
Eat My Flesh and Drink My Blood

Mike Gendron

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Are these words of Jesus from John 6:53 to be taken literally or figuratively? The Roman Catholic Church teaches the context of John chapter six is to be interpreted in a literal sense and thus believes Jesus is giving absolute and unconditional requirements for eternal life. The Vatican's literal interpretation forms the foundation for its doctrine of transubstantiation — the miraculous changing of bread and wine into the living Christ, His body and blood, soul and divinity. Each Catholic priest is said to have the power to call Jesus down from the right hand of the Father when he lifts the wafer and whispers the words "*Hoc corpus meus est.*" Catholics believe, as they consume the lifeless wafer, they are actually eating and drinking the living body and blood of Jesus Christ.

In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.¹

The partaking of the Eucharist is essential to their salvation and a doctrine they must believe and accept to become and remain a Catholic.

The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation.²

Prior to consuming the Eucharist, Catholics worship the wafer as if it were Jesus Christ being lifted up.

"Worship of the Eucharist. In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord." ³ "The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself." ⁴

If priests indeed have the exclusive power to change finite bread and wine into the body and blood of the infinite Christ, and, if indeed, consuming His body and blood is necessary for salvation, then the whole world must become Catholic to escape the wrath of God. On the other hand, if Jesus was speaking in figurative language, then this teaching becomes the most blasphemous and deceptive hoax any religion could impose on its people. There is no middle ground. Therefore we are left with a question of utmost importance: Was the message Jesus conveyed to the Jewish multitude to be understood as literal or figurative? There are at least seven convincing biblical reasons why this passage is to be taken figuratively.

Counterfeit Miracle

No where in the Bible do we ever see a miracle performed where the evidence indicated no miracle had taken place. Yet, after the priest performs his super natural act of transubstantiation, the wafer and wine look, taste, smell and feel the same. It has the appearance of a counterfeit miracle because no noticeable change has occurred. When Jesus changed water into wine, all the elements of water changed into the actual elements of wine.

**Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."
They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into**

wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. 5

Drinking Blood Forbidden

The Law of Moses strictly forbade Jews from drinking blood. A literal interpretation would have Jesus teaching the Jews to disobey the Mosaic Law. This would have been sufficient cause to persecute Jesus. 6

Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. 7

Biblical Disharmony

When John 6:53 is interpreted literally it is in disharmony with the rest of the Bible. "*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you,*" gives no hope of eternal life to any Christian who has not consumed the literal body and blood of Christ. It opposes hundreds of Scriptures that declare justification and salvation are by grace through faith in Christ.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. 8

It Produces A Dilemma

It is stated that the "eating and drinking" in verse 6:54 and the "believing" in verse 6:40 produce the same result - eternal life. If both are literal we have a dilemma. What if a person "believes" but does not "eat or drink"? Or what if a person "eats and drinks" but does not "believe?" This could occur any time a non-believer walked into a Catholic Church and received the Eucharist. Does this person have eternal life because he met one of the requirements but not the other? The only possible way to harmonize the interpretation of these two verses is to accept one as figurative and one as literal.

It Was Figurative in the Old Testament

The Jews were familiar with "eating and drinking" being used figuratively in the Old Testament to describe the appropriation of divine blessings to one's innermost being. It was God's way of providing spiritual nourishment for the soul (Isaiah 55:1-3; Ezekiel 2:8, 3:1).

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty. 9

Jesus Confirmed It To Be Figurative

Jesus informed His disciples there were times when He spoke figuratively and He often used that type of language to describe Himself. The Gospel of John records seven figurative declarations Jesus made of Himself: "the bread of life" (6:48), "the light of the world" (8:12), "the door" (10:9), "the good shepherd" (10:11), "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "the way, the truth and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1). He also referred to His body as the temple (2:19).

"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. 10

His Words Were Spiritual

Jesus ended this teaching by revealing "*the words I have spoken to you are spirit*" (6:63). As with each of the seven miracles in John's Gospel, Jesus uses the miracle to convey a spiritual truth. Here Jesus has just multiplied the loaves and fish and uses an analogy to teach the necessity of spiritual nourishment. This is consistent with His teaching on how we are to worship God. "*God is Spirit and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24). As we worship Christ He is present spiritually, not physically. In fact, Jesus can only be bodily present at one place at one time. His omnipresence refers only to His spirit. It is impossible for Christ to be bodily present in thousands of Catholic Churches around the world. When Jesus is received spiritually, one time in the heart, there is no need to receive him physically, over and over again in the stomach.

Jesus began the discourse by saying whoever comes to Him and believes in Him will not hunger or thirst. Thus the eating and drinking are symbolic of coming to Him in faith.

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. 11

There is another serious problem for Catholics who insist on a literal interpretation. They must realize that after they have consumed the physical body of Christ, it then decomposes during the digestive cycle. This goes against God's promise to never let His Holy Son see decay (Acts 2:27).

In conclusion, it is clear from the Scriptures that the words referring to the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Jesus are to be understood in a spiritual or symbolic sense and not literally. Worshipping a wafer carries the same consequence for Catholics as worshipping a golden calf did for the Israelites. 12

Footnotes:

1 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, (San Francisco, CA, Ignatius Press, 1994) para. 1374

2 Ibid 1129

3 Ibid 1378

4 Ibid, para. 1324

5 The Gospel of John, Chapter 2, verses 8-11

6 The Gospel of John, Chapter 5, verse 16

7 Leviticus 17:10-11

8 Ephesians 2:8-9

9 Jeremiah 15:16

10 John 16:25

11 John 6:35

12 Exodus 32

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