



Is It a Sin If I...? (Part III)

Colossians 3:17: (NASB) *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*



Sin is a difficult thing to handle. We are constantly challenged to live up to godly standards of righteousness daily. As our social order expands into countless variations of perceived freedoms, there are many questions that need clarifying regarding what is right and wrong in God's eyes. Today we examine two of those questions. First, is it a sin if I, as a Christian, get a tattoo? Opinions on this question vary to an amazing degree. So, does the Bible guide us on this? Second, is it a sin if I get a blood transfusion? While this is perhaps a small issue for most of us, there are some who have very deep convictions on this matter. What does the Bible say, and what does the Bible not say?



We receive questions from listeners who message us through the Christian Questions app or email us at inspiration@christianquestions.com. Many are behavior and lifestyle questions that fall into a gray area, so throughout this "Is It a Sin" series, we are exploring some of these in depth.

1. In Episode 1240 Part I, we talked about wearing makeup and nail polish, cross-dressing and gambling.
2. In Episode 1241 Part II, we addressed various questions about sexuality.

Keep sending in your questions!

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The overriding theme for this series is simple: Answering and exploring questions about everyday cultural, social and religious topics that Christians may have different opinions on and defining them scripturally.

At the center of this scriptural defining process is our theme scripture:

Colossians 3:17: (NASB) *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

ANY question we may have about our
THOUGHTS, WORDS or ACTIONS in our lives,
should ALWAYS be run through this simple scriptural filter:



- What are my thoughts, words and deeds?
- Do they scripturally and appropriately fit into the category of being done in the name of Jesus?
- Can I truly be thankful to God through Jesus for this thought, word or deed?

As we look into some of the ancient practices of tattooing, let's look at what the Jewish Law said about this:



*What if the tattoo is religious or spiritual?
"Think before you ink."*

Leviticus 19:26-31: (NASB) ²⁶You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying. ²⁷You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard. ²⁸You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD. ²⁹Do not profane your daughter by

making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness. ³⁰You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary; I am the LORD. ³¹Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.

All things commanded here were for the purpose of defining the Hebrews as the people of God. Their appearance, their society, their religious practices and their morality were all manifestations of their loyalty to God and God alone, and for their separation from the pagan religions which surrounded them.



You shall not make cuts in your body—these cuts may reference more random and emotionally-driven cutting in contrast to tattoos depicting a design with a specific meaning.

An example of the random cutting involved the priests of the false god Baal.

They slashed themselves with swords and spears to show their dedication to their so-called “god” as they tried to get his attention:

1 Kings 18:27-29: (NASB) ²⁷It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened. ²⁸So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. ²⁹When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

Self-mutilation was unfortunately a common practice among pagan religions.

(Source: Britannica.com) Flagellation, in religion, the disciplinary or devotional practice of beating with whips. ...Floggings and mutilations were sometimes self-inflicted. ...In the early Christian church, self-flagellation was apparently imposed as punishment and as a means of penance for disobedient clergy and laity. ...When plague ravaged Italy in 1259, Raniero Fasani, also known as the Hermit of Umbria, organized processions of self-scourging flagellants who practiced the ritual. ...The practice gradually subsided, but in the 16th century the Jesuits temporarily revived lay interest in self-inflicted flagellation, especially in southern Europe.

Deuteronomy again mentions that the people of Israel were never to do such things:

Deuteronomy 14:1-2: (NASB) *¹You are the sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead. ²For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

In other words, certain superstitious rituals for mourning the dead, including various cutting rituals, were forbidden for the Israelites.

The priesthood was also specifically instructed to never make such marks upon themselves:

Leviticus 21:5-6: (NASB) *⁵They shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh. ⁶They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present the offerings by fire to the LORD, the food of their God; so they shall be holy.*

They were holy before God –such markings were NOT a symbol of holiness! In principle, the priesthood should live up to the highest standard.

Quoting again:

Leviticus 19:28
NASB

Leviticus 19:28: (NASB) *You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any **tattoo <7085> marks** on yourselves: I am the LORD.*

People who are against tattooing point to this scripture.

However, the word “tattoo” does not show up in the English language until about the late 1700’s. The King James Version was first published long before that in the year 1611.

Leviticus 19:28
KJV

Leviticus 19:28: (KJV) *Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any **marks <7085>** upon you: I am the Lord.*

The word *tattoo* is missing in the King James! The phrase *tattoo marks* was added in later translations.

This Hebrew word only appears once in scripture:

Marks: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #7085; *qa’āqa’*; an incision or gash:—mark

Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon: incision, imprintment, tattoo

Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon: stigma; a mark branded on the skin

These definitions all indicate a serious, permanent mark. The book of Leviticus tells the Israelites to stay away from that kind of activity. Why was that important?



The Israelites lived between Egypt and Canaan. Egyptian mummies show decorative tattoos, but only on women. It is thought these were either for treating medical diseases, or as part of fertility rites, or as a good luck charm during birth.



(Source: "Wounds prepared with iron: tattoos in antiquity," Martin Dinter and Astrid Khoo) Outside the Greek and Roman world, the significance of tattoos varied wildly. In Egypt, tattoos carried magical and religious functions. Mummified corpses reveal that as early as 2000 B.C., women received dot-pattern tattoos on their abdomens. The purpose of these tattoos is believed to have been the enhancement of fertility. Faience figurines, which were interred with the dead to ensure resurrection, exhibited similar dot-patterns on their abdomens and thighs. These dolls were evidently meant as fertility charms for living relatives, as one figurine bears the following hieroglyphic inscription: 'May a birth be granted to your daughter Seh'. The connection between tattoos and fertility is also perceptible from how these patterns would stretch into symbolic 'web' or 'netting' designs during pregnancy. ...This link between fertility and tattooing was deeply rooted in Egyptian culture; Hathor, the goddess of motherhood, was served by tattooed priestesses.

It is clever that they put these dot patterns on a woman so that as she expanded with pregnancy, the pattern formed a net of protection. However, these practices show us a picture of superstition. They were used to bring luck or protection, possibly to heal in a superstitious way. They were associated with magic and Paganism.

God says the Israelites were not to do such things, drawing His people away from superstitious practices. This caused them to stand separate from the Pagans around them.

(Source: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/bible-verses-about-tattoos/>) In Canaan, evidence indicates that instead of marking the body with ink, more extreme scarification measures, like branding, slashing, or gashing the skin were used.

(Source: "Wounds prepared with iron: tattoos in antiquity," Martin Dinter and Astrid Khoo) Long before the Greeks and Romans, however, Near Eastern societies practiced punitive tattooing. By the time of the Pentateuch's completion in 400 B.C., a strong taboo against tattooing had already developed in Jewish culture. This vehement social stigma is encapsulated in the prohibition recorded in Leviticus: 'You shall not etch a tattoo on yourselves'...A long tradition of forced tattooing had engendered a negative view of tattooing among the Jews, which was later reinforced by Rabbinic commentaries. The medieval scholar Maimonides explained that 'pagans', such as the Canaanites, had tattooed their Jewish captives and thereby consecrated them to idols. Indeed, the Jews viewed tattooing as unlawful due to its historical associations with idolatry and slavery.

With this significant historical use of tattooing, it is no wonder that God did not want them to have anything to do with it. The Jewish people taken as slaves by these other nations were sometimes tattooed across their foreheads with the name of their owner, or the nation or identifying them as slaves.

As God's people, they did not need to be marked in this way. They were to follow Him with obedience.



While we have not yet answered the tattoo question for Christians, we have clearly uncovered a principle of godly holiness and separation of one's body from the crowd.

God was pretty blunt about what He wanted His people to do and not do. Being different meant everything!

With all of that said regarding tattoos in the Old Testament, where does it leave us now as disciples of Christ?

We know that as Christians we are not bound to the ceremonial rituals of the Old Testament Jewish Law. Jesus never mentions anything about body markings regarding his followers. We also know that there were likely many Gentiles who came into Christianity who, for various reasons, would have had body markings. What do we do with all of this?

The first Gentile convert named Cornelius may have had a tattoo as a Centurion in the Roman army. Apparently, in the Roman Empire, soldiers were tattooed with permanent dots. This was used as a means of identification and membership in a certain unit.



Cornelius, Peter and preparing for Gentile converts

Why would God even call a Roman soldier? Each person called to follow Jesus comes from a different background. Each starts where they are when they are called, and rises up to where they need to be as a follower of Christ.

PROS AND CONS

CON

After creating man, God pronounced His creation "very good." The skin of humans was beautiful and perfect. When people get a tattoo, they are marring God's work. Why mess up what God created?

PRO

A Bible-related tattoo is a permanent witness to those around us.

CON

A religious tattoo is not necessary as a witness. Jesus said the world will know Christians by their love in John 13:34,35. Our characters testify to our walk with God, as described as the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22,23.

PRO

Today's tattoos are much different from those described in the Old Testament. Today they are a means of self-expression and personal decoration.

CON

The only scripturally-sanctioned cutting of flesh was circumcision (Genesis 17:12). It was an outward testimony that an Israelite man had entered into the Law Covenant with God. This was an important and holy witness.



PRO

Although tattoos may have a history in ancient ritual and false religion, in our cultural context they do not necessarily denote a connection with evil or false faith. They are often just ornamentation.

CON

Tattoos can bring unnecessary attention to ourselves. They can have negative impacts on future relationships and even employment. They are costly and painful to remove.

PRO

Even if Leviticus 19:26-31 meant an inked tattoo, it has nothing to do with the moral part of the Law that applies to all people in all timeframes. Christians are not bound to the ceremonial part of the Law so any prohibition there does not apply, which is why Christians today eat shrimp and can wear linen and wool together.

To make sense of all these pros and cons, we want to find biblical principles. The New Testament does NOT specifically prohibit tattoos. To personally apply biblical principles, we will use “mirror questions” to ask ourselves if we are considering this activity.

Biblical principles to consider in the tattoo debate:



- ✚ Does my desire for a spiritual or random tattoo potentially cross the line of simply being a sacrificial Christian?
- ✚ Does my discipleship need displaying with permanent markings on my flesh, or does my example of a permanently transformed character make the point?



Matthew 5:33-37: (NASB) ³³Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord. ³⁴But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no; anything beyond these is of evil.

As Christians, we are to live with humility, be selfless, be clothed with meekness, not drawing attention to ourselves. We want people to see a character that reflects Christ rather than ourselves. We should let our “yes be yes” - our lives should speak fully and fluently for where we are and what we are going to do.

We have often talked about being a witness without saying anything. Jonathan had an interesting experience along this line.



Years ago, I was taking a course on how to create a business. We all had different ideas of businesses we were pursuing. Halfway through the course, I got a phone call from one of the other students. He said he knew I was a man of faith and needed to talk. I was not sure how he knew about my faith; religion had never come up in the class. He was at a low point in his life and contemplating suicide. He asked what I believed, and I shared God’s plan for all and how loving and merciful God truly is. This was a comfort to him.

We started studying the Bible together, and it changed his life. I was truly grateful to the LORD for letting me help this wonderful man.

Jonathan did not need a tattoo with a scripture on his arm to be a living scripture to somebody else.



- ✚ Does my desire for a spiritual or random tattoo potentially cross the line of my sacred responsibility in any way?
- ✚ Am I lowering my standards to those of the world around me by expressing myself in the same ways they express themselves?
Am I bringing myself down a level?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: (YLT) ¹⁹Have ye not known that your body is a sanctuary of the holy spirit in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own, ²⁰for ye were bought with a price; glorify, then, God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

How do we glorify God in our body and spirit? With humility. I am a humble servant given the tremendous privilege of grace and honor. What am I doing with it?

How did Jesus draw attention to himself? Certainly not by how he looked. He probably wore the same clothes for three and a half years! He drew attention to the will and word of God. That is the example we have to follow.



- ✚ Does my desire for a spiritual or random tattoo potentially cross the line regarding my personal choices?
- ✚ Am I leveraging the principle of it not being prohibited into a way to justify getting what I want at the expense of my highest standards of discipleship?

1 Corinthians 10:23: (NASB) *All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.*

The Bible doesn't say I can't, so therefore I can, right? No!

What about getting a Bible-related tattoo, like a cross or a scripture, to give a witness to others? Why do we feel we need to make a display when we can live a life as an example of one who walks behind the cross of Christ - a life that speaks of righteousness, godliness, mercy and God's plan?

The highest standard is to BE, not to SHOW.



- ✚ Does my desire for a spiritual or random tattoo potentially cross the line regarding my firm stance against any and every "seducing spirit"?
- ✚ Is my spiritual conscience highly functional?

The Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about!

1 Timothy 4:1-2: (KJV) ¹Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; ²Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.



(Source: Bible commentary by David Guzik) Paul knew what it was to have a dead, burned conscience. Before he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he felt completely justified in his persecution of Christians and hatred of Jesus. He could feel justified because his conscience was seared and needed a wake-up call –which the Lord graciously provided.

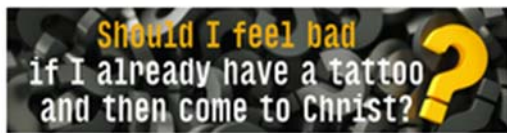
How fine-tuned is my conscience? Am I living differently than the world, or am I blending in because my thinking is more earthy than spiritual? Our job is not to blend in.

There is a difference between getting attention by wearing a flashy hat or glitter eye shadow in that a tattoo is basically permanent and will forever define us. Something may be attractive to us and we have good reasons for it now, but then our perceptions change.

While tattoos are not on the same level as other lifestyle changes like entering the permanent covenant of marriage, it *is* a permanent decision to alter our bodies. What are the lifetime benefits and challenges, and where does Christ truly fit in this picture? We truly need to think seriously about the decision.

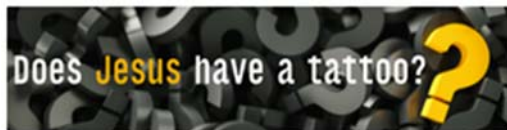


No. The Bible does not give a specific prohibition against tattooing. *Pick opinion: I do not see tattoos as an example of living out the highest principles.*



No. The tattoo is part of who you were then, where you came from. Cornelius likely had one. This could be a great witness, as in: *This is who I used to be, let me tell you about who I have become...*

Even if it is now an embarrassment, it can be used a reference point of growth and as we witness to others. This is similar to how we grow from bad experiences.



Revelation 19:16: (NASB) *And on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

The book of Revelation - and specifically the context of this scripture - is filled with symbolic pictures. There is a sword coming out of his mouth, his eyes are like flames of fire and his robe is soaked in blood. At this point in Revelation, Jesus is a spirit being, and so having a literal robe and literal thigh with writing is unlikely.

Apparently ancient kings and military men would have their titles embossed on their robes and swords. John Gill suggests: “..either it was upon that part of his garment which covered his thigh; or else that it was also on his sword, which he sometimes girt upon his thigh.” They would have their titles and names embossed upon their robes and their swords and probably anywhere else there might be room to put a name. This is a clear picture of identity –but it is a symbol, not a literal happening.



(Source: Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) *And on his thigh* - the robe or military cloak may be conceived of as open and flowing, so as to expose the limbs of the rider; and the idea is, that the name was conspicuously written not only on the flowing robe, but on the other parts of his dress, so that it must be conspicuous whether his military cloak was wrapped closely around him, or whether it was open to the breeze. Grotius supposes that this name was on the edge or hilt of the sword which descended from his thigh.

(Source: John Gill's Exposition of the Bible) This name, afterwards expressed, is said to be written on his vesture, in allusion to the custom of persons of note and eminence having their names interwoven in their garments, and which was sometimes done in letters of gold, as Zeuxis had; and it is expressive of the conspicuousness of Christ's kingdom, which now will come with observation; his judgments, the administrations of his kingly office, will be manifest, and he will reign before his ancients gloriously: and its being said to be written on his thigh may mean either that it was upon that part of his garment which covered his thigh; or else that it was also on his sword, which he sometimes girt upon his thigh.



Tattoos are NOT expressly forbidden to Christians. If we become a disciple of Christ already having tattoos, we can seek their removal OR use them as a witness of what we used to be in contrast to what we are becoming. Seeking a new tattoo should be done with the utmost attention to the spiritual details of our lives as the most important elements of our decision.

Think along spiritual lines before you ink!

There certainly is a lot more to tattoos that we may have previously thought. The bottom line is to be spiritually guided.

What about receiving blood when needed? Are blood transfusions allowable for followers of Christ?

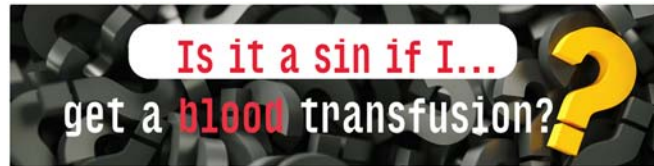
For many of us this is not an issue at all, but for some it ends up being a life and death challenge. For millions of Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientists (the latter do not accept any medical treatment), blood transfusions are a line in the sand that cannot be crossed. While we will not focus on the deaths and tragic results of this belief, we will look into the scriptural reasoning on both sides of the issue so we can find the *thus sayeth the LORD*.



I recently had surgery. Right before I was wheeled into the operating room, the hospital asked if I was a Jehovah's Witness and do I refuse any necessary blood transfusion. I had to sign a paper where I said no, I was not a Jehovah's Witness and therefore would accept blood. Many hospitals in the United States respect religious beliefs and look for workarounds.

While we appreciate having strong convictions, this is a situation where the Bible does not directly speak on the topic, as there were no blood transfusions in ancient days. According to Wikipedia: "By the late 19th century, blood transfusion was regarded as a risky and dubious procedure, and was largely shunned by the medical establishment."

Of course, that has changed in our day.



(Source: JW.org) The Bible commands that we not ingest blood. So, we should not accept whole blood or its primary components in any form, whether offered as food or as a transfusion. We avoid taking blood not only in obedience to God but also out of respect for Him as the Giver of life.

The Jehovah's Witness position has changed over time from its original total ban in 1951. In the year 2000, the ban was limited to just "whole blood or its primary components." This meant that using red cell "fractions" like hemoglobin –the protein that transports oxygen –was not banned. It is the same with using other fractions from red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma. Receiving bone marrow, for example, is allowed.

The Jehovah's Witnesses website uses four scripture passages to defend their position on blood transfusions.

1

Here is the first, but we need to understand this in context:

Genesis 9:3-4: (NASB) ³Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. ⁴Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

Coming out of the Ark, Noah and his family were now specifically instructed along several lines of moral behavior.

This particular aspect of God's commands is interpreted different ways.

(Source: JW.org) God allowed Noah and his family to add animal flesh to their diet after the Flood but commanded them not to eat the blood. God told Noah: "Only flesh with its soul—its blood—you must not eat." This command applies to all mankind from that time on because all are descendants of Noah.

We take exception with the statements: "...but commanded them not to eat the blood," and "This command applies to all mankind from that time on because all are descendants of Noah." First, the command to Noah was not to eat an animal with the blood still in the body. Not eating blood itself was not forbidden until the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 17:10. Christians are not subject to the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law.

Out of respect for the animal, it was to be bled when killed for food.

(Source: Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible) *The flesh with its life in its blood* - while there is life in the blood, or while the creature is living; the meaning is, that a creature designed for food should be properly killed, and its blood let out; that it should not be devoured alive, as by a beast of prey; that raw flesh should not be eaten, as since by cannibals, and might be by riotous flesh eaters, before the flood; for notwithstanding this law, as flesh without the blood might be eaten, so blood properly let out, and dressed, or mixed with other things, might be eaten, for aught this says to the contrary; but was not to be eaten with the flesh, though it might separately, which was afterwards forbid by another law. The design of this was to restrain cruelty in men, and particularly to prevent the shedding of human blood, which men might be led into, were they suffered to tear living creatures in pieces, and feed upon their raw flesh, and the blood in it.

Eating blood is not a blood transfusion. The Hebrew word for *eat* used in Genesis 9:4 means "eat, consume or devour –literally or figuratively."



Key “blood” factors here in Genesis:

1. Noah was instructed that the consumption of animals for food was now acceptable.
2. The focus is on the humane treatment of animals as a food source.
3. The focus is on the importance of blood as the key for life itself in all sentient beings.

The blood is the visible, tangible key to life for humans and animals. Drain it out - and they are no more. When we look at blood as a symbol in the Bible, the fact that blood is the key to life gives us insight into why God puts such an emphasis on blood.

This begins our understanding of the blood issue. We observe that partaking of animal meat as food after it has been properly prepared for consumption has NOTHING to do with any conversation or application regarding blood transfusions. These are very different subjects.

Blood transfusions in ancient Israel did not exist. These two activities use different systems (circulatory and digestive) within the body. Eating versus transfusing to save or bolster life have no similarity.

This is the first time the Bible states blood is not to be eaten, as part of the Mosaic Law:

2

Leviticus 17:10: (NASB) *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.*

(Source: JW.org) God viewed the soul, or life, as being in the blood and belonging to Him. Although this Law was given only to the nation of Israel, it shows how seriously God viewed the Law against eating blood.

Again, that Hebrew word translated as *eat* here does literally mean “eat.”

Deuteronomy confirms the seriousness of this aspect of the Law:

Deuteronomy 12:23,24: (NASB) *²³Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. ²⁴You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.*

As a side note, the Jehovah’s Witnesses forbid the donating and storing of blood because of verse 24.

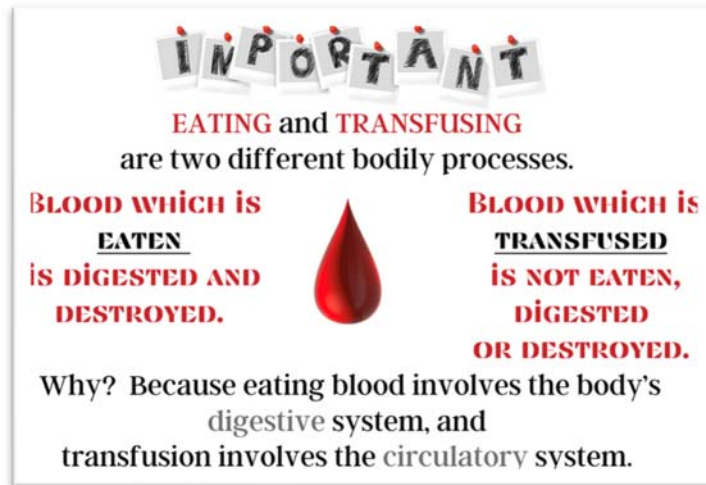
(Source: Watchtower 2000, October 15, p.31) Blood is not to be stored; it is to be poured out - returned to God, as it were.



This has to do with eating blood. There does not seem to be a correlation with blood transfusions in any of the verses we have read so far.



The Jehovah’s Witness command in 1951 was originally based on the misconception that food was converted into blood and that blood itself was what actually nourished the body.



We understand the seriousness with which millions of people adhere to this idea, but we are not seeing proof in the Scriptures of the validity of their belief.

The context of Leviticus gives us an important perspective and a powerful “why” for the prohibition against eating blood:

Leviticus 17:8-11: (NASB) ⁸Then you shall say to them, any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, ⁹and does not bring it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to offer it to the LORD, that man also shall be cut off from his people.

Notice the penalty for not bringing a sacrifice to the door of the Tabernacle – it was being cut off from His people.

¹⁰And 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.

Interesting! Not bringing a sacrifice to the door of the Tabernacle had the same penalty as eating blood. Eating blood does not carry a unique penalty above all else, as it is part of a list of other actions. If we see the same penalty for two different things, we cannot take one scripture without the rest. In context, it loses its singular focus and becomes one of many focuses.



Much of ceremonial law involved symbolism to foreshadow God's plan for man, but it also included healthy, common-sense practices to keep God's people safe from disease.

However, blood IS important – why?

¹¹For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.

This is why blood is so important! The life of humanity is represented in our blood. There is no better symbol of that life, as it carries life support throughout the body. God saw this as a way to make a most dramatic point about His plan for redemption. The shed blood of Jesus atoned for Adam. Blood is, therefore, critically important from God's eyes to our lives.



There are two points regarding God's message here:

1. God's requiring blood sacrifices from the start shows us that from the moment of Adam's sin, humanity needed redemption.

Remember how Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was not? This first human death was marked by God calling attention to Abel's shed blood:

Genesis 4:9-11: (NASB) ⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? ¹⁰He said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. ¹¹Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Abel's blood, the symbol of his life, was spilled upon the ground and a curse resulted upon Cain. This reinforces the sacredness of life. *The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground* - figuratively.

We can see how important blood is because it is the tangible representation of the sacredness of life. This is why the blood of Jesus becomes so critical to every Christian.

2. Leviticus teaches us that blood sacrifices were the pathway to atonement with God.

Hebrews 10:1-4: (NASB) ¹For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? ³But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

ALL of those sacrifices were symbolically showing the ransom price of Jesus, who shed his blood once as an atonement for the sins of Adam.



We agree with the sacredness of blood, but we do not want to confuse blood sacredness with transfusions and eating blood. Blood is a symbol for life.

It is also important to note that the Bible only references eating animal blood because of our diet. It technically is not addressing human blood, as with a transfusion.



Why are these scriptures having to do with the death of the animal used to prevent even banking our own blood for a medical procedure? No one has died –the blood is put back into the person from whom it is taken. And even donating blood does not mean the donor has died.

There is a stark difference between the prohibition of eating blood under the Law and the transfusing of blood in a medical procedure. Transfusing can stabilize and preserve human life. It is a wonderful blessing of modern medicine.



Blood is a comprehensive representation of life. Israel was to be merciful in the killing of animals for food or sacrifice and the handling of the blood of those animals was to be respectful. Blood sacrifices pointed to Jesus and his own shed blood. Within all of these verses there is absolutely ZERO correlation between the eating of the blood of a dead or dying animal and the receiving of the blood from a living being to protect and save the life of a living being.

God's instructions to Israel were sober and clear. Let's be sure to apply these things only in the way they were meant to be applied!

Now we have a clear Old Testament perspective, but does the New Testament address the blood transfusion question?

The short answer to this is no because the whole idea of blood being transfused to save life is not even hinted at in Scripture. However, we do have several scriptural principles that clearly show us how the New Testament's application and symbolic use of blood goes far beyond the Old Testament guidelines.

The third scriptural passage used by those who refuse blood transfusions is in Acts 15. This records a meeting called the Jerusalem Council around 48 AD, years after the crucifixion of Jesus.



The primary debate was whether or not Gentiles following Jesus would need to be circumcised, but the overall question was: Would Gentiles have to first convert to Judaism in order to accept Christ?

The decision of the Council was that Gentiles did NOT have to observe the Mosaic Law. However, it was recommended that four requirements be observed in order to prevent stumbling Jewish Christians.

Here is the third passage used to forbid blood transfusions:

Acts 15:19-21: (NASB) ¹⁹Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, ²⁰but that we write to them that they

1. abstain from things contaminated by idols
2. and from fornication
3. and from what is strangled
4. and from blood.

²¹For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.

(Source: JW.org) God gave Christians the same command that He had given to Noah. History shows that early Christians refused to consume whole blood or even to use it for medical reasons.

Again, note “**whole blood only**” is a recent change with the Jehovah's Witness organization. The components of blood are not addressed.



from what is strangled – Jehovah's Witnesses understand this to mean eating meat with blood, according to the old Law.

and from blood – Jehovah's Witnesses understand this to mean an expansion of the Law to not use blood in any way.

The idea of abstaining from blood is being interpreted and expanded as:
Do not eat it OR take it into your veins.



We are respectfully asking, could this randomly be expanded further to say, do not touch blood so therefore do not go into the medical field? How far do you take the interpretation?

The issue is that this IS an interpretation, unfortunately with no basis in Scripture. If we create a meaning on our own, we veer off from God's meaning. Nowhere in Scripture is it EVER remotely mentioned about taking anything into your veins. We have to use our highest spiritual integrity when reading and interpreting the Bible.

Later on, the Apostle Paul clearly taught that eating meat offered to idols was not an inherent sin.

It was a sin potentially only in relation to the personal motivation of the individual doing the eating:

1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-9: (NASB) ⁴Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

There is no such thing as an idol in the world – meaning, while there were (and are!) lots of idols in the world, they were only statues made with human hands, meaningless and without spiritual value.



Meat was offered in sacrifice to various idols who obviously did not eat it. At the end of the day, it was removed and sold to the vendors in the market or served at various eating places around the city. Of course, this meat was not actually tainted by the idol, but its association apparently bothered some, especially new Christians trying to shun any hint of Paganism.

⁷However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

There were many Christian Gentiles coming in from Paganism. For their entire Paganistic lives, they worshipped idols and considered them real and valuable. Paul is being sensitive to their feelings. The Jewish Christians for different reasons might have a similar sensitivity. It would have been hard for the Jews to lose the abhorrence of everything connected to idols. The Apostle Paul was saying we have to be careful not to stumble our brethren.

⁸But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

Paul teaches us to know our liberty and know how others of our fellowship view that liberty, and to always be aware of those who are sensitive according to their own conscience! In teaching these deep principles of conscience, Paul was stepping beyond what the Jerusalem Council had decided.



But Paul was at that Council where it was decided to *abstain from things contaminated by idols*.



Is he now contradicting what the Council agreed upon?

This acceptance of eating meat is also repeated in Romans 14:12-17.



Paul expanded on the matter by saying the truth is that things like meat offered to idols does not actually contaminate the meat. In Acts 15, there was a compromise made for the sake of unity and maintaining peace. He says if you and those you meet with do not have a problem with this, then eat the meat. It does not matter unless it matters to those around you. It is a matter of conscience and of respect for the brotherhood's sensitivity towards various things.

The Apostle Paul goes beyond the Jerusalem Council by saying eating meat originally given to idols **does not** matter, as the idols are fake and meaningless, unless it **does** matter – meaning, someone is offended by the practice.

Somewhat like our discussion on tattoos, it becomes a matter of conscience and personal choice, as well as being sensitive to things that might stumble those around us.

Jesus' lessons about blood were very hard for his fellow Jews to hear:

John 6:53-55: (NASB) ⁵³So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

These verses were all about the symbolism of this picture –the point Jesus makes is that he truly did fulfill all aspects of the Law! To eat his flesh in symbol is to partake of the sacrifice of his broken body. To drink his blood in symbol is to personally apply the merit of his sacrificed life.

His sacrifice needs to nourish us and buy us back from sin.

At face value, this would have been a very repulsive statement to the Jews after all the scriptures we have gone through about blood! In fact, it goes on to say many Jews no longer followed him after this. He did this on purpose so they could see how he was teaching them beyond what had ever been taught before.

Remember, Jesus fulfilled ALL aspects of the Law.

We have “partaken” of his blood and had his blood applied to us; therefore, we are freed from the Law:

Romans 10:4: (NASB) *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

In summary, we see Acts 15:19-21 has ZERO correlation with anything remotely related to blood transfusions.

This is the final text cited by those who refuse blood transfusions:

4 Colossians 1:20: (NASB) *And through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

(Source: JW.org) There are sound medical reasons to avoid blood transfusions. More important, though, God commands that we abstain from blood because what it represents is sacred to Him.

It is true that rare mistakes like giving the wrong blood type can be harmful or even fatal. Early on, diseases like AIDS were transferred through infusions, though now blood is thoroughly screened to lower that possibility. Laparoscopic surgeries and other so-called “bloodless techniques” are more popular now, involve less blood loss, fewer infections and have easier recoveries.



Let’s examine some of the context of this verse as it helps us see just how Jesus puts the sacredness of blood in context:

Colossians 1:17-20: (NASB) *¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is also head of the body, the church; and he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

We see the comprehensiveness of the role Jesus’ sacrifice plays. It is through the application of Jesus’ blood that all of God’s plan works. To have this blood applied means we partake of it. Again, there is a ZERO correlation to blood transfusions!

The Jehovah Witness concept of blood transfusions sounds like the Parable of the Old Garment with the New Patch - stretching something that cannot be stretched.



Three parables to help us stretch with the Christian development required of us

Keeping the integrity of scriptures is of the utmost importance when we have these kinds of questions that work with our morality.

Finally, any contact with blood was a reason for “uncleanness” in the Old Testament. Anyone touching blood was unclean and separated from others for a prescribed period of time.

The New Testament shockingly reverses this when Jesus’ blood is applied:

Revelation 7:14: (NASB) *I said to him, My lord, you know. And he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

This scripture is describing the *great multitude*, also known as the *great company* in heaven. We just discussed this at length in Episode 1250.



Learning the destiny of those not fully faithful to the heavenly call



These individuals are said to have *washed their robes...in the blood of the Lamb*. This is the opposite of the Old Testament prohibitions. God is showing us through this picture that blood brings life, and how important it is to sustain life. This symbol is positive, not something we should avoid. We should rejoice in the properties of blood explained to us in the New Testament.



We absolutely believe no, it is not a sin to get a blood transfusion. The Scriptures do not even give a hint towards that thinking. Applying them in such a way, we believe, stretches them beyond their intended meaning.

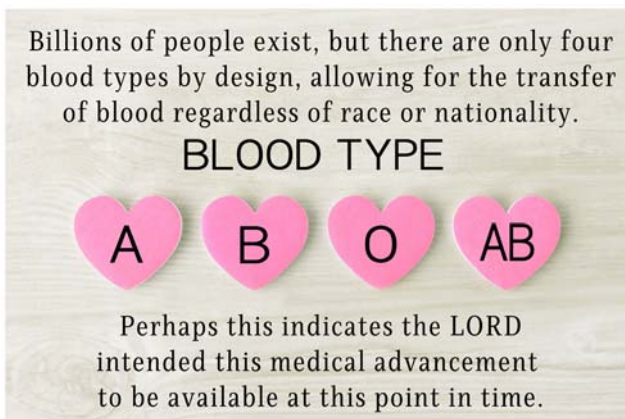


If your child is on his or her deathbed, and you have the opportunity to save them by giving them blood, would you not do so? We feel refusing aid to someone would be a sinful action based on Scripture. We realize the conscience of individuals come into play here, but we must align our conscience with the Bible as God has given us and not an organization.



Our symbolic partaking of the blood of Jesus helps us see that his blood actually feeds us life. Because the Old Testament scriptures on drinking blood are all based on the ceremonial Law which Jesus nailed to the cross, we are free to claim the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Let us embrace the modern medical wonders of applying the lifesaving properties of human blood from donor to recipient and thank God for the life we are given!

Thank God that we live in a time where our lives can be helped and even saved by these medical miracles and the role blood plays in our well-being.





We covered two topics of whether or not tattoos and blood transfusions are sinful. In both cases, we looked at what the Scriptures say on these subjects and what they do NOT say. We must base our conscience on what they say - not on what we like or feel.

*So, is it a sin if I...?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on October 24, 2022
Ep. 1252: Is It a Sin if I...? Celebrate Halloween? (Part IV)

Study Questions follow

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1251: Is It a Sin If I...? (Part III)

<https://christianquestions.com/society/1251-sin/>

See:



1. What “scriptural filter” should use if we have a question about any of our thoughts, words or deeds? (See Colossians 3:17)
2. What does the Jewish Law say about cutting and marks on the Israelites’ bodies? What is the difference between the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and King James Version (KJV) translations of Leviticus 19:26-31? Why was the word “tattoo” not used in the KJV? Why would God prohibit the Jewish people from self-mutilation, slashing and cutting themselves? How would this prohibition have helped the nation of Israel? (See 1 Kings 18:27-29, Deuteronomy 14:1-2)
3. Did Jesus mention tattooing or cutting to his followers? Would any Christians who were in the early church have had permanent marks like tattoos? Can you think of any pros or cons beyond what is listed in the CQ Rewind Show Notes? (See John 13:34-35, Galatians 5:22-23, Genesis 17:12, Leviticus 19:26-31)
4. Does the New Testament specifically prohibit tattooing? How can we make a decision on things in our lives that are not spelled out in the Scriptures? What are some “mirror” questions we can ask ourselves? (See Matthew 5:33-37, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 10:23, 1 Timothy 4:1-2)
5. Does Genesis 9:3-4 have anything to do with blood transfusions? Explain. What three factors about blood should we focus on in this passage? Why is blood important here?
6. What do Leviticus 17:8-11 and Deuteronomy 12:23-24 prohibit? Contrast eating blood with transfusing blood. Why is blood so important? Explain the two points on this. (See Genesis 4:9-11, Hebrews 10:1-4)
7. Where is the danger in interpreting and expanding the thought of abstaining from blood in Acts 15:19-21 to mean we should not take it into our veins? How can Paul say in Acts 15:20 to “abstain from things contaminated by idols,” but then in 1 Corinthians 8:4 say that idols are not real, so the eating the meat offered to them was not a problem? How can we apply this today? Are you doing something that might stumble others? (See Romans 14:13-17)
8. What is the importance of Jesus’ blood in Colossians 1:17-20? How does the New Testament reverse the prohibition against touching blood in the Law? How did Jesus shock and disturb his followers with his teaching about the application of his blood? (See Revelation 7:14, John 6:53-55)