

## “Through Slaughter To Splendor” (Jn. 6:51-59)

1. Offensive Claim (51-52)
  - a. Jesus, knowing their hearts (cf. 2:24-5; 6:15), had begun His conversation with a rebuke and a corrective (vv. 26-27). At this point He begins to issue an ultimatum which is offensive (51) and will become repulsive, grotesque, primitive, and anathema (53).
2. Outrageous Claim (53)
  - a. Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:10-11ff., & Deut. 12:16 prohibits consuming blood in meat – much more drinking it! Kosher butchering necessitates the draining of blood etc. so as to avoid violation of such an abominable thing clearly and forcefully forbidden by God!
  - b. Such a claim would turn their “quarreling” to vehement opposition.
  - c. However, did Jesus mean for such to be taken physically literally? Such literal practice w/ regard to an animal would be abhorrent but regarding a man’s blood such would be unspeakable. Such consumption was so abhorrent and seemingly anathema that the Christians even wrote instructions for the continued abstinence of such (see Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).
3. Oblivious Claims? (need for exegesis)
  - a. I will not condemn Catholics, Anglicans, nor Eastern Orthodox for adhering to trans or con-substantiation as I know their reasonings. We must approach passages like these with extra care.
  - b. Has Jesus used metaphorical language previously? Cf. 2:19; 3:5; 4:14, 32, 34; 5:24; 6:27; 7:38 to name only a few examples.
  - c. “Flesh and blood” = “Hebrew idiom referring to the whole person (cf. Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14).”<sup>1</sup>
  - d. Keener points out, “the expression “the blood of grapes,” meaning wine (Gen 49:11), which was essential to the Passover meal.”<sup>2</sup> And, as the ‘grapes of wrath’ (Rev. 14:19) is indicative of judgment, blood was indicative of violent death i.e. slaughter.<sup>3</sup> Jesus’ terminology is indicative of His own fleshly sacrifice i.e. His holy body and blood. To give up flesh and blood assumes sacrifice no matter how it is interpreted.
  - e. Isa. 53:5 = prophecy entailing literally flesh sacrifice paired with surrounding verses entailing spiritual accompaniment.
4. Objective Claims (54-59)
  - a. We are fallible – but Jesus is not – thus His claims are true (and salvific here!); thus we must examine them sufficiently.
  - b. Life or Death: V. 53 stated the negative and v. 54 states the positive regarding life and death. This salvific matter is stated in terms of eating and drinking of Jesus.
  - c. Metaphor: Has John shared Jesus’ speaking of such before? Yes!
    - i. In v. 47 He merely states belief in Him equates to eternal life.
    - ii. In ch. 3 Jesus likens eternal life to being born again.
    - iii. In 4:14 Jesus likens eternal life to an internal fountain of springing waters.
    - iv. In 5:24 Jesus says that belief in Him will resurrect a living person. How so?
    - v. In 11:25-26 Jesus states the same reality.
    - vi. In Ro. 14:17 we see another affirmation that literal is sometime spiritual not physical!

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<sup>1</sup> Köstenberger, A. J. (2007). [John](#). In *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (p. 451). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

<sup>2</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Jn 6:53). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>3</sup> See Meaning of Blood in Further Consideration below.

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- d. The word for “eats” is different<sup>136</sup> from that used previously, and it is used again in the following verses (56, 57, 58; elsewhere in the New Testament only in Matt. 24:38; John 13:18). It properly applies to somewhat noisy feeding (like “munch” or “crunch”). There is often the notion of eating with enjoyment (so in Matt. 24:38). It is a startling word in this context, and stresses the actuality of the partaking of Christ that is in mind. Some suggest that it points to a literal feeding and therefore to the sacrament. But this does not follow. There is no logic in saying: “The verb is used of literal eating. Therefore eating the flesh of Christ must mean eating the communion bread. (emphasis mine)”<sup>137 4</sup> **END PART 1**
- e. **BEGIN PART 2:** Not a ‘taste’ of Jesus but ‘savoring’ Jesus! Cf. Heb. 6:4-6
- f. Grottesque or joy in sacrifice? There is a paradoxical joy in sacrifice. Jesus was slaughtered to joyfully redeem us. Paul wanted to share in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:10). We die to ourselves in order to *truly* live. And to truly live is to feed on Christ – to abide in Him! →
- g. V. 55-56 “True” food or “real” food is that of abiding in Christ. Though real may not mean literal it literally means real sustenance of spiritual nutrition!
- h. Again, not literal camping out in Jesus. Such is no more literal that receiving Jesus into your heart = him residing in the aorta. Cf. 5:38.
- i. Some metaphors are so common, we don’t even consider that they are not literal e.g. Jn. 3:35. He doesn’t *literally* have the whole world in His hand.
- j. We are not to take literally eating the body of Jesus any more than literally see Him as wheat and yeast.
- k. Furthermore, v. 63 literally distinguishes *profitless flesh* from the *life-giving Spirit*!
- l. Objective claims such as these need not be taken in a wooden literal sense though they are conveying stark realities. Like Jesus said we must “die” to “live,” “It may be that to eat Jesus’ flesh and to drink his blood implies not only benefiting from his death but to some degree sharing or participating in that death. He says as much in the other three Gospels (see Mt 10:38–39; 16:24–25; Mk 8:34–35; Lk 9:23–24; 14:27; 17:33), and later in this Gospel he will make a similar point in illustrating the principle that “unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit” (see 12:24–25).”<sup>5</sup>
- m. Purpose for both physical and spiritual food: “Other foods, including the Old Testament manna, had certain value, but Jesus’ flesh and blood really are food and drink—they are really what food and drink should be in an ideal, archetypical sense (*cf.* Additional Note). They provide eternal life.”<sup>6</sup>
- n. Union with Christ = abiding in Christ. R. C. Sproul paraphrased Jesus: “You have to take all of Me, as if you were ingesting Me.”

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<sup>136</sup> The tense is different, too. The present ὁ τρώγων points to a continuing appropriation. Indeed, Ryle sees the whole point of the verb in this. He cites Leigh, that the word “noteth a continuance of eating, as brute beasts will eat all day, and some part of the night” and adds, “our Lord meant the habit of continually feeding on Him all day long by faith. He did not mean the occasional eating of material food in an ordinance.”

<sup>137</sup> That τρώγω does not differ significantly from ἐσθίω is indicated by the fact that in their reports of the activity of the people of Noah’s generation Matthew uses the former (Matt. 24:38) and Luke the latter (Luke 17:27). Similarly, in the quotation from Ps. 41:9 in John 13:18 we find τρώγω, but the LXX has ἐσθίω.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, L. (1995). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 335–336). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>5</sup> Michaels, J. R. (2010). *The Gospel of John* (pp. 396–397). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

<sup>6</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 298). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

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- o. V. 57. Living in Christ is also being joined to Him in His death and thus His blood was spilt so we could have eternal life.
  - p. V. 58. “By now it is clear that “this bread” is the flesh of Jesus “for the life of the world” (v. 51), and that eternal life is possible only through his death. The two questions, “How does he say now that ‘I came down from heaven?’” (v. 42), and “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52), have now been answered, but as we will see (v. 60), not to everyone’s satisfaction.”<sup>7</sup>
  - q. He is the Bread who offers spiritual life. He *is* the sign who comes from the Father. He is the living One who is in the Father. He is the way as the unblemished Lamb was slain for the world! He is the One in whom we believe unto eternal life – we believe in Him and thus are found to abide in Him and the Father.
  - r. It may seem obscene to speak in cannibalistic terms of drinking human blood but the literal act of such is considered abhorrent in Scripture. Jesus was speaking of eternal life and abiding in Him. He was also alluding to the necessity of His very real and physical bodily sacrifice! And that sacrifice was cruel, obscene, and primitive – but it is a beautiful triumph of justice, mercy, and grace for our salvation. Therefore, we who trust in it, abide in Jesus and unashamedly celebrate the slain Lamb who takes away the sin of the world!
5. Observance Claims (Partaking of Communion)
- a. This is the only passage which claims necessity to eat and drink ... unto eternal life yet all other salvific passages do *not* require such a view or described practice. It’s almost certainly one in a line of many metaphors which describe salvation or eternal life. →
  - b. “partaking” “trusting” = living by faith.
  - c. More people than the thief on the cross next to Jesus haven’t physically done so, yet he was promised paradise.
  - d. If transubstantiation or Consubstantiation is true: Protestants are either not saved or partake of literally body and blood of Christ unaware (w/o faith in such).
  - e. My mind cannot comport a hyper literal understanding of physical cannibalism which is an abomination. Furthermore, Jesus’ single perfect sacrifice was offered once and for all (Heb. 10:12)!
  - f. Symbolism always points to reality. Manna from God physically nourished the people yet they physically died. Jesus from above spiritually quickens and nourishes us to eternal life. The former manna could not prevent death and the latter Manna overcame it!

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<sup>7</sup> Michaels, J. R. (2010). [\*The Gospel of John\*](#) (p. 403). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

## Further Consideration

Meaning of Blood: “The primary symbolic reference of ‘blood’ in the Bible is not to life but to violent death, *i.e.* to life violently and often sacrificially ended.”<sup>20 8</sup>

“Munching” (3) In v. 54 and again in vv. 56, 57, 58, the verb for ‘to eat’ becomes *trōgō* (as opposed to *esthiō*, or more precisely its aorist stem *phag-*, the customary verb found elsewhere in this passage). In earlier Greek, *trōgō* was used for the munching of (especially herbivorous) animals; from the classical period on, the verb was also used of human beings. Some have taken its presence here as a sign of the literalness of ‘eating’ that occurs in the eucharist. It is far more likely that John injects no new meaning by selecting this verb, but prefers this verb when he opts for the Greek present tense (similarly in 13:18).<sup>9</sup>

Leon Morris summarizes vv. 57-58: “**57** Jesus comes back to his mission: he had been sent by “the living Father,” where the participle stresses the active quality of life that inheres in the Father. “Because of” is patient of two meanings<sup>138</sup> and probably both are in mind here. First of all, the life of the Son is bound up with that of the Father (it is 5:26 in another form): the Son has no life apart from the Father. And, second, the Son lives for the Father. To do the Father’s will is his very meat (4:34). This forms an analogy whereby the effect of feeding on Christ may be gauged. Notice that no longer does he speak of eating the flesh and drinking the blood, but simply of eating him. The tense is continuous. This way of putting it makes it clearer than ever that it is the taking of Christ within oneself that is meant by the metaphor of eating and drinking.<sup>139</sup> Anyone<sup>140</sup> who so receives Christ will have the life that comes only from Christ. And that person will live only for Christ; nothing else will matter. Notice that Christ alone has direct access to the Father. Believers receive life only mediately through Christ. ¶ **58** The thought of verses 49–50 is repeated in another form. Jesus’ opponents had expressed their respect for the manna, and, indeed, had challenged him to produce it. Jesus now reminds them that, wonderful though the manna had been, there had been no life-giving quality in it. Those who ate of it died like other people. But the bread of which he has been speaking, the bread that really came down from heaven,<sup>141</sup> is different. Anyone who eats of it will not die like others. That person will, to be sure, pass through the gate of death but will live eternally. It is likely that the singular “he who feeds” in contrast with the plural “Our forefathers” is significant. At any rate throughout the discourse the singular is regularly used

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word ‘Blood’ in Scripture* (Tyndale Press, 1947).

<sup>8</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#) (p. 296). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>9</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#) (p. 296). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>138</sup> The Greek is διὰ τὸν πατέρα. Many draw attention to Alexander’s dictum that he owed life to his father, but good life to Aristotle. δι’ ἐκεῖνον μὲν ζῶν, διὰ τοῦτον δὲ καλῶς ζῶν (Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 8).

<sup>139</sup> “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood” is identical in vv. 54, and 56. But this third time it is “the one who feeds on me.” In threefold repetitions John has the habit of introducing slight variations without appreciable change of meaning (see on 3:5). It is unlikely that eating the flesh and drinking the blood are to be understood in any other sense than “the one who feeds on me.” For the meaning Strachan aptly cites the Talmud (*Sanh.* 99a) for a saying that speaks of “eating” the Messiah. The Soncino translation (p. 699) employs the verb “enjoy,” which is what the passage must signify.

<sup>140</sup> κακεῖνος is emphatic.

<sup>141</sup> This is the tenth reference in this chapter to coming down from heaven. In the earlier nine οὐρανοῦ is invariably preceded by the article. There is no article here, though the meaning appears to be the same.

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to denote the person who is in right relationship with Jesus. Faith must be personal. There is more to it than being a member of a group.”<sup>10</sup>

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PC:

All orthodox believers partake of Jesus. All who know Him abide in Him and thus He in us. Not all believers agree upon the understanding of Jesus’ discourse on eating and drinking His flesh and blood and on the meaning of His instruction for His disciples to partake of the elements to remember Him. This is a crucial debate within Christendom because all sides of it realize that the interpretation and implications of these passages are profound and salvific! We will explore the text of Jesus’ discourse in John 6:51-59 and exegetically interpret such with fear and trembling so as to understand Jesus’ words with utter sobriety. This discourse emphasizes both negative and positive consequences (life or death) for heeding Jesus’ words and such results come down to whether or not we “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood.” What does it mean to eat and drink of His body and blood? That is the question and eternal life is in the balance of our adherence to it, according to Jesus’ own words. Spirit of Christ, lead us into truth for our salvation and Your glory!

PC for Part 2:

What does it mean to be “in Christ”? That description is the most used description of Christians in the New Testament. To be in Christ is a spiritual status of salvation. Jesus is the last Adam and the first Adam was our representative in whom all of mankind are ‘in.’ All sinners are in the first man. Likewise, all who trust in Christ are in Christ. All in Adam die due to sin; and all in Christ have eternal life because Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose for us! All who partake in Christ are His and are justified, being sanctified, and will be glorified forevermore. We will be perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus and thus perfectly fulfill the Law – which is to love the LORD with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength!

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<sup>10</sup> Morris, L. (1995). [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#) (pp. 336–337). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.