

A Spiritual Transfusion Reminds Us of the Finished Work of Christ

Chapter 8: (BLOOD/Transfusion): Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org / Studies

Resource: In His Image by Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. (1984). *In his two companion books, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made and In His Image, Dr. Brand with the help of Philip Yancey, places an emphasis on the individual human cells in our body and their varying roles within the body for the sake of the body as a whole. He then points to the Body of Christ (the Church) and makes insightful analogies about the connections and forces that unite and guide our human bodies (and the Body of Christ). The suggested process is to review the questions prior to reviewing the content. If time is limited, each person in a group discussion should read the content prior to spending time in a group discussion to answer the questions.*

Questions for Personal Applications or Group Discussions:

1. What new information did you learn in this section (5 chapters) on Blood that will be of value to you when you celebrate Communion?
2. What do we experience when we celebrate the Lord's Table (Communion) together?
3. Jesus said He is "real food and real drink" for us since He is alive today. He rose from the grave (resurrected) and ascended to be with God the Father. How can we effectively remind each other that Christ is alive and is in us who are believers?
4. Why does Dr. Brand say that a blood transfusion is a better metaphor than even the one Christ used (vine and branches)?
5. Would you be able to do what Dr. Betts did to prove that donating blood was safe and necessary at times?
6. Name the benefits we receive when we ingest the symbolic elements of wine (juice) and bread for his blood and body.

John 6:51-58 – *Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

Dr. Brand states that blood transfusion has emerged as a kind of summary image of the Christian symbol of blood. In a time when a blood transfusion was unknown to us, Jesus chose the perplexing concept of drinking His blood. What really happens in this ceremony when Christ's body and blood symbolically become a part of my own? Brand suggests it is simply a physical expression of a spiritual reality. Communion is a metaphor or a vehicle for the presence of God. Most of us get a bit somber when taking in the wine and bread as symbols of Christ's blood and body. It is a somber time to reflect or simply understand spiritual reality.

Brand suggested that we are being transfused with Christ during this sacrament since this was our Master's way of reminding His children of His forgiveness, love, healing, and acceptance. Christ is risen and alive today and He makes us alive (spiritually) in Him. (As an aside, Paul, as a wise physician, always had good advice. I recall him telling my wife, Penny, that she was doing a good thing by letting our kids walk barefooted in their early years so that the growth of their feet wouldn't be hindered by tight fitting shoes.)

Christ said, "I am the Living One." (Rev 1:18) He is the real food and real drink (spiritually) for us. Obviously, our physical bodies need water and food but our souls need the real food and drink of Christ if we are to be alive spiritually in Him.

Brand offers us the history of blood transfusion and some of his own personal experiences after his training and return to India as an orthopedic surgeon. He shared again of the dramatic personal experience of watching a young girl return to life while receiving a second transfusion in London's Connaught Hospital and how that experience drew him into a life-long career in medicine. As a surgeon at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, he designed a device to suction out a patient's own blood during a surgery to re-circulate it doing a surgery. That worked for some patients while others needed a supply of five or more pints during surgery.

He wrote about the challenges faced by a colleague – Dr. Reeve Betts who was a thoracic surgeon at Vellore. Though Dr. Betts had the knowledge and skills to save many lives, he was prevented from doing so without a functioning blood bank. Dr. Brand said that developing and running a blood bank was his number one priority in 1949. He suggested that blood specialists today probably do not realize the challenges of developing a blood bank. This was so small task for Dr. Brand as he had to learn the skills of typing, cross-matching, and screening of donors for health problems. Vellore was a hot dusty atmosphere when many people were afflicted with parasites or hepatitis so it became extremely important to screen people to run a trustworthy blood bank. Sadly, he said, they damaged some patients unintentionally with a transfusion of contaminated blood.

But that wasn't the main challenge initially. To people in India at the time, blood represented life and the family members of a sick patient in need of blood for surgery were not willing to give up any of their blood in fear of dying. Ignorance was the factor. Quite often in frustration and anger, Dr. Betts would reluctantly donate his own blood to prove that giving up blood was safe. Paul had to prompt Dr. Betts to regulate his blood donations so he could be able to do the necessary surgeries. As family members watched Dr. Betts give his blood without any physical effects, they would reluctantly start donating blood to save a family member. Once the fears were diminished, Dr. Brand was able to start a successful bank.

Paul shared the history of blood transfusions. He preferred to use this image more than anything else to illustrate why Jesus chose the perplexing image of "drinking His blood." A Jewish doctor in Italy in 1492 tried transfusing blood from three young boys into ailing Pope Innocent VIII. All three boys died from hemorrhaging while the pontiff barely outlived them. Not a success story! Two whole centuries later, blood transfusions resurged in France by the personal physician for Louis XIV who restored a dying boy using blood of a lamb. However, the second recipient who received a transfusion died promptly after heading to a tavern to celebrate.

Most physicians at that time believed that withdrawing (letting) blood offered the best hope of recovery. One physician claimed to be cured of rheumatism after sixty-four lettings in eight months. Another physician in France claimed to have overseen the letting of 20 million pints of blood! At that time, there was a law forbidding the heresy of transfusion. However physicians in Italy and England did not give up. Consider the death of President George Washington in 1799, two and a half years after his retirement. Waking up with a sore throat and shortness of breath after the previous day of riding his horse in the cold rain, a physician and a bloodletter were called. The bloodletter let out 40% of his blood thinking that was the best treatment. He died the same day! Thankfully, we have learned that bloodletting is not a recommended procedure. Ultimately doctors succeeded in human-to-human blood sharing. It was during WWI when the benefits of blood transfusions began to outweigh its risks. Medics on the field were busy saving lives of soldiers with life-threatening wounds.

So what are the spiritual applications of this refined method of blood transfusions? Dr. Brand wrote that Jesus and His followers obviously did not envision a Red Cross blood supply depot. When suggesting that we regularly celebrate the Lord's Table (Communion) Jesus gave His followers a more contemporary example of the vine and the branches where there is life if sap is running from the vine to the branches. Today, with the success of life-giving blood transfusions (which Brand says we take for granted), Dr. Brand suggests we have a better metaphor to understand the mystery of how we benefit when symbolically depending on Christ's "wise blood" becoming part of our own.

This sacrament reminds us that Christ is not dead. Though removed from us, He is alive and present in us by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that "every cell in His Body (the Church) is linked, unified, and bathed by the nutrients of a common source (similar to the human body). Blood feeds life. The infusion of fresh blood also helps explain the process of cleansing. We learned already that Jesus earned "wise blood" which He freely shares with us to help us overcome the Enemy in our daily challenges. This is why we are to go and teach (disciple) the peoples of all the nations (**Matthew 28:19**). There is no other way to fight Satan, the Enemy, globally.

Dr. Brand shared that he received in the Eucharist an infusion of strength and energy by availing himself of Christ's own reserves. Personally, I find myself more eager to enjoy the benefits of the Lord's Supper celebration with the family of God. This ceremony or ritual is to be repeated. Someone asked, "Why go to a party, when you can drink by yourself? Why kiss your wife, when you both know you love her? Why tell great jokes to old friends who have heard them before? Why take your daughter to lunch on her birthday when you are going to have supper together anyway?" Another author wrote, "Sex is to marriage what the sacraments are to Christianity: the physical expression of spiritual reality." Repetition is part of life - of being human. Reminders are necessary.

We use material things like wedding rings, badges of rank, prizes, medals and birthday presents as a means of grace (of showing honor and love). The material items of bread and wine is authenticated by our Master's death and resurrection which proved He was Lord of all. He earned the right to command us to ingest His blood and body (symbolically) in a sacramental meal / ceremony. He reminds us who He is and whose we are (His). Brand said, "When we come to the table to celebrate whose we are, we experience the gracious flow of His forgiveness and love & healing – a murmur to us that we are accepted and made alive forever. **We are TRANSFUSED!**" Christ said that the one who feeds on Him will remain in Him and will live because of Him (**John 6:54-58**).