

John 6:52

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Analysis

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? The verb 'emachonto' (stroved/contended) indicates intense, hostile debate. Their question 'pōs' (how) reveals they're taking Jesus literally, missing the spiritual reality. This interpretive blindness is typical of unregenerate thinking—spiritual truths seem foolish (1 Corinthians 2:14). Their offense at cannibalistic imagery exposes their carnal understanding. Jesus doesn't soften the offense but intensifies it (verses 53-58), because the offense is necessary. The cross itself is offensive to natural human reasoning. Reformed theology emphasizes that only the Spirit's regenerating work opens blind eyes to understand spiritual realities. Human wisdom cannot penetrate divine mystery; faith is required.

Historical Context

Levitical law strictly prohibited consuming blood (Leviticus 17:10-14), making Jesus's language especially shocking to Jewish hearers. Cannibalism was among the most serious taboos in both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. Jesus's metaphorical language about eating flesh and drinking blood would trigger visceral revulsion. Yet this is precisely the point—the gospel offends natural human sensibilities. The incarnation itself is offensive (God becoming flesh), as is the atonement (God dying for sinners). The early church faced accusations of cannibalism from Romans who misunderstood communion. John's audience would understand Jesus's words as metaphor for complete appropriation of Christ through faith, yet the offensive language remained deliberate.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why does Jesus use offensive language rather than clarifying His metaphor immediately?
2. What aspects of the gospel still offend natural human reasoning today?
3. How does this passage demonstrate that spiritual understanding requires divine illumination, not just intellectual effort?

Interlinear Text

Ἐμάχοντο οὖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι λέγοντες

strove therefore among themselves G3588 The Jews saying
G3164 G3767 G4314 G240 G2453 G3004

Πῶς δύναται οὗτος ἡμῖν δοῦναι τὴν σάρκα φαγεῖν

How can this man us give G3588 his flesh to eat
G4459 G1410 G3778 G2254 G1325 G4561 G5315

Additional Cross-References

John 9:16 (Parallel theme): Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.

John 10:19 (Parallel theme): There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.

John 6:41 (Parallel theme): The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (Parallel theme): But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org