looks in amazement at a world pressing and jostling like swine around their feeding troughs, paying life away for what to him are trifles at the best.**[10]**

This does not deny some importance to fleshly and material needs, nor the binding obligation of Christians to alleviate to the fullest extent of their abilities such needs of their fellow beings, and especially of their fellow disciples. But let people slow down in their mad pursuit of secular and material values and more adequately concern themselves with the ultimate needs of the soul. After all, the latter are eternal needs, the former only temporary needs.

But work for the food which abideth unto eternal life ... And how, indeed, may men work for such food as that? Let them study the Scriptures as lost men in a wilderness might study a map, searching them daily, as did the Bereans; let them seek and attend the corporate worship services, bringing their whole hearts into the public assemblies, and truly worshipping God in spirit and in truth; let them meditate upon the word of God day and night, honor its precepts, heed its warnings, observe its prohibitions, receive its promises, and trust it as God's word absolutely. Such verbs in the New Testament as study, strive, work, walk, sing, worship, pray, bear, love; give, keep, ask, seek, knock, and run - such verbs denote the type of spiritual activity included in the Saviour's command to "work for the food that perishes not."

Which the Son of man shall give unto you ... Christ did not here reveal the shocking truth which he would later stress that he himself was the true bread from heaven; here he identified himself only as the giver of it.

For him the Father, even God, hath sealed ... Ryle noted regarding this:

The expression applied to our Lord in this place stands alone, but there is no doubt of its meaning. It signifies that in the eternal counsels of God the Father, he has sealed, commissioned, and designated the Son of man, the incarnate Word, to be the giver of everlasting life to man. It is an office for which Christ has been solemnly set apart by the Father.^[11]

From the most ancient times, documents sealed by kings were considered to carry the utmost in power and authority (**Esther 8:8**). John's use of "sealed" therefore appears as an assurance of the absolutely sufficient power of God to provide salvation through Jesus Christ.

^[8] W. F. Howard, *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952). Vol. **VIII**, p. 554.

^[9] *Ibid.*

^[10] *Ibid.*

^[11] J. C. Ryle, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

Verse 28

They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

Christ had just enjoined upon his hearers the mandate that they should work for the food that perishes not; and their reaction was quite naturally, "Well, what must we do?" thinking no doubt that he would mention some of the commandments from the Old Testament; but it was not merely a more particular fidelity to the Old Testament that could lead to eternal life, but the complete acceptance of an entirely new system that would be

required not only of them but of all men. That new system of Christianity, though of grace and unmerited favor, was nevertheless a system with works of its own, works of a far different nature from the law, but still "works of faith," for Christ said in this verse: "Work for the food that abides unto eternal life" (**John 6:27**).

This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent ... In all the New Testament, there is not a more instructive verse than this which designates faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as a work performed by men, but also in the ultimate sense a work of God. This statement demolishes the prevalent Protestant heresy that "There is nothing you can do to be saved!" Faith itself is something that must be done; but its importance is sufficient to justify its standing here as a synecdoche of all that must be done. For more on synecdoche, see the index of my Commentary on Romans. As Dorris noted: "This verse illustrates the truth that the works of God are works ordained by God to be performed by men."**[12]** For identification of seven Scriptural classifications of works, see my Commentary on Romans, p. 62.

There is a difference in "believing" and in "believing in" or "believing on" the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, one believes the apostle John, but we do not believe in him. Christ demanded absolute faith in himself, and still does.

What must we do ... ? means "What must we do to be saved?" and is a question encountered several times in the New Testament. On Pentecost, in the jail at Philippi, and on the Damascus road, the question "What shall I do?" was the initial movement of souls toward the Lord. The question has a Scriptural answer, and it is criminal to substitute the sophistry of men for the divine answer. In answer to this question, the Holy Spirit said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved ... Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins ... Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on his name" (**Acts 16:31**; 2:38; 22:16).

Verse 30

They said therefore unto him, What then dost thou for a sign, that we may see, and believe thee? What workest thou?

The marvelous wonder of the day before was lost on that carnal multitude. Instead of being convinced, they demanded sign upon sign, even suggesting a moment later that Jesus' miracle was inferior to Moses' miracle (it was not Moses' miracle, but God's) of the manna. The manna had been provided for a period of forty years and was held to be superior to the barley loaves Jesus created. However, God's purpose was different in the two cases. In the wilderness, the survival of the chosen people was the objective; but in the ministry of Christ, it was the identification of Jesus as the Messiah and divine Son of God which was the objective; and, for the latter purpose, creation of barley loaves for five thousand people was just as effective (or should have been) as feeding a million people for a whole generation.

What then ... for a sign ... This demand of a sign was characteristic of that people. The Pharisees demanded a "sign from heaven" (**Matthew 16:1**; 12:38), no doubt meaning some spectacular wonder of their own choosing; but Jesus rejected such vain and carnal demands, resting the final proof of his Godhead upon "the sign of the prophet Jonah," that is, the death, burial and resurrection from the dead. Mark stated of another occasion that Jesus "marveled at their unbelief" (**Mark 6:6**). Surely Jesus must have marveled here also.

THE MARVEL OF UNBELIEF

Unbelief is such a wonder that Christ himself marveled at it!

I. Unbelief is a state in which man consciously accepts for himself the status and destiny of a mere animal. Contrary to the deepest instinct of the soul and the prompting of his own ego, the unbeliever rejects the status available to him as a child of God, claims descent from simian ancestors,

and ascribes to himself a destiny identical with that of a rat or a worm.

II. Unbelief is contrary to man's nature. Man's very nature is to believe, an inveterate trait locked into the deepest instincts of human life. Evil men know that trait is in men and take full advantage of it, all of the schemes ever devised for defrauding men having as their dominant characteristic a reliance on man's willingness to believe almost anything. As P. T. Barnum indelicately stated it, "There's a sucker born every minute!" What an incredible marvel it is, therefore, that in the contemplation of the mountains of evidence attesting the authenticity of Christ and his message, the behavior of mankind should be atypical. What a wonder that people will not believe in God, but will believe in witchcraft! No wonder Jesus marveled at unbelief.

III. Unbelief is a denial of man's highest hopes. The unbeliever forsakes the hope of heaven, forfeits all cosmic value for himself, and flaunts his conviction that he shall descend to the rotteness of a grave and remain there forever. Such a spiritual renunciation is soul suicide; and even Christ marveled at such a thing.

IV. Unbelief is a denial of the senses and a closing of the windows of the mind. It is a refusal to see, to hear, and to understand the mountainous evidence calling men to believe in the Lord Jesus. It is like a man staring at the Grand Canyon or the Matterhorn and saying, "I do not believe it!" The Holy Bible, the history of Israel, the great commemorative festivals of Judaism and Christianity, the sweep of the religion of Christ through history and the collateral enlightenment and civilization which invariably attended it, and the lives of faith in all ages these the unbeliever will not see. The thundering voice of history, the testimony of the calendar, and the witness of all that is highest and best in art, literature, music, architecture, government, and psychology - all are rejected by the unbeliever in the manner of Southey's owl hooting at the noon sun, and saying, "Where is it? Where is it?"

V. Unbelief is reverse logic. In **Mark 6:6**, where it is stated that Jesus marveled because of their unbelief, the reference is to the citizens of Nazareth who rejected Jesus because he lived in their village! This was their logic (?): We are unworthy and ignoble; Christ came from one of our families; therefore he is unworthy and ignoble! That is exactly like saying: I hear this great and wonderful music; but since a person like I am is hearing it, it cannot possibly be true! This is the logic (?) that supports unbelief.

Then what a marvel indeed is unbelief! It is a display of human ignorance, perversity, and conceit turned wrong-side out, that staggers the imagination and is no easier to understand than the death march of the lemmings. That the highest of creatures should consciously reject for himself any higher eternal status than that of a dog makes no sense at all, being an unqualified wonder.

Verse 31

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.

It is best to be on guard when Satan quotes Scripture. Their quotation of **Nehemiah 9:15** was a misquote because they made Moses the antecedent of "he" rather than God, an error Jesus corrected. This was actually, on their part, a disparagement of Jesus' sign of the day before. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had claimed to be greater than Moses; but that carnal multitude, still intent on using Jesus in their schemes against the Romans, contrasted his miracle unfavorably with what they improperly called Moses' miracle, the manna, of course, having been provided for many years. What they were really trying to do here was to intimidate Christ into feeding everybody for years on end; but of course they would have liked a better diet than those barley loaves. The carnality of those men and the vulgar boldness of their daring suggestion constitute a remarkable proof of the fourth sign, for it is perfectly clear that they recognized in Jesus Christ the power to do what they wished him to do. Their logic was excellent, recognizing the fact that one who has the power to feed five thousand from five loaves and two little fishes also has

the power to feed all men indefinitely. How easily could Jesus have fed an army to be used against the Romans that was their view and their motivation for what was said here.

Verse 32

Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven.

See under preceding verse. They were wrong in their inference that Moses was greater than Christ, for God, not Moses, fed them in the wilderness. Moses was God's "servant" (**Nehemiah 9:14**), and thus he stood in the comparison of the two wonders on a parity with the apostles, through whose hands Jesus fed them; and Christ was on a parity with God the provider. In the second clause, Christ again tried to lift their eyes to the far more wonderful thing that God was at that very moment doing for them in his providing the "true bread out of heaven," namely, Christ the Saviour. The tragedy was complete in this, that they could not see the true bread before their eyes, being utterly blinded by the barley loaves which absolutely dominated their thoughts.

In many of God's wonders, there are primary and secondary manifestations of them, as in the rainbow, the primary bow always appearing brighter and on the lower level, and with the colors reversed in the secondary. Thus, there are two miracles in view in sign four. The primary wonder was the barley loaves, the higher marvel being Christ himself, the true bread of heaven. In this remarkable analogy, a change of status appears in the function of Christ, who in the physical miracle was the provider, but who in the spiritual counterpart of it appeared as the bread provided, recalling the reversal of the rainbow colors mentioned above. Jesus never succeeded in lifting the eyes of his audience to that higher level of seeing the true bread of life. The barley loaves, the barley loaves, the barley loaves!

Verse 33

For the bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven and giveth life unto the world.

Unto the world ... Not for Israel alone was the true bread, but for all the world. The true bread was far greater than the manna in these particulars: (1) it gives and sustains spiritual life, a far greater thing than merely sustaining physical life; (2) it is for all the world, not merely for Israel alone; (3) it creates spiritual life leading to eternal life, which no manna could have done.

Verse 34

They said therefore unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

Strongly suggestive of the woman's words at the well ([John 4:15](#)), this was as close as they came to believing; but here there was no following on to know the Lord. Moreover, they did not know what they were asking, and there is the strong possibility they were still thinking of supplies for an army.

Verse 35

Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

I am the bread of life ... is one of the seven great "I am's" of John. This is an apt metaphor of God's providing in Christ the means of human redemption. In that age, bread was essential to every meal, the staff of life, a fit emblem of Christ the soul's food.

He that believeth on me shall never thirst ... This is parallel to the previous clause and means the same, the living water and the bread of life being separate metaphors for one thing only, Jesus Christ. "Believeth on me ..." should not be understood as an affirmation of the popular superstition regarding salvation by "faith only." See [John 12:42](#).

Verse 36

But I said unto you, that ye have seen me, and yet believe not.

The thought of this verse is in [John 6:26](#); but it is a mention of a part of the conversation reported here for the first time, but having taken place a little earlier.

Verse 37

All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

All that which the Father giveth me ... refers to all who shall be saved, none being excluded, so long as they truly come to Christ, that being the thrust of the second clause. Significantly, this verse makes no reference to faith like that in the previous verse; but this does not exclude faith, the verses being supplementary each to the other. Thus, one must believe and come to Jesus in order to be saved. Coming to Jesus is equivalent to entering his kingdom; and entering that requires one to be born of water and of the spirit ([John 3:5](#)). Coming to Jesus therefore means being born again. No subjective experience whatever can be substituted for the new birth. "Coming" is something that a man does, not something that he thinks, believes, or feels.

Verse 38

For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

A bolder statement of the virgin birth of Christ cannot be imagined than this offhand, factual statement from the lips of Christ: "I am come down from heaven." From first to last John stresses the eternal existence of Christ and his prior residence in heaven, the virgin birth being an inescapable corollary. How else, pray tell, could God have entered our earth-life as a man?

Not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me ... Jesus' absolute submission to the Father's will is stressed throughout John. Jesus did not even speak from himself but delivered the words God commanded him to speak (**John 12:48,49**).

Verse 39

And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

These verses are a double affirmation of the most stupendous claim ever made by the Son of God, declaring that the highest authority in the universe has guaranteed the fulfillment of what Jesus here promised.

All that which he hath given me ... refers to all the souls who shall respond to the offer of salvation, their response being viewed here as the Father's giving them to Jesus, which is indeed true. Even when men believe and obey the gospel unto eternal life, the reception of it is still the gift of God.

I should lose nothing ... Not merely what happens in this life is in view here, for he spoke of the whole sweep of time to eternity. Not even death shall defeat the purpose of God in the redemption of them that believe and come to Jesus.

But shall raise it up at the last day ... This countermands all the sorrows and frustrations of life. The use of neuter pronouns such as "all" and "it" do not compromise the plain meaning of this passage, human souls being viewed not as masculine or feminine, but abstractly (**Galatians 3:28**).

The last day ... is repeated four times in this chapter (**John 6:39,40,44,54**). As Dummelow said, "These words show that Christ came to abolish not natural, but spiritual death. Believers will die, but their death will be followed by a glorious resurrection."**[13]**

Destructive critics have vainly tried to edit the doctrine of eternal judgment out of John; and thus Bullinger interpreted "last day" to mean the day of the believer's death, and the "raising" his translation into paradise (!). As Ryle noted, "Such interpretations are utterly destitute of foundation."**[14]** Sholten dragged out the critic's device of last resort, making all of the "last day" references glosses; but the words stand. Prior bias is the only discernible explanation of such handling of the word of God. John indeed did teach of the last day and the general resurrection of the dead with the

assignment of appropriate destinies for both the righteous and the wicked (**John 5:24-29**) - more accurately, Christ so taught, and John accurately reported him. Regarding the last day, Hovey said:

"Till that day, the bodies of the saints will sleep in the dust of the earth; but then they will be raised incorruptible, glorious, and adapted to the wants of the spirit. Christ will thus effect the salvation of the whole man."**[15]**

Beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life ... (**John 6:40**). These words are a restatement of the great promise of the preceding verse. They should not be understood as outlining "all that is required" of those to be saved, as some love to conclude;**[16]** but they are a statement of the important first steps toward salvation. Jesus had just said that men must "come" unto him (**John 6:37**).

The uttermost confidence belongs to the true believer in Christ. No power of flesh, darkness, or hell can take the Christian's crown by force. Christ shall prevail unto the final salvation of the total body of the redeemed; and, upon the astounding promises here recorded, speculative theories of election and predestination have been grounded. But any theory that reaches a degree of presumption that denies the possibility of a saved person's falling is anti-Scriptural and untrue. The Christian's crown may not be forcibly removed from him by any power in the universe; but, through the freedom of the will, one may defect; and, in the light of this fact, this same author admonished, "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown" (**Revelation 3:11**). Even John Calvin wrote: "They are madmen who seek their own salvation, or that of others, in the whirlpool of predestination, not keeping the way of salvation which is exhibited to them."**[17]**

[13] J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1937), p. 786.

[14] J. C. Ryle, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

[15] Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on John* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1885), p. 157.

[16] J. C. Ryle, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 381.

Verse 41

The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said, I am the bread which came down out of heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth he now say, I am come down out of heaven?

The Jews ... John's repeated use of these terms in reference to his own countrymen emphasizes the hostility and antagonism of the chosen people toward Christianity, and shows that at the time he wrote the enmity had become adamant and unyielding. He no longer identified himself as a Jew, thus exhibiting the new identity in Christ, of which Paul said, "In Christ ... there can be neither Jew nor Greek" (**Galatians 3:26-28**). John's acceptance of the new identity for himself cannot be made the grounds of an allegation that one not a Jew wrote this Gospel.

Murmuring ... implies a malignant and reprehensible opposition. Most commentators detect a break in these verses from the situation earlier in the chapter, indicating that the discussion from here to the end of the chapter took place in the synagogue, where official members of the Jewish establishment took up the argument against Christ. If so, this would account for the more hostile trend of the conversation (**John 6:59**).

I am the bread which came down from heaven ... Jesus had not used these exact words; but they are a fair and logical deduction from what he had said (**John 6:33,35,38**). The opponents were correct in their understanding of what Christ meant; but they were aroused and angered by it. Why? Evidently Christ's lowly condition on earth was the great stumbling block to their acceptance of him.

If the Master had come as an all-powerful monarch, in riches, splendor, and earthly glow, they might have been willing to receive him; but a poor, lowly, suffering Messiah, without property or social position, whose chief followers were fishermen, and who had nowhere to lay his head - such a Messiah they reviled and detested, their human pride refusing to believe that such a one came from God. His lowliness and poverty, and finally his death of the cross - these things were the stumblingblock to the Jews (**1 Corinthians 1:23**).

Is not this Jesus ... according to Ryle, "has a latent sneer in it, which our English versions cannot fully convey. It is as if they said, 'Is not this fellow, etc.'"**[18]**

The son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know ... The conclusion of the leaders in the synagogue at Capernaum that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary was a deduction based on ignorance. They thought they knew, no doubt, and might even have investigated in Nazareth with a hope of finding some taint in Jesus' background; but, if Joseph and Mary were interrogated by them, one may be certain that they refused to tell the evil rulers of the synagogue any of the marvels that attended the Lord's birth.

There was one thing that the crowd in the synagogue were correct in, and that was their conclusion that Jesus' teaching contradicted their supposition about his being the natural son of Joseph, thus making Jesus' teaching in this place to be an affirmation of his virgin birth.

Verse 43

Jesus answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me except the Father that sent me draw him; and I will raise him up in the last day.

Those who find in this an irresistible and sovereign act of God in calling individual sinners find much more than is in it, for the very next verse tells exactly how the drawing is accomplished: "They shall all be taught of God." To suppose that God draws some and not others would be to suppose that God is partial and unjust (**Acts 10:34**). The murmurers in this passage had rejected the teaching of God relative to the lowliness of the Messiah, thus thwarting God's drawing of them unto himself. The fact of rejection by some does not nullify the promise; the ones who respond will still be raised up at the last day.

Verse 45

It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.

The prophets ... calls to mind **Isaiah 54:13** and **Jeremiah 31:31-35**; but Jesus' words here seem more reasonably construed as a reference to the general teaching of the Old Testament that in the days of the new covenant men shall receive teaching from God. Those who heed God's word,

come to Jesus, being in such a manner drawn to him, and drawn of God. All human theories of immutable decrees, effectual calling, eternal election, and irresistible drawing, as applied to some men and not to others, appear to this commentator to be vain and hurtful speculations without foundation either in reason or the sacred text. If God does not draw men by his word, how is it done? Is not the word a sufficient instrument? Was it not the word that hurled the suns in space, and lifted up the cross, and stilled the sea? Why should some other means of drawing be imagined? The divine word is more than enough. Also, in the book of Acts, not a single record exists in the history of apostolic preaching in which even one person was converted who had not first heard the word of God; and it is therefore concluded that all who are converted are converted by the word of God.

The doctrine imported into this place and which is here rejected was enunciated thus by Hendriksen:

It is not true that **John 6:45** cancels, or at least weakens **John 4:44**. The expression, It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God, does not in any sense whatever place in the hands of men the power to accept Jesus as Lord.**[19]**

Despite such views, John himself taught that those who "believe on his name" through hearing God's word, are given the "power to become children of God" (**John 1:12**). The theory which stipulates that one who has heard God's word, consequently believing on Jesus Christ, does not thereby have the right to become a child of God until some mysterious further action on the part of God himself in "drawing" the sinner is repugnant; because, in the final analysis, it makes God and not the sinner responsible for whether or not he accepts the Lord. God has already given his word to men, to the whole creation; and therein is also the power for all who choose to do so to become God's children. As Lipscomb said:

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It is the drawing power. It draws by its manifestation of the love of God, by its revelation of the crucified Saviour. If man's will consents, and he yields to the drawing power, he comes; but, if he will not, and refuses to be drawn, he does not come. God will not force him.**[20]**

[19] William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 239.

[20] David Lipscomb, A Commentary on the Gospel of John (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Co., 1960), p. 99.

Verse 46

Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father.

This teaching guards against the notion that one could know God by means of the Old Testament alone. The true revelation of God could come only from one, even from him "that is from God," which is Christ.

Verse 47

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life.

The preconditions of receiving eternal life are not the subject of this verse. Here Christ was not speaking of them that "believe on" Jesus, but of him that "believeth" the word of God. There is no authority for translating this place, "He that believeth on me hath eternal life." Christ did say that

everyone that believeth on him **SHOULD HAVE** eternal life ([John 3:16](#); 6:40).

Verse 48

I am the bread of life.

For discussion of Christ as the bread of life see under [John 6:32,33,51](#).

Verse 49

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea, and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.

These verses are a recapitulation of the Lord's teachings in [John 6:32-33](#), and with the additional new element regarding his crucifixion, that is, giving "his flesh" for the life of the world. For contrast between the manna and the true bread, see under [John 6:32-33](#). "Flesh" in this context is a reference to the human body of the Lord, and is not used in the sense that Paul sometimes used the term. It was the human life of the divine Saviour that was sacrificed on the cross to provide bread for all men unto eternal life, bread appearing in this metaphor as the principal and dominating element of human diet. Christ is the soul's true food.

Verse 52

The Jews therefore strove with one another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

How ... ? This is the usual question of unbelief; see under [John 3:9](#). What Jesus meant by this was the soul's appreciating and assimilating the benefits derived from his death upon the cross. Christ is to the soul what food and drink are to the body. Without food and drink, the body dies; without Christ the soul dies. Any Christian who has for a lifetime studied the Holy Scriptures in their reference to Christ, and prayed to him daily, and worshipped him constantly, and who has sat down every Lord's day for many years in a weekly assembly where tokens of his flesh and blood are actually eaten - such a person finds the flippant question of the skeptics mentioned here a lot more ridiculous than Jesus' statement must have appeared to them.

Verse 53

Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.

Far from modifying the startling metaphor Jesus had adopted, he extended and restated it dogmatically. Taken literally, the passage would be cannibalistic and repulsive, thus requiring a spiritual understanding of it. It is a metaphorical reference to the soul-saving benefit procured on behalf of the human family by Christ's atoning death on the cross and the shedding of his blood. The eating and drinking refer to the soul's proper appropriation of that benefit.

Verse 54

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up, at the last day.

Is there any reference here to the Lord's Supper? With due deference to the screams of outrage marking the reaction of most modern commentators to such a question, it is the positive certainty of this interpreter that such a reference to the Lord's Supper is surely here. Our Lord said of the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper, "This is my body ... this is my blood"; and there is no logical way of dissociating those remarks from what is said here. This is not to say that "eating the flesh and drinking the blood" of the Son of God refers exclusively to the Lord's Supper; but there is no escape from the positive certainty that the Lord's Supper is included. Therefore, it is denied here that persons who are neglecting or refusing to observe the Lord's Supper as Christ commanded are in any manner whatsoever "eating and drinking" in the manner mentioned here. Let those who contend that they are indeed "eating" Jesus' flesh and "drinking" his blood explain the mystery of how such "eating and drinking" means spurning the only "eating and drinking" Jesus ever commanded, namely, that of the Lord's Supper!

The oldest interpretations that have come down through history affirm the reference here to the Lord's Supper. Thus, Cyprian said:

When therefore he says that whosoever shall eat of his bread shall live forever; as it is manifest that those who partake of his body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living, etc.[21]

This interpretation is offensive to some, as for example, Adam Clarke, who said:

This can never be understood of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper: (1) Because this was not instituted until a year later; (2) it cannot be said that those who do not receive the sacrament shall perish everlastingly; and (3) nor can it be supposed that all who do receive it are necessarily eternally saved.[22]

Clarke's objections have no weight, because: (1) John spoke mysteriously of the Holy Spirit long before he was given (see **John 7:39** and comment). This prophesies the supper. (2) Clarke's objection here refutes the interpretation that would make the Lord's Supper the only thing meant by Jesus' words; but, of course, the totality of Jesus' teaching, of which the Lord's Supper is a conspicuous part, must be believed and obeyed. Moreover, those who refuse Jesus' teaching as it regards the Lord's Supper have no promise whatever of eternal life. Men may scream about this if they please, but this is what the word of God says. (3) In this, Clarke's words are true enough but irrelevant as an argument against a reference to the Lord's Supper as being intended here. Clarke's argument is just this: "Look, if this refers to the Lord's Supper, it would mean that people who observe it are saved, and those who don't are lost! And that cannot possibly be true!"

Well, why not? If the Lord's Supper is a normal and conspicuous element of Christianity, designed to be partaken of by the whole body of the redeemed of all ages and to be continued until the second advent of the Son of God; and, if the Lord's Supper is the only ceremonial ordinance

commanded to be observed repeatedly throughout the full lifetime of every Christian, is it not therefore absolutely true that the saved and lost of all ages may be accurately identified as those who do, or who do not, observe it? Of course it is. The trouble with the commentators is that, so long they have construed salvation by faith as meaning "by faith only," that they similarly interpret the obvious reference to the Lord's Supper here as "Lord's Supper only." However, the reference to the Lord's Supper in this place, which is stoutly affirmed by this writer, is not to the supper **ONLY**, but to the entire system of Christianity for which it (by metonymy) stands.

[21] Cyprian, On the Lord's Prayer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. V. p. 452.

[22] Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Whole Bible (London: Mason and Lane, 1837), Vol. V, p. 563.

Verse 55

For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

The soul's true and only food leading to eternal life is the body given and the blood shed by Christ, hence the soul's true food and drink.

Verse 56

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him.

Abideth in me ... brings into view the spiritual body of the Lord, which is his church, and the eating and drinking of his flesh and blood is a reference to serving Christ within that body, including the faithful observance of his commands relative to the Lord's Supper.

In me ... The implications of this tiny prepositional phrase are perhaps the profoundest in the entire Bible. In Paul's writings, this phrase, or its equivalent (in Christ, in him, in whom, etc.), is used 169 times. This is the Holy Spirit's manner of declaring that the concept of being "in Christ" is about the most important thing in divine revelation. See my Commentary on Romans, p. 112.

He that eateth and drinketh, etc. ... abideth in me ... The person who is faithfully observing the Lord's command regarding the Lord's Supper is abiding in Christ; and those who remove themselves from such faithful observance also remove themselves from being "in Christ." Some religionists may not find this truth to their liking; but there does not seem to be any honest way to remove such a conclusion from this text. "He that eateth and drinketh ... abideth in" Christ. Although certainly included, the Lord's Supper is not the only eating and drinking characteristic of the Christian's life. Paul declared that "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). Here the receiving of the Holy Spirit is the same as to "drink of" the Holy Spirit.

And I in him ... In this passage, the mutual union of Christ and believers is spoken of as the saved being in the Lord, and as the Lord being in the saved. These are not descriptive of two states but of one. Other New Testament designations of the same condition are: "In the Spirit" (**Revelation 1:10**); "Spirit in you" (**1 Corinthians 6:19**), "he ... in God" (3:21), "God in you" (**Philippians 2:12**), "mind of Christ ... in you" (**Philippians 2:5**), "word

of Christ ... in you" (**Colossians 3:16**). Thus the blessed union between the saved and God is variously described in the New Testament as: God in men, men in God, Christ in men, men in Christ, the Holy Spirit in men, men in the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ in men, and the word of Christ in men. These are not eight states or conditions of spiritual life, but one, the saved state.

In fairness to the people who have so strongly resisted any idea of the Lord's Supper being referred to in this passage, it should be said that their principal concern was to guard against the gross literalization of the passage as was done in the Council of Trent and their dogmatic promulgation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the doctrine which affirms that the bread and wine of the supper are actually changed by the blessing of the priest into the literal flesh and blood of the Son of God. However, that erroneous teaching must be guarded against in some other manner than that of stripping the reference to the holy communion out of this passage.

Verse 57

As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he shall also live because of me.

Eating Christ is a metaphor for accepting the whole system of Christianity in faith and obedience.

Verse 58

This is the bread which came down out of heaven: not as the fathers ate and died; he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.

This and the preceding verse are a repetition for the sake of emphasis of the words in **John 6:31-35**, which see.

Verse 59

These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that the discussions were brought on by the fourth sign at Bethsaida Julius. When they tried to make Jesus king, he left them and returned to the western shore where some of them followed him. Apparently some of the discussions were held outside (**John 6:25-40**), then continued before the rulers of the synagogue inside that edifice at Capernaum (**John 6:41-59**).

Verse 60

Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?

Hard saying ... was a correct designation. It was so judged by them that first heard it; and therein appears ample justification for setting aside all interpretations that would make an easy thing out of this, such as declaring that it means "Whoever believes shall be saved"! The right interpretation must take into account the difficulty.

Verse 61

But Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at this, said unto them, Doth this cause you to stumble?

The omniscience of Jesus, so often referred to in John, is apparent here also. The Lord read the hearts of his disciples and moved at once to help them.

Doth this cause you to stumble ... ? A literal understanding of Jesus' teaching here was never intended; but the glow of the metaphor is seen in the fact that the truth it was designed to convey is no less astounding than the shocking metaphor used to teach it. That the soul's only food and drink leading to eternal life must be Jesus Christ - that truth still causes men to stumble.

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS

Many of Jesus' plainest teaching must be accounted "hard sayings." His teachings concerning judgment, hell, and eternal condemnation are so hard, in fact, that some reject them. His doctrine concerning the new birth, going the second mile, turning the other cheek, and the forbidding of divorce are hard sayings; and men are still offended by them, even as some disciples were offended then. For the child of faith, the sayings of Christ are received in meekness, whether fully understood or not; because true confidence in the Lord will not permit the setting aside of anything that he taught.

Verse 62

What then if ye should see the Son of man ascending where he was before?

This is a reference to the ascension of Christ into heaven, an event which would, of necessity, be preceded by the sufferings and death of the Lord. It seems that for that latter fact, not stated but implied, the Lord spoke these words with a view to raising the question of how his disciples' faith would be able to withstand the far greater test of events leading to his ascension. If a shocking metaphor had offended them, how about their reaction to what was coming in the Passion?

Verse 63

It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life.

This was Jesus' way of saying, "Look, with regard to what I said about eating my flesh and drinking my blood, you must not take that literally, but spiritually. 'The flesh profiteth nothing ...' Of course, eating my literal flesh would be to no profit; but my words are spirit and are life. It is my teaching which you must assimilate."

Verse 64

But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were which believed not, and who it was that should betray him.

Again the omniscience of Jesus is in view. The foreknowledge of God, or of Christ, is a difficulty for some. How can it be, they ask, that God knows what will happen without in such knowledge becoming the cause of what happens? No one can explain how that may be; but there is a counterpart to it in man's life which might possibly shed some light on it. Thus, a person knows what happened yesterday, but such knowledge does not mean that he caused whatever happened. Just so, God knows what will happen tomorrow without thereby becoming the cause of its happening. The Lord's knowledge of who would betray him did not cause Judas to sell the Lord.

Verse 65

And he said, For this cause have I said unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it be given him of the Father.

See under [John 6:44-45](#) for comment on how God draws men, and how he gives men power to come to Christ. The Lord's evident purpose here was to encourage the faithful disciples. The defection of many, the unbelief of some, and the treachery of one - all of these were events which were due to the fact of their rejecting God's word by which they would have been drawn to Jesus, and thus it was not given unto them by the Father to be Jesus' disciples and to have eternal life.

Verse 66

Upon this many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.

The more carnal majority of the throng that heard Jesus found the events and discussions of that day an insurmountable obstacle to their following him any longer. It was clear that Jesus had no intention of feeding them while they made war on Rome; and, when the Lord tried to teach them of the true bread from heaven, they scoffed at it. It became evident as the day wore on that they would have none of the spiritual food that Christ offered. As a last resort, he hurled a shocking metaphor into the teeth of that crowd that wanted to eat, eat, eat, at his hands, saying, "Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you!" Thus the Lord gave them the excuse they needed to leave him.

Verse 67

Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away?

These words were spoken sorrowfully and with deepest concern lest the Twelve themselves should be swept away by the great defection; nevertheless, the Lord would not force even them. Every man was free to leave if he chose to do so. God's plans always go forward, with or without men's cooperation. Even the Twelve were not indispensable; and, if they had defected, others would have been chosen, and the Master's work would have succeeded just the same. However, the Lord loved those men and earnestly desired their continuance with him.

Verse 68

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Here, in Peter's answer, was the secret of why many defected that day, and a few did not. It was not that God in some imperial, inscrutable election, before all time and eternity, had decreed that some should go and others stay. Far from it! Peter had regard to the word of God which Jesus was teaching; and that word was the anchor that held Peter, despite the fact that the metaphor must have shocked him as much as it did the multitude. Those who defected were not taught of God, due to their own character, and not for any lack of opportunity; therefore they were not drawn of God, being drawn instead by their own carnal preferences.

TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

I. Peter's question carried the implication that all men require someone to whom they can go. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps; he is never free to order his own affairs but is always the slave of the philosophy he accepts. Man's constitutional nature is such that he is free only to choose a master, a choice that narrows down to God or Mammon. This explains man's irrevocable commitment to religion. He may have the true religion, or any one of a thousand false religions; but religion he must have. For example, dialectical materialism is nothing but a godless, anti-Christian religion, the same being also true of many other systems and "-isms."

II. Peter's reply carried also the implication that human loyalties are inherently directed to a person, rather than to some philosophy, system, or ethic. Peter did not ask, "To what shall we go?" but rather, "To whom shall we go?"

Since the world was, man has never been able, among ten thousand faiths, to have a religion without a personality enshrined at the heart of it. It may be questioned if to an abstract principle men have ever yet, since the world was, built one solitary temple, reared a single altar, offered a single sacrifice, or breathed a single prayer.**[23]**

III. This need for going to someone is inherent in the helplessness of humanity. Peter's reply made mention of "eternal life," and therein is the admission that the present existence is mortal and ephemeral. Man's mortality, ignorance, and sin are components of his need, which, like an open wound uncovered, sends him to another.

IV. "Thou only hast the words of eternal life ..." Peter had already found the Lord to be food and drink for his soul; and although Peter, like the others, was no doubt shocked by Jesus' metaphor, nevertheless, the meaning of it he already knew. Of all the teachers who ever instructed the human race, only Jesus Christ delivered a convincing body of truth regarding eternal life and the procurement of it by men. To turn away from Jesus our Lord is to turn into darkness and despair. Mankind is like one lost in a lifeboat on the sea in a storm at midnight; and across the boundless ocean only one beacon penetrates the vast darkness that engulfs him, and to turn away from the only light is to choose darkness and death. Jesus is the world's only light.

Verse 69

And we have believed and know that thou art the holy one of God.

Here is glimpsed one of the great realities regarding knowing and believing. Knowledge is properly held to be valuable, but it is not in knowing, but in believing, that one discovers spiritual reality. If one shall wait until he "knows," in the absolute sense of that term, he shall never believe; but if with all his heart he shall "believe" in the fullest sense of the word, then he shall know with certainty and absolute assurance the great truths unfolded in the word of the Lord. "We walk by faith, and not by sight," an apostle said; and, as the soul of man would ascend into that eternal realm of the spirit and take hold of the inheritance of the saints in light, he will find faith a far better conveyance than mere knowledge. This derives from the nature of our quest. May all who read these lines "believe," and then they shall know that Jesus is the holy one of God. Thus it was with Peter and with all who ever did it. And the warning should be heeded that the decision to believe or not to believe is not an intellectual choice at all, but a moral choice; but those who make the moral decision to believe inevitably find also that it is fully supported by all of the gifts of reason and of intelligence as well; and the believer shall find, as did the apostles, that believing, he shall know the truth.

Verse 70

Jesus answered them, Did not I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?

For more on the subject of foreknowledge, see under [John 6:64](#), also in my Commentary on Romans, p. 322.

One of you is a devil ... does not mean that Judas had been a devil from the beginning, or that he was a devil when Jesus selected him as an apostle. Judas "by transgression fell" ([Acts 1:25](#)); and it is impossible for one to fall from an eminence he does not have. Some considerable time had passed since Judas was chosen; and, during that interval, the fall had taken place, hence Jesus' use of the present tense, "is a devil."

Verse 71

Now he spake of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he it was that should betray, him, being one of the twelve.

Perhaps the purpose of Jesus' introduction of this shocking revelation was to prepare the other apostles for the impact of so dastardly a deed as the betrayal; and there could have been no better time for such a warning than the very moment when Peter was affirming so strongly their faith and knowledge of the Son of God. This is another example of the sense of movement throughout this Gospel, a characteristic which some, incredibly, have failed to see.

The placement of this warning concerning Judas at this particular place in the Gospel supports the supposition that Judas had been taken in by the arguments of those who wanted to make Jesus king, and that the traitor found the demands of his carnal nature more in harmony with the enemies of the Lord than in companionship with the Lord of life.

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Bibliographical Information

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