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Watchtower Bible & Tract Society

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Re: **Blood and upholding righteous standards**

Dear Brothers

I appreciate your letter dated March 23, 1998 in response to questions regarding blood and upholding righteous standards. Having read your response months ago, and meditated on it for some time, I'm impelled to ask additional questions. I do this in the spirit of our brothers in ancient Berea who were 'examining the scriptures daily.' (Acts 17:10,11)

In your letter the following statement is made:

"It might be argued that if blood was properly disposed of, it would not be possible to make serum injections"

This argument is precisely at the heart of one of my questions. I had asked:

*How can it be Scripturally reasoned that all of this misuse of blood, explicitly to sell, buy or use blood fractions, can possibly be accepted by any Christian conscience? Would not acceptance (and purchase) of the intentional end product be directly supportive of the process when there is no obligation on our part to accept such? Is the described process acceptable? (Please see my letter dated 2/16/98 page 5)*

As informed persons we all know that injections derived from blood would be impossible to manufacture commercially if blood was disposed of properly, just as your quoted words suggest. Thus Christians know that use of any blood derivative is dependent on blood not being poured out as commanded by God. In your response I found no answer to my questions (stated above) relative to this issue. Again, can it possibly be scripturally reasoned away that our intentional buying of products having blood components as a critical element does not support the wholesale abuse of blood? Should we view processing of blood for commercial gain as acceptable, that is, since we support it by voluntarily purchasing some of its end products? I feel an answer should be possible and that it would likely have a direct bearing on Christian conduct.

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Blood & Upholding Righteous Standards

Further, you state:

“But if blood is taken from a body and, before it is disposed of, is broken down by a medical procedure and in the process a small fraction is extracted, not to eat or to nourish the body, but to immunize against a disease, could it be said that there is a clear violation of God’s law not to eat blood?”

From infancy I’ve been taught that transfusion of material intravenously is similar to *eating*, at least as far as abstention goes. As one of Jehovah’s Witnesses I’ve often used the illustration of a doctor telling his patient to abstain from alcohol whether this be ingestion by mouth or intravenous transfusion, either way the patient must abstain from alcohol. In harmony with this thought, I must conclude that ingestion of a blood fraction, intravenously or otherwise would be *eating*. What if the same medical blood derivative could be given orally? It’s still being given for immunization, would this then be eating?

It seems the crux of the above quoted reasoning is that blood derivatives are ‘not eaten to nourish the body.’ Does the administering of blood components like white cells nourish the body like a meal? Would they even be administered as a meal, or would they only be administered for medical purposes? Someone starving could be saved if provided with food for ingestion, whether this be provided intravenously or by mouth. Would someone starving survive by having a blood component like white cells transfused into their veins? It seems white cells are used only for medical purposes, not to provide nutrition like a meal, but to increase the bodies ability to fight certain conditions. Isn’t this similar to why other acceptable components are used? I understand from your letter that major components of blood carry *some* type of nourishment, but is it the same as eating a meal? Again, would white cells provide *nourishing sustenance* if given intravenously similar to its going through the human digestive track? Also, I’m quite sure that the 5% of blood which we tolerate acceptance of could be eaten for nourishment just as red cells or white cells could. Why does it become acceptable if this same material is ingested intravenously? Isn’t this similar to eating? After all, some of these components are prescribed and administered in substantial amounts, especially when they are infused regularly.

Food we eat does more than provide energy and mass, it nourishes us. *Websters New World Dictionary of the American Language* defines nourish as “to feed or sustain with substances necessary to life and growth.” Food we eat nourishes us for life in *more than one way*, it not only provides for growth, but our bodies also gain necessary *elements* enabling it to fight against disease and thus live. Nourishing food, just like taking medicine, helps us fight off disease. In fact a well balanced diet is probably more responsible for enabling our bodies to fight disease than medicine we may be prescribed. An example of this is a mothers milk, components therein provide immunization for the child against certain diseases. Are the immunization components of a mothers milk not considered nutrition, is it not food? Even among adults it is a good diet that helps maintain our body’s immune system, in fact, natural immunity vanishes with poor diet. Persons may take injections containing blood components or vitamin supplements to bolster their immune system against disease. Certainly taking vitamin or mineral supplements is eating, even though the actual amounts ingested with each dose may be relatively minute. Immunization injections containing blood components likewise serve to bolster the immune system, why is this not also considered eating? By definition medical use of blood components is life sustaining nourishment whether they be strictly for immunization or not.

Your letter contains two illustrations. Below I quote excerpts of what seem to be key phrases from the first illustration followed by comments and questions:

"Jehovah is reasonable concerning his laws and their application... plucking and eating some of the heads of grain that made up a very minor fraction of the field was not prohibited by the law. Such plucking was not to be considered "work" that was prohibited."

For Israelites eating was a normal daily practice. God didn't *prohibit* eating on the Sabbath. (Exodus 16:29) Plucking grains from a field for immediate and personal consumption was nothing more than eating a meal. The effort involved in plucking those heads of grain was no more labor intensive than getting dishes off the shelf and serving an already prepared meal to a family. Your comment though seems to reason that size or amount somehow enters into the picture with the command to abstain from blood. I don't see the instance above as a matter of amount, but rather a matter of activity. They weren't "working" as prohibited in God's Sabbath law, they were *eating* their meal, an activity *not prohibited* on the Sabbath.

It is true that God allowed certain activities on the Sabbath, though these did require exertion. But things God *explicitly prohibited* were not tolerated, *not even when infringed upon in some minor way*. Could Eve had eaten just minor components from the forbidden tree and been acceptable to God? Would Achan have lived had he only intentionally taken minor components of spoil? In these cases God gave *explicit prohibitions*, and *amount* had nothing whatsoever to do with the prohibition. God has said "abstain from blood." Is there something in this command separating blood components? This prohibition is quite explicit, just as His commands to take no spoils from Jericho and not to eat from that one tree in the garden of Eden. If we view acceptance of blood for medical purposes as breaking God's command to abstain from blood, how can we justify acceptance of 5% of it's components based on amount or nutritional value?

The second illustration stated in part:

"For instance, if a person is told to discard a bushel of potatoes and not to eat them, would this command be violated if the potatoes were cooked and in the process the starch from the potatoes was isolated and used for medical purposes? First of all, could the ingestion of the isolated starch for medical reasons be said to be eating potatoes?"

When a child, if my mother had said, "Randy, dump those potatoes out. Don't eat them.", and I turned around and cooked the starch out and ingested it, you can be sure I'd have been disciplined. Her instructions were clear, dump them out and don't even think about eating *those potatoes*, meaning anything I had been told to throw out. Yes, cooking the starch out and ingesting it would be eating something we had been told to discard.

You asked: "Could the ingestion of the isolated starch for medical reasons be said to be eating potatoes?" In the illustration we've been told two things, 'dump the potatoes and don't eat them.' Can you imagine God making this command and one of us replying, 'Okay, as soon as I cook out the starch I want for ingestion, I'll dump what's left over'? We were told to dump *those potatoes*, not what's left after taking what we want. Cooking the starch out and disposing of the remnants would not be discarding the potatoes, it would be throwing out leftovers. In the illustration we were told to "discard... potatoes", can you have a potato without starch? If God had given this command you can be sure he was well aware of each component - not just starch - making up the potato. Plus, in the matter of blood, we're dealing with God's chosen and *sacred* symbol of life, something that *belongs to him*. If God commanded "Return those *sacred* potatoes to me, *they belong to me*, do not eat them", and we subsequently cooked the starch out for personal consumption then returned what's left, wouldn't that be stealing? Your reasoning above would allow the

dissection of potatoes into individual elements and ingestion of the same individually, *none of which* would be “eating potatoes”, and so doing would be tampering with another’s property.

What if you gave a team use of your baseball for the duration of their game, requesting the ball be returned to you at the games end and that your ball not be played for additional games? Of course you know some *incidental* damage and loss will occur to this ball while being played, thus you don’t expect to have the exact or entire ball returned, it will have some obvious use in that minor bits of leather will be missing and perhaps even the cover thread may be severed in a spot or two, both of which are normal losses incurred while playing ball. At games end, if one of the players *intentionally* separates the threads off your ball – a minor, yet significant, component – intending to use them to repair the teams old ball, would this be acceptable? Or, what if this same player, after the game ended, *intentionally* picked pieces of sound leather off with a pocket knife, hoping to use these bits of leather for his own purposes? The player could reason, ‘Well we did give back your ball, just without this one small component, and you said not to play additional games with it, and we’re not, we only have the threads from your ball, not the windings necessary for play.’ Would you feel you’d been dealt with in an upright manner? When we pour out our blood, we do more than simply pour out blood, we in effect give it back to Jehovah to whom it belongs. Are we faithfully doing this if we *intentionally* remove the minor “threads” and *use them*?

Jehovah has *explicitly forbidden* humans to eat blood since the days of Noah. Later God’s law on blood included directions on its proper disposal. *Since blood is sacred and eating it is forbidden, it seems reasonable to apply Bible examples where sacred objects belonging to Jehovah were prohibited from personal consumption.* Such an example can be found in the account of Jericho’s destruction. Upon attacking, Joshua said: “Shout; for Jehovah has given YOU the city. And the city must become a thing devoted to destruction; it with *everything that is in it belongs to Jehovah...* As for YOU people, only *keep away from the thing devoted to destruction,* for fear YOU may get a desire and YOU do take some of the thing devoted to destruction and do constitute the camp of Israel a thing devoted to destruction and bring ostracism upon it. *But all the silver and the gold and the articles of copper and iron are something holy to Jehovah. Into the treasure of Jehovah it should go.*” (Joshua 6:16-19)

With his words Joshua made God’s direction clear, everything in Jericho belonged to Jehovah, nothing was to be taken for personal consumption. Everything was to be destroyed by means of fire. After the burning, metal objects – gold, silver, copper and iron – were to be turned over to the treasury at God’s tabernacle. We all know the fate of Achan. In modern terms, he had taken several thousand dollars worth of God’s belongings resulting in his and his family’s death. Additionally, *the Israelite nation* suffered the death of thirty six men along with humiliating defeat at Ai. (Joshua 7:4,5) Would it have been acceptable if Achan had *intentionally* only salvaged some minor fraction of the booty? If Achan had found an inexpensive bottle of oil prior to the destruction by fire, would it have been acceptable for him to take home for his own use because of its medicinal value? God’s direction was clear, *if an Israelite were to “take some of the thing devoted to destruction” it would “bring ostracism upon” Israel.* What if the leadership of Israel had tolerated individuals separating out minor components of booty for their own use?

Another similar example is of “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” This tree represented something *belonging to God,* it was his property, *It was sacred,* and humans were forbidden to “eat” from it. If it had been possible to take something from this tree and “break it down by a medical procedure thereby obtaining some fraction component able to fight disease”, would it have been acceptable for ingestion? Could we possibly conclude that this would not be eating from the tree?

Are we to understand that some components of blood belong to Jehovah and some do not, allowing Christian tolerance of intentional ingestion of some blood fractions? When it comes to blood – God’s sacred symbol of life – are we to understand that Christians can distinguish and separate off the parts they want before giving the rest back to God?

One summation in your letter is that the aspect of taking in blood which is scripturally objectionable is its *providing of nourishment*. You are specific that whole blood and major components carry nourishment to the body. Does this mean that the tolerated 5% of components carry no nourishment? If persons ate these components outright would they gain no nourishment from them? Aren’t the immunization effects themselves nourishment just as the immunizing components of a mother’s milk are to her infant child? Is it the major components themselves or the nutrition they carry which makes them objectionable? We have used the transference of antibodies and proteins via the placenta as reason that some might conscientiously accept these components of blood. However, when it comes to *nourishment* carried by the blood, doesn’t a fetus receive every bit of it’s nutrition – including water from the plasma – from the blood of the mother? How do we explain this seeming contradiction in deduction?


By now I’m sure you can see my reluctance to continue blood specific conversations with individuals in the healthcare field. I have found it difficult – if not impossible – to express scriptural reasons for our tolerance of *some* blood components and intolerance of other blood components. One physician has recently raised the subject but I quickly changed the topic for want of scriptural answer.

In view of the Bible’s explicit directive to abstain from blood, and our governing its use among ourselves, it would seem that either we should tolerate no *intentional* acceptance of blood regardless of the component, or that we view acceptance of blood for purely medical reasons differently from eating blood as a meal. Our current teaching seems impossible to explain *scripturally*, leaving *arbitrary reasoning* as our answer.

Until now I have chosen not to share the information above with those to whom it was intended because I don’t understand your response as it is. I would ask your re-examination of my initial letter together with this reply. I express my deepest appreciation for your earnest efforts. Thanks in advance.

Recently we enjoyed our district convention program carrying the theme “God’s Way of Life”. It provided refreshment and instilled enthusiasm for living God’s way. The book entitled *Is There a Creator Who Cares About You?* along with the brochure *What happens to Us When We Die?* I have found most strengthening. I wish to express my appreciation for such provisions. Keep up the good work!

Your brother in Jehovah’s service,



R. Jensen

enclosure: Copy of my original letter dated 2/16/98  
Copy of your letter dated 3/23/98