

John 6:53 - Unless you eat My flesh

Unless You Eat the Flesh
of the Son of Man and Drink His Blood You Have No Life In
You

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 and the above headlined verse 53 are literal. Thus Jesus is giving absolute and unconditional requirements for eternal life. In fact, this literal interpretation forms the foundation for Rome's 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 elevates 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. This is a vital and important step in their salvation and a doctrine they must believe and accept to become a Catholic.

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 the question of utmost importance is -- Was the message Jesus conveyed to the Jewish multitude to be understood as literal or figurative? Rome has never presented a good argument for defending its literal interpretation. Yet there are at least seven convincing reasons why this passage must be taken figuratively.

Counterfeit
Miracle

There is no Biblical precedent where something supernatural occurred where the outward evidence indicated no miracle had taken place. (The wafer and wine look, taste and feel the same before and after the supposed miracle of transubstantiation). When Jesus changed water into wine, all the elements of water changed into the actual elements of wine.

Drinking
Blood Forbidden

The Law of Moses strictly forbade
Jews from drinking blood (Leviticus 17:10-14) A literal interpretation

would have Jesus teaching the Jews to disobey the Mosaic Law. This would have been enough cause to persecute Jesus. (See John 5:16)

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 faith alone in Christ.

Produces Dilemma

It appears 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 happen 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 these two verses is to accept one verse as figurative and one as literal.

Figurative In 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. (See Jeremiah 15:16; Isaiah 55:1-3; and Ezekiel 2:8, 3:1)

Jesus Confirmed

Jesus informed His disciples there were times when He spoke figuratively (John 16:25) and 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).

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 a human 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.