

FEED ON JESUS FOR ETERNAL LIFE

John 6: 52-59 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Barna Group is a Christian research organization that provides data and insights that affect our faith, culture, and ministry today. Barna reports that 70% of high school students who enter college as professing Christians will leave college with little to any faith. Sadly, they report that these students usually do not return to their faith, 80% of those reared in Christian homes and in church will be disengaged from Christianity by age 29. Why is this happening? For millennia, each generation has had the younger generation interacting with the older generation. But today, we have distinct cultures between the generations and little interaction taking place. Life events occurred in past generations and individuals processed those events with family, classmates, colleagues, or church members. Those were the support groups and processing centers. In today's electronic world, the processing group is usually a selected group of "friends" or by finding truth by Google searching, and accepting those results as true. These digital influences now dictate the meaning of words and the methods of expression. This has separated the older and younger generations too often and has isolated the two cultures of older and younger from each other.

Patterns of thinking built on belief in the foundation of God's Word and God as Creator with God's moral standard has shifted to the believed assumption that humans exist by chance, and that each of must determine our own value system. This disconnect has birthed a humanistic foundation for society today, changing the meaning of words. The most notable redefinition is tolerance, meaning that all values, beliefs, lifestyles, and truth claims are equal. Removing God and the Bible as our cultures reference points means everyone can now say, "Your thoughts aren't as good as mine; your beliefs are less than mine, as everyone has the right to their individual system of truth, and that there is no objective foundation of truth revealed by God. This tolerance definition applies to all values, beliefs, and lifestyles, saying all lifestyles are equally valid. This is called multiculturalism. This new view of truth must embrace all perspectives as equally true. Sociologists call this a quantum shift, meaning we as believers must keep declaring God's Word applies to every generation, including 2024. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the same in every generation. Salvation is still today, only by grace through faith in the person and completed redemptive sacrifice of Jesus, God the Son.

Now today, preaching the Gospel to many without a biblical foundation means when we look at a stretching text such as these words of Jesus in John 6:52-59, people are prone to say—the meaning is whatever you make it. Here in our text, Jesus is again using a word picture, a metaphor, in verse 54 to tell us that the eating and drinking He is speaking of is the only means of receiving eternal life. Since we know from Jesus' words in John 1:11-12 that believing and receiving Him are the means of having eternal life, and of being born again spiritually in John 3:1-8, then we know how to interpret this new idiom of speech about eating Jesus' flesh, the Bread of Life, and drinking His blood. We know Jesus is using another figure

of speech to teach His disciples a deeper understanding about believing and receiving Him as Savior. This should help us today to come to understand verse 54 as Jesus said, “Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...”

Therefore, let’s examine what Jesus meant and means by His words and what He never meant. Today, God wants us to keep our finger on the text, His Word, and to come to understand in an even deeper metaphor what it means to believe and receive Jesus into our hearts and to have fellowship and communion with Him, being joined to Christ, and being in union with Jesus. Let’s see what Jesus never meant first and then attempt to take in what He meant by speaking in this figure of speech of eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

WHAT DID JESUS NEVER MEAN BY CALLING US TO EAT HIS FLESH AND DRINK HIS BLOOD? (I.)

Notice Jesus’ words, v. 54, 7“Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” There are two major misinterpretations that Jesus doubtless was not calling His disciples to do or believe or even to conceive of. **First, Jesus was not teaching His disciples to bite into his earthly body, cannibalism, or to latch onto His body and seek to drink or eat His very life’s blood.** Drinking blood was especially abhorrent and repulsive to the Jews as the law of Moses forbids eating blood. (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:10,11,14, Deuteronomy 12:16, I Samuel 14:23, and James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church told the Jerusalem Council to not stand in the way of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ, but to remind them of four prohibitions—“Acts 15:20/29, “that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” So both the Old and New Testament forbid the eating of blood. The classic Old Testament passage is Leviticus 17:10,11 is God’s command, “If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.” So, don’t think Jesus was going against His own word when He said in John 6:54, “Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.”

The second misconception is believed by millions of people who think they have eternal life by commemorating the body of the Lord broken and the blood of the Lord shed on Calvary’s cross.

Back in 1973, I had a dear pastor friend I love tell me in an open meeting called Key ’73. We were attempting in the greater Bloomington-Normal twin cities in Illinois to join together in a crusade to bring in Billy Graham for a crusade. As I was leading the meeting, this pastor stood up and said, “Pastor Carlson, I get tired of hearing you say that there is only one way for us to be saved, by repenting of sin, believing, and receiving Jesus. There are three ways, You keep omitting that we can also receive Jesus by taking the Lord’s Supper and through being baptized.” It’s not true. Why can we be sure that Jesus wasn’t speaking about taking communion or the Lord’s Supper. Let me give you at least seven reasons Jesus wasn’t trying to speak of the Lord’s Supper. Now be sure, when we take communion, we are remembering the Lord’s sacrificial

death for us on the cross, but there are clear reasons why we can deduct from Jesus' words that He was not trying to prefigure the Table of the Lord being celebrated after the cross. Here are these reasons. **(1) This taking of the Lord's Supper as what Jesus meant is another attempt to prove Jesus had a physical meaning in what He said.** Seeing Jesus say the Lord's Table is how we eat His flesh and drink His blood is finding one more way to miss the spiritual truth. This was what this Capernaum crowd was arguing and wrangling over, when they disputed in verse 52, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Unbelief never understands the mystery of salvation, so unbelief scoffs and says, "This is a sheer impossibility." If taking communion in church or taking what some call the Eucharist in church is the key and medicine for reaching immortality, that is saying something Jesus never meant. Jesus wasn't saying when we submit to a church rite or ritual, we win eternal life. Many people believe that eating the unleavened bread or drinking the cup means that the pastor or priest is changing the elements into Jesus' body and blood. But no! Where is Jesus today? He is at the right hand of His Father on high from whence He shall come soon to judge the living and the dead.

(2) If eating His flesh and drinking His blood were His Supper, why was Jesus discussing this with unbelieving Jews, before He shared the command to take the Lord's Supper the night before Calvary? Jesus first introduced taking the elements of His body and blood at the Last Supper. **(3) The eating of Jesus' body and drinking of His blood was a human analogy to convey a spiritual truth.** This metaphor was what Jesus used with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. **(4) Since Jesus made this eating and drinking absolutely essential for eternal life, He made no exceptions.** If Jesus was speaking about a church ordinance or as some call it, a church sacrament, then everyone, whether born-again or not is spiritually dead, and hell bound. This would include Old Testament saints, the thief on the cross, and thousands of people who have trusted Christ for salvation in hospitals, after accidents, or soldiers getting saved in a foxhole before dying. Jesus was not excluding people in His words.

(5) Jesus declared in John 6: 50, "This is the Bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it, and not die." Eat is in the Greek aorist tense, what we call the past tense. To eat the Bread of Life is in a once for all action of receiving Jesus, meaning the one who so partakes has inside himself life eternal. In verse 51, again Jesus used the past tense to say, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats (past tense—if anyone has eaten) of this bread, he will live forever." Taking the Lord's Supper is a repeated thing, not a once for all ritual. The early church (Acts 2:46) took the Lord's Supper daily. Whatever Jesus is speaking of is a once for all eating or drinking. **(6) At the Last Supper, Jesus never called the communion bread or the symbol of His body, "My flesh."** In Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, and Luke 22:19, Jesus said each time, "Take eat, this is My body, broken for you or which is for you." In Corinthians 10:15, Paul said, "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" In I Corinthians 11:24, Paul quoted Jesus after breaking the bread, saying, "This is My body which is for you." Jesus never once said "My flesh" in the Last

Supper. Strangely, Jesus made it clear in John 13:26 that though He was standing there in His flesh, He was not giving them His flesh. He identified His betrayer saying, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.” **(7) To believe Jesus was speaking in John 6 of the Lord’s Table, then he must believe that the morsel of bread as Jesus called it in John 13:26 as well Jesus called what they were to drink the cup--turns into the very body and blood of Christ.** Here in John 6:57, Jesus said, “Whoever feeds on Me, He also will live because of Me.” Does this miracle of eternal life happen when we take the Lord’s Supper, and must the elements become literally the body and blood of the Lord? Is the pastor or priest serving the elements to change the elements into Jesus’ physical body and blood? To take Jesus’ words in John 6 literally is to make the same mistake the Capernaum crowd in John 6:59 made, who would not believe Jesus.

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN BY CALLING US TO EAT HIS FLESH AND DRINK HIS BLOOD?

Let me read it to you again, and as you listen, remember not to think physically, as Nicodemus, or the Samaritan woman, or this Capernaum crowd. Listen to Jesus deeply calling to you and me to say we must intimately and personally eat spiritually of His flesh and drink spiritually of His blood to have eternal life. Listen as I read John 6:52-59. Now I want to comment on each of these eight verses and attempt to tell us what Jesus spiritually meant.

- v. 52 – “The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” The Jews drew the right conclusion that Jesus wanted them to eat His flesh. Jesus said this earlier in John 6:35,48, saying, “I am the Bread of Life.” Jesus said in John 6:50 He was the bread come down from heaven, so that one may eat of it, and not die.” Then, in John 6:51, Jesus said, “And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Notice Jesus used the future tense, “that I will give” to point to His sacrifice for us on the cross of Calvary.” The Capernaum crowd as us, they were called to eat, but not of Jesus’ physical frame—making a literal mistake of Jesus’ figure of speech.
- v. 53 – “So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man (a quote from Daniel 9:13—meaning Anointed One/Messiah) and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” Jesus wasn’t toning down His words to the crowd but showing them that if they would take His words literally, they would be absurd. Jesus was spiritually telling the crowd “Whoever takes Me into their life or spirit/soul, accepting Me, will see My flesh given for the life of the world, v. 51 as the only means of salvation. Seen as Jesus meant these words, this is the doctrine of His willing sacrifice of Jesus by His shed blood as the ransom given for the salvation of sinners.
- v. 54 – “Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day.” Augustine of Hippo, born Nov. 13, 354 AD and died on August 28, 430 AD explained this simply, saying, “Believe, and you have eaten.” The word Jesus used here for eating is not the same Greek word **phago**, meaning to eat meat. This word **trogo** in v. 54, means to chew, crunch, munch or savor with noticeable delight and pleasure.

This word **trogo** speaks of eating with enjoyment as in Matthew 24:38. It is a striking word for Jesus to use about eating spiritually from Him in joy, delight, pleasure, and satisfaction. This is far beyond physically eating a morsel of unleavened bread at the Lord's Supper. This is speaking of feeding our hearts, our souls, and our minds upon Jesus, the living Word, and as we feed upon His flesh and drink His blood spiritually, we take His glorious life inside of us and He takes us into union with Himself. That is eternal life. That Capernaum crowd knew the Scriptures including Psalm 34:8, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him." The Hebrew word taste, **taam** means to try the flavor of, or to put God to the taste, or to prove Him to be who He has promised to be.

- v. 55 -- "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink." Our Lord in John 15:1 also spoke figuratively, saying, "I am the true Vine," in the same way as here He calls His flesh—His body sacrificed on the cross, true food, and His blood to be shed on the cross, true drink. Jesus' meaning is that those of us who receive and believe in Him and who receive the merits of His death in our place, we receive true spiritual nourishment unto eternal life.
- v. 56 – "Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in Him." Spiritually, Jesus is telling us that we as born-again believers who feed on Him spiritually become partakers of His divine nature, which is exactly what Peter said of believers in II Peter 1:4, and Hebrews 12:10 says we share in Christ's holiness. John 15:4,5, declares the same truth with another figure speaking of us as branches in the Vine-Jesus. We read, "Abide in Me, and I in You. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the Vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. Jesus later in this sermon told this unbelieving crowd, in v. 63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all." This verb about whoever feeds speaks of connection with Jesus and this feeding here is not the once for all feeding, but now Jesus speaks of continually abiding, which is more than a fleeting prayer, or a fleeting taking of the Lord's Supper. This is a picture of the closest possible relationship that this spiritual eater and drinker has in Christ and Christ in him/her.
- v. 57 – "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on Me, he also will live because of Me." Jesus here returns to His mission of being the Bread sent from Heaven. Speaking of part of the Trinity, Jesus speaks about the life of the Son being bound up with the Father, and the Son having no life apart from Him. Thus, as Jesus said to His disciples at the well in Sychar, for Him to do the Father's will is His very meat-John 4:34, now Jesus departs from saying, eating My flesh and drinking My blood, but simply speaks of eating Him. This verb is in the continuous state making it clearer that in the taking of Christ into and within ourselves, we have the eternal life that only comes from Christ alone. Jesus is here seen as our Mediator—we must feed on Him. We cannot receive eternal life from a pastor or a priest. Only Jesus has immediate access to the

Father, so believers who feed on Jesus continually receive His eternal life though Jesus as our Mediator. This union we have with Christ is what Jesus spoke of in John 17 and this union with Jesus makes us partake of a spiritual union similar to that union of the Son of God with the Father. Paul understood Jesus words and declared Jesus mystery of the Gospel in Colossians 1:26,27, declaring, “The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to His saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

- v. 58 – This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate (the manna) and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” Jesus’ opponents, His unbelieving crowd had respect for the physical manna that fell for 40 years in the wilderness. In essence, they were challenging Jesus to produce manna for them. Jesus is letting them know that what they want—physical bread, wonderful as the manna was, there was no lifelong quality in it. Those who ate of it, died in the wilderness, like all people die. Those who eat the Bread of Life must pass through the gateway of death, but we will live eternally with Jesus.
- v. 59 – “Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as He taught at Capernaum.” As I have preached to you here in church, Jesus spoke to a crowd of Jews in a building like our church—a place people gathered in to worship God. Now that’s the message except for a summary of what we can see Jesus was saying.

Jesus was saying to this crowd. “The Bread of Life I am speaking of is a Person, it’s Me, the Son of Man, the Son of God. I am One with the Father. I’m going to the cross. That’s why the Father sent Me here to earth. As I said, “The Bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh,” My body. Through My sacrifice on the cross in your place, I am going to bring to Myself anyone who will believe on Me, come to Me, eat and drink of Me. To all who come to Me, I give life, eternal life, indwelling, satisfying, resurrection life. I will bring everyone who comes to Me into vital eternal union with Me, union that will last for all eternity. This communion of My spirit with you who come, is not partaking of anything physical or material. I am speaking of you having saving union with Me, receiving Me as Your Savior and Lord. You cannot receive My life through moral or intellectual persuasion. You can only receive My eternal life through union. Quit thinking of something physical, material, or some ritual. You have to be part and parcel with Me and know Me in an intimate relationship by repenting of your sin, coming, believing, and receiving Me. Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you are without life eternally. There is a Oneness between My Father and I that you will share in as a believer who comes to Me. When you come to Me, I enter your heart and live within you by My Holy Spirit. Come to Me, take My life inside you. I want you to be drenched, permeated, saturated, and filled with My life, the life of God. You need Me. Let Me live inside you and abide in you. Don’t argue with me another moment. Come to Me, Jesus, and eat and drink. Come taste and see that I the Lord am good.” Amen.