

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John 6:1-71. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John 6:1-71 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John 6:1-71 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John 6:71. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in John 6:5-13 about the necessity to exercise faith. Jesus and his disciples were at a lonely place, but a great crowd of people followed them. There were five thousand men, and besides them very many women and children! Then Jesus tested one of his disciples, Philip, saying, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” And Philip answered, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Philip *calculated instead of exercising faith!* Jesus tested Philip. He gave Philip an opportunity to show if he had sympathy for the crowd of hungry people and if he had learned the meaning of the miracles of Jesus as *signs*. The miracles as signs intended to point to the majesty, power and glory of Jesus, to his willingness and ability to supply every need of people. However, Philip immediately began to calculate, forgetting that the power of Jesus surpasses every possible calculation! It did not occur to Philip that just as Jesus had shown his ability to supply abundant wine at the wedding at Cana, he would be just as able to furnish bread here.

Another disciple of Jesus, Andrew, said, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” Andrew also looked at the many people and *calculated*. Only five small loaves of bread and only two small fish! All the disciples of Jesus still looked at the situation and argued rationally. All of them calculated and doubted if there could be any solution for the problem! All the disciples did not think of his previous miracles and failed to exercise faith in Jesus’ ability!

The important truth for me is that Jesus is not dependant on the physical world, which he created. If he created the whole universe, he can create wine and bread and anything he wants to create. I must learn not to look at the problems in life, but to Jesus Christ, who has the ability to solve all problems. I must learn to exercise faith in Jesus Christ and his words!

(T) An important truth for me in is John 6:35-46 about the relationship of divine predestination and human responsibility.

First. God the Father sovereignly gives people to Jesus.

In John 6:37, Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away”. There is complete harmony and co-operation between God the Father and God the Son. All those people that God the Father gives, God the Son welcomes. In this verse Jesus emphasises *God’s sovereign choice* to give certain people to Jesus. This verse speaks of divine predestination.

However, in John 6:36, Jesus says, “You have seen me and still you do not believe!” In this verse Jesus emphasises *man’s responsibility* to respond when they hear the gospel. Many who listened to Jesus that day, heard the gospel and even saw the miracle of Jesus, and yet they refused to believe! Jesus clearly places the blame for their failure to believe upon the people themselves. People remain fully responsible for their personal actions!

Second. God the Father irresistibly draws people to Jesus.

In John 6:44, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”. Here Jesus emphasises God’s sovereign predestination that is carried out in history. *To draw* means much more than *to give knowledge and moral influence*. The Father does not merely *beckon and advise* people, but he *draws them irresistibly* to Jesus Christ! The same word *to draw* is used in John 12:32, where after his crucifixion, Jesus would irresistibly draw people from all

over the world to himself! It is used in John 18:10, where the sword of Peter is actually drawn out of its sheath. It is used in John 21:6,11, where the net full of big fishes is actually drawn or dragged ashore! It is used in Acts 16:19, where Paul and Silas are dragged into the forum and in Acts 21:30, where Paul is dragged out of the temple. It is used in James 2:6, where the rich people drag the poor people before their judgement-seats. It is clear that Jesus is speaking of the irresistible way in which God the Father is drawing people to Jesus Christ! However, when God draws people, he deals with them as responsible beings. He powerfully influences their mind, will, heart, yes their entire human personality so that these begin to function in their own right. God the Father draws people in such a powerful way that they accept him by a living faith. *God's predestination does not exclude human responsibility, but includes it!* But both at the beginning and throughout the entire process of being saved, the initiative and power is always from God! This drawing-power of God is very real, strong, and effective, and it is wielded by God himself!

In John 6:45, Jesus says, "They will all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me". With respect to the way people are being saved, God's teaching and man's listening are not simply placed side by side. The Bible teaches that it is always God *who takes the initiative and who is in control from the beginning to the end*. God the Father must draw before people can come to Jesus. God the Father must teach before people can listen and learn. God's predestination to draw certain people includes these people's responsibility to listen, to respond and to learn. The negative side of this truth is that unless God the Father draws, no one can come to Jesus! Unless God the Father teaches, no one can hear and learn. The positive side of this truth is that whoever the Father draws, will definitely come to Jesus, will listen and learn, and will certainly be saved! The grace of the God of the Bible always conquers. It does what it has purposed to do. God's grace is irresistible.

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 6:1-71 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (6:26-29). What does Jesus mean when he says that we must not work for the food that spoils?

(T) This is a saying with a hidden meaning (H: a mashal). Just like the Samaritan woman did not understand his saying about *the living water*, so the Jews now did not understand his saying about *the food that endures to eternal life*. They both gave a literal interpretation to the living water and the food that endures. *The food that spoils* is ordinary food, which can never fill the heart, always perishes and has no abiding value. *The food that endures* is Jesus Christ himself who gives himself as an atonement sacrifice for sins. This food produces eternal life and sustains it! God the Father has put his seal of approval on Jesus Christ (27). By means of all the witnesses mentioned in chapter 5, God the Father has certified that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God.

The work which God requires or the endeavour that God requires is to believe in Jesus Christ! So this does not mean that people are saved by doing some *work* out of their own initiative and by which they earn eternal life. Salvation is always God's sovereign work of grace in the heart and mind of people. Salvation is a gift that is given by grace and should be received by faith. Therefore, Jesus urges the Jews not to simply *work* for material things, but to *endeavour* to receive eternal life from him.

2nd Question. (6:39-40). What does the Bible teach about the perseverance of Christians?

(S) One. Jesus promises that true believers will persevere to the end.

In John 6:39-40, Jesus says that the will of God the Father is that Jesus Christ loses nobody of all the people that God the Father has given to him, right up to his Second Coming when he will raise their bodies from the dead. He says that the will of God the Father is that every person who looks to God the Son and believes in him shall have everlasting life. At his Second Coming Jesus will raise their physical bodies from the grave. These two verses teach the truth that *true believers will persevere until the end*. The last day is the day of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the resurrection of all the dead and the final judgement of all people will take place.

Two. The assurance that you will persevere does not exclude your responsibility.

The truth that true born-again Christians will persevere in their faith until the end is viewed from the point of view of God's predestination in verse 39 and viewed from the point of view of human responsibility in verse 40. From God's point of view, all Christians collectively are given to Jesus Christ and he preserves them to the end! He cannot and will not fail in his task! From man's point of view, every Christian individually has the responsibility to have an abiding trust in Jesus Christ alone.

Three. The perseverance of believers is taught in the whole Bible.

In John 10:28, Jesus gives Christians *never-ending* life, they will *never* perish and *nobody* will snatch them out of his hand! Romans 8:28-33 teaches that *all* the people, whom God chooses sovereignly and from eternity, will be called,

justified and glorified in time! Romans 11:29 teaches that not only God's gifts, but also his *call is irrevocable!* In Philippians 1:6 Paul is confident that God not only begins a good work in people, but also *carries it to completion* until the Second Coming! 2 Timothy 2:19 says that that God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, "The Lord knows those who are his". In 1 Peter 1:4-5 is written, that God has given us an inheritance that can *never* perish, spoil or fade, which is kept in heaven for us. It also says that we are shielded by God's power until the last day.

Thus, the Bible promises that *God's plan cannot be changed, God's calling cannot be revoked, our inheritance from God cannot be defiled, God's foundation cannot be shaken, God's seal cannot be broken and our life in God cannot perish.* Moreover, the truth of the preservation and thus perseverance of Christians is surely implied in the term "eternal life".

3rd Question. (6:50-58). What is the meaning of "eating the flesh of Jesus" and "drinking the blood of Jesus"?

(T) In John 6:51,54 Jesus again uses a saying with hidden meaning (H: mashal) and says, "I am *the living bread* which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day."

One. These words may not be interpreted literally.

Many people have taken these words of Jesus in a more or less literal way and have failed to understand what he was saying. The Jews certainly interpreted the words of Jesus literally, as if he had intended that in some way or other people must partake of his physical body. Moreover, drinking blood was very repulsive for the Jews. The Old Testament certainly forbids the eating of blood (Lev 17:10). Jesus certainly did not advocate cannibalism.

Two. *Flesh and blood* are symbols of the body and soul of Jesus Christ.

If the Jews had studied the Bible, they would have been able to recognise the symbolism in what Jesus was saying. In Leviticus 17:11 the Bible says, "For the life or soul of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." The blood was viewed as the seat of life and represented *the soul*. Apart from the soul, blood has no intrinsic value. In Hebrews 9:22 is written, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness". Thus, just as a lamb had to shed his life-blood and die in order to make atonement for the life of the sinner in the Old Testament, so Jesus Christ had to shed his life-blood and die, in order to make atonement for the sins of all his people in the world. The shedding of the blood of Jesus, that is, the shedding of his life or soul, was the great punishment for our sins. It satisfied God's holy and righteous anger against our sins. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was the most important historical and religious event in the history of mankind!

Three. *Eating and drinking* are symbols of receiving and assimilating.

Just as food and drink are offered and accepted, so also the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is offered to believers and *accepted* by them. Just as food and drink are assimilated by the body, so the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is *assimilated* by the soul of believers. In John 6:66 and 68 the disciples *believed* in Jesus Christ, *followed* him and *identified completely* with him. Today, believers or disciples of Jesus Christ should do the same. Just as food and drink nourish and sustain physical life, so the sacrifice of Jesus Christ nourishes and sustains spiritual life.

In summary: "*The flesh and blood of Jesus*" is symbolic of the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus on the cross. '*Eating*' and '*drinking*' is symbolic for accepting Christ and his atonement of sins into your heart and life. Jesus never meant these words to be interpreted literally, but symbolically. He meant to say, "The person who accepts me into his whole life as the only sacrifice of atonement for his sins, he has eternal life. He will surely be saved".

Four. The teaching in the context of these words is not literal, but spiritual.

John 6:35 clearly shows that Jesus was speaking about coming to him and believing in him. By comparing John 6:54 with John 6:40 we come to the same conclusion. Although John 6:54 uses symbolic language and verse 40 uses straightforward language, they both have exactly the same result! While John 6:54 says that *eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus* would result in eternal life and the physical resurrection, John 6:40 says that *looking at Jesus and believing in him* would have those results!

Moreover, not only the way to the end result, but also the result is described in spiritual terms. John 6:52 says that the end result is eternal life and John 6:54 says that the end result is the believer remaining in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ remaining in the believer. So John chapter 6 does NOT deal with literal concepts, but with spiritual concepts.

Finally, in verse 63, he teaches clearly that he is not speaking of literal things, but of spiritual things, by saying, "The Spirit gives life, but the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life". Jesus says that people must stop thinking that he is asking them to literally eat his body and to literally drink his blood. It is rather his *spirit*, that is, his *person* in the act of giving his body to be broken and his blood to be shed on the cross that gives

them everlasting life. The *words* he speaks to them *are not simply literal but are spiritual*, because they give spiritual life to those who accept them.

(S) **STEP 4. APPLY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*.

STEP 5. PRAY

Let us take turns to pray about one truth God has taught us in John chapter 6.

Dear Father in heaven, I want to learn to exercise faith in your power instead of to calculate in difficult circumstances.

(T) Dear Father in heaven. You have drawn me to Jesus Christ and have given me to him. He has welcomed me and will never drive me away. Thank you that you will continue and complete the good work that you have started in me.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Make a commitment to do Bible study every week. Prepare next week's Bible study. Use "the five steps" method to prepare John 7:1-53.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".