

Jehovah's Witnesses and the BLOOD ISSUE



Blood as used in the Bible is a symbol, it is not sacred in, and of, itself. That which it symbolises, life and redemption, specifically the life and redeeming blood of Christ, are what are sacred.

Does the refusal of a transfusion by a Jehovah's Witness (JW), perhaps resulting in death, uphold the sacredness of God required for blood as a symbol? Or, does it violate the sacred meaning of the symbol—life and redemption?

Or, because blood is symbolic of life and redemption would not the acceptance of a transfusion honour the sacred reality, life and redemption?

Would not the giving of blood in a transfusion to save a life be parallel to Christ giving his blood on Golgotha for our eternal life?

JWs are perhaps better known by the general public for their refusal to accept a blood transfusion than by any other teaching. Their reason for such a conviction is that to them accepting a transfusion is viewed as eating blood and the Bible speaks against the eating of blood or unbled meat. But, is that what the Bible says, and can it be extended to the transfusing of blood?

When it is pointed out to a JW that the Bible says nothing against blood transfusions they will frequently respond by saying: "*Of course, such a procedure was unknown in Biblical times. But, the Bible does say 'abstain from blood' and how can you 'abstain' while taking a transfusion?*"

The reason that we are to "*abstain*" from blood is the same reason that we are to "*abstain from meat offered to idols*" (Acts 15:29). Paul said this was a matter of conscience and regard for a weaker brother (1 Cor 8).

The reason why God placed a restriction on blood in the first place was because as Leviticus 17:11 says, :"*...for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*" God was sanctifying, setting apart for a holy purpose, the symbol of life and man's redemption, so that man would have the highest respect for life.

Many pagan religions profaned blood by the way they used it. For instance it has been the view of many in occultic religions in both ancient and modern times that if you would eat animal or even human flesh while it was still living, you would obtain the strength, or life force, of the thing being eaten. This was the reason why God placed such a restriction on Noah and Israel.

In the Old Testament sacrifices we see animal blood being shed for the sins of people. These sacrifices typified the shedding of the blood of Jesus on Golgotha. The sanctification of blood as a sacred symbol was ultimately because of the sacredness of the blood of Jesus. However, the **purpose** of the shedding of blood, whether in type in the Old Testament, or in the reality of Christ in the New Testament, was because the purpose of God was **TO GIVE LIFE**. **Hence, the value of life itself is preeminent over its symbol, blood.**

Is it not interesting that the Church, which God purchased with

His own blood (Acts 20:28), is told to eat Christ's flesh and **drink His blood** symbolically in the Lord's Supper (John 6:53-58).

There is a hierarchy of values in the Levitical law. For instance it was forbidden to the Israelites to gather wood on the Sabbath. When the first offender was brought before Moses for judgment, Moses was told by God to put the man to death. Because this was the first offense, and it was a direct challenge to what God had commanded, the severest penalty was required.

However, in Luke 14:5 Jesus asked the Pharisees, "*Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?*" The difference in Jesus' example is that a life is being saved, even if it is only the life of an animal. To administer a blood transfusion to save a life is to endorse, or sustain, the preeminent value, which is life itself.

Does self-sacrifice by refusal of a blood transfusion strengthen the value God places on life, or weaken it? Is it a sin to sustain life? It would be a sin to throw oneself in front of train of truck. But, it would not be a sin if in doing such a thing one was pushing another person out of danger. The difference, life, the life of another, is being valued highly, even though it costs a life to do so. With a blood transfusion life is being sustained but without the death of anyone else.

ANSWERING THE PROOFTEXTS:

Though there are many Old Testament passages that discuss the eating of blood, the scriptures cited below are the key JWs' texts. So, for the sake of space, comment will be reserved to these.

1. GENESIS 9:4:

This is the first prohibition against the eating of blood. God gave Noah and his family permission to eat animal flesh but He restricted that permission by saying: "*Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.*"

Because this was given to Noah and his family, which then constituted the entire human race, and was prior to the Law, the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society (WTS) says this restriction was a universal one. (*Jehovah's Witnesses and the Question of Blood, 1977, p.7*)

Two other things should be pointed out here. First, there are two kinds of flesh discussed. The first is living animals, or "*flesh with its life*" (**Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament**), and the second is unbled dead meat. This restriction is given to show respect for the blood sacrifices.

Second, the claim by JWs that this prohibition is universal on all mankind is not warranted because Noah and his family were the only believers who were saved through the Flood so the prohibition could still be limited to believers only. And, Moses was inspired by

God to sat, "You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to the foreigner, for you are a holy people to the Lord your God." (Deut 14:21)

The WTB is also inconsistent by saying that Gen 9:4 is universal, because in *The Watchtower*, November 15, 1964, pp. 682-683, they say it is permissible for a JW doctor to administer blood to a non-Witness patient because Deut 14:21 allows Israelites to sell unbled meat to the Gentiles.

2. LEVITICUS 17:10:

"And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people."

Since this text is part of the Law it cannot be said to be applicable to all of mankind. It is speaking directly in the offense of drinking blood. Because blood is at the heart of the Old Testament sacrificial system, and typified the blood of Christ, it carried a heavier penalty than unbled meat. If you read verse 15 you will notice the very mild penalty for eating unbled meat. The reason for the difference is that when an animal is killed by an Israelite he is to show his reverence for life and the atonement by pouring out the blood.

However, the Law, and the type, are fulfilled in Christ. As Matthew Henry says in his Commentary, p.131, "The reason is now superseded, which intimates that the law itself was ceremonial, and is no longer in force..." The strictest orthodox Jews who still practice the Old Testament dietary laws have never equated a blood transfusion with eating blood. In fact among all the sects who claim to follow the Bible the JWs stand alone on this issue. No one else sees any connection between eating blood and transfusing it.

For this reason today, it is "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." (Matt 15:11)

3. ACTS 15:20,29:

In the New Testament the text the WTS cites to claim that this Old Testament prohibition against ingesting blood was carried over to the New Covenant is found in Acts 15:20,29. The decision of the Church leaders in Jerusalem over a question of Christian unity among Jews and Gentiles was that, "...they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood." Verse 29 carries on, "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication..."

In Lev 17 and 18 God commanded these same four restrictions because it is common logic to realise that the Israelites, after their slavery of over 400 years in Egypt, must have adopted the many

paganistic customs of the Egyptians. Fornication, worship of and offers to idols, like the drinking of blood etc. Hence, God had to bring them back to pure Divine worship!

Thus, in the New Testament church this same separation from the pagan practices is required of Gentile, ex-pagan, believers. These four practices, of feasting at pagan temples on the meats offered to idols, of temple prostitution (fornication), eating the bloody meat of things strangled which was considered a delicacy, and from the eating or drinking of blood which was considered by some pagan religions the food of demons, were the same four restrictions placed on Israel when they departed from Egypt.

No doubt exists in the minds of JWs that abstention from blood is absolute. So is fornication, and correctly so. However, the eating of meat offered to idols by Christians is not absolute, as according to them Paul did teach in 1 Cor 8, "an idol is nothing," and that a mature Christian can eat such meat if it does not offend his conscience or a weaker brother.

Thus, the point is made that in the context we have some things that are absolutes (abstaining from fornication), and some that are not (abstaining from meat offered to idols). So to say that the command to abstain from blood, or things strangled, is absolute and incumbent on all Christians is arbitrary.

In context the problem being solved by this ruling of the first general council in Jerusalem was a problem of Christian unity among all legalistic and undiscerning Gentiles at a specific time and in a specific place.

IS A TRANSFUSION FOOD?

One of the simplest facts of biology proves that a transfusion does not constitute the eating of blood. When you eat anything it is taken to the stomach where it is digested and then is passed through the intestines into the blood vessels where blood carries it throughout the body for nourishment. This is the digestive system.

In a transfusion the blood that is transfused travels through the blood stream until it arrives at the intestines where it picks up the digested food passed through the intestines and carries that food throughout the body. This is the circulatory system. The transfused blood is **not food itself** but the carrier of food and oxygen. The food that is digested is broken down into its component parts whereas the blood remains whole.

A CASE OF PHARISAISM:

The prohibition against transfusion (i.e., eating) blood leads to some bizarre and capricious decisions by the WTS leaders.

An example is the question asked about the seepage of blood into the mouth when a tooth has been pulled. An expected answer

could be: "...a Christian, while he is conscious, would be able to spit out what blood accumulated in his mouth..."

The Watchtowers, February 15, 1964, pp.127-128 and June 15, 1982, p.31 say that Christians should not knowingly feed, or allow, blood to be fed to animals over which they have control. If this reasoning is followed does a JW go outside on a summer evening to enjoy the night air knowing that mosquitoes are going to drink his blood?

Or what about his pet receiving a blood transfusion? According to a letter dd., April 6, 1963 from the WTS head office in New York to Mrs A Huczko of California, "It would not be Scripturally proper do so."

OTHER STRANGE DOCTRINES:

The WTS taught that vaccinations were a direct violation of God's everlasting covenant that He made with Noah after the flood and that it never saved a human life, *The Golden Age* (forerunner of *Awake!*), February 4, 1931, p.293 and p.291. Later it became a health risk and was no longer a religious issue. It was also stated that there was no doubt that vaccinations have caused a marked decrease in the number of people contracting contagious diseases. (*Awake!*, August 22, 1965, p.20)

Organ transplants were considered cannibalism (forbidden by God) in *The Watchtower*, November 15, 1967, p.702 and people who submitted to such operations were nothing less than cannibals. In *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1980, p.31 this matter was revised and no longer forbidden by God's word.

THE QUESTION:

How many JWs lost their lives when the above two rulings were in force? Who is responsible for those lost lives since the withdrawal of these unbiblical commands?

How long before the WTS will revise their unfounded view on blood and what about the thousands of JWs who lost their lives? Who is then going to take responsibility for it?

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