

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EAT JESUS' FLESH AND BLOOD?

John 6:45-59

Jesus says some hard sayings in John 6. But it is helpful if we keep in mind Jesus' main theme is eternal life. Eternal life is not just knowing some facts about Jesus, but is a real personal relationship of union with Jesus by faith, receiving Him, knowing Him, abiding in Him, and committing yourself to Him.

1. WHAT EATING JESUS' FLESH AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD DOES NOT MEAN:

- Jesus has already claimed to be the Bread of Life, the One who satisfies our souls and quenches our spiritual thirst – John 6:35. Jesus is the Bread from Heaven given by God. Jesus says He will give His flesh for the world. When the people grumble about it, Jesus goes on to claim in a perplexing pronouncement that He is not only the Bread of Life, but that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood.
- This passage is not teaching cannibalism nor is it teaching the Roman Catholic doctrine of “Transubstantiation.” Since the Fourth Lateran Council of A.D. 1215, the Roman Catholic Church officially teaches that the wafer and the wine at the Mass become the actual Body and Blood of Jesus. This passage is the proof-text they use to support this teaching.
- Why this is not referring to physically eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood: 1. Cannibalism is repulsive and against God's law. Drinking or eating any blood was abhorrent – Leviticus 17:10-14; Acts 15:19,20. Notice the people's response when they were thinking literally and naturally – verse 52. 2. The people in the synagogue at Capernaum and the disciples would not have understood this as referring to the Lord's Supper because the Lord's Supper had not happened yet. Although believers later would see allusions here to the Lord's Supper. 3. Jesus is addressing unbelievers in this passage and the Lord's Supper is for believers. 4. Jesus uses the term “flesh” here, and all the Lord's Supper passages use the term “body” – for example Luke 22:19. 5. Jesus says the result of eating and drinking is eternal life. We do not receive eternal life by simply partaking of Communion. This would be a denial of the gospel and many other passages about salvation by grace and believing in Jesus – John 6:47.

2. WHAT EATING JESUS' FLESH AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD DOES MEAN:

- The manna that Israel ate in the wilderness sustained physical life for just a day. Even though they ate manna, they died – verses 49 and 58. Israel grumbled and complained even about Manna too – Numbers 11:4-6. But the Bread Jesus offers is so much more – verse 51. Jesus benefits us eternally. Jesus sustains us now and forever. Jesus is saying: *“I am that which every sinner needs and without which He shall surely perish”* – A.W. Pink, John.
- So what does Jesus mean when He said we have to eat His flesh and drink His Blood? The same thing He has been saying all along. We must believe in Jesus – verses 29, 35, 47. We must come to Jesus – verse 35, 40. We must listen and learn from Him – verse 45. By mentioning His flesh He is pointing to His sacrifice on the cross – verse 51. *“Faith is like eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus. Clearly the sacrifice of the cross is in His mind”* – Bruce Milne. How is faith like consuming Jesus? His death for our sins must be personally appropriated as one personally takes food to oneself. Jesus does not suddenly go against everything He has been saying to introduce some “hocus-pocus” or mysterious way of salvation. Believing, listening, learning, and coming to Jesus are what it means to have faith in Jesus. We enter into a life-transforming

union with Christ. *“To eat Christ – to appropriate Him by faith – is to remain united to Christ and be in communion with Him.” – Murray Harris, John.* We commune with Christ by abiding in Him by faith, feeding on His Word and Truth. Our life is sustained by Jesus. We live now in union with Him – Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27.

- Bread only does you good if you actually eat it! So this is a graphic, striking way to speak of faith in Jesus. Faith in Christ is necessary and is always personal. We feed on Christ in His Word by taking His truth into our mind and heart, meditating (chewing) on His promises, and believing on Christ. *‘We must eat the Bread to live....You either eat or you don’t. The same is true of believing on Jesus. You either believe Him or you don’t’ – Matt Carter, John.*
- We are to feed daily on Christ through His Word, the Bible. He is food for our souls. Only Jesus quenches our thirst. We still speak this way of chewing on an idea, or drinking in a lecture, etc. *“‘Eating and drinking’ stress that the commitment that is involved in faith is as real, irrevocable, and productive of results as any literal eating and drinking...that is what it means to eat Christ’s flesh and drink His blood. It is to commit yourself to Him. It is to accept His promise and pledge on your behalf and to repeat His promise, vowing to be His for eternity.” – James M. Boice, John.*

Concluding applications:

- You must believe in Jesus to have eternal life.
- Are you feeding on Jesus through His Word and communing with Him daily?
- Although Jesus is not speaking of actually eating His flesh and drinking His blood, we can apply this to the symbolism of the Lord’ Supper. We do commune with Jesus Himself personally, and we do remember His flesh offered on the cross, and His sacrificial blood poured out for us.
- Jesus is spiritually always present with His people.