

The Flesh And Blood Of Jesus Christ: Our Food And Drink

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Five thousand men, plus women and children—fed and filled from five loaves and two fish! Anyone who can do that must be the Prophet that Moses prophesied would come (Deuteronomy 18:15). After all, Moses fed an entire nation daily for forty years with bread from heaven, didn't he? So, doing what Moses did, even on a "smaller scale" proves that this Jesus of Nazareth must be that Prophet.

Also, being that Prophet who is like Moses, Jesus should be able do what Moses did. He is able to feed five thousand; why not the whole nation—daily, just as Moses did?

So the next day here they came by boat to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. Our Lord's disciples were eye-witnesses. One of them, John, recorded the whole scenario, including what Jesus said and where He said it. We find it in John, chapter 6, verses 22 through 59.

"Rabbi, when did you come here?" they asked. Jesus responded by telling them frankly that they were not interested in what the Father was telling them about Him through His miracles. They only wanted more free bread.

Jesus urged them not to labor mainly for the food that merely passes through them and nourishes only their bodies. Labor even more for the spiritual food that nourishes their souls and lasts forever. *That* food has far more than the "seal of approval" of any human agency. *He* is that food from heaven and has the Father's seal of the Holy Spirit!

They still did not understand. Next, they asked Jesus what they were to do in order to work the works of God. Jesus replied that the work of God is to believe on Him whom God sent.

Believe God's clear and conclusive testimony concerning Jesus, commit yourself to Him and follow Him. That is the "faith that works through love" (Galatians 5:6).

But instead of believing the Father's witness, the people started interrogating Jesus. They demanded that He give them a sign. Moses gave their forefathers bread from heaven to eat. So, what can *you* do, Rabbi?

Jesus replied emphatically that Moses did not give them the true Bread from heaven that feeds the soul and is the source of everlasting life to everyone in the world who will truly believe. Immediately and urgently the people asked Jesus to give them this "bread from heaven" that would sustain them permanently.

This reminds us of the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well. When Jesus offered her "living water," she asked for water that would permanently quench her physical thirst and relieve her of the chore of drawing water from the well (John 4). She did not understand what Jesus was offering. Neither did this crowd.

Then Jesus made one of His definitive and startling "I am" statements. "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." He followed that with His dissertation on His divine mission; His authority; and His power to keep, raise up, and give everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

Jesus' declaration that He is the bread that came down from heaven touched off a subdued murmuring about where He came from. Being totally unaware of His virgin conception and birth, they mistakenly thought He was just the son of Joseph and Mary.

Jesus responded to their murmurings by continuing His self-revealing dissertation, including two more "I am" statements. He quoted from Isaiah 54:13. Only the ones whom the Father draws come to Jesus. In this world only He has seen the Father. He who believes in Him has everlasting life because He *is* the bread of life.

They had referred to the fact that their forefathers ate manna in wilderness. Jesus reminded them that their forefathers were dead. The manna did not give them the true bread from heaven, the bread that they can eat and live forever.

When He said, "The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world," that *really* "set them off." How can Jesus, a man, give them His flesh to eat?

That question has resulted in centuries of confusion, misunderstanding, and notions bordering on superstition. It is the same kind of confusion and misunderstanding that led Nicodemus to ask Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:3). Nicodemus was thinking in literal, ontological terms. So was this crowd. So has much of the Church.

Jesus responded to their quarreling by delivering his ultimatum: "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."

The Lord then presented Himself as the only true bread and drink that came from the Father and brings Him and the believer into the mutual indwelling that is eternal life.

O.K. So then what is this all about—this life-or-death matter of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus Christ?

For a moment let's go back to ancient Israel. God relates to mankind on the terms of a covenant. That covenant is conditioned on a blood sacrifice. Yes, a blood sacrifice. Why? because God is the holy and just moral Governor of the universe. We all have sinned—violated the universal moral law—and become guilty before God and under the death penalty, both physical and eternal.

The only way we can be forgiven and reconciled to God is by means of a substitute—the innocent dying for the guilty. The guilty person must repent and place his or her trust entirely in the atoning death of the substitute. That alone satisfies the necessary moral and governmental conditions of forgiveness and reconciliation with the Lawgiver, the Judge.

But why the blood? The answer is in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."

When God made a covenant with Israel, it was conditioned on the substitutionary sacrifice of certain animals. When Moses presented the covenant to the assembled people, he took the blood of the sacrificial animal, splashed it out toward them, and announced loudly, "Behold, the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words" (see Exodus 24:1 - 8; also Hebrews 9:16 - 22).

Many centuries later, assembled with His disciples, Jesus took the cup containing "the fruit of the vine" and quietly said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; see also Mark 14:22 - 25; Luke 22:17 - 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23 - 26).

The new covenant replaced the old. It is conditioned on and validated by the sacrificed body and shed blood of Jesus Christ Himself!

So, what did Jesus mean when He broke the bread and said, "This is My body," and when He took the cup and said, "This is My blood"? (Matthew 26:26, 28).

What is this Communion, also known as The Eucharist?

What The Communion Is Not.

First, we must understand what it is *not*. It is not a magic formula or ritual. It is not mystically the real, literal flesh and blood of Jesus. Our Lord Himself made that clear to His confused and offended disciples after they heard Him say that to have eternal life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood.

He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:61 - 63).

Jesus made it clear that He was referring to spiritual and relational reality, not biological anatomy.

Yes, Jesus *did* literally and physically give His material body and shed His material blood on the cross for our salvation. That was a once-for-all sacrifice, an all-sufficient, one-time event, and it is *not* to be repeated in the Eucharist.

When the Lord took the bread and said, "this is my body." and when He took the cup and said, "This is my blood," His body was still seated at the table and His blood was still coursing through His veins. If they were in real presence His broken body and shed blood, there would have been no need for Him to go on to be crucified. His crucifixion would have been unnecessary. The result would have been right there in His hands and theirs.

When Jesus said to the crowd, "My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed: (John 6:55), *He was not talking about anything we swallow and put into our stomachs.*

The bread and the cup are emblems, not elements. An emblem has a natural "fitness" to the reality it emblemizes. It is not the reality itself.

The body of Jesus did not mystically become broken bread fragments at The Last Supper. The same is true of His blood. It did not mystically flow over the table.

When someone stands before a congregation, holds up a wafer ("host"), and asserts, "This is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," he is engaging in superstition that borders on blasphemy.

People who think that they have been spiritually "nourished" by the Eucharist without having the reality of a living and life-transforming *koinonia* (communion) with Jesus Christ are fatally deceived. How sad; how heart-breaking.

The Communion (Eucharist) is not a "dose" of grace and salvation. Salvation is not something we swallow. It is the gift of God received "by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).

Therefore, when Jesus said to the disciples, "This is My body which is broken for you" and "This is My blood, which is shed for many," He was speaking prophetically and proleptically of an event that was at that moment established in the eternal purpose of God and that would become a reality in time and space only hours later.

What The Communion Is.

Although it is not a sacrament that mystically confers an inner grace, the Communion *is* one of the two ordinances that Christ gave the Church. Baptism is the other. Jesus ordained (established) it as a *memorial* of His sacrificial death.

As was previously stated, the bread and drink of the Communion are emblems, not "elements." Still, an emblem is more than a symbol. An emblem has a natural "fitness" to the reality it emblemizes that a symbol does not have. A symbol merely *suggests* something, whether or not it has a natural fitness to what it symbolizes.

All of the life-giving and life-sustaining provisions and blessings of the New Covenant come to us through the once-for-all offering of the body and the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.

It is important to remember that we must appropriate personally *by faith* the reality of Christ and His completed and all-sufficient work on the cross on our behalf. *That* is the reality of the New Covenant relationship in Christ. *That* is the real communion (*koinonia*). *That* is the real presence of Christ.

There must be real communion for the "Communion" to be real.

First, the Communion is an affirmation and a testimony of our vital, living, *personal* relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. He said, "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" (John 6:56, 57).

Believers have received by grace through faith full reconciliation with God by the offering up of the body and the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. That fully reconciled relationship, that personal holy communion is life eternal.

That is the "vertical" dimension of the Communion.

Also, the Communion is an affirmation and a testimony of our living relationship with others who are also "in Christ." "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17). The one Bread is Christ.

This relationship with other believers is universal. It is lived out in our on-going personal and communal relationships. It involves all of our mutual "one another" (*allelon*) relationships and their practical obligations that are entailed on us through our communion in Christ. These are clearly set forth for us in The Scriptures.

That is "the communion of saints." That is the "horizontal" dimension of the Communion.

Lastly, the Communion is a testimony to the world. When people ask us, "Why is your lifestyle so different? why do you want to go to church? why do you want to pray and read the Bible? why do you talk so much about Jesus?"—we raise the communion bread and fruit of the vine and reply, "*THIS* is my answer! He died for me. I live for Him!"

The first-person record of the Communion is contained in The Gospels. It is repeated and expanded by the apostle Paul as he personally received it from Jesus Christ Himself by revelation. Paul records it in 1 Corinthians 11:23 - 26.

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

In the historical context of the way the church at Corinth was grossly abusing the Communion, the inspired apostle goes on to warn anyone who would profane the Communion of the consequences of doing so.

Whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord "in an unworthy manner" (irreverently, carelessly) sins against His body and blood. We are to examine ourselves before receiving the Communion and then "eat of that bread and drink of that cup." Otherwise we eat and drink judgment to ourselves, not discerning (recognizing and respecting) the (Lord's) body—His own body sacrificed on the cross, and also His body (the Church) because "we, being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread [Christ]," as we read in 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17.

If we as believers do not judge ourselves, we will be chastened by the Lord (*ouch!*). If the Lord has to chasten us, He does so in love so that we will not be condemned with the world.

In celebrating the Communion we accept everything the cross represents and everything it demands of us—Christ's love for us, every moral obligation that His love places on us, our death to sin and everything that is unworthy of Him, our commitment to walk in newness of life.

"These hands have held the emblem of the broken flesh of my Lord. These lips have touched the liquid emblem of His blood!" What an awesome and reverent act!

In the Communion Of The Lord's Supper, we look in four directions:

- (1) we look back—we do it in remembrance of Him (1 Corinthians 11:24);
- (2) we look inward—we examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28);
- (3) we look around—to one another in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17);
- (4) we look ahead—we proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).