

THE IMPORTANCE OF DECISIONS

John 6:55-71

Former President Ronald Reagan says he learned the need for decision-making early in life. An aunt had taken him to a cobbler to have a pair of shoes made for him. The shoemaker asked young Ronald Reagan, "Do you want a square toe or a round toe?" Reagan hemmed and hawed. So the cobbler said, "Come back in a day or two and let me know what you want."

A few days later the shoemaker saw Reagan on the street and asked what he had decided about the shoes. "I still haven't made up my mind," the boy answered. "Very well," said the cobbler.

When Reagan received the shoes, he was shocked to see that one shoe had a square toe and the other a round toe.

"Looking at those shoes every day taught me a lesson," said Reagan years

later. "If you don't make your own decisions, somebody else will make them for you!"

The sovereign God has made us people, not puppets. We have His Word to guide us, His love to redeem us, and His assurance that we are capable of making choices.¹ Now in this concluding section of John chapter 6, Jesus confronts people with the need for making decisions about Him. He also repeats His teaching about the disciples' need to understand the meaning of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. That is the first important decision they encounter. Will they believe Christ's words about being the Bread that comes down from Heaven? We have already explained that this does not mean they should literally eat His flesh and drink His blood but that His body and blood was the necessary sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and that anyone who desires salvation and eternal life must accept that teaching, repent of their sins, and ask Christ into their life as Savior.

¹ *Bible Illustrations*, Ronald Reagan.

That is the process required for salvation and eternal life. It is a free gift of

God's grace beginning with the faith of a person in Jesus' sacrificial death. It cannot be earned as many of these disciples wanted to believe.

They believed they could be good enough to earn their salvation and because of that pride they condemned themselves to an eternal Hell. Because it is so important Jesus repeats this teaching in verses 55-58 of John 6 NAS:

*55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56
"He who eats 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 he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.
58 "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the
fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."*

Verse 58 is of course referring to the manna which God provided the Israelites while they were wandering in the desert over a period of forty years. That was the kind of bread that provided food for the body. The bread that Jesus is offering is food for the soul. The manna only provided them

nourishment for their physical lives and they eventually died. The bread that Jesus offers, faith in His death for sin, provides eternal life. As Jesus was teaching His disciples in the synagogue in Capernaum, trying to help them understand who He was and what it meant that He had come, they began grumbling about Him repeatedly telling them that they needed to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

Jesus is also saying in these verses that to truly have life with a capital L we need to internalize Christ as much as possible. Now how do we internalize Christ or “*eat His flesh and drink His blood*” as described here? First, we appropriate Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the grave as payment for the sins in our life (Romans 10:9, 10). By doing that you become a member of the family of God (John 1:12,13).

When a child is born into a human family, he/she begins to take on the characteristics of the parents. The child reacts the same, holds the same values, and even adopts the mannerisms of his/her parents. Psychologists tell us children do that because they have identified with their parents so much that they have internalized the parent. Tell me, when you start to do something, don’t you often hear mom’s or dad’s voice in your head saying,

“Do it this way—or that way”? Sure you do. Maybe your dad taught you how to parallel park, and today whenever you begin to parallel park the car you hear his voice saying, *“Pull up even, so that your steering wheel is even with the steering wheel on the car in front of the parking space.”*

When you become part of God’s family you start listening to what God has to tell you. You take on His values and behaviors. And where do you get that? From the Bible. The more you read and study and memorize Scripture, the more you are internalizing Christ, who is the living Word of God (John 1:1-4, 14). The longer and more thoroughly you study God’s Word and obey what it says, the more you come to have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Another way you internalize Christ is that when you receive Him as your Savior the Holy Spirit comes to live within you. The Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as “the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9,11). So you have His Spirit within you, guiding you and helping you, teaching you what God wants you to know and to do. So through the Holy Spirit of Christ and through the Word of Christ you internalize the Lord Jesus just as thoroughly, or even more so, than if you had literally consumed His flesh.

John 6:59-65 NAS:

59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. 60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" 61 But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? 62 "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? 63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

Many of the Jews who had been following Jesus began to complain that this kind of talk was hard to understand and accept. They were making a poor decision: they did not want to hear Christ's words anymore.

Jesus asked them if such teaching in any way caused them to stumble. The Greek word used here is *skandalizo* and means “to ensnare, to trap, to cause to stumble”; it is often used to indicate a falling away into unbelief.² Jesus knew that those who were not willing to accept Him fully would stumble over him into unbelief or be offended by Him.³ But in spite of knowing some would reject His message He stated it clearly and honestly. We must do the same. If we speak of Jesus lovingly and honestly, we should not be depressed nor feel inadequate if the message of the Gospel is rejected or if it offends someone. Even when Jesus delivered His own message, many listening to Him rejected it. That is simply the result of the power of sin in a person’s life, and it is a very dangerous decision for that person to make.

² Matthew 13:21; 24:10; Mark 6:3; Romans 14:20-21.

³ Bruce, Barton B. et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 5.

Because these Jews would not believe that Jesus came down from Heaven, Jesus asked them in verse 62 if they would believe Him if He were to ascend back up to Heaven where He said He came from. Would they believe Him? Would they be willing to accept the fact that He was who He said He was and that He had the power and authority to give them eternal life, which they could not attain through the works of the flesh? Verse 63 tells us: "*it is the*

Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” In other words you cannot achieve salvation and eternal life by performing good works on your own. Jesus is telling them the only way they can receive eternal life. Eternal life is the gift of God which comes only as a result of faith.

It is also entirely possible here that Jesus is saying that a fleshly or literal interpretation of His words will leave them clueless as to what He is actually saying, and they must be able to see the spiritual interpretation. If they cannot get past thinking that He is suggesting they actually eat His body and drink His blood they do not stand a chance of receiving salvation. Remember Jesus’ words may frequently carry multiple meanings, all of which can be accurate. When you are God, you are capable of doing such things.

Let us look at verse 65: "*For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father*" (NAS). The Father uses several different means to call everyone to be reconciled to Him, as we have already discussed. For those that believe and trust in God, God will then point them to Jesus for salvation and eternal life. If you insist that

you can earn your own salvation and do not trust in the Words of the Father, you will not believe Jesus. This is another poor decision, which will have serious consequences for you.

Now remember, and this is so important, Jesus is speaking here to first century Jews who have grown up with the Law. Over the centuries of the Old Testament, the Scribes and the teachers of the Law had come to change the truth of the Word of God in the Old Testament to a meaning that satisfied their personal ambitions. They had changed it in a way that made it possible for a person to think they could attain salvation on their own by keeping all of God's Law and doing good works. They had simply ignored the teaching of their own Old Testament for the version they preferred in order to satisfy their own desires. It would be very much like a Bible translator today taking a number of liberties in translating the entire Bible by changing God's words and replacing them with words he/she believed God actually meant. Or pastors today who only teach the pleasant parts of the Bible, the parts about God's love, leaving out the complete truth about God's justice and righteousness. Paul warned Timothy that this would happen:

2 Timothy 4:3 NAS

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.

It was necessary for Jesus to tell them that they believed a lie and that they must come to understand the doctrine of His atoning death for their sins. In order to do this He had to create the most understandable imagery possible. Here was the Son of a mere carpenter trying to explain to these Jews that He was sent from the God of Heaven to tell them that their religion was nothing but a big lie. Many of them simply could not bring themselves to believe it for one reason or another. So we read in verse 66: *As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.*

Now the reason I emphasized the importance of knowing that these disciples were first century Jews is that I believe Jesus' teaching to them was unique. I do not believe He would have necessarily used the same approach if He were speaking to an audience of Greeks or Romans, or even twenty-first century seekers. Again it is this uniqueness that verse 65 speaks to. *"For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been*

granted him from the Father." God, through the writers of the Old Testament, had repeatedly made it clear that a relationship with Him was based on faith and not works and that one day He would send a Savior. He set up the Law and the sacrifices as interim measures to help guide the people until that Savior came.

Any faithful Jew who read their Old Testament and believed God would have known this clearly and would have been expecting a Messiah to one day come.

Throughout the Old Testament God had emphasized the importance of choice. Let us look at a few such references.

Exodus 32:26 NAS

Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.

Deuteronomy 30:19 NAS

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set

before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”

Joshua 24:14-15 NAS

14 "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

1 Kings 18:21 NAS

Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word.

So we see that God had made it clear to all Jews that they had to choose between serving false gods or serving the true God. God had given many

prophecies to let them know Jesus would one day arrive on the scene. He included enough in those Old Testament prophecies to indicate how they could be sure the One claiming to be the Messiah was for real. In other words they could look at forty or fifty or more prophecies that predicted events directly involving the Messiah, and if all those things had come true in regard to Him, they could be certain He was who He claimed to be. Jesus satisfied all of these requirements and they should have recognized Him beyond the shadow of a doubt to be the promised Son of God.

I believe this to be the meaning of verse 65. God has pointed all Jews to the coming of Jesus Christ to the world as the promised Savior, and they can be 100% certain of this if they are believers in the Word of God in their own Old Testament.

However, if they have accepted all of this foolishness that the religious leaders had authorized over the centuries in turning God's Word into a works oriented salvation, it simply means they have not believed the God that gave them His Word in the Old Testament and will therefore not choose to believe the One whom God has now sent. This is not unlike what is happening in today's culture. People want to make up their own versions of God, creating

a God they can be comfortable with rather than accepting a God who they think will spoil all their fun. They reject a God who tells them the way things are and that there is only one way to eternal life. So the bottom line here is that many of the disciples stop following Jesus because they simply cannot accept His teaching.

Then Jesus says to His inner circle of twelve apostles in verse 67: *"You do not want to go away also, do you?"* And Simon Peter answers expressing his faith and, I would have to assume, the faith of all but one of the others based on the wording here. Peter is making a significant choice and basing it on a clear statement of who Christ is in verses 67 and 68: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."* In the same manner we have been discussing, Jesus Himself selected the twelve apostles and gave them the opportunity of salvation by teaching them the truth of the gospel message. And how does anyone including the twelve apostles come to know the truth of the message?

Romans 10:17 NAS:

17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of

Christ.

They had all listened to the teaching of Christ; eleven of them chose to accept Christ and one chose to betray Him. Verses 70 and 71 (NAS): *"Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.* So out of twelve of the apostles that Jesus Himself chose, there was one who would choose not to accept His teaching. Judas chose to follow Satan even though he had been exposed to the teaching of Jesus. Such is the power of evil in this world. Even though all have enough knowledge of God to be directed toward the only means of salvation, Satan will be able to play on the sinful desires of many to the point where they will not believe Jesus and will choose to follow Satan.

Today we have a complete Bible. The New Testament brings us the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies provided in the Old Testament. We may by studying our Bibles understand the gospel message as presented by Jesus Himself as well as a number of others who were chosen to write the Holy Scripture. When I look at the complete teachings of the Bible, I do not see evidence indicating that God has selected some people for salvation and

some people for destruction. That runs contrary to the nature of God and Christ presented in this complete work. God pointed the Jews toward Jesus in the Old Testament and the New Testament clearly identifies God's new covenant with the world through Jesus Christ. All people throughout human history have been given the opportunity for salvation. Some have made the right choices to receive it, others have not.

I believe the message here in this last section of John 6 is that the truth of the Gospel will be rejected by some and accepted by some, and the important thing to remember is to present it to others in a loving and straight forward manner. Do not dilute it in any way to make people feel more comfortable with it. Present it honestly as Jesus did and then simply allow the person to make their choice, their own decision. From this point on salvation is a matter of a person's own free will and the operation of the Holy Spirit within their life. No one has the ability to understand that kind of supernatural occurrence. But unless a person genuinely desires a relationship with Christ, God is not going to force that relationship on anyone. We need only concern ourselves with presenting Jesus' message to others and allow the Holy Spirit to be responsible for the conversion.