

Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood
(John 6:51-71)
Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background, from Previous Lessons

- a. Jesus miraculously fed a crowd of thousands (5,000 men), and later walked on water.
- b. Jesus uses this backdrop to teach that He is the fulfillment of the manna that Moses gave in the Wilderness. Jesus says that He is the true bread which came down from heaven

II. Jesus Teaches, “You Must Eat My Flesh, and Drink My Blood” (Read John 6:51-71)

- a. What Jesus is saying here.
 - i. If anyone “eats His flesh”, that person will live forever
 - 1. Jesus contrasts this with the manna given by Moses (which people ate, but later died).
 - 2. Jesus says He will give his flesh for the life of the world.
 - ii. Jesus also says we must “drink His blood”.
 - 1. Unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we will have no life in us.
 - 2. Whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood will have eternal life, and will be raised up (resurrected bodily) by Jesus, on the last day.
- b. The disciples struggle with this teaching.
 - i. They find this teaching offensive.
 - ii. Many disciples leave Jesus over this teaching, and “walked with Him no more” (**John 6:66**)
 - iii. Instead of backing down and softening the teaching, Jesus challenges those who remain, “Do you also want to go away?” (**John 6:67**) Jesus is not being politically correct, nor is he afraid to offend others.

1. Peter responds that they have nowhere else to go, since they believe Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of God; He has “the words of eternal life”. (**John 6:68-69**)
 - a. *So even though Peter (apparently) does not understand this teaching*, he remains with Jesus because Peter believes He is the Christ, the Son of God.
- c. **Question:** Why did many of Jesus’ own disciples abandon Him at this point, even after seeing great teaching and miracles like feeding 5,000 miraculously?
 - i. **Answer:** In my opinion, the statement that they would have to *drink the blood of Jesus* was so offensive that it drove away many of His disciples.
 1. The prohibition on drinking blood was in the Law of Moses, but it was in place from the beginning, even long before the time of Moses.
 2. Read **Genesis 9:1-4**
 - a. After the Flood, God gives Noah and his descendants the flesh of all animals to eat. (Perhaps people were vegetarians before that?)
 - b. However, they are forbidden to eat flesh that had blood in it.
 3. This prohibition was also affirmed in the Law of Moses. Read **Leviticus 17:10-14**.
 - a. Anyone who eats blood (Israelite or resident alien) will be utterly destroyed by God.
 - b. When an animal is killed, blood must be poured out onto the ground (not eaten), “for the life of all flesh is in its blood”. (**Leviticus 17:11** and **17:14**)
 - i. In the Septuagint, the Greek word used for “life” is psuche (ψυχή), which also can be translated “soul”.
 - ii. Examples where we see the same word (ψυχή) used in the New Testament:
 1. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear

Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)

2. “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (**Matthew 16:26**, NKJV)
3. (*You are*) “receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” (**1 Peter 1:9**, NKJV)

iii. Therefore, it appears that this prohibition on drinking blood was because the life or soul of an animal is in its blood.

1. Recall that rituals involving blood are often associated with idolatry and the occult.
2. The prohibition on drinking blood is even carried forward in the New Testament. When the apostles meet in Jerusalem to decide whether the Gentiles are to follow the Law of Moses, their conclusion is that only four parts will apply to them. This is explained in **Acts 15:28-29**, in a letter issued by the apostles. One of the four is a prohibition on blood. A second one (abstaining from eating the meat of strangled animals) may be related to that, as well.
4. Given that it was never acceptable to drink the blood of animals or men, I can understand why many of Jesus’ followers would be revolted and confused by this teaching: to the point of no longer walking with Him!

III. What Did Jesus Mean by “Eating His Flesh and Drinking His Blood”?

- a. Did He intend for this to be taken *literally* (literally eat and digest his flesh and drink his actual blood), or did He mean it to be taken *figuratively* (using an expression to communicate a spiritual truth, but not intended to be taken literally)? What do you think in this case?
- b. Examples where Jesus’ speech (whether to be taken literally or figuratively) caused confusion to His followers:

- i. In **John 2:19** Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Those who heard Him thought He was speaking literally about the temple built by Herod; however, He was speaking figuratively about His body.
- ii. In **John 3:3-5** Jesus said, “You must be born again.” Nicodemus was confused, wondering if he would have to literally enter back into his mother’s womb to be reborn. However, Jesus meant a spiritual rebirth here, which early Christians understood as referring to water baptism (being born again of water and the Spirit; consider **Acts 2:38**, **Acts 22:16**, **Romans 6:4-5**).
 1. In this case I would consider this as a true, literal rebirth. However, it is a *spiritual* rebirth, as opposed to the type of physical rebirth that came to Nicodemus’ mind.
- iii. Further in **John**, we have the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Before doing that, when the disciples thought Lazarus was ill (but Jesus knew he had died), He says, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” (**John 11:11**, NKJV)
 1. The text explains that the disciples assumed Jesus was speaking about literal, natural sleep. However, Jesus was speaking figuratively: “sleep” = death, and “waking up” = being raised bodily from the dead.
- iv. A few times Jesus used the expression, “(he must be) lifted up”. (**John 3:14**, **8:28**, **12:32-34**). Clearly people were confused by this expression, but in **John 12:32-34** it explains that he meant that he would be *literally* lifted up on a cross; that is how he would be killed.
- v. Consider when Jesus said, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (**Luke 14:26**, NKJV)
 1. Did Jesus mean this to be *taken literally*, that we should hate all these people? Or was he speaking figuratively, or using a figure of speech to convey a spiritual truth?
- vi. Another classic example. Jesus said, “For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.”” (**Matthew 19:12**, NKJV)
 1. Does Jesus mean this *literally* (that men following Him would castrate themselves), or *figuratively* (that some men would set

aside marriage and sexual life, living single and celibate for the kingdom)? What do you think?

- vii. When delivering the parables, the main method Jesus used in teaching, many times his hearers did not understand what He was saying: because he was using figurative language and people were taking it literally. Consider **Matthew 13:10-16, 13:34-45**
- viii. In **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, in the prophecy Moses gives regarding the great Prophet who would come in the future. Moses tells the Israelites, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brothers...”. Peter points to this prophecy in **Acts 3:22-26**, explaining that God had fulfilled this promise by *literally raising Jesus up* from the dead.
 - 1. (I assume most Jews had assumed that the “*God will raise up*” part of the prophecy should be taken figuratively, as when we say a church is trying to “raise up” more leaders.)
- ix. From examples like these, we see that sometimes something in Scripture is meant to be taken literally, and sometimes it is meant to be taken figuratively. Throughout spiritual history, many people initially got it wrong, including when Jesus spoke. This is one of the challenges we face in clearly understanding the Scriptures.
 - 1. Many people use a Me-centered approach to interpreting Scripture, which goes roughly as follows: *If I personally don't want to take this command literally, I will either ignore it or take it figuratively.* Of course this would be an intellectually bankrupt approach, unworthy of a real truth-seeker!
 - 2. The better approach is to wrestle with a passage in light of everything else Jesus said, and how the apostles understood it, seeking to understand the *original intent* of the author (in this case, Jesus and the Holy Spirit). We need spiritual wisdom and a heart that wants the truth, whatever that is.
 - 3. A trap question I am often asked in Boston, by people who are trying to peg me as an ignorant fundamentalist is something like: “Do you take *everything* in the Bible literally?” My response is to point to some of the passages we just discussed to show that Jesus often spoke figuratively. My personal goal is to take the Scriptures *as originally intended*, without explaining away difficult or challenging things.
 - 4. So, how do we know if something in the Bible is literal or figurative? Here is the approach I would like to take:

- a. First, I look at what Jesus says in other parts of the Scripture about the passage that I am wrestling with.
- b. Second, I look at any other Scriptures that might shed light on the difficult passage in view.
- c. Third, I consider how the early Christian writers understood passages (where I am not 100% sure, after following the previous steps). What is the value of considering the early Christian writers (ante-Nicene writers in particular, prior to the Council of Nicaea, c. 325 AD)? Advantages they have over us, in general:
 - i. They are *not* inspired writings, however...
 - ii. They were closer to the source in time, and in some cases knew the apostles or were one human link removed from them.
 - iii. Also, they were familiar with the Greek language and were not polluted by hundreds of years of theological wanderings and innovations.
- c. Things Jesus said that might shed light on whether “eating his flesh and drinking his blood” should be taken literally or figuratively.
 - i. When challenged by his hearers, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” (v. 52), Jesus responds:
 1. “For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” (John 6:55, NKJV)
 2. In the New American Standard version, it reads “For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.” (John 6:55, NASB95)
 3. In Young’s Literal Translation it is rendered, “for my flesh truly is food, and my blood truly is drink,” (John 6:55, YLT)
 - ii. Consider what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper, the night before He was crucified.
 1. “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’” (Matthew 26:26–28, NKJV)

2. “Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’” (**Luke 22:15–20**, NKJV)
- iii. Consider what Paul said, in discussing the Lord’s Supper and pointing back to what Jesus had said at the Last Supper.
 1. In explaining why Christians cannot participate in meals with pagans involving animals sacrificed to demons, and idolatry, Paul points back to the Lord’s table. (**1 Corinthians 10:14-21**)
 - a. “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, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” (**1 Corinthians 10:16–17**, NKJV)
 - b. “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons.” (**1 Corinthians 10:21**, NKJV)
 2. Read **1 Corinthians 11:23-30**
 - a. The Christians understood Jesus’ instructions at the last Supper were that they were to continue to observe this meal regularly (as the Jews did with the Passover).
 - b. Paul says that they are proclaiming the Lord’s death when they eat this bread and drink this cup; and that would continue until the return of Jesus. (**1 Corinthians 11:26**)
 - c. There was something very serious about this special spiritual meal; it had to be taken in a worthy manner, with spiritual self-examination.
 - d. According to Paul, we must be “discerning the Lord’s body” when we eat this meal. (**1 Corinthians 11:29**)

- e. Eating and drinking this meal in an unworthy manner had resulted in sickness and even death. (**1 Corinthians 11:30**)
 - i. I assume “sleep” here refers to death, in view of the context.
 - ii. It sounds to me like this is talking about something more powerful than simply a memorial meal or remembrance.
 - iii. Based on this statement, it strikes me that Paul understands Jesus to be speaking literally, rather than figuratively.
- iv. Consider foreshadowings from the Old Testament, and what they might reveal to us on this point.
 - 1. The first foreshadowing of communion that I see in the Old Testament is in **Genesis 14**. Melchizedek, the priest of God who foreshadowed Christ. (**Genesis 14:18-20**). “He brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. He blessed Abraham...”
 - a. **Psalm 110:4** says, “you are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” This refers to Jesus, identifying Him as “my Lord” in **v.1**).
 - b. The parallel to Christ is further developed in **Hebrews 5-7**.
 - i. Jesus was the king of righteousness and the king of peace. (**Hebrews 7:1-2**)
 - 2. The Passover Lamb
 - a. Recall that Jesus referred to the Last Supper as a Passover meal. “Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’” (**Luke 22:15**, NKJV)
 - b. Paul refers to Christ as *our* Passover lamb. “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” (**1 Corinthians 5:7**, NKJV)
 - c. The story of the Passover Lamb foreshadowed Jesus, down to very specific details. Consider the instructions

that the Lord gave regarding the Passover Lamb, in **Exodus 12**.

- i. One lamb, without blemish, selected per family. (This foreshadowed Jesus, the one Lamb to be sacrificed for all, who was without sin.)
- ii. That lamb was to be sacrificed at twilight on eve of the Passover. (This corresponded to the time when Jesus died on the cross.)
- iii. Blood of the lamb on the doorframe of the house would protect those who remained inside. This would save them from death that would come upon all the other households through the destroying angel. (This foreshadowed how Jesus' blood would provide forgiveness of our sins, saving us from spiritual death if we remain faithful to the Lord.)
- iv. The Jews were not to break any of the bones of that lamb. (This foreshadowed that none of the Jesus' bones would be broken, as discussed in **John 19:36**)
- v. Let us consider another specific instruction given to us in **Exodus 12**: all God's people would gather regularly to eat a meal consisting of the flesh of that Passover Lamb that had been sacrificed.
 1. **Question:** If the blood of the lamb was what saved the people from death, why not just kill the lamb, put the lamb's blood on the doorframe and then offer the lamb up as a whole burnt offering?
 2. **Question:** Why did God *insist that the people eat the flesh of the lamb that had been sacrificed?* And why re-enact that special meal over and over, to continue through future generations?
 3. **Question:** Could it be that God is revealing details about the Lord's supper in advance through this Exodus story?

3. Spiritual food and drink in the Wilderness

- a. Paul explains in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** that the story of the exodus from Egypt, including wandering in the Wilderness for 40 years on the way to the Promised Land, foreshadowed the Christian life. (This story is found in the books of **Exodus** and **Numbers**)
- b. Point that Paul is making to the Corinthians: just because you are a Christian now, and in the church, don't assume that you will automatically make it to heaven. You must persevere in the faith to the end and avoid falling into serious sin that could disqualify you.
- c. "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." (**1 Corinthians 10:1-5**, NKJV)
 - i. They were all "baptized into Moses, in the cloud and the sea"
 1. Foreshadowing our Christians baptism, being born again of water and spirit, **John 3:3-5**).
 - ii. They all "ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink"
 1. This foreshadowed *our* spiritual food, which Christians share together in the Lord's Supper.
 - iii. "The drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."
 1. This "drinking from...Christ" foreshadowed that we would be sustained here in the Wilderness (representing our Christian journey from baptism to the Promised Land) by drinking from Him.
 - iv. Yet most of them did not make it: serving as a warning to us!

- v. The Christian life is foreshadowed by baptism (beginning of our journey, being delivered from the land of bondage) and the Lord's supper (the spiritual meal that will sustain us in the Wilderness of the Christian life, until we reach our Promised Land.
 - 1. Note that it says they "drank from Christ", the rock that followed them in the Wilderness.
- d. How did early Christians understand the Lord's Supper? Did they view the Lord's supper literally (the body of Christ being present in the bread) or figuratively (just a memorial meal)?
 - i. One of the earliest Christian apologies is from Justin Martyr, a philosopher from Samaria who was converted to the Christian faith. Writing to the leaders of the Roman government. 160 AD, from *Justin Martyr's First Apology*:
 - 1. "When we are finished praying, we greet each other with a kiss. Then bread and a cup of wine mixed with water are brought to the presiding brother. Upon taking them, he gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And he gives thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at God's hands.
 - 2. "When he is finished praying and giving thanks, all the people who were present express their assent by saying 'amen'. This word amen means in the Hebrew language, 'So be it.' After the presiding brother has given thanks and all the people have given their assent, the ones called servants (deacons) give to each person who is present the bread and wine mixed with water, over which the thanksgiving was given, so they can partake. They also take a portion to those who are absent.
 - 3. "We call this food 'thanksgiving' (Greek: eucharistia). The only ones allowed to partake of this are those who believe that the things we teach are true, who been washed with the washing that is for the forgiveness of sins and for spiritual rebirth, and who live by the teachings of Christ. For we do not receive these as just ordinary bread and drink. But Jesus Christ our Savior became human by the word of God – having both flesh and blood for our salvation. So we have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of his word is the flesh and

blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. Our blood and flesh are nourished from it by transmutation.

4. "The apostles, in their memoirs, which are called 'good news' (gospels), have passed on to us the things Jesus commanded them. They relate that Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks, said, 'this is my body. Do this in remembrance of me.' And in like manner having taken the cup and given thanks, he said, 'this is my blood,' and gave it to them alone. (**Luke 22:19**)
5. "As might be expected, the wicked demons have imitated this in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. You may already know, or can learn, that in their mystic rites, bread and a cup of water, over which incantations are said, are given to those being initiated.
6. "After these things are done, we continually remind each other of these things. The wealthy among us help the needy. And we stay together. We thank the Maker of all, through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, for all the things he has given us. On the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together to one place. There the memoirs of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read, for as long as time permits. When the reader is finished, the presiding brother verbally instructs us and urges us to imitate the good things that were read to us. Next we all rise together and pray. And as I related before, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought. In like manner, the presiding brother offers prayers and thanksgiving according to his ability. And the people assent, saying, 'Amen.' Then the bread and wine are distributed to each person, and each partakes. The servants (deacons) take a portion to those who are absent."
 - a. (The quote above is taken from a modern translation in a work published by Scroll Publishing entitled, *We Don't Just Speak Great Things, We Live Them*; from chapter 6 of the section on *Justin Martyr's First Apology*, pp. 92-93. The original text can be found in *Justin Martyr's First Apology*, chapters 65-66, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 1, p. 185.)
 - ii. This quote from *Justin Martyr's First Apology* is consistent with what most other early Christian writers expressed, and (much more important) is totally consistent with the Scriptures we have read. Some early Christian writers saw additional, figurative understandings in what Jesus said in **John 6** regarding "eating His

flesh”, etc. Regardless, this does not appear to have been a point of division within the church (and I am *not* talking about the Gnostics here!).

1. For those interested in exploring early Christian views on this, good places to start would include:
 - a. *What the Early Christians Believed about Communion* (audio message by David Bercot)
 - b. *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, article on ‘Eucharist’ (This book is available through Scroll Publishing and other sources).

IV. Implications for Us, Today

- a. Just as Jesus said no one can see the kingdom of God unless He is born again of water and the spirit (**John 3:3-5**), He says here that unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we have no life in us (**John 6:53**). Both of these are connected to receiving eternal life, according to what Jesus said.
- b. Groups throughout history have gotten off track by reacting against abuses or distortions of the Roman Catholic church, or other groups. I believe they have tended to *overreact in the opposite direction*, instead of returning to the simple, original faith handed down by the apostles. That would include:
 - i. Reacting against infant baptism by rejecting the importance of baptism altogether.
 - ii. Reacting against abuses with works and indulgences by saying that what we do (works) has nothing to do with salvation.
 - iii. Reacting against abuses in celibate-only ministry/ clergy by rejecting Jesus’ and Paul’s positive teachings on the blessings of single life wholly devoted to God.
 - iv. And, rejecting the sacramental, mystical pageantry that evolved in the Lord’s Supper to rendering it nothing more than an occasional memorial observance.
 - v. Let us be careful not to overreact in response to historical abuses of other groups. Specifically, in this case we do not want to miss the importance of what Jesus and Paul taught regarding the Lord’s Supper.
 1. Recall that Christians from the beginning were devoted to celebrating the Lord’s Supper every week on Sunday, as Justin pointed out (and others have, as well).

2. This is not something to be taken lightly.
3. It is limited to baptized believers walking in the light; not just any stranger, including unbelievers walking off the street.
4. Barring someone from communion by church discipline in the case of serious sin was a very sobering thing.
5. We must take this in a worthy manner. It is not a matter of ritual or some outward thing only that will protect us regardless of how we live.

V. Epilogue – Some Further Thoughts

- a. After giving this lesson in our house church, we had some good follow-up questions and discussion. Based on that, David Adams and I agreed that it might be helpful to add this short additional segment.
- b. To recap, early Christians like Justin Martyr took the words of Jesus literally here regarding eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and understood that as being realized through the Lord's Supper each Sunday when they gathered. They believed that this is much more than simply a remembrance or memorial of what He did.
- c. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria (who died a martyr in Rome c. 107 AD) writes even earlier than Justin Martyr (these quotes from Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, pp. 251-252):
 - i. "... breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying, so that we should live forever in Jesus Christ." *Ignatius* (c. 105, E), Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.1, p. 58.
 - ii. "I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life—which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.... And I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life." *Ignatius* (c. 105, E), ANF vol. 1, p.77.
 - iii. "Take heed, then, to have only one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to the unity of His blood." *Ignatius* (c. 105, E), ANF vol. 1, p. 81.
 - iv. "They [the Gnostics] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not believe the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ.... Those, therefore, who speak against this gift of God, incur death." *Ignatius* (c. 105, E), ANF vol. 1, p. 89.

- d. **Question:** Is this what the Catholic church teaches, “transubstantiation”?
- i. **Answer:** I was raised Catholic and was taught that the bread becomes in reality the body of Christ, only under the appearance of bread. Similarly, they believe that the wine is in reality transformed into the blood of Christ.
 - ii. Consequently, I recall growing up Catholic sometimes the consecrated bread (called the ‘host’) would be kept in an ornate see-through case called a monstrance. People would look at it, watch over it all night, or hold it up on processions around the church or elsewhere. Practices like these, and the doctrinal foundation for them, generally developed during the Middle Age.
 - iii. The early church did not have practices like that. They believed that the body of Christ was fully present in the bread that was consecrated, but it was still bread as well. After all; Paul says
 1. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:26–28, NKJV)
 2. Paul has no problem here saying that they are eating bread. (He does not say “when you eat this flesh that *has the appearance of bread*”)
 3. The early Christians believed that it was still bread. However the body of Christ really was present in it in some way, also. This is sometimes called “the real presence”.
 - iv. It is interesting to me that it was generally the Gnostics, who believed that flesh is evil (therefore Jesus could not have come in the flesh) that had a hard time accepting that God could use physical things (like baptism of the body in water, or bread and wine in communion) to be of great spiritual significance.
 1. However, God’s plan is to save all of man: both the body and the spirit. That is one of the reasons why belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, foreshadowing our own resurrection of the flesh from the grave, was considered a foundational teaching:
 - a. “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works

and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” (**Hebrews 6:1-2**, NKJV)

- b. Also in the Apostles Creed closes, “(I believe in)...the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”
2. If God’s plan is to save the body and the spirit, it follows that the body and physical things do matter: baptism and the Lord’s Supper involve both. It is ironic that while most evangelical Protestants today reject the importance of the physical elements (water baptism and real presence in the Lord’s supper), likely in reaction against ceremonialism and ritual they saw in the Catholic Church. However, in their over-reaction they end up holding positions very similar to the Gnostics, arch-heretics and opponents of the early church.
 - a. It is also interesting to me that the Churches of Christ, while accepting the importance of the physical elements in water baptism, generally do not hold the same view toward the Lord’s Supper in terms of the “real presence”.
 3. This should be something that unifies all Christians. While the Lord’s supper should be limited to those who are baptized believers walking in the light (not for unbelievers or those in unrepentant serious sin), we should not be excluding true brothers and sisters from being united with us at the table of the Lord.
 - a. This should be a time of reflection, and also joyful thanksgiving.
 4. Finally, a word of caution to all. Paul reminded the Corinthians that Jesus’ promise of eternal life and the kingdom to all who were born again of water and the spirit (baptized) and who were “eating the spiritual food and drink” (Lord’s supper) were not an unconditional guarantee to get into the Promised Land (eternal life in the kingdom).
 - a. If we, like some, turn this into an empty weekly ritual and do not live godly lives, we will be disqualified from our eternal reward!