

FEEDING ON THE SON

John 6:53-59

by Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On the evening before Jesus Christ was crucified, He had a last supper with His disciples. He took the bread and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." And the disciples all ate of the bread and drank the wine. On that occasion Jesus instituted one of the two ordinances of the church.
2. Roman Catholics and some Episcopalians call it the eucharist, because before Jesus passed out the bread He gave thanks for it, and the Greek word for "give thanks" is *eucharisteo*. Some call it the Lord's Supper, or the Lord's table (1 Cor 10:21), following the example of Paul (1 Cor 11:20). The early church called it "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). And some call it communion, because the ceremony is a time of fellowship with the Lord.
3. Over the centuries there has been serious debate about the meaning of the Lord's Supper among Christians.
 - i. The Roman Catholic View. The Roman Catholic Church believes in transubstantiation (substance across) – that the bread and the wine are miraculously and actually changed into the very body and blood of Christ, while containing the appearance and taste of bread and wine. The Lord's Supper must be administered by a priest, because only after blesses the bread and says, "This is my body," does it transform into the body and blood of Christ. This is called sacerdotalism (a priest is needed to mediate between God and man). Until very recently (Vatican II council, 1962-1965), only the priest drank the wine, because they feared that if the wine was passed out to all the laypeople, some might carelessly spill the blood of Christ on the ground. They also teach that every time the mass is celebrated, the sacrifice of Christ is repeated. **Millard Erickson** writes, "The second major tenet of the Catholic view is that the Lord's Supper involves a sacrificial act. In the Mass a real sacrifice is again offered by Christ only behalf of the worshipers in the same sense as was the crucifixion. It is to be understood as a propitiatory sacrifice satisfying God's demands. It serves to atone for venial sins." The **Baltimore Catechism** states, "The Mass continues the sacrifice of the cross. Each time the mass is offered, the sacrifice of Christ is repeated. A new sacrifice is not offered, but by divine power, one and the same sacrifice is repeated." Therefore, it has been estimated that according to the Catholic view of the Lord's Supper, Christ is sacrificed as often as two hundred thousand times per day worldwide. Roman Catholics teach that the Lord's

Supper conveys grace to the participant. That is, participation in the Lord's Supper effects spiritual changes that would not otherwise occur. For example, it is through the Lord's Supper that God gives us salvation and spiritual strength. Another aspect of the Roman Catholic view of the Lord's Supper is the worship of the elements. Once the elements are transformed by the priest into the body and blood of Christ, they are worshiped. **Erwin Lutzer** wrote, "The Council of Trent said that the highest form of worship – worship worthy of God Himself – may be rendered to these transformed elements."

- ii. Then came the Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth century, under the leadership of men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. While each of these men rejected the Roman Catholic teaching on the Lord's Supper, they also disagreed with one another. The Reformers rejected the notion of the priesthood; and they taught that all Christians must partake of the Lord's Supper. But their disagreement primarily centered on the words of Jesus, "This is my body." Was Jesus being literal or symbolic? Also, what are the blessings of partaking in the Lord's Supper? Is it a means of grace, or is it a memorial?
 1. The Lutheran View. Martin Luther taught a view called consubstantiation (substance with), or the real presence of Christ. The bread and wine are not transformed into the body and blood of Christ, but the actual body and blood of Christ are with, in, and under them. The one thing becomes two. It is bread and wine, but also flesh and blood. "The example sometimes given is to say that Christ's body is present in the bread as water is present in a sponge -- the water is not the sponge, but is present in which and under a sponge, and is present wherever the sponge is present (Wayne Grudem)." So, he held that elements are still bread and wine, but contain the actual body and blood of Christ. Luther believed in the concept of manducation – the actual eating of the Jesus' body. Lutherans also believe that the Lord's Supper conveys grace to the participant. It is through one's participation in the Lord's Supper that you receive God's grace for salvation and the spiritual life.
 2. The Reformed View. John Calvin tried to find a middle ground. He taught that the bread and wine are not transformed into the body and blood of Christ, but that the participant experiences the special spiritual presence of Christ by partaking. That is, by participating in the Lord's Super one is brought into contact with the spiritual presence of Christ, and through this encounter with Christ one receives special blessings.

- a. **Wayne Grudem** “The spiritual nourishment, so necessary for our souls, is both symbolized and experienced in our participation in the Lord’s Supper.”
 - b. **Wayne Grudem** “... Christ is also spiritual present in a special way as we partake of the bread and wine.”
 - c. **Millard Erickson** “... true communications are spiritually nourished by partaking of the bread and the wine. The Holy Spirit brings them into closer connection with the person of Christ, the living head of the church and the source of spiritual vitality.... There is then, a genuine objective benefit of the sacrament. It is not generated by the participant; rather, it is brought to the sacrament by Christ himself. By taking the elements the participant actually receives anew and continually the vitality of Christ.”
3. The Memorial View. Ulrich Zwingli said that the body and bread are not transformed at all, but are symbols of the body and bread of Christ. The Lord’s Supper, therefore, is not a means of grace by which we experience the special presence of Christ or receive salvation, but a memorial by which we remember the death of Christ for our sins.
- This third view is the correct view, as we’ll discover this morning.
4. Much of the debate surrounding the Lord’s Supper surrounds the passage that we are studying today – John 6:53-59. So, let’s study this passage, and then we’ll talk more about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.

II. TEXT: John 6:53-59

1. 53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. 54 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, 55 because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. 56 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.” 59 He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

III. EXPOSITION

1. **John 6:53-54** So Jesus said to them, “53 Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. 54 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
- i. Three questions arise. First, does Jesus literally want us to feed on Him? Second, is He referring to the Lord’s Supper? Third, if He speaking of the Lord’s Supper, is He saying that the Lord’s Supper is necessary for salvation?

- ii. First question: Does Jesus literally want us to feed on Him, or was He being symbolic?
1. Cannibalism is clearly against God's will.
 2. Drinking blood was forbidden in the Mosaic law and in the New Testament (Lev 17:10; Acts 15:29).
 3. Jesus had already made it clear that the way to eternal life was to believe in Him. Then, after the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, He referred to Himself as the Bread of Life. In the context of this symbolism, Jesus then said that the way to eternal life is to feed on Him. A comparison of John 6:40 and John 6:54 make it clear that feeding on Christ is analogous to believing in Him. The results of the two verses are the same – eternal life and resurrection. In verse 40 the result comes from believing, and in verse 54 it comes from feeding on Him. It seems obvious that eating and drinking in verse 54 are symbols of believing in verse 40.
 - a. John 6:40 "For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."
 - b. John 6:54 "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."
 4. Jesus often used symbolic language in His teachings.
 - a. John 6:41 "I am the bread which came down from heaven." He did not mean that He was literally a loaf of Evangeline Maid bread that floated down from heaven, but that He was the source of spiritual life and strength.
 - b. John 8:12 "I am the light of the world." He was not saying that He was the actual sun or the moon or the stars, but that He helped people to see God.
 - c. John 10:9 "I am the door." He was not claiming to be a literal door; a piece of lumber with hinges and a knob. He was saying that He is the entrance to salvation.
 - d. John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd." Jesus wasn't claiming to be a literal shepherd with sheep. He was saying that like a good shepherd, He lays down His life for His friends.
 - e. John 15:1 "I am the true vine." Jesus wasn't claiming to actually be a grape vine, but the source of our spiritual fruit.
- iii. Second question: Was Jesus referring to the Lord's Supper? No. Jesus had not yet instituted the Lord's Supper, so if He was referring it, His words would have been both meaningless and impossible to apply to His immediate audience. Thus, He was probably not referring to the Lord's Supper at all.

- iv. Third question: If Jesus was referring to the Lord's Supper, did He mean that participation in the Lord's supper is the way to receive eternal life? No.
 - 1. Jesus had already made it crystal clear in His teaching and in this discourse that the way to receive eternal life was to believe in Him. This discourse is the first and only time that He said something about feeding on Him, and it is because He had used the symbolism of bread to teach about Himself.
 - a. John 3:16 "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."
 - b. John 5:24 "Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life."
 - c. John 6:40 "For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."
 - d. John 6:47 "Truly I tell you, anyone who believes has eternal life."
 - 2. The rest of the New Testament makes it clear that the way to receive salvation is faith, not feeding on the Son.
 - a. Romans 10:9 "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
 - b. 1 Peter 1:5 "You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."
 - c. 1 John 5:1 "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God"
 - 3. John 6:54 and John 6:40 are strikingly similar. In John 6:40, Jesus said that the way to eternal life is to believe. In John 6:54 He said the way to eternal life is to feed on Him. It is obvious that feeding on Him is symbolic for believing, and that believing, not the Lord's Supper, is the condition we must meet to receive salvation.
- 2. **John 6:56** "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."
 - i. We've already seen that feeding on the Son is symbolic for believing in Him. What did Jesus mean that the one who believes in Him remains in Him?
 - ii. Jesus is referring to one of the blessings of salvation called union with Christ. Believers are said to be "in Christ," and Christ is said to be "in them."
 - 1. Romans 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."

2. 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”
 3. Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
 4. Colossians 1:27 “God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
3. **John 6:57** “Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.”
 - i. Question: When Jesus said “I live because of the Father,” was He saying that the Father created Him and sustains Him, just as God created and sustains us? No.
 - ii. Jesus lived as a human because of the Father – the Father sent Him. Just as Christ had a human existence because of the Father, you have an eternal existence because of the Son. Christ lived on earth because of the Father, and you will on earth because of the Son.
 4. Now that we have studied this passage and shown that Jesus was speaking symbolically, not literally, that He wasn’t referring to the Lord’s Supper, and that He wasn’t saying that the Lord’s Supper is salvific, we can discover the true meaning of this passage.

IV. WHY DID JESUS USE THE SYMBOLISM OF EATING HIS BODY AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD?

1. A closer look will show why Jesus used this symbolism. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood share many parallels with saving faith.
 - i. Eating involves trust. No one knowingly eats spoiled or poisonous food. To eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood is analogous to trusting in Him.
 - ii. Food is useless unless it is eaten, and the same is true about spiritual truth. You must believe in Jesus to receive the benefits.
 - iii. Eating is prompted by hunger; those who are not hungry are not interested in food. In the same way, sinners who do not see their need for Christ have no hunger for spiritual food. Until you see your desperate need for a Savior, you will not turn to Christ for salvation.
 - iv. The food you eat becomes a part of you through the operation of the body’s digestive system. “You are what you eat.” When you believe in Christ, He comes to live inside of You, and you gradually become like Him in your character, conduct, and convictions.

- v. Eating is personal. No one can eat a meal for you. No one can be saved for you. You must personally trust in Jesus Christ for yourself to receive salvation.¹

V. THE BENEFITS OF FEEDING ON THE SON

1. Now as we look back over this passage, let's take a look at the benefits Christ offers to those who eat His flesh and drink His blood.
 - i. Abundant life.
 1. **John 6:53** "Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves."
 2. This is the promise of the highest quality of life to those who believe in Jesus.
 - ii. Eternal life.
 1. **John 6:54** "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"
 2. When you die, you will go to heaven instead of hell.
 - iii. Resurrection.
 1. **John 6:54** "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"
 2. When Christ returns, He will give you a new glorified body that will be sinless, without defect, and immortal.
 - iv. Union with Christ.
 1. **John 6:56** "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."
 2. Those who trust in Christ become intimately connected to Him; they are in Christ, and Christ is in them.
2. Now, let's finish up this study by looking more about the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

VI. WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?

1. **Baptist Faith And Message** "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming."
2. Let's highlight three words from this definition:
 - i. "Symbolic."
 1. The bread and wine are not the actual body and blood of Jesus, nor a spiritual form of the body and blood of Jesus. They are symbols of His body and blood.
 2. When someone shows you a picture of his kids he says, "These are my kids." Obviously, what he means is that this is a picture of his

¹ These five points were inspired by John MacArthur's exposition of John 6:51 in the MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

kids. In the same way, when Jesus said, “This is my body,” He meant, “This bread is a symbol of my body.” “This bread represents my body.” “This bread is an illustration of my body.” “This bread is a picture of my body.”

3. Again, Jesus often used symbolic language. He didn’t actually mean that He was a door, or an actual light, or an actual shepherd. These words were symbols to help us understand spiritual truth.
4. So, we reject the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation, the Lutheran teaching of consubstantiation, and the Reformed view of the real presence.

ii. “Obedience.”

1. The Lord’s Supper is an act of obedience. We do it because Christ ordered it. This is why we call it an ordinance. Christ ordered, or commanded us to do it.
2. **Luke 22:19** “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
3. Jesus did not instruct us on how often to do it, but just to practice it continually.
4. The church has two ordinances – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is the initiatory rite of the church. You do it once to signify your acceptance of the Christian faith. The Lord’s Supper is the continuing rite of the church. You do it regularly for the rest of your life to signify your ongoing faith in Jesus Christ.
5. Who gets to participate? Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper for His followers. Therefore, the Lord’s Supper is for believers when they gather for worship.
 - a. Closed communion: Some churches only believers who are members in good standing with the church to participate.
 - b. Open communion: Some churches invite all believers to participate in the Lord’s Supper.
 - c. It is for all believers, not just the pastor (priest). Matthew 26:27 “Drink from it, all of you.” Mark 14:23 “And they all drank from it.”

iii. “Memorialize.”

1. The Lord’s Supper is a memorial of the death of Jesus Christ for our sins.
2. **Luke 22:19** “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
3. The Lord’s Supper does not save us. The Lord’s Supper does not infuse us with special grace for the Christian life. The Lord’s Supper

does not bring Christ closer to us. The Lord's Supper is a memorial; it helps us to remember what Christ has done for us.

4. The Lord's Supper is not a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, as Roman Catholics teach.
 - a. Hebrews 10:10 "By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time."
 - b. Erwin Lutzer points out four contrasts that are made between Christ's sacrifice and those of the Old Testament (from Heb 10:10-14).
 - i. In the OT, many priests offered sacrifices, but now there is only one High priest who lives forever.
 - ii. In the OT, many sacrifices were offered, every day, when sin was committed. In the NT Christ offered one sacrifice for sins for all time.
 - iii. The OT sacrifices could only take care of past sins, which is why they had to be reoffered again and again. But Christ paid for all sins, past, present, and future.
 - iv. The OT priests were not allowed to sit down while working in the temple, but Christ sat down at the right hand of God after dying on the cross because His work was finished.
5. But this does not mean it is unimportant. The Lord's Supper has several benefits:
 - a. It is a visual sermon. It proclaims the gospel to all those watching in a very visual way. It shows what Christ has done for us.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 11:26** "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."
 - b. It symbolizes our faith in the cross of Christ. Eating and drinking are visual symbols that we personally trust in Jesus Christ as God's payment for our sins.
 - i. **Wayne Grudem** "As I take the bread and cup for myself, by my actions I am proclaiming, 'I need you and trust you, Lord Jesus, to forgive my sins and to give life and health to my soul, for only by your broken body and shed blood can I be saved.'"
 - c. It symbolizes the spiritual nourishment that we receive from Christ. Just as food nourishes us, so our relationship with Christ nourishes us spiritually, granting us all the blessings of salvation – forgiveness of sins, eternal life, abundant life,

union with Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, regeneration, sanctification, adoption, glorification, the Word of God, church family, etc.

- d. It symbolizes that Christ's is with us. Just as the bread and wine are very near to us, so Christ's presence is very near to us – even nearer.
 - i. **Millard Erickson** The Lord's Supper "serves merely as a reminder of the truth that the Lord is present and available."
 - e. By leading us to focus on the cross, it helps us to be grateful.
 - f. By leading us to focus on the cross, it helps us to love Christ more (more dedicated to obedience and service).
 - g. It encourages us to live holy lives so that we do not partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 11:27-30** "27 So, then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep."
6. Because of these many benefits, the Lord's Supper is a means of grace used by God to for our spiritual growth.
- a. **Millard Erickson** "All Christians who participate in the Lord's Supper see it as conferring a spiritual benefit on them. In this sense, all agree that the Lord's Supper is sacramental. It can be a means, or at least an occasion, of spiritual growth in the Lord."

VII. CONCLUSION

1. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are not actually feeding on the Son of God – eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Instead, we are remembering all that Christ has done for us, and all the blessings we have as a result, and we are reaffirming our faith in Christ and our commitment to Him as a result.
2. Do not miss the special blessing that the Lord's Supper can be. It is more than an empty ritual. It is a ceremony that God can use to draw you closer to Him and to grow you in Christ.