

Eat the Flesh

John 6:47-60

By Scott Huckaby

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Let's first establish the context of this hard saying by Jesus... Our text is what Jesus said the day after He had fed the 5,000 up by the Sea of Galilee... one of the few stories recorded by all four gospel writers. And it was also, by the way, after Jesus had caught up to his disciples who were sailing across over to Capernaum by walking on the sea.

A crowd of people in Capernaum sought Jesus apparently looking for another free lunch. This caused Jesus to launch into a mini sermon about how they should seek the food which endures to everlasting life and not just that which perishes. And in His mini sermon He said, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger and he who believes in Me shall never thirst"* (John 6:35).

His message caused certain Jews to murmur against Him because they objected His claim of being the bread that came down from heaven. They knew Jesus came from Nazareth so this apparently meant that He couldn't have possibly come from heaven. At the root of their objection that they were dancing around was that Jesus was essentially claiming to be the Messiah and He was not what they expected of the Messiah.

John 6:47-60 – The Bread of Life

⁴⁷ *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.* ⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life.* ⁴⁹ *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.* ⁵⁰ *This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.* ⁵¹ *I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."*

⁵² *The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"*

⁵³ *Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.* ⁵⁴ *Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.* ⁵⁵ *For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.* 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 feeds*

on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ *This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

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 hard saying; who can understand it?"*

v47 – Who is it that has everlasting life?

This is the simple gospel... He who believes in Jesus has everlasting life. However, this begs the question...

What does it mean to believe?

That is, to trust in, rely on, and cling to Jesus. It is a trusting love, a relationship with Him.

How is this admonition to believe in Jesus unique?

It is astounding... No other prophet or holy man of the Bible ever said such a thing; "Believe in me and find everlasting life."

v48 – How is Jesus "the bread of life"?

Jesus repeated and continued the use of this metaphor. As bread is necessary for physical life, so Jesus is necessary for spiritual and eternal life.

What kind of things do we feed on besides food?

Everyone feeds on something or other. You see, one person getting a Sunday newspaper will feed on that! Another goes to frivolous amusements, and feeds on them. Another feeds upon their business, and upon the thought of their many cares! But all that is poor food. If you did but possess true spiritual life, you would know the deep necessity there is of feeding upon Christ.

v49-50 – How was the bread of Christ superior to manna?

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead: The manna Israel ate in the wilderness only gave them temporal life; what Jesus offers brings eternal life.

v51 – Is eating Christ’s bread from heaven a contradiction to simply believing?

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever: Jesus spoke in a figure of speech. The metaphor of eating and drinking was common in Jesus’ day, and pointed to a taking within one’s innermost being.

What error can people make in thinking Jesus was referring to the Lord’s Supper here?

Certainly, Jesus said these things before He instituted the Lord’s Supper as a memorial where we would remember His sacrifice for us. Jesus initiated the Christian practice of communion, the Lord’s Table as on the night before His crucifixion (Luke 22:14-23). It was celebrated among early Christians (Acts 2:42) and taught about in Paul’s letters (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

- Thus, some who connect this passage to communion mistakenly think that receiving the bread and cup of the Lord’s Table is essential for salvation, and that all who do are guaranteed salvation.
- With that said, the concept of internalizing Jesus Christ is related to that of communion. So, the truth of the need to internalize the sacrifice of Jesus expounds on the truth which the Lord’s Supper conveys.

With what does Jesus equate His bread from heaven?

The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world: Jesus plainly explained what He meant by bread in this context. That bread was His flesh, given for the life of the world. It was His soon-coming work on the cross when He gave His life as a sacrifice pleasing to God the Father and as a substitute for guilty sinners.

- To give one’s flesh can scarcely mean anything other than death, and the wording here points to a death which is both voluntary (‘I will give’) and vicarious (‘for the life of the world’).

What does the idea of receiving Jesus spiritually as one takes food internally preclude seeing Him as a great moral teacher?

It could not be a matter of receiving Him as a good or great man or noble martyr. It was receiving Him in light of what He did on the cross, His ultimate act of love for lost humanity.

v52 – Did those hearing Jesus understand what He was talking about?

How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?

It’s probable that the Jewish leaders willfully misunderstood Jesus at this point. He just explained that the bread was His body that would be given as a sacrifice

for the life of the world (John 6:51). They willfully twisted His words to imply a bizarre cannibalism.

v53-54 – How did Jesus respond to those who were not grasping what He was talking about?

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you: Jesus responded to their willful misunderstanding by speaking even more boldly, amplifying the point made at John 6:51 – His “flesh” was His laid-down life.

- Bread of life is a metaphor. Bread from heaven is a metaphor. Living bread is a metaphor. Bread of God is a metaphor. It doesn’t surprise that Jesus extends the bread metaphor to His actual, soon-to-come sacrifice on the cross.
- The crucified and risen Jesus must be received and internalized – metaphorically eating – or there is no true spiritual life, no eternal life.
- In the language Jesus spoke, “my flesh” could be another way of saying “myself.”

v55-56 – In what sense was the flesh and blood of Christ food indeed?

The sacrificed life of Jesus is food and drink for the hungry and thirsty soul. When we receive and internalize Jesus Christ and Him crucified for us, we truly abide in Jesus, and He in us (abides in Me, and I in him).

Do you think Jesus might have been intentionally offensive in His radical statements?

Perhaps offending some was the case in part. In response to those who twisted His words and meaning, He made the metaphors stronger, not weaker. He refused to back down from the truth: I am the bread of life, and the substance of that bread is His sacrifice on the cross, the giving of His flesh and blood. What He gave at the cross, we must receive.

v57 – What is the good news here?

He who feeds on Me will live because of Me: Those who do come to Jesus, believe upon Him, and feed upon His Word will find life. They will live, but not because they have found or earned the answer, but because Jesus has freely given what He won at the cross – *because of Me.*

- In eating and drinking, a man is not a producer, but a consumer; he is not a doer or a giver forth; he simply takes in.
- If an empress should eat, she would become as completely a receiver as the pauper in the workhouse.
- Eating is an act of reception in every case. So it is with faith: you have not to do, to be, or to feel, but only to receive.

v58 – What is our role in having eternal life?

He who eats this bread will live forever: Jesus offers us heavenly bread for eternal life, but we must eat it. Faith in Jesus is not compared with tasting or admiring, but with eating. Jesus says that we must have Him within us, and we must partake of Him.

- Seeing a loaf of bread on a plate will not satisfy our hunger.
- Knowing the ingredients in the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Taking pictures of the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Telling other people about the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Selling the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Playing catch with the bread will not satisfy our hunger.
- Nothing will satisfy our hunger and bring us life except actually eating the bread. He who eats this bread will live forever.

v59 – What does this reveal about where Jesus taught this lesson about Him being the bread of life?

These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum: This remarkable discourse of Jesus, starting at John 6:26 and including the back and forth with His listeners happened during a synagogue service. Jesus likely was given the freedom of the synagogue, the opportunity to speak to the congregation.

v60 – How did Jesus' disciples react to His teaching about eating His flesh?

This is a hard saying: This refers to that which is hard to accept, not to what is hard to understand. No doubt, these disciples (disciples in the broad sense, not the narrower sense) found Jesus' words somewhat mysterious, but it was the parts they did understand that were really disturbing.

Does this hard saying support the Catholic Church's doctrine of transubstantiation?

That is certainly what is claimed by the Catholic church who interpret this passage literally. This doctrine came out of the Council of Trent in the mid-1500's declaring that the church's consecration of the communion elements transforms them into the actual flesh and blood of Christ (though they retain the appearance, odor, and taste of bread and wine).

What is the problem with literal interpretation here?

Jesus made it exceedingly obvious what He meant just a few verses later:

John 6:63 – The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

Jesus specifically stated that His words are "spirit." Jesus was using physical concepts, eating and drinking, to teach a spiritual truth.

- Just as consuming physical food and drink sustains our physical bodies, so are our spiritual lives saved and built up by spiritually receiving Him, by grace through faith.
- Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood are symbols of fully and completely receiving Him in our lives.

Besides being flat wrong, what is the biggest problem the doctrine of transubstantiation should be rejected?

The doctrine of transubstantiation is viewed by the Catholic Church as a "re-sacrifice" of Jesus Christ for our sins, or as a "re-offering / re-presentation" of His sacrifice.

- This is directly in contradiction to what Scripture says, that Jesus died "once for all" and does not need to be sacrificed again (Hebrews 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18).
- Hebrews 7:27 declares, "Unlike the other high priests, He (Jesus) does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins ONCE for all when He offered Himself."

How do we know when to interpret a passage literally and when to take it symbolically or figuratively?

You look at the context. If we are to take it figuratively then there will be clues indicating that as there is in this case. Another good rule of thumb is to always take Scripture literally unless that just doesn't make sense. That idea is supported by this saying: If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense, or you'll end up with nonsense.

- God wants us to have a personal relationship with Him so that means we should be able to understand His Word with the help of the Holy Spirit and not having to seek out some human intermediary to tell what God means by what He said.

Alright, how do we apply this hard saying lesson that Jesus taught?

Those with eternal life trust that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross paid the penalty for their sin with every fiber of their being. And thus, out of gratitude for what He has done for us, we seek to please Him by applying everything He has taught us to our own lives.

How does having Jesus in our lives help us cope with the crazy things going on in this world?

He has given us wonderful promises that we need to remember. And what is the worst that can happen? We could die but we know that death is simply a transition to being with Jesus in heaven. We need to guard against being so in love with this world that we have no desire for being in heaven with Jesus.