

Response to Objections to the Body and Blood of Jesus

On the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

I have presented below a number of responses to common objections to the Real Presence. This is the doctrine which teaches the bread and cup of Communion become the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, as an ordinary reading of His teaching demands. This doctrine was taught broadly by the Church from just about the earliest documented era in Church history, and was never denied by any significant number of Christians until the Protestant reformers after Luther fifteen centuries later either spiritualized the doctrine or denied it entirely. Until then all of Christendom accepted that Christ was fully present in the bread and wine they received.

I have responded to most of these objections elsewhere in essays I've written on the doctrine, but I wish to place my responses together in one place, as I think that is helpful in showing how the doctrine is solidly defended. In my experience those who attack this doctrine are those who otherwise take the Bible at face value, and accept the normal meaning of words unless it is proven they mean something else. Those people simply change their rules when it comes to John chapter 6, and to the words with which Jesus presented His New Covenant meal at the Last Supper. They will do anything they can to deny the regular meaning of Christ's words, despite the fact that following their normal rules would demand they accept the Real Presence. This is a convenient change of rules, and for this reason twists Scripture.

I use the word Protestant in the essay and elsewhere, to refer to the overall Protestant sphere of theology. I realize many today do not identify as Protestant – be they Baptist, Mennonite, or Evangelical – but it is still a useful term, and usually accomplishes its goal of identifying this sphere of belief. Protestant to me refers to non-Roman Catholic, and to a lesser extent non-Eastern Orthodox, Christian belief. Except for the Lutherans, nearly all Protestants reject the Real Presence.

The New Covenant meal of the bread and cup, which Jesus refers to as His body and blood, is among the most central things the Christian does. Christ gave this meal to His disciples immediately before offering His life for us, and He commanded we eat this meal in memory of Him. The Church was receiving the body and blood together as a family of God from that time onward. Early descriptions from history show it occurring every week. Some believers have had such a love for Christ they desired to receive it every day. At times in Catholic history it was offered far less often, and various branches of Protestants today receive it only twice a year: once at the Resurrection (or Passover), and once later for anyone who might have missed it. The heart of the Christian faith is to trust in Christ and obey. Equally close to the heart is to come together as a family, and receive Communion with Christ. The Christian life – you might say -- is the bread and the cup of Communion.

Objection 1. Jesus was only speaking allegorically

Perhaps the commonest objection you hear from Protestants is that Jesus only speaks allegorically or symbolically when He said we must eat His flesh and drink His blood. The argument usually goes that Jesus often speaks in parables, or uses symbolic language, just as He does when He calls himself “the temple of God” while not actually being a literal temple, or refers to himself as the “true vine,” while not actually being a plant. If Jesus speaks this way regularly, surely we can know that He speaks symbolically here, since why would He want us to really consume His flesh and blood? Most commonly the one offended by Jesus’ words claims He really referred to fellowship with Him, or something similar. Therefore, eating flesh and drinking blood must only refer to our life of fellowship with the Lord.

Before I answer this most common objection, let me point out, this kind of arguing away the meaning of Jesus’ words, both at John 6 and at His Passover, would have been alien to the early Church. While the earliest leaders of the Church after the apostles certainly appreciated there was symbolism in Communion, they all recognized that this was also the body and blood of Christ, a supernatural meal that we receive. They taught and defended this doctrine, and were accused by the pagans of being cannibals because of it. The modern Protestant sounds far afield from historical Christianity in the early era, and in fact sounds closer to the pagan view, looking for a chance to mock this sacrament, and attack branches of the Church they generally dislike anyway. The Protestant dislike of this teaching puts them plainly in the camp of the heathen.

But what do we make of this claim that Jesus was only speaking allegorically as He so often does? This superficial argument holds little strength on examination and should not deter us from accepting the plain meaning. Number one, while they insist the words are symbolic in meaning, they cannot actually prove this, and are unable to show an example of this idiom being used elsewhere in the Bible or in ancient near eastern literature meaning fellowship. If the phrase is really just a non-literal idiom, why don’t we see it used that way elsewhere to refer to fellowship? Rather, if we examine the Bible, and if we examine ancient near-eastern literature, we find that eating someone’s flesh and drinking someone’s blood actually mean something very different. These words, when used in a non-literal way, refer to hating, harming, or destroying someone. This is the case even today in the Near East. I spoke once with a Christian Zionist who had visited an Arab country. He told a Muslim man that He was a Zionist and a supporter of Israel, and the man responded with this: “We are going to drink your blood!” Was the Arab man suggesting they would meet for fellowship later that evening? Or was he proclaiming his people would defeat and perhaps destroy the pro-Israel crowd. If you accept the latter, you really need to understand that Jesus did not speak in metaphor when He said – Drink my blood. Such a metaphor does not exist. He spoke a plain truth.

Another way to know the claim of symbolic language is wrong is the powerful fact that Jesus defended His own statements as true. Just like there are today, there were hearers of His teaching who were offended by it. Jesus had every chance to say to them, and every chance to say to the disciples, "I am only speaking in metaphor." Jesus did just that in regards to other teachings of His. He clearly explained what He meant when He said "leaven of the Pharisees," for example. (Matthew 16:11-12) He used the term "leaven" to refer to false doctrine. Yet here, not only does Jesus fail to explain it as metaphor, but He defends its meaning repeatedly, saying: **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. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.** (John 6:53-56)

This is a powerful confirmation that Jesus means what He says. He even begins with "most assuredly, I say to you," meaning we can be sure of the truth He is about to present. He repeats this truth multiple times here and in the following verses. If Jesus does NOT mean what He says regarding His body and blood, this would simply be lying. Does God lie to us? Using a metaphor to make a point is not lying. However, defending the actual truth of metaphorical words repeatedly against objections would make anyone a liar if those words were not true. You will not find anywhere else in the Gospels where Jesus defends symbolic language by affirming its literal meaning. He does not do that when He calls himself "the temple of God." He does not do that when He calls himself the "true vine." He only does so here, because He is affirming the actual truth of those words which others deny. In modern terms, He just told us, "This really really is my flesh, and this really really is my blood." Are you one to call Him a liar?

Objection 2. Jesus was only pulling the wool over their eyes

This argument usually goes like this, although it has some variants: Jesus was giving an intentionally ridiculous teaching, just to get the phonies away, after which only the true believers would stay with Him. He basically was misleading the crowd about what He meant, but those who remained would understand or He would explain it to them later. They usually point out that large crowds had been gathering and following Jesus for a while now, so obviously many could have been there for the wrong reasons, including for the wonders alone. By telling them to gnaw on His flesh and drink His blood, Jesus knew that many would leave. Therefore, we cannot accept that the bread and cup really are His divine flesh and blood.

This kind of explanation fails on the accounts already mentioned in the previous explanation: that of the claim of symbolism. Yet it fails also because it makes Almighty God into a deceiver, its proponents openly admitting that He is. I would suggest that if you think God was pulling the wool over their eyes here, without real proof that He is, you could basically make that claim anywhere. Maybe Jesus pulled the wool over their eyes when He says two chapters later,

“Before Abraham was, I AM.” That is what Jehovah’s Witnesses claim. They claim He was just fooling those stupid Pharisees, not really referring to His Deity. Likewise, maybe He was pulling the wool over their eyes in John chapter 10 when He teaches, **“I and my Father are one,”** another teaching of His oneness with God that almost got Him killed by stoning. Maybe God is also pulling the wool over our eyes when the angels tell us, regarding the resurrection, **“He is risen. He is not here.”** (Mark 16:6) Maybe He deceives us when He says to Thomas, **“reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”** (John 20:27) If we assume God is tricking an audience when He gives a difficult teaching, we can use that argument anywhere. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God is a God of truth. (Deuteronomy 32:4, John 17:17) His Word is proven. (2 Samuel 22:31) He does not lie. (Numbers 23:19)

This claim that Jesus only tricks the foolish audience with His words about the body and blood also typically assumes He will reveal the truth later to those who remain with Him. As I point out elsewhere in this piece, He nowhere does this. Unlike His explanation elsewhere of other metaphorical language, He does not wait for the crowds to leave, and then explain that all He really means is we should have fellowship with Him. Rather, quite the opposite. When it comes time to ask the apostles if they will also abandon Him, Peter does not answer by saying, “Of course we won’t abandon you; we understand you speak only in metaphor.” No. Peter says they have nowhere else to go, and they remain because they have come to believe He is Messiah and Son of God. That’s not a statement of understanding a unique idiom that Jesus just used. Rather it is a statement that they accept His teaching on faith. Where do we see Jesus waiting for the crowds to leave and then eagerly explaining away the meaning of the words to the small group which remains? Nowhere. This is a part of the false narrative by those who want to ignore this doctrine because it offends them, as it offended the crowds first hearing it. Jesus is not deceiving anyone with His words. He is speaking the truth.

Objection 3. Jesus couldn’t have meant it literally, since the Torah prohibits drinking blood

Another common objection to Jesus’ words about eating His flesh and blood is that as a Jewish teacher, He could not possibly have meant them literally. That’s because eating ANY blood is prohibited in Leviticus 17 and elsewhere, and of course eating human flesh is taboo in many cultures, including Hebrew culture. He would have been teaching cannibalism, and a Jewish teacher could never do that.

This objection, while it sounds appropriate to a Hebrew culture, is a bit confused in some of its assumptions and its reasoning. Therefore, it comes to the wrong conclusion. Of course, it also ignores what I have previously mentioned, that no one can document an appropriate idiomatic use of those words, and Jesus Himself defends the meaning of them very strongly. Perhaps the biggest confusion is that it assumes the Torah prohibition on eating blood MUST apply to

drinking the blood of the supernatural divine Son of God. However, it does not apply for multiple reasons.

Number one, the prohibition on eating flesh with the blood in it – or drinking blood – referred to blood which would contain all the outward characteristics of blood, and be recognizable as such. It was not referring to something which bore all the outward characteristics of wine, but was miraculously made into the blood of the Son of God. In fact, if you showed the cup of Communion to a judge who ruled on the Torah, I don't think he would even recognize it as blood, and could possibly rule on the case. It clearly is not the blood the Torah was prohibiting, which was blood outwardly, not by supernatural miracle. Moreover, considering that the New Testament makes dietary laws and ritual purity laws less than a mandate, and shows they existed to point toward the coming Savior, it is odd to apply this prohibition on drinking blood to the cup of Communion. Do you avoid eating steak with blood in it? If not, why object to drinking the blood of the Savior. We are not mandated to follow such dietary laws.

Those same basic principles apply to the general taboo on eating human flesh. This taboo developed regarding flesh that actually looks, feels, smells, and is like flesh on every other level. It did not develop to prohibit the consuming of what is outwardly baked bread, but which miraculously becomes the divine body of the Son of God. It would be quite a stretch to make the taboo apply to it in fact. Moreover, even if we were to apply it, human beings regularly make exception to such taboos for the sake of saving human life when there is famine, so in regards to the salvation offered in Christ, salvation from sin and death, we would likewise allow consuming flesh anyway.

I would point out, and I really want you to notice this, even though it's not the most objective of arguments, the multiple prohibitions against eating flesh with blood in it seem to be speaking prophetically, as all Scripture does. The prohibition is given originally to Noah at his covenant. (Genesis 9:4) The prohibition is given also to Israel as part of theirs. God clearly explains this prohibition is because the **“life of the flesh is in the blood.”** (Leviticus 17:11) We should not want animal life in our being -- the logic appears to be -- since we are man and not animal. We don't want animal blood because we don't want animal life. But what life do we want – or even need – in our being? The life we both want and need is the life of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is HIS life in our being which saves us, sanctifies us, and brings eternal life with God. If the life is in the blood then, we rightly receive Christ's blood, where animal blood could never suffice, and would only degrade the human being. For centuries this reminder has been with mankind through the prohibitions of Torah. Now the truth has been revealed, and even offered and given to us: the life blood of the Son of God and His salvation.

One further note on the literal: – and I think this point can help modern objectors understand better—we do not take Jesus' words 100% literally. Rather, we take them MORE literally than a symbolist or spiritual interpretation. That's because, if we took them 100% literally, we would expect there to be visible flesh and blood during Communion, we would expect them to taste like

flesh and blood, we would expect vomiting and perhaps screaming from the congregation, and we would be saying that Jesus suffers incredible pain every time His children receive Communion, as they gnaw on His flesh. Yet we do not say these things. We take the words literally enough to understand it really is His divine body and blood, but we also recognize those words in a different sense: they refer to the elements miraculously becoming His body and blood, yet remaining outwardly the bread and cup. The doctrine of the Real Presence then is somewhat literal, and somewhat spiritual, and certainly accepts that there are symbolic elements as well. It is literal enough to not require we dismiss Jesus' words, but is spiritual enough to understand this only occurs by a miracle. You need to take that element into account if you seek to understand the Real Presence.

Objections 4. **Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me,” so it is nothing more than memorial.**

One of the commonest things you hear from those who demand Jesus left His people only with a cracker and juice, is that since Jesus told His apostles, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19) this New Covenant meal is meant only as a memorial. That means it cannot possibly be a consuming of His divine body and blood. Game over. Right?

The problem with this thinking should be obvious. The fact that Jesus gives this meal to us as a memorial is not at all in conflict with Him giving us His body and blood within that meal. This objection simply takes a tiny slice of the passages on the subject, and seeks to use it to overrule the rest. Clearly, our New Covenant meal can be a memorial and at the same time have Jesus present in the bread and cup too. There is no logic that makes them mutually exclusive.

In fact, recognizing that Communion is a memorial of Christ's passion, and also recognizing it as consuming the Lamb of God fits with the identity that Communion has as our new version of the Old Covenant Passover. That celebration, in ancient Israel, was clearly given as a memorial. (Exodus 12:14, 25-27) Verse 14 states: **‘So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.** You can easily imagine an Israelite father telling his children at the table all the details of the Exodus, as verses 25 to 27 teach. Moreover, this celebration also involved eating a real sacrificial lamb, this lamb eaten each year being a memorial of the original lamb which was sacrificed just before leaving Egypt. (Exodus 12:3-12, Deuteronomy 16:1-8) The instructions from Deuteronomy teach: **“Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd . . . “And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the LORD your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.** (vs. 2,7)

Passover was a chance to recall the departure from Israel, God's work in that deliverance, and many of the details of the Exodus history. That rich remembrance of the original departure from bondage -- just as we have departed from the bondage of sin -- was also a real meal with a real

lamb. Since the original Passover functioned this way, it is beautifully in harmony that our Passover does too, in turning our hearts to how the Lord took us out of sin, conquered the devil, and gave His life for us. Like ancient Israel in its remembrance, we also receive a sacrificial offering at the table, one far superior to a sweet, white, wooly animal, one perfect in all His ways and without sin. That is who we receive in the bread and cup. We remember our own Exodus, and we also consume the Lamb of God.

Objection 5. Jesus said we are saved by eating His flesh, so He can't really mean eating flesh

Some people think that because Jesus links this discussion of eating and drinking flesh and blood to salvation, it could not possibly refer to flesh and blood. We can see in verses 53 and 54 He teaches: **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.** The argument is that since it is faith by which we are saved, He must be referring to faith here, and not actual eating and drinking.

To begin with, if you claim Jesus only speaks allegorically, you don't do your argument any favors here. The same logic would say that since we are saved by faith, He could not really be referring to eating a cracker and drinking a sip of wine or grape juice. Eating and drinking a symbolic food does not save anyone, only faith does. At the Last Supper, when Jesus says – **this is my body** – is He really saying – this is faith? Do you actually eat faith? This argument really backfires if you think Communion is just about eating symbols. A symbolic snack saves no one.

The reason why Jesus connects eating His body and blood with eternal life, and with being raised up on the last day, is because there are things in the New Covenant truly linked to our salvation. You might say, they are a chance to experience that salvation in the physical world, in our bodies. They are a necessary part of our walk in faith. Jesus similarly links baptism to salvation (Mark 16:16), as do Paul and Peter. Is that connection between baptism and salvation proof that we don't REALLY get baptized in real water? Is it proof that when the Bible says to be baptized it really means to just have faith? No, of course not. It expresses this act is an outworking of our saving faith, and an experience of the spiritual in this visible world. We see other similar teachings throughout the New Testament; teachings which connect a profession of faith (Romans 10:9-10), childbearing for women (1 Timothy 2:15), suffering (Romans 8:17), perseverance (Revelation 3:10) and other experiences to our eternal salvation. Historically some of these have been called sacraments, but clearly their connection to salvation does not require they are purely symbolic. Some of them clearly are physical in nature.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that Jesus links eating His body and blood to salvation as well. If we receive Christ through faith, we will also receive Baptism and Communion, and through them we will unite with His life and be conformed to His image. We share in His life through

these things even after coming to faith. They are an integral part of the Christian life. The fact Jesus speaks of salvation, then, does not demand He only speaks of faith.

Objection 6. Jesus broke bread with the apostles while He was still with us on earth. That could not possibly be His body and blood since He was sitting right there

The idea that Jesus held His own body in His hands at this new Passover is troubling to some. How could Jesus offer His body and blood when He was sitting at the meal with His apostles? That would be impossible, right? This must disprove the literal meaning of His teaching.

Not so fast. Finding this to be a problem essentially forgets who Jesus is. In answering this objection, I would first point to Jesus' own words in John 6 to those who were stupefied: "**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.**" (vs. 62-63) Who is this man Jesus of Nazareth? Is He simply prophet of Israel? Is He a mere human Messiah? When we receive this teaching, and the reality of the Real Presence in Communion, we are receiving it from a fully divine Person. Being divine does not leave the limitations of space and time. It transcends them. That means that that Jesus, the Incarnation of the Almighty, can with no obstacle offer us His body and blood as He sits before our eyes. This should be no more a problem than His offering us the body and blood while He is seated in heaven. God has no human limits.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

Can we really suggest that He who walked on water, healed lepers with a touch, rose from the grave, dwells in heaven, and was with the Father even before the foundation of the earth cannot hold His body in His own hands? I would stay away from the kind of thinking. Christ is He who was, who is, and who is to come.

Objection 7. Jesus elsewhere defined bread or food as something else

People can really confuse themselves if they import other passages into Jesus' teaching in John 6 or at the institution of the Eucharist. One such attempt is to look for anything else in the Gospels, or even in the New Testament that uses food or bread as a metaphor, and demand that is what Jesus is saying regarding His body and blood. For example, some would point to a passage like John 4:34, in which Jesus says, **My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work**, and insist this proves Jesus is only speaking non-literally about eating His body and blood too.

Yet a strategy like this requires going outside of the actual phrases Jesus uses, and also taking in texts from wildly different contexts. Jesus specifically speaks of eating and drinking His body and blood. He does NOT merely speak of food and drink. Moreover, the situation in John 6, and the logical development of that entire passage up to the point He teaches the body and blood, is unique to this section. John 4, and other places in the New Testament, simply do not fit. How would you like to try and slip the metaphorical idea presented in John 4 into the Last Supper, and suggest NO real eating of bread was done? If we took any and all metaphorical uses of food or bread we could allege there was no real eating being mentioned in all Scripture. We have to stick to the text at hand then, and follow its words and local context. Here, Jesus plainly identifies the meaning of flesh and blood as real food and drink. He identifies bread with His own body. There is no need to search around elsewhere looking for an alternate meaning. He fixes the meaning for us.

Others will try and trump Jesus' identification of these terms by going elsewhere in the same chapter, albeit earlier in the passage's development. Some allege that verse 35, for example, already identifies the body and blood as something else, so we needn't take Jesus at His word. Yet that verse does no such thing. Jesus says in this verse: **I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.** This verse does not contain what the symbolist demands it contain – an identification of eating His body and drinking His blood as something totally different. It does not even contain those phrases. Rather, it identifies Jesus as the “bread of life.” then it speaks of our hunger and thirst being quenched. This hardly rules out an ordinary reading of Jesus' words later, which are quite clear, but only allows a spiritual understanding of hunger and thirst, which Scripture also does elsewhere. This is a long developing passage, and to latch on to this verse is to stop earlier in the development process anyway. In fact at this point Jesus is still talking about the manna in the desert, and is only beginning to reach the point of revealing himself to be the true bread. Nor has He yet taught the need to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

Yet, here is a point you must not miss: there really is a spiritual meaning in hungering and thirsting and it is not exclusive to eating and drinking the body and blood. What law says a long passage cannot contain spiritual meaning and literal? Romans 6, in a much shorter section, contains the literal death and resurrection of Jesus right next to the figurative death and resurrection of the new believer. If Jesus is “the bread of life,” we are free to see both spiritual hunger being filled and also see real eating and drinking going on. Remember, that is later what Jesus himself would say, affirming He is REAL food and drink several times over. This chapter is all in the context of a REAL meal coming soon – the Passover, in which real bread and cups of wine were eaten and drunk. Therefore, a general affirmation of the spiritual meaning of hunger and thirst does not rule out the real eating of the coming feast, the real eating of Communion, or the true nature of His body and blood. They all go hand in hand.

Objection 8. James White's explanation – the crowds got it right.

This brings us to a theory put forth by James White, and one which utilizes some of the above approach, but is wholly unique. Dr. White uses an argument I have never heard before, and it is not the approach you usually hear Protestants take when trying to explain away the ordinary meaning of the body and blood. I have written [a very detailed response](#) and refutation to his arguments elsewhere, but I want to briefly explain and respond to what he teaches. Like the previously mentioned arguments, he does try and make the earlier sections in John 6, such as verse 35, cause us to redefine Jesus' own strong and repeated words later.

In brief, James White says that the crowds who rejected Jesus' teaching did NOT misunderstand Him and take Him too literally. Rather, they understood just what He was talking about. Since Jesus had interwoven His speech with theological doctrine about the need for God's grace in salvation and the need for belief in salvation, the crowd RIGHTLY understood eating His flesh and blood really had something to do with belief. They rejected that need for grace and belief, and when Jesus insisted and reaffirmed we must really eat His body and blood, He was only insisting and reaffirming this theological truth. They left not because they rejected what they perceived as cannibalism, but because they rejected core truths of salvation. Dr. White also tries to lay claim to the context, and insists that because there are these theological truths presented earlier than Jesus' explanation of the body and blood, this requires we understand the body and blood that way.

While it's a big subject and a long chapter, I will say in brief why this approach is brazenly in error, a problem which is likely why most Protestants don't devise or accept a theory like this themselves. Firstly, let me state this theory fails at insisting the context be heavily defined by the theological statements, and not by other weighty matters. The context is not merely in theology, but is in the coming Passover, as is mentioned in the earliest verses. The Passover is a real meal, not a spiritual one, in which the Torah required eating the lamb of the sacrifice along with unleavened bread, and in which tradition required drinking multiple cups of wine. Jesus is soon to have His Passover with His apostles, in which as the Lamb of God He gives them the bread and cup, saying – this is My body, and this is My blood, or the New Covenant in My blood. It is further a context in which Jesus miraculously provides real bread for the crowds to eat, not symbolic bread, but actual bread they would gnaw on with their teeth and swallow. In the development of the passage, Jesus also refers to the manna with which God fed Israel in the desert, the manna being a real miraculous food, not an allegorical one, which Israel gathered off the desert floor, chewed on with their teeth, and ate. He compares himself to this real food, pointing out that while the manna was miraculous, everyone who ate it died anyway. He is bread also, but He is greater bread, and if we eat this bread we will live. I think anyone can see that this long passage contains much talk of real meals, and much talk of real eating and drinking. If so, let's not try and force the theological truths contained to define bread as only spiritual.

The argument that the crowd understood Jesus' words as referring to the necessity of grace and faith also does not have real positive support in text itself. He never identifies eating His flesh and blood that way. He himself identifies the foods as His body and blood when the crowd becomes upset. Moreover, the objection of the crowd says nothing about grace or faith, but they object to Jesus calling himself bread, and they reject to being told to eat and drink Him. The words of the crowd and the words of Jesus then both fail to support this theory. One really has to just read it into the text.

The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." (vs. 41)

The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us *His* flesh to eat?" (vs. 52)

Where do they mention the difficult theological teaching in their complaints? They do not. You see, Jesus is free to give both theological teaching and also instructions on eating a real meal in the same exposition. They are interwoven, and certainly relate to each other, but there need be no confusion. We can no more doubt that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him (vs. 44) than we can doubt we must eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Son of Man. (vs. 53) We simply take the theological as theological and the real meal as a real meal.

The connection between the spiritual teachings in this chapter and the real meal are important to note. If we are those drawn by the Father, if we are those believing in the Son, we will also eat the new Passover. We will receive the body and blood of Christ. If we have received His eternal life through faith, we shall also unite with His eternal life in the New Covenant meal, the bread and cup of Communion, Christ's body and blood. If we come to Jesus and believe, we will also accept His hard teachings, including this one. The spiritual and the actual are very well united in this chapter.

Objection 9. If that were true, it would repeat breaking His body on the cross and go against Scripture

Certain minds may assume that if Christ is broken and poured out at Communion, this would demand He be sacrificed over and over as a propitiatory sacrifice. It would completely contradict the once and for all passages (Romans 6:10, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 3:18), and the past and completed nature of His saving act. (John 19:30, Ephesians 2:5, Romans 5:9)

However, this expresses a misunderstanding of the breaking and pouring out of the body and blood in Communion. I'd say at most this person objects to the understanding offered by the Roman Catholic Church, which certainly claims it is a "propitiatory sacrifice." Yet even the

Roman Church would say it is not a repeat of the act, but a representation of that one same act, which applies that sacrifice to the believer who receives it. They would affirm Christ is not suffering and dying all over again, but that their Mass is a representation of that single original act. To put it another way, they say the cross is a reality that transcends ordinary time, and the repeated liturgy in which the body and blood are offered simply touches upon that one-time act. It makes the cross present here.

Other Christians such as Lutherans would understand the bread and cup in a manner that sounds less in the territory of the actual sacrifice at Calvary, or of a represented propitiatory sacrifice. Some define it as a love offering, one which Christ gives us as a full expression of love and provides us with His very being. There is no propitiation there, nor an application of it. There is grace and unity with Christ through consuming the Real Presence. The actual wording of the Bible's teaching leaves a certain amount of leeway there as I can see it. Since this is the case, the objection that the body and blood at Communion threatens Christ's one-time act, is simply a misunderstanding of what it is and how it functions.

It's important to remember, that in the New Covenant Passover, and the New Covenant sacrifice, it is fully in line with God's patterns that the sacrifice is eaten. The lamb of the Passover was eaten by the family which kept the lamb. (Exodus 12:8) Certain animal sacrifices were eaten by the priests. (Leviticus 10:14) For the New Covenant reality to follow this pattern, and fulfill it, should not be an odd idea, but is in line with how the New Covenant both follows and transcends previous patterns elsewhere. Jesus is the Lamb of God. He is the sacrifice for the people, and the centerpiece of the ancient meal itself. Whether one understands it as a love offering, or as a touching on the reality of the sacrifice at Calvary, the body and blood of Christ in Communion do not require repeating the act at the cross.

Objection 10. Jesus explained His words as allegorical in verses 62-64

Sometimes you hear people go for the hopeful easy answer when they insist that Jesus himself, in the very same passage in John 6, explains His own words as something besides literal. They then point to verses 62 to 64 and seem to think they've got an uncontested touchdown with them. This they do not. Jesus' short teaching in these verses simply does not say what the symbolist desires they say. He doesn't say – my words don't mean what they normally do, but have another meaning entirely. He doesn't say – what I'm really trying to tell you through these words is just to believe in me and to have fellowship with me. No. What He teaches is this:

“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. “But there are some of you who do not believe.”

Any reader could tell you the meaning of this teaching is somewhat obtuse. It is not completely clear, and one has to discern carefully what content is there. We can easily accept the reality of Christ's body and blood in John 6, and also recognize how this teaching explains them. Jesus is pointing the audience to His true nature, which if they have faith they will recognize – the nature of the Son of God. He is the one who came down from heaven. He is divine, and more than an ordinary prophet. This is key to whether anyone will believe these words. Jesus then speaks of the kind of faith we need to accept Him, and with it His difficult teachings – it is a faith not rooted in the flesh, or the fallen man, but a faith rooted in the spiritual, in the regenerate and born again man. His teachings are spirit as they speak to a spiritual faith and to eternal truth in heaven, where He will soon go to. His words are also life because He is the one with eternal life, and those who believe will accept them. This is a reasonable understanding of the words that is in harmony with the rest.

Some objectors insist that because Jesus simply utters the phrase – the flesh profits nothing – He must be saying He is not speaking of physical body and blood. Yet this is to read into the text. Jesus is only speaking of the flesh in terms of the fallen man, and of trying to understand through the flesh. If you think the flesh profits nothing in the broad sense of the physical, then ask yourself this: when Jesus went to the cross did His flesh profit nothing for us? Did His real blood pouring out profit nothing for us? When Jesus rose from the grave, did His flesh not rise in a resurrection body, or was He just a spirit? Did the fact He rose in a body profit nothing? Clearly, there is great value in the physical, including the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. So don't try to take the phrase in a very broad way, or it will make no sense. He was speaking of the importance of understanding through our spirit, and not the flesh of our carnal man. Realize this and you will see it all fits together.

Moreover, the objection that Jesus explains away His words in verses 62-64 fails boldly on another count: just look at what happens AFTER He speaks these words. Even after He gives this teaching about His nature and about the spirit, we are told that followers abandoned Jesus. (vs. 66) Now if He just explained away His words, why on earth did they abandon Him as if they were still disgusted by them? That makes no sense. What disgust is there to be had at a metaphor? Following this, as I have mentioned before, Jesus challenges His disciples on whether they too will leave as the crowds did. The response given by Peter is one of a man believing by faith, and not one of a man who's just been given a rational explanation. He says: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** (vss. 68-69) See, even after verses 62-64 the best that the men closest to Christ can respond is just to accept His teaching based on faith. That is not the response of men who have just received a reasonable explanation. It is the response of men who are still mystified, but are willing to accept His words with amazement just because He is the Son of God -- As should we.

This brings me to a related point, which I want to mention here, even though it's not central. The faith that we need to have is very often rooted in the faith that we have already received. In other

words, faith builds upon faith. Here the disciples took His teaching on faith because they had already received HIM in faith. Think about how often our faith depends on previous knowledge God has already given us. We have a simple faith in God as our Creator, which all men should perceive in their hearts based on natural law. Then we have faith in Jesus which we can only receive by supernatural grace and which ultimately renews our very being.

Then there is faith we have in things the New Testament teaches only because we have already placed faith in Christ. The Real Presence is one of them. Natural man would not receive or believe a teaching like this (think of the crowds who rejected Jesus). Only supernatural and renewed man, relying on the spirit, believes these words. Similarly, we only believe in the Holy Trinity because we have already trusted in Christ and now accept the revelation of the New Testament. Perhaps natural man could speculate about a three-ness of God, but He could never know the Trinity with any clarity or confidence. You and I CAN if we are believing in Jesus, because since we believe in Him, we also believe those things it requires a spiritual faith to believe.

That is part of the reality we see sketched out between Jesus' shocking teaching and the reaction of both the crowds who abandon Jesus, and the disciples who remain. We see believing and believing go together, and how faith builds upon faith. If we truly know the Son of Man has come down from heaven, and has risen up to heaven, we know His words are true. To apply that here: we know He is present in the bread and cup of Communion. Then we willingly receive Him, in His entire divine person. We will do that even if we don't think we have a great explanation.

That means even if you think I have given you a sub-par explanation of the doctrine, I encourage you to trust in Christ's words anyway. He is the one you must listen to and not me. His words are true regardless of whether they fit into our logical understanding. They are truth and they are life. Just believe them.

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