

- I. Jesus speaks truth to the crowd about themselves and about Himself
  - A. John 6:51-59 . . . "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." [52] Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" [53] So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. [54] He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [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." [59] These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.
  - B. Introduction to a difficult passage
    1. Over the centuries the church has had its struggles in providing a clear, Biblically supported explanation of what this passage means.
      - a. We cannot even be sure Jesus' disciples accurately understand what Jesus was talking about, but we do know from John's writings that many of His disciples said in response to these words, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" (John 6:60).
      - b. The Greek word translated "difficult" means hard or harsh in a way that is so offensive that those who heard it were probably disgusted by it and would never imagine themselves doing it.
      - c. As a result of these difficult words, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore (John 6:66).
    2. What made Jesus' words so difficult and offensive to those who heard them for the first time? The offense was because they not only inferred a form of cannibalism, but a form of cannibalism that was to take place while Jesus was alive – and needed to be left alive so they could continue feeding off him.
    3. However, by the time John wrote his gospel, it is probable – though we do not know this for sure – that many of his Christian readers

would have understood these words from a eucharistic perspective. In other words, they would have read these words and understood that they were eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood by sharing in the bread and cup of communion.

4. We do know from the writings of the early church and the on-going teachings and practices of the Catholic and Orthodox churches that the most common and longest held understandings of this passage is a eucharistic understanding, that is, one where the communion bread in some mystical way becomes the body of Christ and the communion drink the blood of Christ.
  - a. And those who hold this understanding believe that in eating the bread and drinking the cup of communion they are mystically taking in some measure of Christ's life, which along with the other ways they take in the life of Christ feeds them spiritually, and in feeding them spiritually, strengthens them to live as Christ would have them live.
  - b. In other words, according to this early church understanding of John 6:53-58, communion is more than a remembrance of Jesus and what He has done to save us from our sin, it is also a means whereby God, through the bread and cup, mystically imparts some measure of the life of Christ into us to strengthen us spiritually in order to help us live the life we were saved to live.
  - c. And it is receiving a measure of the life of Christ in this form that is the reason the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches partake of communion every Sunday.
5. If you are Protestant or were raised in a non-liturgical church or have only been exposed to Protestant theologies, you may be wondering how the early church came to believe that a piece of bread and some wine or grape juice could become Christ's body and blood and impart the some measure of the life of Christ to us.
  - a. According to the writings of the early church, they got their understanding and belief from two primary sources –
  - b. First, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper – “Take eat, this is My body” ... and ... “drink from it all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant” (Matthew 26:26-29).
  - c. And second, the words of John 6:53-58, which were told to them by the disciples, and ultimately recorded by John.
6. Now you still may be thinking that this makes no sense. How does a piece of bread and a cup of wine or grape juice become the body and blood of Christ? And even if it doesn't actually become the body and

- blood of Christ, how does ingesting these two elements impart some measure of the life of Christ to us? Why do Christians believe this?
- a. These are good questions, and answering them is made more difficult for three reasons.
  - b. The first reason it is difficult to answer these questions is because the spiritual mysteries and mystical realities that are said to be part of communion are at best inferred in Jesus' words during the Last Supper and by His words recorded here in John 6.
    - (1) In other words, there is no clear scripture statement that confirms that the communion elements mystically become the body and blood of Christ, and just as mystically impart the life of Christ to us.
    - (2) And it is this lack of direct Biblical support that makes it so difficult to answer the above questions
  - c. The second reason it is so difficult to answer questions challenging the legitimacy of this belief and practice is the long standing animosity and distrust by Protestants of most things Catholic, and especially their theology, teachings, and practices. If the Catholics believe the bread and cup become the body and blood of Jesus, then just on principle, we won't.
  - d. The third reason it is hard for modern day Protestants to accept this teaching on communion is the belief that if science cannot demystify a mystery, it is probably not true.
7. There is one more introductory point I want to make about this portion of scripture.
- a. Though I myself hold this teaching lightly, and though I have never encouraged you to believe that the bread we eat and the juice we drink mysteriously becomes the actual body and blood of Christ, I do believe there is a spiritually mystical side to communion just as I believe there is a spiritually mystical side to baptism.
  - b. For me, this mystical side of communion is a mystery that is beyond my understanding and therefore beyond my ability to explain. But I also believe we ought to allow spiritual mysteries to remain mysteries, and accept them by faith. It is my opinion that our efforts at trying to explain mysteries has fed pride and division within the church, and nurtured cults outside the church.
  - c. Therefore, it is my opinion that we should not ignore this view of communion or seek to discredit the beliefs and practices of those who do hold this view. If God somehow imparts some measure

of Christ's life through the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, let us be wise enough to receive it. If He doesn't, let us be humble enough to accept those who believe He does.

8. However, a Eucharistic interpretation of these words from Jesus is not the only way to understand them, and today we will spend the rest of the teaching time looking at another way to understand what Jesus is saying. And this other way is not intended to be in competition with or in contradiction of the Eucharistic view, but in addition to that view.

### C. Pray

- II. Jesus says we must eat His body and drink His blood to have eternal life
  - A. John 6:52 . . . Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"
  - B. John 6:53-55 . . . So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. [54] He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.
    1. As I look over vs 51-58, it seems to me the subject of the immediate context is eternal life – according to Jesus' own words as found in:
      - a. Vs 51 . . . "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever . . ."
      - b. Vs 54 . . . "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."
      - c. Vs 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."
    2. In this same way, the subject of the larger context of vs 26-71, is eternal life – as stated by Jesus, with the exception of Peter's statement in vs 68.
      - a. Vs 27 . . . Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give to you.
      - b. Vs 39 . . . This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.
      - c. Vs 40 . . . For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

- d. Vs 44 . . . No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.
  - e. Vs 47 . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.
  - f. Vs 50 . . . This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.
  - g. Vs 51, 54, 58 – we have already read.
  - h. Vs 67-68 . . . So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" [68] Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.
3. In addition to the larger context of John 6, John says his purpose for writing this gospel is, "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). It seems to me that John's use of the word life in his statement is a reference to eternal life.
  4. My point here is that these words of Jesus about eating His flesh and drinking His blood are placed within an immediate and larger context whose focus is eternal life. Therefore, it is my opinion that when Jesus speaks of eating His body and drinking His blood, He is not only speaking of communion, He is also speaking of the actions and activities associated with believing in Jesus unto eternal life.
- C. For example, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves."
1. We know from 1 John 3:9-10 that "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] By this the children of God (*those who have the life of Christ in them*) and the children of the devil (*those who do not have the life of Christ in them*) are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.
    - a. In other words, no one who knowingly, willingly, and repeatedly commits the same sin or sins has life in them. They have not been eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ – no matter how many times they go to church and take communion.
    - b. 1 John 3:10 goes a step further and says that if you DO NOT purposefully, deliberately, and repeatedly practice righteousness, you are not born of God, that is, you do not have life in you, which means you are not eating and drinking Christ.

2. Staying in John's letter, we read in 1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." In other words, if you do not know God, you do not have life in yourself. And if you do not have life in yourself, you are not eating Christ's flesh or drinking His blood.
3. Paul put it this way in Romans 2:13, "for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." Here again, if you are not just before God, you do not have life in yourself.
4. My purpose in reading these verses is to show who is and who isn't eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking His blood, and who has and who does not have life within them.
5. Therefore, without diminishing the value of sharing in communion, taking communion is not enough just as faith without works is not enough, and just as knowledge of God without the accompanying actions is not enough, and just as reading your Bible without living according to what read is not enough, and just as giving tithes and offerings if given to be noticed by others is not enough, and just as worshiping God is not enough if you do not worship in spirit and in truth.
6. So what is enough to have life within us? What must we do to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus? According to the scriptures, here are some examples of eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus that contribute to life within.
  - a. Pursuing the kind of righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees – of Jesus day, is part of what we must do to have life within us (Matthew 5:20).
  - b. Being like the wise man who built his house on the rock, that is, who both listened and obeyed what Jesus said is part of eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Christ (Matthew 7:24-25).
  - c. Denying yourself, taking up your cross daily, and following Jesus is part of having the life of Christ within (Matthew 16:24).
  - d. Humbling yourself before God and man is part of what we must do to have life within us (Luke 18:9-14, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5).
  - e. Crucifying our flesh with its passions and desires, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit is part of what it means to have life within us (Galatians 5:22-24).
  - f. Being baptized and sharing in communion are also ways that add to the life of Christ within us.

7. John 6:56 . . . He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.
  - a. This is a powerful truth and helps us understand how we are to live according to Jesus' words in John 15:1-5, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit...[4] Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. [5] I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."
  - b. Though the abiding is mystical in nature, the application of abiding is very practical, for Jesus says here in John 6:56, that we will abide in Him and He is us if we eat His flesh and drink His blood. And we eat His flesh and drink His blood in the ways I just listed, along with other ways I did not list, but still feed us.
  
- D. John 6:57-58 . . . 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."
  1. When we eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood to have life within us, the life we have is not temporary or confined to this world, it is eternal. Therefore, the life within that begins in this world lasts forever!
  2. Therefore, may we not occasionally or as if on a diet eat and drink, but may we hunger and thirst, and may we run from evil and pursue godliness with utmost purpose and wise planning all day, every day.

### III. Conclusion

- A. John 6:59 . . . These things [Jesus] said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.
- B. Communion