# “You Are What You Eat”

## *John 6:51-59*

***“And now, as wickedness multiplies more quickly, corrupt ways of life are spreading day by day throughout the world, and those most abominable sanctuaries of impious assemblies are growing. …They recognize each other by secret marks and signs, and they love one another almost before they become acquainted. Everywhere they mingle together…indiscriminately calling each other brothers and sisters…***

***If there were not an underlying basis of truth, shrewd rumor would not spread about them such a great variety of charges that can hardly be mentioned in polite company.***

***…Now the story about the initiation of novices is as disgusting as it is well known. An infant covered with flour, in order to deceive the unwary, is placed before the one who is to be initiated into their rites. The novice… [mortally wounds the infant]. The infant's blood - oh horrible! - they lap up thirstily; its limbs they parcel out eagerly.”*** Shocking, isn’t it? Graphic and disgusting. Who in their right mind would ever want to be associated with something like that? Well, here’s the sting: what I just read was talking about Christians!

The quote comes from a letter dated from the second or third century AD, written by a man named Minucius Felix. He was quoting a pagan by the name of Caecilius. It seems that Caecilius—along with many Romans of that time—was under the impression that Christians practiced cannibalism. Rumors circulated that infants were sacrificed and consumed.

It was the practice of the Eucharist—Holy Communion—the Lord’s Supper—that fueled these hideous rumors. At that time in the young church, the Lord’s Supper was practiced only by those who had become members of the church. And since it was done behind closed doors so the not-yet members couldn’t see what was happening, rumors arose that the Christians were up to some very nasty business. As word leaked out, the rumors grew until the joyful and simple Eucharist meal of bread and wine had become twisted into a vile cannibalistic practice. Of course, as rumors go, these were all lies designed to discredit the church and get it in trouble.

Let’s turn to our Scripture reading, John 6:51-59.

In this chapter Jesus had performed a miracle of feeding five thousand people and his disciples had witnessed him walking on water. And when the crowds caught up with him again, Jesus scolded them for wanting more miracles. They were chasing after him because he’d provided them with bread, not because of who he was. So Jesus challenged their short-sighted perspective and raised the bar on the commitment required to follow him: *51I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”*

*52Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked.*

*53So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. 54But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. 55For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. 58I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.”*

*59He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.*

Much like the Romans and the twisted rumors about the church’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the Jews around Jesus that day wanted to take things literally. They were shocked to hear Jesus suggest they had to resort to cannibalism in order to follow him. But that wasn’t what Jesus was saying at all. He was using a vivid word-picture to indicate, one, the depth of commitment needed, and two, that he himself was their true source of life. *“ Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”* In other words, “you are what you eat.”

***It’s what our mothers always told us. “You are what you eat.” In order to be fit and healthy we’re to eat good food. Imagine if we actually did look like what we eat… I’d be a carton of ice cream! You might be a bunch of carrots, a Reese’s cup, a slice of bread, a bowl of soup, a strip of bacon, or a grapefruit!*** Jesus said that if we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we have eternal life, that we remain in him—*and* he remains in us. *He remains in us.* You are what you eat.

When we eat the bread of the Communion table, we understand we’re taking in a symbol of the body of Christ. His body was broken and crucified, for us. ***The words of our Communion liturgy say “Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ…”*** We’re asking to become, in our daily world, what Jesus was. We’re asking for him to break us through devotion, obedience and humble service. As his body was broken for us, we are to be broken for the world. You are what you eat.

When we take the cup, the blood of Christ, we understand we’re drinking in a symbol of the blood of Christ—blood that was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and for our salvation. ***“Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.”*** We’re asking for him to pour us out through devotion, obedience and sacrificial service. As his blood was shed for you and me, we are to imitate him by forgiving others and giving of ourselves selflessly. You are what you eat—and drink.

So when we receive Jesus by faith at this table, what does he expect of us when we arise and go our separate ways? Very quickly let me point out four important things.

To be the body and blood of Christ means **surrender**. We’re to give up—raise our hands and say, “Lord, all I have is yours. Take it and make me who you want me to be.” In Luke 9:23-24, Jesus said *…“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.”* We have to let go of our agendas, attitudes and wrong behaviors. We have to surrender our plans in order to fully embrace the will of God for us, our families, our church, our world. Without surrender there is no discipleship. We can try to fool ourselves and those around us by talking a good game, but if we don’t surrender, we’re not true followers.

Second, to be the body and blood of Christ means **sacrifice**. This is closely tied with surrender. Surrender deals with our heart, mind, will and spirit—submitting them to the full lordship of Jesus Christ. Sacrifice deals with releasing things which mean something to us, but which often form obstacles to true discipleship. Many Christians need to sacrifice their wealth or material possessions to the Lord. Others may need to sacrifice some of their free time in order to serve. In John 10:11, Jesus said *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.”* He was willing to make the ultimate commitment on behalf of the sheep.

Third, to be the body and blood of Christ means **service**. Speaking to his disciples in Mark 10:45, Jesus said *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others...”* To be a follower of Jesus is to serve others. It isn’t an option; it’s a requirement. Just like surrender and sacrifice: if we’re not practicing humble service to others, we’re not following Jesus. The world doesn’t care about our theology, or worship styles, what kind of building we have, or how good our teaching is. They want to know if we care enough to get our hands dirty for others.

And to be the body and blood of Christ means **suffering**. We cannot come to this table and partake of this meal without being aware of the suffering of Christ that made it possible. In like fashion, we cannot be Christ in the world without experiencing and enduring our own suffering. Jesus told us in Luke 6:22, *What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man.* Notice that Jesus said *“*when *people hate you.”* Not “if.” *WHEN*. If you are what you eat, and if Christ remains in us, and we become the body and blood of Christ for the world, then people will hate us.

To help the poor, to welcome the outcast, to forgive the sinner, to share our resources, to love unconditionally—all means that there are those who will despise you and talk bad about you. ***I firmly believe that the degree to which we’re persecuted is in direct proportion to how much we’re doing for God’s kingdom. If we’re persecuted little, we’re doing little for the kingdom. If we’re laughed at, lied about, criticized or condemned for doing what Jesus did, then we’re doing a lot for the kingdom.***

Thus, when we kneel here to eat and drink it is so that we can go forth to surrender, sacrifice, serve and suffer for the kingdom. A faith that begins and ends only at this altar is a shallow, selfish faith. It’s only about me and what I want, expect or demand. But a faith that begins at this altar and is carried into the world in practical ways is an active, growing faith. The question is whether or not we truly want to surrender, to sacrifice, to serve and to suffer? Without these marks of the Christian life, we’re just kidding ourselves. We’re just playing a game. And the world knows it.

So are you ready to become what you eat? Are you prepared to renew your commitment to surrender, to sacrifice, to serve, to suffer? The table has been prepared. The Lord waits to receive us in this meal even as we receive him.

You are what you eat.

Amen.