

“Whoever Eats My Flesh and Drinks My blood ...”

John 6:41-59

The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." 42 And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.

47 Most assuredly [amen, amen], 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 [amen, amen], 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.

Jesus of Nazareth claims of that He, a Man, is the **Son of Man** of Daniel's prophecy and that He "came down from heaven" which in the OT Scriptures is only attributed to God.

Jesus of Nazareth says that He Himself is the **Bread of God** who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. [6:33]

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper it is extremely important that we understand the teaching about the Lord's Supper from John Chapter 6.

John Chapter 6 has **nothing** to do with the Lord's Supper!
And yet John Chapter 6 has **everything** to do with the Lord's Supper!

Pay close attention and I will try to make sense out of that contradictory statement. In my studied opinion, this is one of the **most important** lessons that you will ever learn from the Bible.

"He that has ears to hear let him hear!"

What does Jesus mean when He says,

"... unless...whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood ..." [53-54]

The reason that "John Chapter 6 has **nothing** to do with the Lord's Supper and **everything** to do with the Lord's Supper" is because of how men have twisted what Jesus said:

53 Most assuredly [amen, amen], 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.

The problem arises when men misinterpret what Jesus actually taught.

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

Men who are ignorant of the Scriptures and whose carnal thinking can only imagine a **literal** meaning in the words of Christ have tried to make the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine in the Lord's Supper to have some meaning from John 6. Men who take the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood to be literal have invented a way that that can be done.

If they can somehow change the physical bread and the actual wine from one substance into another it would then be possible to literally eat His flesh and drink His blood.

However, Jesus is not referring to the Lord's Supper in John 6 and I believe that you will understand that if you can grasp the importance of this lesson.

John wrote this gospel a generation after the other three evangelists. Even then the Lord's Supper was being abused by assigning special power to the bread and to the wine.

John writes five chapters [13-17] about the events in the Upper Room on that final night and does not mention the **institution** of the Lord's Supper.

The reason, I believe, that John does not mention the **institution** of the Lord's Supper is so that his readers will understand the **spiritual** meaning of the Lord's Supper.

My desire is to give you the **spiritual** interpretation of John's Gospel.

By that I mean that every word that Lord Jesus Christ spoke and every event, no matter how seemingly insignificant, was to show that He is the Sent One from God as promised in the OT Scriptures.

Many of the commentators miss so much because they have been blinded by presuppositions that certain OT prophecies are yet to be fulfilled in a restoration of national Israel even when the Bible is clear that these prophecies were fulfilled in Christ and in His church.

Just to remind you of one example, John the Baptist declared the end of the sacrificial system when he pointed to Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'

Now please stay with me because I intend to make an important case from John Chapter 6 with an "**argument from silence.**"

It is difficult and most often wrong to prove too much about a doctrine when the Bible passage is silent on that subject.

But I will make my case and you must decide if it is a valid argument.

Once more I must give Charles Alexander credit for this line of thought.

No other writer on John's Gospel that I have read has given the spiritual meaning of the text. In this case it is what John **does not** say that is extremely significant.

John makes no mention of the **institution** of the Lord's Supper. This is remarkable because John gives us more information about events in the Upper Room any of the other three gospels. John devotes five chapters to that single night.

Why does John **not** mention the **institution** of the Lord's Supper in chapters 13-17? The answer is found in Christ's discourse on the Bread of Life recorded only by John in Chapter 6.

Jesus makes a **seven-fold** declaration [seven being the number of perfection and completeness in the Bible] that He Himself is the **Bread of God** that must be eaten by faith to the obtaining of eternal life. Cf. 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, and 58.

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."

53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly [Amen, amen], 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."

In four of these verses, the Lord adds the figure of **drinking** to eating; and the first of these four, verse 53, uses the "double amen." Various translations have it "Truly, truly; Verily, verily; Most assuredly, etc."

Let me remind you of the importance of the "double amen." It always signifies something that the Lord is about to say that is vital to our understanding of His person.

Then Lord must intend something profound to have so emphasized the necessity of "eating and drinking" of His flesh and of His blood.

Why "eating and drinking?" Go to the OT and see how significant a role that eating and drinking played in the Hebrew culture.

What happens when we physically eat and drink anything?

In the **physical** sense our body assimilates food and drink and processes it. Whatever we eat and drink becomes part of us. It is the most intimate thing that you can do.

In the **spiritual** sense when we "eat and drink" Christ's flesh and blood we are living on the **doctrine** of Christ. Jesus Christ is part of us as He indwells His people through the Holy Spirit.

Here is the "**argument from silence.**" When Jesus makes these statements about "eating and drinking" of His flesh and of His blood the Lord's Supper had not yet been instituted. It is my belief that the **omission** of any mention of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper by John is a deliberate effort to dispel any notion of **efficacy in the substance** of the bread and the wine.

The notion that there is some carnal efficacy in the substance of the bread and the wine is one of Satan's most destructive errors in all the history of the church.

John, who wrote a generation after the other gospels were already in circulation, in the closing years of the first century, saw the antichristian error of the abuse of the elements of the bread and the wine and purposely omitted any reference to them.

John gives us the **doctrine** of the last ordinance as the Lord presents Himself to the unbelieving nation as the Bread of God who came down from heaven.

Jesus makes this very clear in verse 63, “**It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.**” The words spoken by Christ are “**spirit and life.**”

Here Jesus is answering the question of the Jews, “**How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?**” [52], and the bewilderment of His disciples in verse 60, “**This is a hard saying; who can understand it?**”

To further establish the design of John’s Gospel please recall that neither does John give a specific reference to the actual **baptism** of Christ. The record of His baptism is given by the other three evangelists but not by John and for the same reason that John omitted institution of the Lord’s Supper.

Just as many have made the bread and wine into idols, as the “adore” the wafer, so has baptism been declared by many to be “necessary” for salvation.

Why then is this message was one of the most important lessons that you will ever learn from the Bible?

To quote Charles Alexander, “He who does not see in this singular fact an inspired and silent protest against the sacramentalism, which by the art and craft of the Evil One was destined to overwhelm the historic church in the course of the ages, must not be able to see very far. Antichrist has used baptism and the Lord’s Supper to supplant the Word by substituting the sacramental virtues of the font and the altar, and the error rages in our day with unabated strength far beyond the Pope’s domain.”

Even the great Martin Luther could not divest himself of a sacramental value in the bread and wine even though Zwingli confronted Luther with his error.

The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is that the human priest has been given the power to bless the bread and the wine and that the bread and the wine change in **substance** into the body and the blood of Jesus.

This is called “**transubstantiation**”. They refer to John 6 for support. See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Doubleday, 1995, pages 393-394.

A step below “transubstantiation” is “**consubstantiation**” which says that while the bread and the wine do not substantially change that the “real presence” of Christ is in the elements. Frankly, I see little distinction between the two notions.

We, as Baptists, believe that the Lord’s Supper is a **memorial** service and the elements are only **symbolic**. When Jesus instituted the Supper, He was before them in His body and said as He broke the bread; “This is My body ...”

It is absurd to think that He meant that the bread that He was holding in His hand was His actual body. The bread remains bread and the wine remains wine!

So dear Christian when Jesus says in the institution of the Lord's Supper, "This is My body ... This is my blood", [see Matthew 26:26-28] it is made clear here in John 6 beyond any doubt that His words are to be understood only in a **spiritual** sense, verse 63.

The strength of this interpretation is reinforced when we recall that when Christ said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and [even] the Spirit ..." that Jesus was **not** referring to the baptismal water but to the prophetic emblem of the Holy Spirit taken from Ezekiel 36:25-26, where water and Spirit are conjoined in one statement making clear that the one is the symbol of the other.

In my understanding it is of the **highest import** that you understand the **spiritual** meaning of what John records. The legalists and the hyper literalists have nearly ruined any hope that many will see the **sufficiency** of the life and work of Jesus Christ.

One of Satan's greatest weapons is to take something good and twist the true meaning to the point that it becomes an idol!

Only grace will allow a sinner to throw out every action and idea that presumes to gain merit from God. All our righteousness is in Christ Jesus. Human merit is hard to eradicate!

Isaiah in 64:6 says this about our personal "righteousness,"

**But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;**

As we worship Christ in the memorial Supper may you have a clearer understanding of "eating and drinking" the Lord's body and of His blood.

The true "eating and drinking" the Lord's body and of His blood is to dwell on the **doctrine** of Christ and to make His Word that which sustains you in life until you die. The Lord's Supper is given to the church to remember His death until He returns in glory and judgment at the end of this present age.

And so John Chapter 6 has **nothing** to do with the Lord's Supper and **everything** to do with the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper

This local body of Christ has studied the Scriptures and the majority decided to follow the Lord's instruction by using wine and unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper.

The use of wine and unleavened bread should be no more of a question than believer's baptism by immersion. It is clearly what the Bible teaches.

However, if anyone has scruples about the use of wine there will be the traditional unfermented juice in the center of the tray. That said I am aware that some of our local body does not agree that we should use wine. I do not believe the use of unleavened bread is questioned.

Since the vote of this body was not unanimous nor were there too many of our members present when the vote was taken, I think it is important for us to be reminded about what the Scripture says about **“matters of conscience.”**

There is no intent to offend anyone in the use of wine. However, one of our sisters pointed out that some may be offended by **not** using wine in the Lord’s Supper!

Whatever the Lord commands cannot be a legitimate “matter of conscience”. However, the use of alcohol in any form may be a “matter of conscience.”

In matters of conscience we are commanded to respect one another. In Romans 14 we are instructed about how strong believers and weak believers are to relate to one another. Neither is there any intent to assign anybody as a strong or weak Christian.

Romans 14:1-4

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

No one is being urged to do anything against his or her conscience.

Romans 14:23, **But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.**

So we will observe the Lord’s Supper, each according to his or her conscience, and not judging nor despising our brother or sister.

This lesson is extracted from the sermon on John 6:41-59 preached at Vineland Park Baptist Church on September 12, 2004.

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