

A HARD SAYING
John 6:60-71

Technical Notes of Matthew Poole

(60) Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

His disciples; his followers, not those that were his disciples indeed, but in name; for many followed him who did not believe in him. And many (in a sense) believed to whom he did not commit himself, chap. 2:23,24. Now, many of these disciples, having heard these sayings and being no way able to comprehend so great mysteries, nor having their eyes opened by the Spirit of illumination, said within themselves, These are sayings hard, or impossible, to be understood. Who is able to hear or to understand them? or who is able to bear them?

(61) When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"

Christ, though clothed with our flesh yet being also the eternal Son of God, knew by virtue of his Divine nature, personally united to the human nature, what was in the heart of man. Hence is this phrase *knew in himself*; which is opposed to a knowledge from the hearing of his own ears, as man hears, whether more immediately from the sound of their words (for we read of nothing they spoke audibly) or from the relation of others, as what they had heard. He knew in himself their thoughts by his Divine prerogative and property of searching the hearts and trying the reins and discerning the thoughts of men afar off. Knowing their thoughts, he says, Does this give you occasion of stumbling?

(62) What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?

Our Savior by these words may seem rather to increase than to abate their offense. That which stumbled them was his calling himself the bread of life; his affirming that he came down from heaven; that he gave life to the world; that the way to obtain this life was eating his flesh and drinking his blood. How does what he now tells them in any way tend to satisfy them? He now speaks of ascending up to heaven, and asserts that he was there before. **Answer:** The former assertions were no way to be justified but upon this foundation--that though he appeared now in the form and shape of a man and was indeed the Son of man, yet he was also God, the eternal Son of God. He therefore here plainly asserts that he was in heaven before he appeared as the Son of man upon the earth, and descending from thence did assume the form of a servant. And for a further proof of this he refers them to what they were to see or hear (to know) within some few months after this discourse (for this was after his third passover, which was to be the last year of his life), viz. that he should ascend up to heaven. It is very probable that some of them did see this with their bodily eyes for he was in Galilee when he ascended, and Capernaum was a city of that province. And when he ascended, the men of Galilee stood gazing up to heaven after him, as appears from Acts 1:11, and had a revelation that they should see him so come again, and descend from heaven as they had seen him go up.

(63) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

As it is not the bread or flesh that a man eats for the sustenance of his animal or natural life that does the main work, but the soul of a man within him which puts forth its virtues and powers in causing the digestion, concoction, and alteration of it (without which it nourishes not the body), so the flesh of Christ eaten carnally can be of no profit for the nourishment of the soul. Nor can the flesh of Christ, considered alone or by any virtue in it, profit. It only profits by virtue of the Divine nature, which being personally united to the human nature, adds all the virtue and merit to the sufferings and actions of the human nature. Just so the human nature of Christ has all its quickening virtue from the Divine nature. It is not therefore the carnal eating of my flesh that I intended (that is a very gross conception of yours); nor can any such thing as that do you good. But the words that I speak to you, they are spiritual, and such by the belief of which you may obtain a spiritual and eternal life. For by believing those words and obeying them you shall come to believe in me, which is that eating my flesh and drinking my blood which I intended, not any corporeal or carnal eating.

(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 would betray Him.

I may say what I will to you; the Spirit quickens, but it does not quicken all. It only quickens whomever it pleases. You understand not these things. The reason is because you believe not. Though some of them did, without question, truly believe, yet the most did not; for we read, ver. 66, that many of them *went back, and walked no more with him*. And though faith be an inward, secret act of the soul, yet Christ knew, and from the beginning, who were believers and who were not. Nay, he had a particular knowledge of that disciple who was to betray him.

(65) And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

He said this, ver. 44: see the notes on that verse. [They are reproduced here, verse 44 reading as follows: "*No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*"]

That by "drawing" here is not to be understood any co-action, or force upon the will, is a thing on all hands out of question. But whether by it be only to be understood a rational drawing by arguments (used in the ministry of the gospel) or a further powerful influence upon the soul, inclining it to be willing and obedient, that is the question. The patrons of a power in man's will to do what is spiritually good and necessary in order to eternal life and salvation understand it of the former only (of which the compelling mentioned in Luke 14:23 is to be understood, for the ministers of the gospel have no other power to compel). But in this regard, the drawing here mentioned is the act not of the servants but of the Master, not of the ministers but of the Father. It is more reasonably concluded that it here signifies a Divine power put forth upon the soul of man, by which it is made obedient to the heavenly call, and willing to close with the offer of Christ in the gospel. For though no such thing can necessarily be concluded from the word *draw*, yet it is easily concluded from the nature of the motion in coming to Christ--the soul's motion to a sublime, spiritual object to which no soul has any power of itself, such is the darkness of the human mind, the obstinacy of the will, the depravity of the affections unless it be illuminated and drawn by the Spirit of God. No soul is able of itself to discern spiritual things, so as to see the goodness and excellency that is in them, much less to move towards the participation of them.

(66) From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

His disciples at large, so called because they followed him partly to hear what he would say and partly to see his miracles, followed him no more. Many professors and seeming disciples of Christ may draw back and fall from their profession, though none who truly receive Christ shall fall away, but by the power of God they shall be preserved through faith unto salvation.

(67) Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

It is probable that some stayed besides the twelve, for it is said only that many of his disciples turned back. Nor was our Savior (who knew the hearts of all) ignorant what they would do, but he had a mind both to try them by this question and also to convince them that there was a false brother among them, whose wickedness (though it lay hid from them) would in a short time discover [reveal] itself.

(68) But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Peter, who is observed in the whole history of the gospel to have discovered [revealed] the hottest and quickest spirit, and to have been first in answering questions propounded to the twelve, replies, *Lord to whom shall we go?*, thereby teaching us that when under temptations to apostasy we should first consider what we shall get by it. The following words teach us that an abiding with Christ in a steady adherence to the truths of his gospel is the best choice that we can make.

(69) Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

We believe (says Peter) *and are sure*, both from what we have heard from thee and from the miracles which we have seen wrought by thee, *that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*; the very words by which St. Matthew (ch. 16:16) expresses that noble confession of his, which our Savior calls the rock upon which he would build his church. But notwithstanding this acknowledgment, which speaks the seeds of this faith now sown in the heart of Peter and the hearts of the rest, yet whoever considers the passages of the other evangelists after this will see reason to believe that their persuasion as to this was but faint, till Christ by his resurrection declared himself the Son of God with power.

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

Chosen, not to eternal life but to the great office of an apostle. I chose but twelve among you, Matt. 10, and of those twelve one is *διαβολος*, an accuser, or informer; a name by which the devil (who is the grand accuser of the brethren) is ordinarily expressed in holy writ.

(71) He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

This *he spoke of Judas Iscariot*, so called (as most think) from the name of the city where he lived, and to distinguish him from the other Judas, the brother of James, who wrote the Epistle that goes by his name and is a part of holy writ. For he *being one of the twelve*, chosen and sent

out with the rest to preach the gospel and empowered by miraculous operations to confirm the truth of it, was yet he who was to betray Christ, as we largely read in all the evangelists' relation of the passion. It is to teach us that no office to which God calls us, no gifts (except those of special grace) with which God blesses any man, can secure him an eternal happy state. Nothing can do that but a true saving faith in Jesus Christ, with the obedience of a holy life becoming the gospel of Christ.