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He Who Feeds On Me

John 6:52-59

Intro: Today we have come to one of the most hotly contested passages of the NT, if not the entire Bible. Great sections of what is called “the Church” hold extremely differing points of view as to what exactly is being discussed by Jesus in vs53-58. These differing viewpoints are not merely matters of opinion or variations of application; they literally mean the difference between being genuinely saved from sin and secure in Christ and or not. This theological disagreement has been raging for well over 1000 years; in fact, it started just a few centuries after the Church began. Who’s right and who’s wrong? Better yet, is anyone right? How can we know with any assurance?

Let me first state right up front that the plan of salvation is so important to God that it is inconceivable that He would allow any area of the written revelation to be anything but crystal clear in regards to that salvation which cost Him so much. The Bible says what the Bible says. If there is any disagreement among those who read it and claim to live by it then the problem lies in human error, not divine revelation. Clearly, someone is wrong, even very wrong, as far as their interpretation of what Jesus is discussing in this passage. But, how can we determine what the correct intention of Jesus is in these verses? How can we distinguish correct theology from a gross misconception?

Well, before we attempt to tackle this argument of the ages, let’s look at a more mundane biblical misconception and see what we can do with it. The scope of our example is a lot smaller than our text but the process of rectifying the misconception is still the same. How many of you have ever heard it preached or at least mentioned that in their meeting on the road to Damascus, Jesus not only converted Saul the persecutor, but He also changed his name to Paul? It’s a commonly held belief that often appears in sermons and has even been articulated in a contemporary Christian song. The problem with this view is, however popular it may be, it’s not just inaccurate - it’s unbiblical.

Now, the concept of name-changing is not unbiblical. God famously

changed the names of Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel in the OT but, there is no scriptural evidence for a Saul/Paul name change in the NT. In fact, there are actually 6 lines of biblical evidence that proves this popular notion wrong.

1) Jesus addresses him as Saul twice in their meeting. Later, Paul mentions being set apart to preach to the Gentiles at this time but he doesn't mention any name change occurring ([Acts 9:4](#); [Gal 1:15-17](#)).

2) A few days later, when Ananias goes to pray for him, he addresses him as Saul ([Acts 9:17](#)).

3) The Holy Spirit calls him Saul before his first missionary trip ([Acts 13:2](#)). It would be strange for the 3rd Person of the Trinity to continue to call him by his "persecutor" name if the 2nd Person of the Trinity had already changed it to his "apostle" name 4 chapters earlier.

4) He was called Saul 11 more times in the Bible after his conversion.

5) The actual shift from Saul to Paul only occurs after he sets off on his 1st missionary journey to the Gentiles ([Acts 13:13](#)). So, the person who actually changes his name in the Bible wasn't Jesus after all – it was Luke!

6) Saul and Paul were 2 names for the same person all along ([Acts 13:9](#)), dual names before and after conversion.

Paul was Jewish and his Hebrew name was Saul, after the first King of Israel from the tribe of Benjamin, his tribe. But, Saul was from Tarsus and as such, he would also have a Greek name, in this case, it was Paul. His Hebrew name appears in Acts as long as he is dealing exclusively with Jews; but when he begins to carry the gospel to the Gentiles, Luke begins to refer to him by his Greek name. There are other examples of this in the NT: Barnabas was also Joses; Simon Peter was also Cephas; Thomas was also Didymus.

Why does this matter? Because, theological ideas that are not rooted in God's Word, no matter how attractive or useful, are at best unnecessary and at worst – dangerous. Sure, this concept will preach but is that all we're after: a 3-point sermon with tight alliteration and a good hook to get peoples

attention? No. If you have to twist the text to make it fit into a prefabricated outline then you're not really doing anyone any good. You might be a popular speaker but you won't be an accurate one. As students of God's Word, we should endeavor to read it closely and be as faithful to it as possible, in every area. If we claim to present the truth, we must do so truthfully. Applications of Scripture that are not actually scriptural can easily undermine someone's faith once they realize they've been misled.

In light of this small example, let's look at our text and see if we can't accurately determine the Lord's intentions in it.

51-52- quarreled- Obviously, Jesus' comments in **vs51** really bothered the Jewish leaders and the crowd as a whole. Their quarrel was actually a heated argument. I doubt that they assumed Jesus was seriously implying cannibalism but the concept was still offensive even if was figurative and if it was, they still had no idea what He was even saying. Their question shows that they had no clue how Jesus could give them His flesh. The mechanics of it bothered them. This is not the first time people misunderstand a spiritual truth by taking it literally. We've seen this in **ch2, 3** and **4**.

53-58- Once Jesus sees that His comments has cause such a ruckus among the crowd, does He back off? Does He begin to tone down the teaching in order to preserve the peace? Not at all! In fact, this time He repeats His claim in even stronger terms! In **vs51** and **53**, Jesus uses the common verb for "to eat" but in **vs54** He uses a coarser word that means to munch or to chew. Why? He's trying to drive home His point but the real conclusion we can draw from this is that Jesus is not willing to tone down His teaching just to preserve the peace because, He knows the true, genuine peace can only come from true, accurate doctrine. You don't change hearts by placating them.

Now, what **is** Jesus talking about in this passage? What does it mean to eat His flesh and to drink His blood? Before we determine what He is talking about, we must first establish what He is not talking about: The Lord's Supper.

Many see this passage in this light, mainly those denominations that give a mystical value to the sacraments.

There are 2 major views of the Lord's Supper. The **1st** is highly literal. It's

held by the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and some high church Anglicans and Episcopalians. According to these groups, the bread and the wine are literally transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus by an ordained priest and become a reenactment of His sacrifice. To them this refers to and describes what happens in the Eucharist. The worshiper literally feeds on Jesus.

The 2nd view is that the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus but also, an opportunity to enter into a closer spiritual fellowship with Jesus corporately. Jesus is present with us at all times but there are also times in our Christian experience when we are more aware of His presence and the lines of communication are more open because of that awareness. The Lord's Supper is one of those times. As we focus our hearts and minds on His sacrifice and love, we sense He is with us. His presence is spiritual and must be received spiritually, that is, by faith.

The reality is: Jesus is not talking about the Lord's Supper at all in these verses. How can we be confident of this?

1) At this time the Lord's Supper hadn't yet been instituted. **2)** Jesus was addressing unbelievers here, while the Lord's Supper is for Christians only. **3)** The eating and drinking spoken of here is unto salvation, while the eating and drinking that is part of the Lord's Supper is for those who are already saved, and relates to our fellowship, growth, and communion. **4)** The Lord's Supper doesn't produce the results associated with the eating and drinking of Jesus in our text. This is the greatest reason, because we know many thousands partake of the Lord's Supper each week and yet still do not possess that eternal life that Jesus says will result from truly feeding upon Him.

So, if He's not talking about the Lord's Supper, what *is* He talking about here? What does it mean to feed on Jesus?

To put it simply, eating His flesh and drinking His blood merely refers to what Jesus has been talking about all along. He's said that people must "believe" in Him (29, 35, 47). They must "come" to Him (35). They must "see" Him (40). They must "hear" and "learn from" Him (45). All these terms—believe, come, listen, learn—refer to faith. This last terms—"eating and drinking"—simply stresses that the commitment involved in faith is just as necessary as any literal eating or drinking and produces just as many results.

Have you committed yourself to Jesus to the degree that He has become as real to you as food? Is He as real to you spiritually as something you can taste or handle? It's hard to know what that really means so let me illustrate it this way. Think of what a bride does in promising herself to her husband. Before the ceremony she can do anything she likes. If she wants to, she can even cancel the whole wedding 30 seconds from start time. But, when the ceremony begins and she gets to the place where she speaks her vows then, on the basis of those vows she is pronounced his wife. She is now no longer her own. At the same time, her groom pronounces his vows to her, and he becomes hers no less than she becomes his.

Now, apply this to Jesus (the faithful lover and Bridegroom of the church) and to us His bride. He courted us and wooed us. We didn't choose Him. He pronounced His vows first in eternity past, long before the foundation of the world. He said, "I, Jesus, take you (believer) to be my wedded wife. I promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for time and eternity." We look into His loving face, believe His promise, and repeated the same vows

In our case, something great happened between Jesus speaking His vows and our repetition of them. Between His vows and our vows, Jesus went to the cross where He paid an infinite price for our sin, purchasing us so that we could be free of sin, guilt, and shame as we come to Him. With His sacrifice in mind we repeat, "I, sinner, take You, Jesus, to be my wedded husband. I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful wife, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for this life and eternity."

That's what real faith is. That's what it means to eat His flesh and drink His blood. It's to commit yourself to Him. It is to accept His promise and pledge on your behalf and to repeat His promise, vowing to be His for eternity. If you have done that, you have done the most important thing there is to be done in this life, regardless of what you may have accomplished or may still accomplish. If you haven't, just know that today is the day of salvation. Today is the day of your union with Christ, if you will receive him into your heart and life.

Finally, there's one more thing revealed in our text. There are some glorious

things that result from feeding on Jesus.

1) The certainty of our salvation (**54**). Here we have the gift of eternal life and the Lord's promise to raise us up at the last day. What is eternal life? It is a life of special quality but its most special quality is that it is eternal! Eternal life is the life of God. It doesn't end because He is without end. This is affirmed in **vs54** because Jesus immediately follows the mention of eternal life with the promise that He will raise up those who've been given eternal life at the last day (**vs39, 40, 44** too). What a great promise! How wonderful it is to know that nothing will ever separate us from the One who loves us and gave Himself for us!

2) Entrance into a life-transforming union with Christ (**56**). What does union with Christ mean? Being joined *to* Christ means we have a change in our life and status. Go back to the wedding illustration. Before the wedding the bride has one status; afterward she has another. There's the change in her name (husband's); a change in legal status. (joint signatures); a psychological change (from single to married) and a social change (friends, entertaining, time spent). When do these changes take place? Instantly and simultaneously the moment she's joined to her husband. It's the same spiritually. The moment we are joined to Christ through faith and by the new birth, we receive a new name and a new way of life with new relationships and obligations opened before us.

Of course, the flip side of this truth is the fact that Christ is joined to us. This means we receive His life and are to go on receiving it in increasing abundance throughout eternity. We're to be filled with "all the fullness of God" (**Eph 3:19**)

You might think you're only capable of holding only so much but just know that God is able to enlarge our spiritual capacities until the full life of the infinite Christ is reproduced in us to the glory of His name!

3) We receive strength for living this life as we feed on Him (**57**). This verse is not talking about eternal life primarily but about our present daily life lived in Christ's power. **Gal 2:20** is another statement of that principle. Do you live by that life of the Lord Jesus Christ? That life is there in all its strength and purity. It is there to feed upon. By that life and that life alone we can grow in wisdom, strength and maturity in our Christian walk

How far do you want to go in your Christian walk? I don't mean linearly – we all want to go to heaven and we will because Jesus promises that. I'm talking about capacity – how far are you willing to go spiritually to see the life of Christ reproduced within you? Just enough to get by or maybe a little more? I believe the world has yet to see what God can do with a man or woman or even a child who is truly and completely sold out to Him. Will that be you? It can be! Will it be difficult? Of course! But the difficulties will not compare to the benefits that will come to God's kingdom because of your surrender, because you chose to feed on Jesus to the best of your abilities.

