

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part twenty-seven

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ARE THERE MANY WAYS TO KNOW GOD, OR JUST ONE?

John 6:45-59 - "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— [46] not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. [47] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. [48] I am the bread of life. [49] Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. [50] This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. [51] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." [52] The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" [53] So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [54] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. [56] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. [57] As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. [58] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." [59] Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum."

I mentioned earlier that where the synoptic gospels describe the Last Supper the Apostle John records the washing of the disciple's feet. He makes no mention of the last Passover celebration of Jesus with His disciples.

But chapter six is John's masterpiece on the theology of the cross of Jesus Christ and the redemption supplied therein. This is a wonderful, though deep and complex chapter, engaging our present study.

But the study, if rich, is also weighty. This is not light, peppy, fluffy stuff. John drills down deep into the work of Christ and calls us to bring our minds along with our hearts as we follow him. We should be clued to the nature of Jesus' words by the fact that His own disciples took "**offense**" at the teaching - **John 6:60-61** - "**When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'**" [61] But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "**Do you take offense at this?**"

Note that. We'll study those words next Sunday. His own disciples didn't take well to these words. So you and I need to be careful in our study of them. They're not really offensive when understood. They're rich and nourishing. And we're only going to study fourteen verses today to break down this chapter into manageable portions.

1) **WITH THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS FOREVER CHRISTOCENTRIC (CHRIST-CENTERED)**

John 6:45-46 - "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— [46] **not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.**"

There is a reason for placing these two verses back to back. They link up a **statement** with a **clarification** of a statement. Jesus knows the words of **verse 45** could very well be misleading without the addition of **verse 46**.

True enough, God has revealed much truth and grace through the Old Testament writings by the prophets. But - He goes on to clarify - that **doesn't** mean people can continue to come to God **just** through those same prophets alone without coming to terms with Himself - the One to whom all those prophets pointed. You can't substitute the prophets for Jesus, the fulfillment of their revelation.

Remember how Jesus chastised His listeners for doing just that in **John 5:45-47** - "**Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. [46] For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?**"

Other texts reveal the same tendency to look for saving truth **elsewhere** while rejecting **Jesus Christ** - **John 5:39-40** - "**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.**"

"But didn't God use those prophets to genuinely speak to His people? And didn't He use them to call people to Himself?"

And yes, He did. But that was then. This is now.

Jesus red flags the use of *signs* without accepting that to which the *signs pointed*. Here's the key teaching point. With the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh God no longer accepts approaches to His saving grace *outside* of Jesus Christ. With the Incarnation everything has changed. The gate to God *narrows*. Now Jesus says, **"No one comes to the Father but by me"**(14:6).

Jesus is now the *exclusive* way and truth and life of God for lost mankind. The whole New Testament now reaffirms these grand words of Jesus:

Acts 17:22-31 - "So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for "In him we live and move and have our being"; "For we are indeed his offspring.' [29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Paul's point is it now matters *how* people seek after God. There was a time when people would just *"...feel their way toward him* [God]...."**(27)**. Paul clearly says God *"overlooked"* religious search divorced from Jesus Christ **(30)**. But those times of *"ignorance"* are now over **(30)**. And they're over because Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. What ended those former times was the coming and dying and rising again of Jesus Christ. Paul says the coming of Jesus Christ *ends* the times of ignorance. That's the important change in religious history.

Or look at **Hebrews 1:1-3** - "Long ago, at *many times and in many ways*, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he *has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...."

Again, we're meant to see the transition from the *many* to the *single*. God, in the past, used *"many times"* and *"many ways"***(1)**. Now He has spoken with finality *"by his Son"***(2)**.

And the important first point of this teaching is the rest of the New Testament didn't *make this concept up*. They got it from Jesus Himself. This is what Jesus is saying in our text - **John 6:46** - **"...not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father."**

So the broad road of the prophets described in **verse 45** isn't useful without Jesus Christ. No one can use other means and *bypass* Jesus Christ. Not any more. Notice, *"...no one"* has seen the Father but the Son. Jesus is the only *qualified* revelation of God. And by that Jesus means no one can put up any other ladder to God. He means the saving voice of the Father is heard when the Son is heard and the saving presence of the Father is seen only when Jesus is seen.

This is the same point the apostle John was making in **John 1:18** - **"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."** From the incarnation onward *all religious devotion that excludes Jesus Christ, God the Son, is unacceptable to Father God*.

Watch Jesus labor to make this point as clearly as He could to Phillip - **John 14:6-9** - "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." [8] Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." [9] Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

I'm still reinforcing the first teaching point of this teaching. ***From the incarnation on saving knowledge of God is forever Christ-centered.*** There are certain points you ***don't*** have to be right on and certain points you ***must*** be right on. This point must be a firmly laid foundation. ***John Calvin***, in not-too-subtle terms, thunders, ***"Accursed then be everything declared to us about God, unless it directs us to Christ!"*** I think you get the point.

2) WHAT IT MEANS TO BELIEVE IN JESUS AND WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT

The block of text to consider here is **John 6:47-58**. Because there are so many important thoughts developed we're going to break it down into smaller units for study. But remember, all of these sub-points come under the big umbrella of the second point of this message - ***what it means to believe in Jesus and why it's so important.***

- a) ***Only belief in Jesus can bring eternal life - John 6:47-50 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. [48] I am the bread of life. [49] Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. [50] This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."***

In **verse 49** He reminds these reminiscent Jews that as great as the manna feeding in the wilderness was everyone who ate that bread was long dead and gone. That bread didn't give eternal life to those who ate it.

This is Jesus' way of repeating what He said in **verse 27** - ***"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."***

The manna in the wilderness, with which these people were so transfixed, is the image Jesus uses to illustrate the material pursuits that seem to fill an ***immediate*** need but cannot fulfill the ***eternal dimension*** of our beings. They claw at our desires and deceive us by their apparent urgency. Food that perishes is a constant ***nag*** but isn't where our deepest needs will be met. Jesus is the ***ultimate fulfillment*** of what our immediate desires deceitfully promise.

- b) ***Belief in Jesus rests down on the historically verifiable event of Jesus' coming into this world to die, but must be constantly reaffirmed and rededicated ever anew - John 6:50-51 - "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. [51] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."***

You have to watch for it, but there is no missing the way Jesus ***switches the tenses*** in these two verses. He is at one and the same time both the bread that ***"comes down"*** (50) and the bread that ***"came down"*** (51). And there's more than cold theology here.

Living faith needs two wings to fly. There is an ***ongoing, constantly renewed, never neglected feeding on the rich fellowship and grace of Jesus Christ.*** The believer doesn't just ***know about*** Jesus. He ***loves*** Jesus. He ***worships*** Jesus. He ***keeps listening*** to Jesus. He ***keeps obeying*** Jesus. The relationship is a ***living, abiding*** relationship. The bread constantly ***comes down*** from heaven. Fresh bread each and every day.

Please don't miss Jesus' point. There's a reason for calling Himself the ***"bread of life"*** (48). Eating is an ***ongoing*** action. You can't sustain your present existence on the food you ate three weeks ago. Jesus means to emphasize our need to ***feed*** on Him continuously. This means ***something happens*** when Christ is neglected by professing believers. Neglect of Christ betrays the whole idea of Christ as the ***bread of life***. Neglected food doesn't feed. Learn to ***partake*** of Christ each day.

But then Jesus provides the other wing of necessary truth. Not only is He the bread that ***comes down*** from heaven (50), He is the bread that ***came down*** (51). There is a ***finished aspect*** to His provision of life. Our faith rests down on something definite - something beyond our own feelings and opinions. Thankfully, the foundation for our eternal life is rooted in an actual ***occurrence***.

Unlike a host of prophetic and angelic revelations on which this world's religions are founded, the ***birth, death, and resurrection*** of the person Jesus Christ are verifiable events. In other words, the bread of life on which I daily feed isn't ***imaginary bread***. It's ***real***.

- c) ***Belief in Jesus means the complete assimilation of His will and rule into the whole of my life - John***

6:52-58 - "The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" [53] So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [54] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. [56] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. [57] As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. [58] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

There is no denying the gruesomeness of these images. Surely Jesus was aware of the distastefulness of His words. Why did He use them? He used them because there is no better image to convey the **extent to which His life must become our own.** This is what **belief in Jesus** means.

In his old commentary on John, **Merrill Tenney** captured the idea with a powerful simplicity - **"The metaphor of eating and drinking is the best possible figure that can be employed to express the assimilation of one body by another, the method whereby life is transferred from the eaten to the eater....Although the figure was in itself repulsive, it expressed the meaning of the complete assimilation of Christ into all the life of the believer, just as the life of the believer is assimilated into that of Christ."**

I had a chicken sandwich last week. But if you cut me open you won't find it. There isn't a single part of my body into which it hasn't gone. Or, more accurately, there isn't a single part of my body that it hasn't **become.** The sandwich is now my hair, my eyesight, my hearing, my teeth, my fingernails, and my lungs that breathe.

If you can find a part of your present thinking and willing that **isn't** Jesus dominated and controlled you need to hear these hard verses on eating His flesh and drinking His blood. This, and nothing less, is what it **means** to believe in Jesus.

3) **GRACIOUSLY, JESUS MADE ALL HIS TEACHING AND HIS WORK HIGHLY VERIFIABLE**

John 6:59 - "Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum."

Why does this little detail matter? Because Jesus took great pride in the fact that He hadn't established some secret cult. In fact, right at the end of His life, this little verse was still hot in His mind - **John 18:19-20** - "The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. [20] Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.'"

Jesus wanted us all to be able to **look into** every word He said. He wanted things to be **verifiable.** His truth was public and open to scrutiny. It would always stand up. That's the way it is with Jesus. You are invited to **inspect** Jesus. You can know Him and feed on Him and trust in Him. He's a sure hope in an unsatisfying world. And He's still the only way to Father God and the only source of eternal life.