

John 6:56

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

Analysis

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. This profound statement climaxes Jesus' Bread of Life discourse, using shocking imagery to describe spiritual union with Christ. The Greek *ho trōgōn* (ὁ τρώγων, "eateth") uses a vivid verb meaning to chew, gnaw, or munch—emphasizing active, personal appropriation rather than passive observation. The present tense indicates continuous, ongoing action: true believers continually feed on Christ by faith.

The phrase "dwelleth in me, and I in him" (en emoi menei kagō en autō, ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ) describes mutual indwelling—menō (μένω) means to remain, abide, or dwell permanently. This reciprocal relationship parallels Jesus' vine-and-branches teaching (John 15:4-7) and His high priestly prayer for believers' unity with the Father and Son (John 17:21-23). The mutual indwelling is not absorption into deity but intimate, personal communion maintained through faith.

While Roman Catholics interpret this literally as supporting transubstantiation (the Eucharist becoming Christ's actual body and blood), most Protestant interpreters understand it metaphorically as faith-union with Christ through the gospel. The context supports the metaphorical view: Jesus explicitly states "the flesh profiteth nothing" and that His words are "spirit and life" (John 6:63). Eating Christ's flesh means believing in His sacrificial death; drinking His blood means appropriating the benefits of His atonement. This produces vital spiritual union where Christ's life becomes the believer's life (Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3-4).

Historical Context

This discourse occurred in the synagogue at Capernaum (John 6:59) following Jesus' miraculous feeding of 5,000 and walking on water (John 6:1-21). The crowd pursued Jesus seeking more physical bread (John 6:26), but Jesus redirected them to spiritual realities. His increasingly difficult teaching about eating His flesh and drinking His blood caused many disciples to abandon Him (John 6:66), revealing that salvation comes through faith, not merely following for material benefits.

The imagery would have been deeply offensive to Jewish listeners for multiple reasons:

1. Mosaic law strictly forbade consuming blood (Leviticus 17:10-14, Deuteronomy 12:23)
2. the language suggested cannibalism, forbidden in all ancient cultures,
3. it implied that Jesus' physical death would be necessary for salvation—an idea incomprehensible before the crucifixion.

Jesus intentionally used provocative language to separate superficial followers from true believers who would trust Him despite scandalous claims.

The timing is significant—this occurred about one year before Jesus' crucifixion, during the Passover season (John 6:4). The Passover context adds meaning: just as Israelites ate the Passover lamb and were protected from judgment (Exodus 12), believers must appropriate Christ, the true Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), to receive eternal life. Later, at the Last Supper (also at Passover), Jesus would institute communion as a memorial of His sacrifice (Luke 22:14-20), connecting the Bread of Life discourse to the ongoing practice of the church.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the vivid language of eating and drinking illustrate the active, personal nature of saving faith?
2. What is the relationship between this passage and the Lord's Supper, and how should we understand communion?
3. How does mutual indwelling (Christ in us, we in Christ) transform daily Christian living?
4. Why did Jesus use such offensive imagery, and what does this teach about the nature of genuine discipleship?
5. How does this passage inform debates about the relationship between faith and sacraments in salvation?

Interlinear Text

ο	τρώγων	μου	τὴν	σάρκα	καὶ	πίνων	μου	τὸ	αἷμα
G3588	He that eateth	my	G3588	flesh	and	drinketh	my	G3588	blood
	G5176		G3450	G4561	G2532	G4095	G3450		G129
ἐν	ἐμοὶ	μένει	κάγὼ	ἐν	αὐτῷ				
in	me	dwelleth	and I	in	him				
G1722	G1698	G3306	G2504	G1722	G846				

Additional Cross-References

John 14:20 (Parallel theme): At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

1 John 3:24 (Parallel theme): And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Revelation 3:20 (Parallel theme): Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Psalms 91:9 (Parallel theme): Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;

John 14:23 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

1 John 4:12 (Parallel theme): No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

2 Corinthians 6:16 (Parallel theme): And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Psalms 90:1 (Parallel theme): Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Psalms 91:1 (Parallel theme): He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Ephesians 3:17 (Parallel theme): That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,