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### **Blood**

#### **The Watchtower Reprints, April 15, 1909, p. 4374**

“(1) Abstain from sacrifices to idols;  
(2) and from blood,  
(3) and from things strangled:...

It is our opinion, therefore that these items thus superadded to law of love should be observed by all spiritual Israelites as representing the divine will.”

#### **Blood, Medicine, and the Law of God, 1961 ed., p. 54**

“They know that if they violate God’s law on blood and the child dies in the process, they have endangered that child’s opportunity for everlasting life in God’s new world.”

#### **Jehovah’s Witnesses on Blood, 1977 ed., p. 18-19**

“Persons who recognize their dependence on the Creator and Life-Giver should be determined to obey his commands. This is the firm position that Jehovah’s Witnesses take... It is out of obedience to the highest authority in the universe, the Creator of life, that they refuse to take blood into their systems either by eating or by transfusion. The issue of blood for Jehovah’s Witnesses, therefore, involves the most fundamental principles on which they as Christians base their lives.”

(continued)

**Awake!, June 22, 1982, p. 25**

“Jehovah’s Witnesses accept medical and surgical treatment. In fact, scores of them are physicians, even surgeons. But Witnesses are deeply religious people who believe that blood transfusion is forbidden for them by Biblical passages such as ‘only flesh with its soul - blood - you must not eat’ (Genesis 9:3-4); ‘(You must ) pour its blood out and cover it with dust’ (Leviticus 17:13-14); and ‘Abstain from... fornication and from what is strangled and from blood’ (Acts 15: 19-21).<sup>1</sup> While these verses are not state in medical terms, Witnesses view them as ruling out transfusion of whole blood, packed RBC’s , and plasma, as well as WBC and platelets administration. However, Witnesses’ religious understanding does not absolutely prohibit the use of components such as albumin, immune globulins, and hemophiliac preparations, each Witness must decide individually if he can accept these.”

**The Watchtower, June 15, 1991, p. 31**

“Some modern laws that are basically good may be misapplied to authorize the forcing of a blood transfusion on a Christian. In this case Christians must take the same stand that the apostle Peter did ‘We must obey God as ruler rather than men.’ - Acts 5:29”

**Awake!, May 22, 1994, p. 2**

“In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue.”

(done)

## SETTLING DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES

ACTS 15:1-35.—MAY 23.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."—V. 11.

The season of peace and prosperity, growth in knowledge and in numbers in the early church, was followed by a season of contention and differences at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas returned from their missionary tour, and reported to the congregation which had sponsored their journey expenses. Together they, the church and their missionaries, rejoiced in their mutual service for the Gentiles. The cause indeed was quite prosperous everywhere. Then came from Jerusalem, the headquarters of the church certain brethren, Hebrews by birth, who, perceiving that the Gentile Christian ignored circumcision, raised a great commotion on that score, claiming that circumcision would not save without Christ, neither would Christ's salvation be operative without circumcision. The minds of many were disturbed, and for a time a split in the church seemed probable. But better counsels prevailed and the beloved brethren, Paul and Barnabas, were sent to Jerusalem as a committee to confer with the apostles and elders there. Our lesson tells of this conference and its results.

Incidentally we remark upon the wisdom shown by these early Christians—they had "the spirit of a sound mind." They had indeed great confidence in Paul and Barnabas and realized that under their ministrations they had already received great blessings from the Lord, which fact rather contradicted the idea that they could not be esteemed proper subjects for divine favor without circumcision. They did wisely, therefore, to consider that the will of the Lord on the subject was positive and that his will would be indicated through the Apostles, of whom our Lord had said, " whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." These Apostles, then, might properly be expected to know and to be able to advise, whether circumcision would be a bounden obligation upon the Gentiles as upon the Jews, or whether they would be loosed from that obligation which had been placed upon Israelites—upon all of Abraham's family.

### THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE

The kindly deference of the Apostles, one to the other at the conference, is quite marked in this account. It is also noticeable that they based their conclusions on the subject on what they found written in the Scriptures (the Old Testament) and their leadings of divine providence. Gradually for several years the truth had become more and more plain to them; how that the special favor of God to the Jews had given place to a general favor toward people of every nation, so that all men everywhere believing in the Lord, accepting his promises and consecrating their lives in harmony therewith, might henceforth have equal privileges and advantages with those of Hebrew birth. They knew of God's covenant relationship with that nation, and it took time for them to become convinced that the divine program had taken another step forward. Similarly in the end of this age there are many who realize that only a "little flock" has been called and has responded, sacrificed, under the present high calling. It is difficult for these to grasp the thought that a change of dispensation is at hand and that God intends to complete the work of this age for the "elect" and to inaugurate a new work for the new age, for the non-elect, for the benefit of "all the families of the earth."

The conclusions of the conference are given us in few words, namely, that so far as God is concerned, he had recognized believers of Gentile birth by his holy Spirit in just the same way in which he had recognized believers of Hebrew birth, "and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." (Acts 15:9) What more could be asked? And these Gentiles had received all this favor of God without having come under the bondage of the Law Covenant. Why, they wisely asked, should we put a yoke upon them, when God has made no such requirement? They realized that the Law Covenant was indeed a yoke. More than this, that it was so heavy a yoke that neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear it. Christ had relieved them of the yoke of the Law Covenant. Why should they put it upon brethren to whom the Lord had never given it?

Going beyond this, even, they recognized that in some respects the Gentile, free from the Law, never having come under that yoke, held the superior position of the two; hence the statement, "We (Hebrews) believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they (Gentiles)."

### THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

We have in Vs. 22-29 the decision of the Apostles on the question. They not only wrote it out, but sent it at the hand of two of their trusted brethren, Judas-Barnabas and Silas, with

Paul and Barnabas, that they might have the matter in written and in oral testimony. The declaration was that the disquieting teachings had not been authorized by the Apostles at Jerusalem. Then they briefly summed up, not as law, but as "necessary things," the followings:—

- (1) Abstain from sacrifices to idols;
- (2) And from blood;
- (3) And from things strangled;
- (4) And from harlotry.

It was not intimated that abstinence from these things would make them Christians, for nothing but faith in Christ and consecration to him and endeavor to walk in his steps could constitute them Christians. By these recommended abstentions they declared, "It will be well with you"; you will find these recommendations profitable to you as followers of the Lord. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul has pointed out most forcefully that "Love is the fulfilling of the Law," because love for God would control the life as respects holiness, and love for our neighbor as respects earthly justice. The things here recommended were necessary to a preservation of the fellowship of the "body" composed of Jews and Gentiles of their different education and sentiments. Without discussing whether or not harm could come to the meats sold in the markets, by reason of pagan ceremonies in connection with their killing, the advice was that these be abstained from, because Jews certainly would consider the eating of such meats as participations in the heathen idolatry—even though from the broad standpoint of fact the idol, being nothing but wood or metal or stone, could neither profit nor injure the food. Nevertheless, it was advisable that the Gentile Christians abstain from the use of their liberty in this direction, out of deference to the weaker brethren, Jews and Gentiles, who could not so deeply philosophize and whose consciences might be injured.

A similar thought attaches to the prohibition of the use of blood. To the Jew it was forbidden, and under his covenant it was made a symbol of life—to partake it would reply responsibility for the life taken. Moreover, in the typical ceremonies of the Law the prohibited blood was used as a symbol representing the sin-offering; for by the blood atonement for sins was effected. To emphasize these typical lessons the Jew had been forbidden to use blood. And there may be other, sanitary, reasons connected with the matter, which are not yet known to us. These prohibitions had never come to the Gentiles, because they had never been under the Law Covenant; but so deeply rooted were the Jewish ideas on this subject that it was necessary to the peace of the church that the Gentiles should observe this matter also. The things strangled meant animals taken in traps, whose blood was not shed or drained out by bleeding to death, as the Jewish Law required of all meats that should be eaten. This restriction was necessary to the harmony between the two branches of spiritual Israel—that which came from Judaism and that which came from the Gentiles.

If they did not wish to be contentious and cause divisions in the church, the Gentile brethren would surely be willing to restrain or sacrifice their liberty respecting these matters. The fourth restriction specified was "fornication," the Greek signifying "harlotry." It is difficult to understand why one moral precept should be thus separated from others and placed on the list with ceremonial requirements. We incline rather to ask, Why not have included profanity, drunkenness, idolatry, adultery, false witness, murder, etc? Are we to understand that the Gentiles are free to commit all the crimes in the calendar not stipulated by this Conference, and merely counseled respecting meats offered to idols, or that have died by strangulation—and the use of blood and fornication? Surely not. Rather all the requirements of the Law are included in the one law of the New Creation—Thou shalt love the Lord and thy neighbor.

Love would cover idolatry, profanity, murder, theft, false witness, adultery, but the law of Love would not so thoroughly cover the items enumerated by the Council. These were necessary, proper, and we are to recognize the authority of the apostles to "bind things on earth," and that they were so guided in their public utterances that they bound nothing unnecessarily, nothing contrary to the divine will. It is our opinion, therefore, that these items thus superadded to the law of love should be observed by all spiritual Israelites as representing the divine will. As a matter of fact nearly all the butchering for our markets is in harmony with the Jewish regulations, although many Jews decline to recognize this and eat only such meats as have been inspected and approved by their rabbis.

If such maneuvers to overrule parental rights continue to have the approval of judges and the public, it is wise for all parents to consider what it can lead to. Are they prepared to accept the thesis that, when parents disagree with a physician on any form of treatment, their child has in the eyes of the law become a "neglected" child, and can for that reason be taken by the state and subjected to the treatment in spite of parental protest? Is the right of parents to exercise their good judgment in the upbringing of their children going to be offered up in sacrifice before the ancient Spartan theory that children are the property of the State? The application of this rule in Nazi Germany meant that boys were taken from their parents to be trained for the "Hitler Youth," and young girls were used for breeding, out of wedlock, what the rulers proclaimed would be a scientifically superior race. Those considered unfit were sterilized; many were even put to death. When doctors and the courts conspire together to override family rights and force the application of certain medical procedures that are currently in vogue, it is but one step in the destruction of freedom. Once the God-given rights of Jehovah's witnesses to exercise their discretion in harmony with God's Word in the upbringing of their children have been trampled underfoot, whose rights will be next?

Jehovah's witnesses do not reject blood for their children due to any lack of parental love. They have sincere love for their children and will do anything within their means to help them, but they are not foolish enough to think that they do good for their offspring by turning their back on God. They know that if they violate God's law on blood and the child dies in the process, they have endangered that child's opportunity for everlasting life in God's new world. Their love is not moti-

vated by overriding emotion that seeks satisfaction only at the moment, but their love is deep, seeking the everlasting welfare of their loved ones.

#### MAINTAINING INTEGRITY TO GOD

Realistically viewed, resorting to blood transfusions even under the most extreme circumstances is not truly lifesaving. It may result in the immediate and very temporary prolongation of life, but that at the cost of eternal life for a dedicated Christian. Then again, it may bring sudden death, and that forever. (Matthew 10:39) How much better to abide by the law of Jehovah God, the Source of life, and abstain from blood than to incur his disapproval as a lawbreaker. At all times, and certainly when one's life forces are ebbing, the course of wisdom is to put confidence in the One in whose hands rests the power of life. God will not forsake those who lovingly obey his commands concerning the sanctity of life. He will reward their confidence in his means of salvation by extending to them the life-giving benefits of the blood of his Son—benefits that will sustain them, not for mere days or years, but forever. They know that none who trust in Jehovah God and his now-glorified Son "will by any means come to disappointment."—1 Peter 2:6.

Even if blood could be administered with absolutely no danger from a medical viewpoint—which cannot be done—would it show love for the patient for others to insist that he accept it in an endeavor to extend his present life, when disobedience to God means the forfeiture of the reward of everlasting life? No! It is a time when all interested persons, whether doctors or friends or relatives, can show their sincere concern for the patient and their fear of God by encouraging the patient to hold fast his faith, not to fear, but to trust in God, who is Almighty.

the mouth and taking it into the blood vessels. And, really, is there in principle any basic difference?

Doctors know that a person can be fed through the mouth or intravenously. Likewise, certain medicines can be administered through various routes. Some antibiotics, for instance, can be taken orally in tablet form or injected into a person's muscles or circulatory system (intravenously). What if you had taken a certain antibiotic tablet and, because of having a dangerous allergic reaction, were warned to abstain from that drug in the future? Would it be reasonable to consider that medical warning to mean that you could not take the drug in tablet form but could safely inject it into your bloodstream? Hardly! The main point would not be the route of administration, but that you should abstain from that antibiotic altogether. Similarly, the decree that Christians must abstain from blood clearly covers the taking of blood into the body, whether through the mouth or directly into the bloodstream.

***How important is this issue to Jehovah's Witnesses?***

Persons who recognize their dependence on the Creator and Life-Giver should be determined to obey his commands. This is the firm position that Jehovah's Witnesses take. They are fully convinced that it is right to comply with God's law commanding abstinence from blood. In this they are not following a personal whim or some baseless fanatical view. It is out of obedience to

the highest authority in the universe, the Creator of life, that they refuse to take blood into their systems either by eating or by transfusion.

The issue of blood for Jehovah's Witnesses, therefore, involves the most fundamental principles on which they as Christians base their lives. Their relationship with their Creator and God is at stake. Furthermore, they wholeheartedly believe the psalmist's words: "The judicial decisions of Jehovah are true; they have proved altogether righteous. . . . In the keeping of them there is a large reward!"—Psalm 19:9, 11.

Some persons who look just at the short-term effect of decisions might doubt that obeying God's law about blood can be considered 'rewarding.' But Jehovah's Witnesses are sure that obeying the directions from their Creator is for their lasting good.

The early Christians felt the same. History shows that their obedience to God was sometimes tested to the limit. In the Roman Empire they were put under pressure to perform acts of idolatry or to engage in immorality. Their refusal to give in could mean being thrown into the Roman arena to be torn apart by vicious animals. But those Christians stuck to their faith; they obeyed God.

Think what that involved. For the early Christians who were parents, refusal to break God's law might even bring death upon their children. Yet we know from history that those Christians did not fearfully and faithlessly turn their back on God and the principles by which they lived.

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## Jehovah's Witnesses —The Surgical/Ethical Challenge

● Physicians face a special challenge in treating Jehovah's Witnesses. Members of this faith have deep religious convictions against accepting homologous or autologous whole blood, packed RBCs [red blood cells], WBCs [white blood cells], or platelets. Many will allow the use of (non-blood-prime) heart-lung, dialysis, or similar equipment if the extracorporeal circulation is uninterrupted. Medical personnel need not be concerned about liability, for Witnesses will take adequate legal steps to relieve liability as to their informed refusal of blood. They accept nonblood replacement fluids. Using these and other meticulous techniques, physicians are performing major surgery of all types on adult and minor Witness patients. A standard of practice for such patients has thus developed that accords with the tenet of treating the "whole person." (*JAMA* 1981;246:2471-2472)

PHYSICIANS face a growing challenge that is a major health issue. There are over half a million Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States who do not accept blood transfusions. The number of Witnesses and those associated with them is increasing. Although formerly, many physicians and hospital officials viewed refusal of a transfusion as a legal problem and sought court authorization to proceed as they believed was medically advisable, recent medical literature reveals that a notable change in attitude is occurring. This may be a result of more surgical experience with patients having very low hemoglobin levels and may also reflect increased awareness of the legal principle of informed consent.

Now, large numbers of elective surgical and trauma cases involving both adult and minor Witnesses are being managed without blood transfusions. Recently, representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses met with surgical and administrative personnel at some of the largest medical centers in the country. These meetings improved understanding and helped resolve questions about blood salvage, transplants, and the avoidance of medical legal confrontations.

### Witness Position on Therapy

Jehovah's Witnesses accept medical and surgical treatment. In fact, scores of them are physicians, even surgeons. But Witnesses are deeply religious people who believe that blood transfusion is forbidden for them by Biblical passages such as: "Only flesh with its soul—its blood—you must not eat" (Genesis 9:3-4); "[You must] pour its blood out and cover it with dust" (Leviticus 17:13-14); and "Abstain from . . . fornication and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:19-21).<sup>1</sup>

While these verses are not stated in medical terms, Witnesses view them as ruling out transfusion of whole blood, packed RBCs, and plasma, as well as WBC and platelet administration. However, Witnesses' religious understanding does not absolutely prohibit the use of components such as albumin, immune globulins, and hemophiliac preparations; each Witness must decide individually if he can accept these.<sup>2</sup>

Witnesses believe that blood removed from the body should be disposed of, so they do not accept autotransfusion of predeposited blood. Techniques for intraoperative collection or hemodilution that involve blood storage are objectionable to them. However,

# Questions From Readers

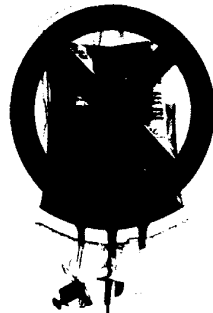
## ■ How strenuously should a Christian resist a blood transfusion that has been ordered or authorized by a court?

Each situation is unique, so there is no all-inclusive rule on this. Christians are known for respectfully 'paying back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,' obeying the laws of the secular government. Yet, they realize that their overriding obligation is to render "God's things to God," not violating his law. —Mark 12:17.

Romans 13:1-7 discusses the relationship of Christians to the governmental "superior authorities." Such governments have the authority to enact laws or to issue directions, usually to promote the general welfare of the populace. And governments 'bear the sword' to enforce their laws and 'to express wrath upon the one practicing what is bad according to their laws.' Being subject to the superior authorities, Christians desire to obey laws and court decrees, but this subjection must be relative. If a Christian is asked to submit to something that would be a violation of God's higher law, the divine law comes first; it takes precedence.

Some modern laws that are basically good may be misapplied to authorize the forcing of a blood transfusion on a Christian. In this case Christians must take the same stand that the apostle Peter did: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29.

Jehovah commanded the Israelites: "Be firmly resolved not to eat the blood, because the blood is the soul and you must not eat



the soul with the flesh." (Deuteronomy 12:23) A Jewish Bible translation of 1917 reads: "Only be steadfast in not eating the blood." And Isaac Leiser rendered the verse: "Only be firm so as not to eat the blood." Does that sound as if God's servants were to be casual or passive about upholding his law?

With good reason Christians have been absolutely determined to obey God, even if a government directed them otherwise. Professor Robert L. Wilken writes: "Christians not only refused [Roman] military service but they would not accept public office nor assume any responsibility for the governing of the cities." (*The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*) Refusal could mean being branded lawbreakers or being condemned to the Roman arena.

Christians today must also be steadfast, firmly resolved not to violate divine law, even if that puts them in some jeopardy as to secular governments. The highest law of the universe—God's law—requires that Christians abstain from blood, just as they are commanded to avoid fornication (sexual immorality). The Bible calls these prohibitions "necessary things." (Acts 15:19-21, 28, 29) Such divine law is not to be taken lightly, as something to be obeyed only if it is convenient or presents no problems. God's law must be obeyed!

We can appreciate, then, why the young Christian mentioned

on page 17 told a court that "she considered a transfusion an invasion of her body and compared it to rape." Would any Christian woman, young or old, passively submit to rape, even if there were a legal grant that the fornication by sexual assault be carried out?

Similarly, the 12-year-old quoted on the same page left no doubt that 'she would fight any court-authorized transfusion with all the strength she could muster, that she would scream and struggle, that she would pull the injecting device out of her arm and would attempt to destroy the blood in the bag over her bed.' She was firmly resolved to obey the divine law.

Jesus withdrew from the area when a crowd wanted to make him king. Similarly, if a court-authorized transfusion seemed likely, a Christian might choose to avoid being accessible for such a violation of God's law. (Matthew 10:16; John 6:15) At the same time, a Christian should wisely seek alternative medical treatment, thus making a genuine effort to maintain life and to regain full health.

If a Christian did put forth very strenuous efforts to avoid a violation of God's law on blood, authorities might consider him a lawbreaker or make him liable to prosecution. If punishment did result, the Christian could view it as suffering for the sake of righteousness. (Compare 1 Peter 2:18-20.) But in most cases, Christians have avoided transfusions and with competent medical care have recovered, so that no lasting legal problems resulted. And most important, they have maintained their integrity to their Divine Life-Giver and Judge.



## Youths Who Put God First

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In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue.



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