

Passage: John 6:60-69 (prepared 8/19/09; preached 8/23/09)

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

62 What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!

63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit[a] and they are life.

64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Notes

60 The enigmatic words of Jesus puzzled some of the disciples just as much as then did the mixed crowd. "Disciples" refers to the total group of adherents who had attached themselves to Jesus, however loosely, not solely to the Twelve. Those who could not understand him, or who were unwilling to trust him completely, withdrew. It was a turning point in their experience. They lacked the spiritual perception to grasp his meaning.

61 Jesus' inward knowledge of the disciples enabled him to detect their attitude. The language reemphasizes the principle stated in John 2:25: "He knew what was in a man." His questions reveal surprise that they were mystified. If they could not understand the meaning of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, how would they be able to interpret his resurrection (implied) and his ascension? If they were bewildered by his language, how much more difficult would they find the final event that would lead to his realm to God?

62 This reference to the Ascension is one of several in the Gospel, though the act itself is not recorded (3:13; 8:21; 16:10; 17:11; 20:17). The disciples had complained that the concept of Jesus' being the true bread that comes down from heaven was incomprehensible. He intimated that if they witnessed his ascension, as he apparently expected, they would be even more astonished. They had difficulty in believing that he could belong to two different realms. When on the morning of his resurrection Mary grasped him in order to keep him in her existing world lest he should vanish again, he reassured her that he had not yet departed permanently to the Father (20:17). His intention of ultimate departure is clearly stated in John 14:3 and 17:11.

63 Jesus undoubtedly was referring to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit imparts life to the believer; it is not transmitted by the process of physical eating. Jesus was saddened by the dullness of some of his disciples that prevented their believing in the sense that they did not appropriate him.

64 Jesus' reference to those who did not believe is explained by his later allusion to Judas (v. 70). Jesus had given ample opportunity for faith to all those who followed him; yet from the beginning his spiritual discernment made him aware of those whose faith was genuine and those whose attachment was only superficial.

65 Jesus strongly implied that faith is the result of God's enabling. Unbelief is natural to those who are selfish and alienated from God and who cannot accept the idea that he can do the impossible. Complete commitment to God is impossible for a selfish heart; the Holy Spirit must awaken and empower it to believe. This does not destroy the voluntary character of faith; it is rather in accord with the cry of the man who said to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Unbelief is part of the fabric of human mentality; the intervention of divine grace is necessary to transform it to faith.

66 "From this time" is a possible translation of *ek toutou*. It could also mean "Because of this [utterance]." The latter makes good sense because it was not simply the chronology that changed the disciples' attitude. It was the difficulty of comprehending Jesus' saying or the offense it gave to their self-sufficiency.

67 The desired response to a question can often be prompted by the way the question is framed. Our Lord ever wishes to encourage faith that is weak, and he had a great deal of concern and love for his disciples. That's why he asked, "You do not want to leave too, do you?"

68 The words of Simon Peter parallel those in the Great Confession given in the Synoptics (Matt 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). Peter spoke as the representative of the Twelve. He declared that nobody else had the life-giving message of Jesus and that there was no other source that would satisfy them. The statement reveals that, in spite of all his usual awkwardness, Simon's faith in Jesus was genuine; and he evidenced true spiritual sensitivity.

"Words of eternal life" refers to the nature of Jesus' teaching rather than to any specific formula he might have used. The Greek article, which marks definiteness, is lacking here. Simon Peter recognized the difference between the authoritative declaration of Jesus and the speculations of the religious teachers of his day. Peter's statement represents the spiritual discernment the disciples had developed during their association with Jesus.

69 The emphatic use of the first personal plural pronoun implies a contrast between the Twelve and those who had deserted Jesus: "We believe" (*italics mine*). Actually, the use of the perfect tense with the verbs "believe" and "know" indicates the verse should be translated "We have believed and have known." This shows a fixed and settled decision, which is expressed here by the English present tense. Peter is affirming that they have reached a final conviction that Jesus is indeed "the Holy One of God." This term is rare in the NT as a title of Jesus. It appears again in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, where he quotes Psalm 16:10 as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection: "Nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Acts 2:27), and also in his speech on Solomon's Colonnade: "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). It bears a strong resemblance to the expression "the Holy One of Israel," which occurs frequently in the prophecy of Isaiah (41:14; 43:3; 47:4; 48:17; and elsewhere).

70 Jesus indicated that his choice of the Twelve was conscious and deliberate; yet he included one he knew would be a traitor. Judas had no less opportunity than any of the others to know and serve Jesus; nor was he a victim of discrimination, for he was given a prominent place among them as treasurer of the group (John 12:6). He was dishonest in his financial administration and selfish in his attitude. In contrast with Simon Peter, who denied Jesus, it can be said that Judas acted by choice, Peter by impulse. Whereas Judas regarded Jesus as a means of attaining his ambition, Peter thought of Jesus as a friend. Judas was motivated by selfishness; Peter, by fear. The word "devil" (*diabolos*) means literally "slanderer." Generally it refers to Satan; only three times in the NT is it applied to human beings, twice in the Pastoral Epistles (2Tim 3:3; Titus 2:3), where it is translated "slandrous" or "slanderer," and in this one instance in John. The two other instances in this Gospel unmistakably refer to Satan.

71 This verse reads like a footnote or side comment. Although the Gospels never indulge in lengthy denunciation of Judas, almost invariably his name is followed by the phrase "who betrayed him Jesus" (Matt 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16; John 12:4; 18:2). "Iscariot" is derived from the transliteration of *keripot*, which means "man of Kerioth." Kerioth was a city in the southern part of Judah (Josh 15:25), south of Hebron in the dry Negeb. There was another city with the same name located in Moab, but the former seems more likely to have been the home of Judas.