Without Flesh - Chapter 6

1. The cause of strife . . . does not lie in the Lord’s Words but in the doubt of people who do not want to believe him in these words. (Hermann Sadde)
   1. Psalm 119:105
   2. John 3:18, 5:47, 8:45, 16:19, 20:24-31
2. What God’s Son has told me, take for truth I do.

Truth Himself speaks truly, or there is nothing true.(Thomas Aquinas)

* 1. John 14:6
  2. John 17:17

1. Be still and know
   1. Psalm 46:10, 107:29
   2. Mark 4:39-41
2. If Jesus wanted to convey some miraculous-impossible-super-divine way of being a piece of bread, what other words should He have said instead? Which words could He have used? Could Jesus have added an “also” or an “in My hand”? Sure. But if a dynamic verb like “is” is not enough, is an adverb or a prepositional phrase really going to change your mind?
   1. This is my body
   2. τουτο μου εστιν το σωμα
   3. hoc est corpus meum
   4. This is My body. Though “is” or “was” might be used metaphorically elsewhere (e.g., 10:4), 10:16 and 11:27 make clear that in the receiving of the sacramental bread, one also receives the very body of Christ. Luth: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine
3. Both Hebrew and Aramaic, languages Jesus would have spoken as mother tongues, function with the silent copula. If Jesus was speaking either of these languages in the Upper Room, He could not have possibly said out loud, “This is My body,” because there is no way to say “is” in either tongue.
   1. John 16:15 Whose job is it to clarify the words of Jesus?
   2. define “spiritual understanding” (1 Cor 12:3)
4. let’s grant the argument that Jesus spoke Aramaic on that night in the Upper Room. If such were the case, then there is no choice but to believe that the authors of the New Testament then chose to translate what He said into Greek. When they did so, for some bizarre reason, they inserted the copula. They added the word is to Jesus’ words. You might think, “Of course they did. They had to translate the metaphor.” But this is just the thing: the Greek does not need to have “is” inserted at all.
   1. This my Body for you

1. They did not add the word symbolizes, although they could have, and I would argue they should have if that is what was meant. Nor did they add the word represents, nor the phrase is like, nor is as if. Instead, all four of the writers, very intentionally, took Jesus’ Aramaic meaning to be most clearly carried into Greek by inserting the lonely copula. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they wrote, “This is My body.”
   1. represent Exo 18:19
   2. is like Exo 15:11 מִי־כָמֹכָה
   3. as if Job 39:16
2. All that our opining can do is divide us further. Pious subtleties that undermine the trustworthiness of the actual words Jesus has instituted and left us shall never unify us. We must either take the writings we have received from the apostles as the ones Jesus wants us to have, or we must believe that Jesus does not want us to have any specific words at all.
   1. John 6:68
3. If their meaning is not plain, then there is no clear meaning to them at all.
   1. John 7:26, John 8:43, John 13:7
   2. Mark 6:52
   3. Luke 22:53, 66-71
4. But if Jesus really wanted to give us a simple statement of a miraculous reality, He used the only word that human language has given us for making such claims. He could not have said it any other way,
5. In a Bible where Jesus often explains parables but never explains miracles, “it’s impossible” is a terribly poor argument against His plain meaning. More than terrible, it has been historically cataclysmic. For once we started down this nonbiblical path of judging the Scriptures by our understanding, we could only eventually find ourselves subsumed beneath the reign of doubt.
6. By the time we are done applying our doubts to the rest of the Bible, next to nothing is left. We flee from doubting “is” to doubting “often” to doubting “wine” to doubting “forgiveness.”
7. What remains now is this unfortunate truth: there is no passage of Scripture that teaches us to question the Scriptures. Yet there are countless passages that insist on its perspicuity. (The clarity of the simplest most natural meaning is preferred)
8. If we are to have any hope in surviving the doubt-driven decline storming over the sides of our little boat, we can no longer assume for ourselves old assertions, inferences, and speculations. We now stand face-to-face with the wrath of God against an unbelieving culture, pressed down under cover of deep darkness. From two thousand years ago, Jesus Himself sits with us, staring across the table with eyes fully aware of the sweaty, bloody terror that shortly awaits Him. He only has a few moments left, a few more words to say. “This is” is what He left us.

7. What is the Bible?

The Bible gathers together the writings of God’s chosen prophets and apostles over a period of more than a thousand years. Through the Holy Spirit, God Himself gave these writers the thoughts and words they recorded (verbal inspiration), such that the Bible is God’s Word. For this reason, the Scriptures are both infallible (incapable of error) and inerrant (containing no mistakes). Holy Scripture is therefore entirely reliable and gives us everything we need to know and believe for Christian faith and life.

21 Hebrews 1:1–2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

22 Ephesians 2:19–20 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.

23 2 Timothy 3:16–17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

24 2 Peter 1:21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

8. Why can we be confident that the Bible is the authoritative and inerrant Word of God?

In the Gospel, the central message of the Bible, God promises us new life on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God’s promises alone create faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself, whom we trust, declares that all the Scriptures are God’s own words, completely dependable in all they teach, and without error.

A. Jesus uses the Old Testament Scriptures as God’s Word. He continually affirms Scripture as authoritative with phrases such as “It is written” and “Have you not read?” (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 19:4). He assures us that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

B. Jesus claims the same authority for Himself, saying, for example, “I say to you” (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32), or “Truly, truly, I say” (John 6:47; see also John 5:47), or explicitly claiming His words to be “spirit and life” (John 6:63; see also John 8:31–32).

C. Just as God called and authorized prophets in the Old Testament, put His words in their mouths, and fulfilled their prophecies, so also Jesus called and authorized His apostolic witnesses to speak His Word, guided by His Spirit (Luke 10:16; John 14:26; Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 1:16–21; 1 John 1:1–4).

Note: We believe the Word of God has the power in itself to convince the reader or hearer of its authority. Because it is God’s Word, it is self-authenticating. The Word of God does what it says. Read Isaiah 55:10–11.

9. Do we use human reason to understand the Bible?

Yes, but human reason must be used within appropriate limits, as a servant of the text. To understand the Bible’s meaning properly, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential.

A. Because Scripture is given in human language, to read and rightly understand what it says, we must humbly use human reason in such matters as context, grammar, and logic.

25 Psalm 119:73 Give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.

26 Matthew 22:37 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

27 Acts 17:11 They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

B. Because the Bible is God’s Word and, unlike all other books, is inspired and inerrant, it is wrong to use human reason to question or deny its truthfulness.

28 Romans 3:4 Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged.”

29 2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

30 Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

31 2 Timothy 4:3–4 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

32 2 Peter 3:15–16 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Note: The fact that the Bible is written in human language does not imply fallibility or error. Here, the incarnation guides our thinking. Jesus was true man, without sin, and true God. So also, the Bible is truly human, without error, and truly divine, the very Word of God in the words of men (Hebrews 4:15 and 2 Peter 1:20–21). For this reason, the Bible’s truthfulness should not be questioned or denied (as happens, for example, with historical criticism).