

The Bread of Life Discourse was Offensive to the Jews

John 6:52-59

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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.”*

Background Notes

Our Lord’s “Bread of Life Discourse” was given in association with His miracle of the feeding of five thousand. It was not given in the same location as the miracle, but it was given to many of the same people. The crowds who had participated in the miracle had come looking for the Lord, and they found Him at Capernaum.

The Lord gave this discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum: *“These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum” (v59)*. If you go to Capernaum today, you will see the remains of a beautiful synagogue that is dated to the 3rd-4th century AD. However, not too long ago, archeologists excavated beneath that synagogue and discovered the floor of the 1st century synagogue - the very synagogue in which our Lord gave this discourse!

In addition to the crowds who had participated in the miracle of the feeding of five thousand, the Jewish leaders at Capernaum were also part of the audience of the discourse. These leaders are referred to as “the Jews” in this chapter: *“The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”(v52)*. These Jewish leaders were opposed to the teachings and ministry of our Lord. In fact, the term “the Jews” throughout John’s gospel is generally an indication of the opposition party.

In verse 52 we see that the Jews were quarreling among themselves. The word that is used here indicates a hot and stormy debate. They were arguing over the meaning of the Lord’s controversial statement in verse 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.”*

What did the Lord mean by that statement? The Jews were having a heated discussion over the meaning. “Certainly this man Jesus didn’t mean cannibalism? Why that would certainly be against our law?” Leviticus 3:17 emphatically said, *“you shall eat neither fat nor blood.”*

So what did the Lord mean by this controversial saying? The Lord didn't answer their argument, but rather He amplified His contentious statement! *"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"(v53).*

Notice that the Lord prefaced His statement with "verily, verily," or "truly" "truly" or *"Most assuredly, I say to you."* This, by the way, is the fourth time that the Lord used this introduction to a statement in the Bread of Life discourse, and it emphasized that what follows was very important. *"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."*

Although the Lord was saying it to those Jewish leaders and the people gathered there in that day, the same holds true today. What does it mean to "eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood"? We'll discuss that in our doctrinal points.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. To partake of Christ's body and blood is the key to salvation.

Verses 53-54: *"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. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

To "eat the flesh of the Son of Man," and to "drink His blood" means to **believe in Him**. Look back at verse 47, compare it with verse 54, and follow the logic. Verse 47: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."* Verse 54: *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life."* If to believe is to have eternal life, and if to eat My flesh and drink My blood is to have eternal life, then it is quite logical to say that to *"eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood"* means to **believe in Him**.

Why did the Lord use this offensive imagery of "eating His flesh" and "drinking His blood?" Why didn't He just say "believe"? Well, he did say "believe" in verse 47 (and many other times). But to convey the **kind** of believing that He meant, He used the figure of eating and drinking. When you eat or drink something, it becomes part of you. In addition, you must eat or drink for yourself. No one else can eat or drink for you.

In the same way, you see, the key to salvation is to **partake of Christ** - not just believe about Him in your head, but to personally **commit** yourself to Him. **Believe** that He died for your sins, and He died as your substitute on the Cross. This is what it means to "appropriate" Christ, or "partake" of Christ. To partake of Christ's body and blood is the key to salvation.

This passage of Scripture does not have anything to do with communion, or the Lord's Supper. It has to do with the Lord's **salvation**. It has to do with believing. It might be confusing to you when you first read this passage, because in

the Lord's Supper we partake of the symbols of the Lord's body and blood as we remember His death as the basis for our salvation. But **partaking of communion or the Lord's Supper does not give you eternal life.**

If this passage was talking about the Lord's Supper, you could build a strong biblical case that we receive eternal life by taking communion: "*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*"(v54). But this passage is not speaking about the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is specifically for people who are already believers. The Bread of Life Discourse was addressed to unbelievers. To partake of Christ's body and blood is the key to salvation.

2. To partake of Christ's body and blood is the key to sanctification.

To be sanctified means to be "**set apart for God's Holy use.**" We use the term "sanctification" to refer to spiritual growth and maturity, to becoming more holy, and to become more Christ-like.

What is the key to sanctification? Look at verses 55-57 once again, "*For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.*" Partaking of Christ's body and blood is the key to sanctification. We not only partake of Christ for salvation, we continually "feed on Christ" for sanctification.

To convey **both** of these aspects of partaking in Christ, two different words and two different verb tenses are used in these verses. In verse 53 the word "eat" is in the Greek aorist, or past tense, indicating that a person partakes of Christ **once** for **salvation** – a definite act. From verse 54 on, a different word is used for "eat." This word means "to chew on," and it is in the present tense – meaning it is a continual action. It refers to the teaching that we must continually feed on Christ for sanctification.

How do we "continually feed on Christ"? Primarily, by feeding on His Word. Meditate on Scripture, and you will be feeding on Christ. Meditating on Scripture doesn't mean just a little devotional time or a few minutes per day - that's not exactly partaking or feeding on Christ. We need to spend some time in the Word of God, and we need to think about it - meditate on it. To partake of Christ's body and blood is the key to sanctification.

Practical Applications

1. Expect to be misunderstood by unbelievers.

In this chapter, the unbelievers misunderstood what the Lord was saying to them. The Lord was talking to them about a most important issue; salvation, but they didn't understand.

Unbelievers will misunderstand us, too. In fact, we should **expect** to be misunderstood by unbelievers! 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us: "*whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of*

Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” The people who were listening to the Lord were blinded, and they didn’t understand what the Lord was saying.

This is still true today. A few years ago, a high school girl in our town became a Christian. Her college-aged sister was not a Christian, so the new Christian brought her older sister to me, hoping that I could talk to her and lead her to Christ. The college age girl knew that there had been a change in her sister’s life, and she wanted what her sister had. I explained the way of salvation in as simple way as possible, but she didn’t understand, and she was still an unbeliever when she went away. But when I saw her a few months later, she had become a Christian! She said, “All of a sudden it began to make sense!” The Holy Spirit had removed the blinders. The way of salvation became clear, and she became a believer!

Maybe this story will be an encouragement for you to keep sharing the good news, even though people at first may not understand. In fact, we should expect to be misunderstood by unbelievers. That’s the way it is! We don’t purposely confuse things and we don’t try to be misunderstood. We try to explain the Good News as simply as possible. We try to communicate, but we will be misunderstood. Expect to be misunderstood by unbelievers.

2. You can live forever!

“This is the bread that came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” (v58).

From your high school history classes, do you remember the Spanish explorer, Ponce de Leon, who discovered Florida? Do you remember that he was actually looking for the “Fountain of Youth”? He never found it! If Ponce de Leon had read the Bread of Life Discourse, he would have found the secret for living **forever!**

Do you want to live forever? You can - if you partake of the Bread of Life, who came down from Heaven. Trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and you can live forever!