

“Eating” Jesus’ Flesh and “Drinking” His Blood

John 6.51-65

When Jesus called Himself the “bread of life,” Jews grumbled and argued (41,52). So Jesus used more graphic illustration of what believing in Him entails—*eating His flesh and drinking His blood!* Unbelieving Jews, some of Jesus’ disciples, and theologians get this wrong. Let’s get it right.

- Getting the flow: Illustrations of believing
 - Jesus: “I am the bread from heaven” – Jews grumble
Isn’t this Joseph and Mary’s kid?
 - Jesus: “The bread I will give is my *flesh!* – Jews riot
How can this man give us his flesh to eat?
 - Jesus: “Eat my flesh and drink my blood” – disciples grumble
Who can listen to this?
- Sharpening the focus: God gave His Son; Jesus gives His life
 - Eating flesh/drinking blood forbidden in the Torah
Gen. 9.4; Lev. 3.17; 17.10-14; Deut. 12.23; cf. Acts 15.20
 - Eating flesh/drinking blood refers to believing in Jesus
His ‘flesh and blood’ sacrifice gives life to all who believe
- Avoiding the fault: It’s about His death, not communion
 - Jesus didn’t institute the Lord’s Supper for another year!
 - Jesus foresees His death and calls them to believe in Him

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks
my blood has eternal life...*

John 6.54

1. John 6.51-65 raises a number of difficult issues. Perhaps the biggest is Jesus declaring that the only way for people to have eternal life is for them to ‘eat His flesh’ and ‘drink His blood’ (vv. 53-57)! Unless Jesus was encouraging His listeners to cannibalize Him (a ridiculous thought), He is providing a metaphor to illustrate some other action. What did Jesus mean by this statement? What *literal* action leads to eternal life in John? What other metaphors for this same action can you identify in John? (See 1.12-13; 3.3; 4.13-14; 6.27-29; 35 and 37; 40; 50-51.)
2. John informs us in v59 that Jesus said these things in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. What was a synagogue? Why might this be significant? What did the Old Testament law (the Torah—Genesis through Deuteronomy) teach about blood? See Gen. 9.4; Lev. 3.17; 17.10-14; and Deut. 12.23. Can you see why Jesus words created a problem for both unbelieving Jews and His disciples (vv. 52, 60)?
3. Roman Catholicism teaches that Jesus meant what He said literally (eating His flesh, drinking His blood); bread and wine at communion become the *real* flesh and blood of Christ – a sacrifice of His body and blood that is a source of eternal life. Why is this both biblically and historically impossible?
4. It is important to note that many of Jesus’ “disciples” struggled with His ‘eating flesh and drinking blood’ metaphor (60). Do you see the reason why Jesus responded the way He did in v62? What did Jesus identify ‘His flesh and His blood’ as in v58? If they are offended by His reference to Himself coming down from heaven, “what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again?” (NLT)
5. Calvinists use v65 (see also vv37, 39, 44) to teach that most people are *unable* to believe in Jesus (because it was not “granted” to them by God). Jesus calls on all to believe; does He command people to do something they cannot do? To whom does God ‘grant’ the *ability* to believe (who does He “draw”; cf. Jn. 12.32)? Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4.4); how should we pray for them?