Questions From Readers

Do Jehovah’s Witnesses accept any medical products derived from blood?

The fundamental answer is that Jehovah’s Witnesses do not accept blood. We firmly believe that God’s law on blood is not open to reform to fit shifting opinions. Still, new issues arise because blood can now be processed into four primary components and fractions of those components. In deciding whether to accept such, a Christian should look beyond possible medical benefits and risks. His concern should be what the Bible says and the potential effect on his relationship with Almighty God.

The key issues are quite simple. As an aid to seeing why this is so, consider some Biblical, historical, and medical background.

Jehovah God told our common ancestor Noah that blood must be treated as something special. (Genesis 9:3, 4) Later, God’s laws to Israel reflected the sacredness of blood: “As for any man of the house of Israel or some alien resident... who eats any sort of blood, I shall certainly set my face against the soul that is eating the blood.” By rejecting God’s law, an Israelite could contaminate others; thus, God added: “I shall indeed cut him off from among his people.” (Leviticus 17:10) Later, at a meeting in Jerusalem, the apostles and older men decreed that we must ‘abstain from blood.’ Doing so is as vital as abstaining from sexual immorality and idolatry.—Acts 15:28, 29.

What would “abstaining” have meant back then? Christians did not consume blood, whether fresh or coagulated; nor did they eat meat from an unblended animal. Also ruled out would be foods to which blood was added, such as blood sausage. Taking in blood in any of those ways would violate God’s law.—1 Samuel 14:32, 33.

Most people in ancient times would not have been troubled over the consuming of blood, as we can see from the writings of Tertullian (second and third centuries C.E.). Responding to false charges that Christians consumed blood, Tertullian mentioned tribes that sealed treaties by tasting blood. He also noted that “when a show is given in the arena, [some] with greedy thirst have caught the fresh blood of the guilty... as a cure for their epilepsy.”

Those practices (even if some Romans did them for health reasons) were wrong for Christians: “We do not include even animals’ blood in our natural diet,” wrote Tertullian. The Romans used food containing blood as a test of the integrity of real Christians. Tertullian added: “Now, I ask you, what sort of a thing is it, that when you are confident [that Christians] will turn with horror from animals’ blood, you should suppose them greedy for human blood?”

Today, few people would think that the laws of Almighty God are at issue if a physician suggested their taking blood. While Jehovah’s Witnesses certainly want to keep living, we are committed to obey Jehovah’s law on blood. What does this mean in the light of current medical practice?

As transfusions of whole blood became common after World War II, Jehovah’s Witnesses saw that this was contrary to God’s law—and we still believe that. Yet, medicine has changed over time. Today, most transfusions are not of whole blood but of one of its primary components: (1) red cells; (2) white cells; (3) platelets; (4) plasma (serum), the fluid part. Depending on the condition of the patient, physicians might prescribe red cells, white cells, platelets, or plasma. Transfusing these major components allows a single unit of blood to be divided among more patients. Jehovah’s Witnesses hold that accepting whole blood or any of those four primary components violates God’s law. Significantly, keeping to this Bible-based position has protected them from many risks, including such diseases as hepatitis and AIDS that can be contracted from blood.

However, since blood can be processed beyond those primary components, questions arise about fractions derived from the primary blood components. How are such fractions used, and

THE WATCHTOWER • JUNE 15, 2000 29