

# They Grumbled About Him

*A Sermon on Predestination and the Lord's Supper*

*John 6:41-58*

<sup>41</sup> So the **Jews grumbled** about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

<sup>42</sup> They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "**Do not grumble among yourselves.**

<sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

<sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-- "**And all your sons will be taught of the LORD**" (Isa 54:13 NAS)

<sup>46</sup> not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.

<sup>47</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

<sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life.

<sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

<sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

<sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

<sup>52</sup> The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

<sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

<sup>54</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

<sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

<sup>56</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

<sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

<sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

## The Church's Food

In the book of Revelation, Jesus says finishes his sermon to the church at Pergamum by saying, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna" (Rev 2:17). Later, Jesus finishes his sermon to the Laodiceans by saying, "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he will me" (Rev 3:20). That's an interesting connection between the two endings. A Catholic commentator astutely points out that "Jesus [has] a meal on His mind ... [but we see] that this is more than an intimate

dinner for two. Jesus had stood at the door and knocked, and now the door is open. John enters 'the Spirit' to see priests [elders?], martyrs, and angels gathered around heaven's throne. With John, we discover that heaven's banquet is a family meal."<sup>1</sup> The former Protestant **Dr. Hahn** says this in relation to **John 6:49-51** where Jesus says that he is the bread come down from heaven, the manna if you will. What Christ feeds us with, the hidden manna, is himself.

Of course, he has in mind the Roman understanding of the Mass, something we will look at later on this morning. But we Reformed Christians share something in common with Rome in what he says here. That is, we believe, following the teachings of Scripture, that Christ has indeed given to his church a great meal which we eat together in the presence of Christ. We participate in it **each week in our church**, for good reason. This meal is the focus of much of today's sermon, although the passage itself probably refers to it only secondarily, though that is debatable. Because so many commentators see the Supper here, I'm going to talk about it. But as I talk about it, make sure you understand the point. It is the point that Jesus is making throughout. The food symbolically and sacramentally eaten in the Lord's Supper is a sign of himself. There must **never be a confusion of the sign with the thing signified**. Otherwise, you run head first into

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (Random House: 1999), 129.

superstition and magic, two things at odds with the gospel of Christ, two things that many people stumble over regarding the Lord's Supper.

## Grumbling and Food

If the church as a bride eats holy food with Christ her husband, it is only because in her infancy the Father also gave her holy food. I'm referring to the church in the OT. The Psalm calls it “the bread of the angels.” “He rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance” (Ps 78:24-25). The Psalm is referring, of course, to the manna in the wilderness sent by God to his grumbling people. This grumbling is important.

God lead the Israelites into a vast wasteland and desert after defeating the Egyptians in the Red Sea. And it says, “The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.” The word (*lun*) is used only 15 times in the OT, none after Joshua. Every occurrence has in mind the Exodus. It is a word peculiar to their disgruntled opinion of Moses' authority which comes, I would argue, almost entirely in the context of hunger (Ex 16:2-3) or thirst (Ex 15:24; 17:3).<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is

---

<sup>2</sup> Even passages such as Numbers 14 and Numbers 16 have near by the reference to Canaan as the land “flowing with milk and honey.” The same relation of food to grumbling appears in the Greek equivalent(s): *Diagoggudzo* (see Ex 15:24; 16:2; Sir 31:24 “The city complains of the one who is stingy with food”; Luke 15:2 “And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them"”; and Luke 19:7 “And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner"”) and *goggudzo* (see Ps 58:16 LXX; “They shall be scattered hither and”)

dissatisfaction with the one responsible for bringing about a physical states of affairs not appreciated, particularly regarding their own appetites. Our appetites go beyond our bellies to anything that we hunger or yearn for.

**Grumbling** is one of those sins that I personally disdain more than most. It never serves a useful purpose, but only exists to harm and destroy. At its root it displays for all the world to see that you are disgruntled and have not learned contentment as you are commanded (cf. **Php 4:11**). It is the first step of a **gossip**, for gossips only gossip because they first grumble to themselves and then others. Eventually, this sin can destroy marriages, families, friendships, churches, and even nations. It is a horrible perverse sin because at its heart it is a questioning of God's authority and sovereignty in our lives. Curiously, **God's sovereignty** is a theme that also comes up in this text, as we will see shortly. Since it is an attack on his sovereignty, it is especially disgusting when those who say they believe in God's sovereignty engage in it, for it reveals a serious contradiction between words and actions.

All in the church are called to **beware** of it. “**Do everything without grumbling**” (**Php 2:14**) and “**These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires**” (**Jude 1:16**). This is the sin, above all others, that caused God to punish Israel by keeping them out of Canaan for 40 years:

---

thither for meat; and if they be not satisfied, they shall even murmur,” John 6:41, 43; 61 and 1 Cor 10:10).

“And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing up a bad report about the land” (Num 14:36). It is something you need to examine and root out in your own life, because some of you engage outwardly in it on a regular basis. You are not satisfied with your spouse, with your family, with your children, with your church. And you think it is perfectly fine to be this way and to grumble. Frankly, we probably all engage in it on an inward basis regularly. This must not be among God’s people.

We bring up grumbling here because it is among the first words of our own passage, which is intentionally paralleling the story of the Exodus. “So the Jews grumbled about him.” “The Jews” here probably refers specifically to the Jewish religious leaders, since we learn in vs. 59 that the discourse we are looking at here was taught by Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum.

What were the grumbling about?

Though there are a couple of related words in Greek that add a few more references, the word John uses here (*goggudzo*, see note 2) only occurs 7 times in the NT. Three of those are in John 6 (41, 43, 61). A fourth is directly related to the Exodus by Paul (1 Cor 10:10). A fifth has the Pharisees grumbling at Christ’s disciples because Jesus is “eating and drinking” with tax-collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30). Thus, it should not surprise you to see that they grumbled because he said, “I am

the bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:41). They were grumbling over food, but this food was more, even as it was in the OT, than physical food. They grumbled over sacramental things, sacred things, mysterious things, and spiritual things.

Consistent with what we have been seeing, their grumbling is rooted in a failure to see invisible, spiritual realities. Instead, they see only with physical eyes. “They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’” (vs. 42). Curiously, John says nothing about the virgin birth in his Gospel. Yet, he opened his book by telling us that Christ is the word made flesh and come down out of heaven. There were plenty of reasons why the Jewish leaders could have accepted Christ’s teaching, for they had many prophecies anticipating this very thing. But they could not see it. Jesus explains why, and as we see even today, his explanation still makes people angry.

## **Grumbling and God’s Sovereignty**

We are going to look for a moment at a theme raised last week, a theme that continues through today’s text, and concludes all the way at the end of the chapter. It is the theme of **God’s sovereignty** in salvation. Just as we see Jesus tell the disciples that he speaks in the parables to the crowds so that they may not understand him (cf. **Matt 13:13**), so now we are

going to find him talk about himself in metaphor so that the Jewish leaders will not understand him. He doesn't tell them this directly, and in fact he continues to tell them that they must believe in him. Yet, our Lord finds it necessary to respond to their grumbling by teaching them nothing less than what Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Spurgeon, and many others have taught about salvation.

“Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” The phrase to key in on is, “I will raise him up on the last day.” Jesus uses this phrase four times in vv. 39, 40, 44, 54. Each time he puts a little different twist on it. Twice he talks about human responsibility and what we must do to be raised by Christ. “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (vs. 40). “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (vs. 54). Twice he talks about God's sovereignty. “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” (vs. 39). “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (vs. 44). We will come back to the first two in a moment.

How are we to think about God's sovereignty in salvation as it is being presented to us by Jesus here? A **Roman Catholic commentator** speaks for most Evangelicals in our own day



when he says, “For, as faith is the gift of God, no one can come to Christ but by faith, ‘*unless His (Heavenly) Father,*’ by the sweet and powerful influence of His grace, which interferes not with man’s free will, “*draw him*”—draws him by pleasure, not by compulsion, draws him by sweet moral persuasion, draws him by his preventing and co-operating graces, while freely co-operating with the powerful and attractive inspirations of heaven.<sup>3</sup> Believe it or not, there is much to be appreciated in what is said here. Yes, the Father draws by pleasure, not by compulsion, by sweet moral persuasion, and by the powerful influence of His grace. He does not drag people by the hair to himself. People come willingly. When it comes to faith, there is, in fact, a cooperation that takes place, an act of the person in response to the gift of God.

But Jesus is talking about more here than believing. He is talking about what comes before believing. He is talking about the gift itself, and this is where the issue has always been between Reformed and Lutheran Protestants and Roman Catholic or Arminians. We don’t disagree with Catholics that we must believe. We disagree with why we believe or with what makes us believe. Jesus is talking about why a person believes here. In effect, he is talking about regeneration.

This work comes through the drawing of the Father. Later, this “drawing” of the Father is equivalent with the

---

<sup>3</sup> John MacEvelly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of St. John* (Dublin; New York: M. H. Gill & Son; Benziger Brothers, 1902), 123.

Father “granting” a person to come (vs. 65). (Notice the reference back: “This is why I told you ...”). The chain is crystal clear.

- None who are given will be lost (39)
- All that the Father gives Christ will come to him (37)
- All that come to Christ are drawn by the Father (44)
- All that come (are drawn) come because the Father grants it to them (65)
- Whoever comes shall never hunger or thirst (35)

Do you see how, according to Jesus, all who are drawn come, and all who come are drawn? This speaks of a special calling that Reformed Christians call an **effectual calling**. To be effectually called is to be brought to life by God’s word through the Spirit alone. It means you must learn to put great trust in God’s word, which is powerful, and can accomplish whatever God sends it out to do. There is a general calling where not everyone does come. Jesus is not talking about that here. He is talking about an effectual calling; a calling that works in and of itself.

This calling comes in the form of being taught by God. “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (vs. 45). This reinforces the chain and makes it even stronger. Being taught by God is a promise of the new covenant given by such as Jeremiah (31:31-34), Ezekiel (36:24-26), Joel (2:28ff), and Isaiah. Jesus is almost certainly quoting **Isaiah 54:13** here. “And all your sons will be taught of

the LORD,” because Jesus always does things in accordance with the Scripture (OT). In the context, it means to be restored by God after the exile. But this is a personal teaching that God graciously gives to individuals; he restores them to life by his word. This teaching is an effectual calling.

It is like Lazarus coming out of his grave because Christ spoke his name. He came out because the calling brought him to life. *That* he came out is not really the issue here. The will is not really the issue here. The issue is being regenerated by the word which Jesus says in our next passage is spirit and life (vs. 63). Regeneration is not like belief. Regeneration comes first and is solely a work of God (monergism). Faith comes second and is a cooperation of the new will with the gift that has been given because of regeneration.

**John 6:46** adds the important qualifier that keeps us on point. Only Christ has seen the Father, so you don't get this calling from mystical experiences apart from the revelation of Christ through the word. It comes only through Christ (not Mary, not apparitions, not secret voices, not a burning in your bosom, etc), because the calling comes from the Father, and only Christ has seen the Father. The Father simply does not reveal himself apart from his only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit who testifies that the Father sent him.

But the point about regeneration, it is God who brings to life, not the human will. The human will acts later, freely, because it has been given a new nature, new affections, and

new desires that long for its creator. This is not what our Catholic friend has in mind, and as such, he misses the point entirely. Jesus is speaking these words to those who continued to deny him, almost in a sense of hardening an already hardened group of people. Any aspect of [predestination](#) often has that effect on people. But you are not told about it to torture you, but rather to encourage you that God in fact will preserve you, because it is he that has brought you to life. It is a healing doctrine that creates assurance, not a doctrine you should ever use to torture people that do not believe in Christ.

[Still, this doctrine causes people to grumble](#), because it means that the food we must eat comes only from God and not ourselves. Egypt doesn't give us this food. You don't give yourself this food. God does. It caused the disciples to grumble even after he said it ([vv. 60-61](#)). Jesus said it because they were grumbling, and the doctrine continues to cause many people to grumble. They don't want to savor this food; they want to spit it out. It gives them nausea. This is something I have never understood, for this doctrine alone give a person confidence that they will in fact finally be raised from the dead. Resting eternal life and being raised from the dead upon my own fickle will, which so easily sins and doubts and turns from its Creator, I can't see how any honest person could have any security whatsoever. Yet, if my freewill causes me to be regenerated, why shouldn't it "uncause" me to be regenerated? And if it is such a powerful and good thing

already, why does it even need to be regenerated? So, Jesus speaks these powerful and difficult words to all those listening to him in order that he might confirm to all that he alone is the source of life and that he alone is able to do a powerful work of God so that people might finally be able to believe. Like the other grumbling, this is ultimately [a grumbling over God's sovereignty and authority](#), his right to do what he wants with his creation. But understand, it is a grumbling about his grace, not about his justice. It says to God, "How dare you do this for some and not all," trying to impose upon God a standard of grace that turns grace into an obligation, as if he owes any of us one ounce of his goodwill. Like other forms of grumbling, this is a dangerous place to be in.

## **Grumbling, The Food from Heaven, and the Eucharist**

Jesus is not through. At the point, he returns to his discussion of the [Bread from Heaven](#), and it becomes intermingled with his discussion of election. It is at this point that we begin to see people talk about the [Eucharist](#) (see discussion on [John 6:11](#)) or the Lord's Supper. We return to the Exodus language of the manna in the wilderness ([John 6:49](#)). Jesus basically says that the Israelites were feasting upon him and that now he offers himself anew to the Jews, first through the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 and then through the giving of himself that comes with believing in him.

One must “eat of it,” and if you eat of it you will “not die” (vs. 50, 51). But now Jesus adds a new word. This bread from heaven is his “flesh” (vs. 51). This brings us back to the two verses about being raised from the dead that speak about human responsibility. “This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (vs. 40). “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (vs. 54).

If Jesus can raise someone from the dead, it is because he himself will be raised from the dead. And if he is raised from the dead, it is because he first has to die. Thus, all of this language first and foremost points to himself and his future just about a year from this sermon, when he will become the lamb sacrificed on the cross, shedding his blood and parting with his flesh so that we might have life. Everything else is secondary to this, and points to it.

Jesus uses the word “flesh” rather than “body” as the synoptic Gospels have it. This causes the Jews to think he is now talking about cannibalism, or, at least, they wonder what in the world he could mean if not that (vs. 52). It causes many others to think about the Lord’s Supper. I was recently told by a Reformed Baptist pastor who took a position in a church that has the supper every week that he would definitely NOT do this if he had the choice, even though he has now been doing it for a couple of years. I didn’t pursue the matter further, but

to me it reveals a great lack of understanding of the meal the Christ has given to his church. I won't go into all of that today. Indeed, many Christians throughout the centuries have seen this as one of the great passages in the NT that refer to the Lord's Supper.

It is not possible to prove that Jesus has or does not have the Supper in mind. On the one hand, he will not institute the Supper for another year. On the other hand, this episode takes place a year to the day prior to it, on the Passover. That it is Passover is definitely no coincidence. Clearly, Jesus is not talking about literal cannibalism. So, he must be talking cryptically about his coming death. But, of course, the Lord's Supper becomes the institutional ceremony commemorating that death each time it is taken.

Here is a sampling of people that bring up the supper in these verses. **D. A. Carson** says, “[vs. 51] inevitably calls to mind the institution of the eucharist: ‘This is my body’.”<sup>4</sup> “Flesh” is not the word used in the formula for the Supper in the Bible (the word is soma/body; **Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24**). Yet, two second century martyrs (**Ignatius**<sup>5</sup> and **Justin**<sup>6</sup>) both use the word flesh for the Supper.

---

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 295. Carson, like most other conservative Evangelical commentators here (i.e. Leon Morris, Andres Köstenberger, etc) says this even as he thinks that the Supper is, at best, only in the background.

<sup>5</sup> **Ignatius of Antioch** (a contemporary of John, d. 108 AD) wrote several letters collected in the Apostolic Fathers. He writes, for example, “Have confidence of you in the Lord, that ye will be of no other mind. Wherefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one [kind of] preaching, and one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf also is broken to all [the communicants], and one cup is

As I said, many Christians have used this passage to at least inform their theology of the Supper.

Of course, Roman Catholics are the first among them. One Catholic commentary says, “At **verse 27**, it is asserted, by many, as most probable, though not admitted by all Commentators, that our Lord commences to treat, in a general and rather obscure way, alternately of His Body and Blood to be given in the Eucharist, and of faith, as the means and the most necessary disposition for securing and partaking of it worthily.”<sup>7</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) says, “The three synoptic Gospels and St. Paul have handed on to us the account of the institution of the Eucharist; **St. John**, for his part, reports the words of Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum that prepare for the institution of the Eucharist: Christ calls himself the bread of life, come down from heaven” (CCC # 1338). Catholics refer to the whole ceremony built around the Supper as the Mass.

At the heart of their theology is something called **transubstantiation**? What exactly is transubstantiation and how does it relate to the Mass? **Transubstantiation** means that

---

distributed among them all: there is but one altar for the whole Church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants” (Philadelphians 4:1). And, “[Heretics] refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ” (Smyrneans 7:1).

<sup>6</sup> **Justin Martyr** (d. 165 AD) wrote, “For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh” (Apology 1.66 “On the Eucharist”).

<sup>7</sup> John MacEvilly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of St. John* (Dublin; New York: M. H. Gill & Son; Benziger Brothers, 1902), 125.



the ordinary elements are magically transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ; even though everything continues to look just like normal (bread, wine), it really isn't. The transformation takes place when the priest holds up the element and says the incantation. Since it is Christ's body really being offered up, it is said to be a "sacrifice."

So that we do not create straw men in our disagreements with them, listen to the CCC. "The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice" (#611). "Memorial" may sound almost Protestant, until you read farther. "Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (#1365).

How does this occur? It teaches, "His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered for all men—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The

event of the Cross and Resurrection *abides* and draws everything toward life” (#1085). In other words, when the Mass occurs, there is a manipulation of time and space, allowing a magical moment where the once-for-all sacrifice becomes literally present in the meal. So it isn't a new sacrifice; it is the same sacrifice offered up again.

This is all extremely weird. It is also quite unnecessary and foreign to Scripture. Hebrews doesn't say his sacrifice continues on in a magical present. It says that it was a once-for-all atonement in the past. It doesn't need to be reenacted for God to forgive sins. In fact, if it does need to be reenacted, many Protestants would argue that it wasn't good enough as a past event, and this is close to if not actual blasphemy. Manipulating time seems like a pretty large stretch to have to justify something that isn't biblical. The final straw that breaks the camel's back is how, because it is actually Christ's body, all a person has to do is eat the meal, and they will feed upon him in every way that they need. The thing itself works magically to feed. Personal faith is not needed.<sup>8</sup> It is the physical presence of Christ's body which is the equivalent of our effectual calling above; it works in and of itself.

---

<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to say if you can take the Supper inappropriately. On the one hand, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states, “In adults, for the valid reception of any sacrament except the Eucharist, it is necessary that they have the intention of receiving it. The sacraments impose obligations and confer grace: Christ does not wish to impose those obligations or confer grace without the consent of man. *The Eucharist is excepted because, in whatever state the recipient may be, it is always the body and blood of Christ.*” But it seemingly contradicts itself a little later saying, “One who unworthily receives the Eucharist can derive no benefit from that sacrament unless, perhaps, he repent of his sins and sacrilege before the sacred species have been destroyed.”

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm#VII>

This whole view seems ironically close to the Jews here who thought Jesus was talking about cannibalism “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52). I mean, if it really becomes his physical body and blood, how is this not cannibalism?<sup>9</sup> Rome can do metaphysical gymnastics around this all they want. The fact is, we have the same misunderstanding of Jesus’ words going on in our passage.

In response to the weirdness of Rome, many Protestants have gone way over to the other side, saying that there is absolutely nothing whatsoever other than a remembrance on the part of the Christian that takes place in the Lord’s Supper. If Jesus does have the Supper in mind here, then this view is flat out wrong, for Jesus combines eating his flesh with the Supper. In fact, the “bare memorialist” view is foreign to the Reformation. Even Ulrich Zwingli, often cited as the champion of the view believed that “Christ is the only food for our souls and is also received as such in the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>10</sup> What the Reformation did on all fronts was say that the elements do not become Christ’s literal physical body, but that

---

<sup>9</sup> A blogger responded to the question this way. 1.) Cannibalism does physical damage human flesh. In the Eucharist, Christ’s flesh is not physically damaged. 2.) Cannibalism depletes a human body of its flesh and blood. In the Eucharist, Christ’s flesh and blood are not depleted. 3a.) Cannibalism involves eating another man’s body and blood in the form of flesh and blood. In the Eucharist, we eat the body and blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine. 3b.) Cannibalism causes one’s physical body to receive nourishment from the human flesh and blood. In the Eucharist, one’s physical body receives the physical nourishment of bread and wine. Another person added, “Cannibalism is the eating of a dead person, but Christ is alive.” But according to the dictionary, cannibalism is simply the eating of another person’s flesh. Under these definitions (above), what we have is a unique form of cannibalism, but not something different from cannibalism.

<sup>10</sup> Herman Bavinck, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 127-142.

<http://www.midamerica.edu/resources/journal/19/bavinkkloosterman19.pdf>

somehow when we partake of Christ's spiritual body by faith (faith is essential), recognizing that they point to Christ and are not an end to themselves, Christ feeds us in a special with himself.

Perhaps the most famous Christian in our circles to use John 6 in this way was **John Calvin**. He begins his treatment of the Lord's Supper in the *Institutes* this way, "AFTER God has once received us into his family, it is not that he may regard us in the light of servants, but of sons, performing the part of a kind and anxious parent, and providing for our maintenance during the whole course of our lives. And, not contented with this, he has been pleased by a pledge to assure us of his continued liberality. To this end, he has given another sacrament to his Church by the hand of his only-begotten Son—viz. a spiritual feast, at which Christ testifies that he himself is living bread (**John 6:51**), on which our souls feed, for a true and blessed immortality." (*Institutes* 4.17.1).<sup>11</sup>

Ever the pastor he says, "The sacrament ... does not make Christ become for the first time the bread of life; but, while it calls to remembrance that Christ was made the bread of life that we may constantly eat him, it gives us a taste and relish for that bread, and makes us feel its efficacy. For it assures us, first, that whatever Christ did or suffered was done to give us life; and, secondly, that this quickening is eternal; by it we are ceaselessly nourished, sustained, and preserved in life. For as

---

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

Christ would not have not been the bread of life to us if he had not been born, if he had not died and risen again; so he could not now be the bread of life, were not the efficacy and fruit of his nativity, death, and resurrection, eternal. All this Christ has elegantly expressed in these words, ‘The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world’ (John 6:51); doubtless intimating, that his body will be as bread in regard to the spiritual life of the soul, because it was to be delivered to death for our salvation, and that he extends it to us for food when he makes us partakers of it by faith” (4.17.5).

## **Responding Appropriately.**

The word and the Supper are means of grace that you are responsible for attending and for responding to appropriately. Notice the parallel between the two responsibility texts regarding being raised up by Christ. “**Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life**” parallels “**everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.**” **Dr. Hendriksen** says in his commentary, “To eat Christ, as the bread of life, means *to accept, appropriate, assimilate* him — in other words, to believe in him (6:47).”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 1-2, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), Jn 6:47.

Eating the Supper must likewise be done in faith, not in some magical power, but not just as a memorial either; rather that Christ Jesus died for your sins, was raised to life for your justification, and ascended into heaven where he lifts you up during the Service to feed you with himself in a deep spiritual mystery. When asked how Christians are united to Christ through the meal, Calvin said that the church is lifted up to heaven where Christ is seated. For him, it is Christ's ascension and that fact that we are seated in heavenly places with him that helps answer the question. This really is the mystery of the entire worship service and it is unique among the events we partake in during the week. Yet, when pressed for more Calvin finally said something like "I would rather take it than explain it." It remains a mystery, every bit as much as the word itself which goes out of a human mouth and creates life in the heart of a dead person. Because of this, we ought to stand in awe of the Supper, just like the Word of God, for they both point to the power of God and of Jesus Christ to save and strengthen people's faith through ordinary means of grace.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, it is possible to eat physically of Christ's gifts, without eating spiritually at all. The people did it the day before this sermon Jesus gave them in the Synagogue. Outward Jesus, physical Jesus, is not enough. You must see the God behind the man, the Spirit behind the flesh, and you must believe through faith alone that when you trust in Christ to do something for you, he will do it.

He will save you from your sins. He will forgive you of them. He will send you the Holy Spirit and he will give you fruit in your life. Eat of his flesh and drink of his blood today. May they be life for your soul, since they are from a living, risen saviour. Then go out from here encouraged in your faith and ready to do all the things he calls you to do as Christians.