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Watchtower blood policy made simple

To many observers, it appears the Watchtower Society's blood policy is almost intentionally ambiguous. So much so that, when needing medical treatment, many Jehovah's Witnesses are uncertain of the Watchtower's complex rules and rely on specially trained Witnesses (members of local 'Hospital Liaison Committees') to tell them whether or not a doctor's recommendations are acceptable.

Is there historical support for their blood policy from the time of the early Christians? Do Jehovah's Witnesses *really* 'abstain from blood'? Which blood fractions are they allowed to accept and which not? Or is everything just up to an individual Witness' own conscience?

This page attempts to clearly and simply explain the reality behind the 'spin.'

Fact 1

Watchtower teaches: Early Christians refused blood.^{[1](#)}

The truth is: Early Christians refused to partake of blood that had been obtained by killing or by assault. However early Christians never refused to accept medical uses of donor blood that had been generously provided by live and uncoerced donors because such technology was not available at the time.^{[2](#)}

Fact 2

Watchtower teaches: Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood.^{[3](#)}

The truth is: Jehovah's Witnesses accept blood.^{[4](#)}

Fact 3

Watchtower teaches: Jehovah's Witnesses are permitted to accept literally anything from blood so long as it is sufficiently fractionated beforehand.^{[5](#)}

The truth is: Just as the Bible does not give details of *allowed* blood constituents, neither does the Bible give details of the Society's *forbidden* blood constituents. They are purely capricious and arbitrary decisions by Watchtower's leaders.^{[6](#)}

Fact 4

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Watchtower teaches: Blood transfusions are high risk hence should be avoided.^{[7](#)}

The truth is: Refusing blood transfusions increases risks associated with a wide array of medical therapies accepted by Jehovah's Witnesses, with a result that many have died.^{[8](#)}

Fact 5

Watchtower teaches: Adherence to its blood policy protects Jehovah's Witnesses from blood borne diseases such as AIDS.^{[9](#)}

The truth is: AIDS has been transmitted by Watchtower-permitted blood constituents.^{[10](#)}

Fact 6

Watchtower teaches: Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept autologous^{[11](#)} transfusions of whole blood.^{[12](#)}

The truth is: Jehovah's Witnesses do accept autologous transfusions of whole blood so long as it is part of a current therapy.^{[13](#)}

Fact 7

Watchtower teaches: Jehovah's Witnesses do not donate blood.^{[14](#)}

The truth is: Jehovah's Witnesses can donate blood if that blood is used in the same fractionated forms that the Watchtower allows under its blood doctrine, which literally is everything in blood after it is sufficiently fractionated.^{[15](#)}

Fact 8

Watchtower teaches: Each Jehovah's Witness is guided by his or her own conscience in deciding whether or not to accept any blood product.^{[16](#)}

The truth is: Watchtower Society leaders decide whether or not Jehovah's Witnesses are permitted to accept blood products.^{[17](#)}

Fact 9

Watchtower teaches: All Jehovah's Witnesses hold the same view of Watchtower's blood policy.^{[18](#)}

The truth is: All Jehovah's Witnesses do not hold the same view of Watchtower's blood policy. Repeatedly the Society has received requests from Jehovah's Witnesses to permit acceptance of blood transfusions, and indeed some Jehovah's Witnesses have accepted blood transfusions. Since the Watchtower began enforcing organized shunning for accepting blood transfusions, some Jehovah's Witnesses have still accepted blood transfusions but have done so secretly.^{[19](#)}

[Send a protest email NOW to Watchtower Society: tell them what you think of their blood policy.](#)

References:

1. Anonymous, "Saving Life with Blood--How?," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1991 6/15: 10 ("Rather than take in blood, which represented life, early Christians were willing to risk death.").
 2. Anonymous, "The Growing Demand for Bloodless Medicine and Surgery," *Awake!*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2000 1/8: 8 ("Indeed, it was not until the early 20th century that transfusion technology had advanced to the point where it was routinely used.").
 3. Anonymous, "My Opinion of a Doctor's Duty Has Changed," *Awake!*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1995 1/22: 31 ("In harmony with Acts 15:29, Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood, including blood transfusions. They do, however, accept nonblood medical management.").
 4. Durable Power of Attorney, supplied to Jehovah's Witnesses by the Watchtower Society, January 2001 ("I accept all fractions derived from any primary components of blood.").
 5. Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2000 6/15: 30 ("The Bible does not give details, so a Christian must make his own conscientious decision before God.").
 6. Anonymous, "Jehovah's Witnesses--The Surgical/Ethical Challenge," *How Can Blood Save Your Life?*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1990: 27 ("Witnesses are deeply religious people who believe that blood transfusion is forbidden for them by Biblical passages such as: "Only flesh with its soul--its blood--you must not eat" (Genesis 9:3-4); "[You must] pour its blood out and cover it with dust" (Leviticus 17:13-14); and "Abstain from . . . fornication and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:19-21). While *these verses are not stated in medical terms*, Witnesses [*i.e. Watchtower leaders*] view them as ruling out transfusion of whole blood, packed RBCs, and plasma, as well as WBC and platelet administration."). [Italics added]
 7. Anonymous, "Not Alone When Our Faith Was Tested," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2001 4/15: 14-15 ("We also knew that blood transfusions are themselves risky. Thousands have contracted diseases and have died from transfusions. The only alternative was high-quality treatment that did not involve blood transfusions.").
 8. Anonymous, "'It's Only Temporary!'-My Life With Kidney Disease," *Awake!*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1996 11/22: 13 ("The doctors explained that this time the surgery was even more serious, because my blood count was very low. I patiently but firmly explained my Bible-based stand, and they finally agreed to do the surgery without blood.").
- Anonymous, "Strengthened to Faithfulness by the Resurrection Hope," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1966 4/1: 219 ("When we are faced with an issue such as blood transfusion, it is truly a source of strength to know that, should we die faithful, we can expect to have an early resurrection.").
- Blurb, *Awake!*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1994 5/22: 2 ("In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue.").
9. Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2000 6/15: 29 ("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.").

10. Anonymous, "Jehovah's Standards Help Us," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1983 6/15: 13 ("The disease is also linked to blood transfusions and blood products. "AIDS has become the second leading cause of death—after uncontrollable bleeding—in hemophiliacs, and, most recently, a number of surgical patients who have received blood transfusions have contracted AIDS, raising fears among some observers about the nation's blood supply."").

Anonymous, "Britain, Blood, and Aids," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1985 6/15: 30 ("...some 70 million units of concentrated Factor VIII are imported from the United States and are used to treat British haemophiliacs. Each batch of Factor VIII is made from plasma that is pooled from as many as 2,500 blood donors. It seems that by importing this blood product the AIDS virus was transferred to the British supply.").

Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2000 6/15: 30 ("For example, clotting factor VIII has been given to hemophiliacs, who bleed easily . . . to prepare gamma globulin, blood-based clotting factors, and so on, requires that blood be collected and processed. Hence, some [Jehovah's Witnesses] reject such products, just as they reject transfusions of whole blood or of its four primary components. Their sincere, conscientious stand should be respected . . . Other [Jehovah's Witnesses] decide differently. They too refuse transfusions of whole blood, red cells, white cells, platelets, or plasma. Yet, they might allow a physician to treat them with a fraction extracted from the primary components.").

11. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), "Transfusion Alert: Use of Autologous Blood," <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/blood/transfusion/logo.htm> (viewed January 23, 2006) ("Autologous blood transfusion is the collection and reinfusion of the patient's own blood or blood components. Allogeneic blood, on the other hand, is collected from someone other than the patient.").

12. Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1997 2/1: 29 ("Christians who are hospitalized understand that biological products removed from them are disposed of, whether the products be body wastes, diseased tissue, or blood.").

13. Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2000 10/15: 31 ("Or the goal may be to isolate some of a blood component and apply that elsewhere on the body. There are also tests in which a quantity of blood is withdrawn in order to tag it or to mix it with medicine, whereupon it is put back into the patient . . . The details may vary, and new procedures, treatments, and tests will certainly be developed. It is not our place to analyze each variation and render a decision. A Christian must decide for himself how his own blood will be handled *in the course of a surgical procedure, medical test, or current therapy*.").

14. Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 2000 10/15: 31 ("Hence, we do not donate blood").

15. R. Jensen, personal letter to the Watchtower Society from a Watchtower-appointed elder, 2001 6/9 page 4 ("In conversation it was stated to me that it is a personal conscience matter whether a Christian decides to donate blood that will be used in fractionated forms, the same fractionated forms that we likewise leave to personal conscience as to acceptance. I was told this act being left up to each Christian's conscience naturally follows from what we have already published about decisions to accept fractions of blood."). [See [The Jensen Letters](#)]

Letter to Cliffe Roche from The Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (a corporate partner with Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc.), 2000 10/15: 31 ("On the same basis, some have felt that under certain conditions they could allow some minor fraction of their blood to be extracted for treating a medical condition as long as there was no misuse of their blood otherwise. The use of blood fractions is neither sanctioned or discouraged, but a matter for personal decision.").

16. Anonymous, *How Can Blood Save Your Life?*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1990: 30-31 ("When a patient is a Jehovah's Witness, beyond the matter of choice, conscience comes into the picture. One cannot think only of the physician's conscience. What of the patient's? Jehovah's Witnesses view life as God's gift represented by blood. They believe the Bible's command that Christians must "abstain from blood" (Acts 15:28, 29). Hence, if a physician paternalistically violated such patients' deep and long-held religious convictions, the result could be tragic. Pope John Paul II has observed that forcing someone to violate his conscience "is the most painful blow inflicted to human dignity. In a certain sense, it is worse than inflicting physical death, or killing.").

17. Letter to L Buster from Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998 August 27 ("If one . . . refuses to uphold Bible standards, including Bible standards regarding the misuse of blood, then this may at times lead to the Scriptural action of disfellowshipping.—1 Corinthians 5:11-13.").

Statement to the media from Jehovah's Witnesses Public Affairs Office, 2000, June 14 ("If a baptised member of the faith willfully and without regret accepts blood transfusions, he indicates by his own actions that he no longer wishes to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The individual revokes his own membership by his own actions, rather than the congregation initiating this step. This represents a procedural change instituted in April 2000 in which the congregation no longer initiates the action to revoke membership in such cases. However, the end result is the same: the individual is no longer viewed as one of Jehovah's Witnesses because he no longer accepts and follows a core tenet of the faith.")

18. Anonymous, "A People Walking in Jesus' Footsteps," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1988 5/1: 17 ("But who uphold the sanctity of blood out of respect for God's law, doing so as a group? When a patient objects to having a transfusion, whom does the doctor automatically think him to be? Does the doctor not usually say: 'You must be one of Jehovah's Witnesses? . . . All of Jehovah's Witnesses hold the same view as they walk in Jesus' footsteps.").

19. See also: [No Universal Assent to Watchtower Blood Policy](#).

Anonymous letter, *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1950 5/1: 143 ("Repeatedly we are confronted with requests for information on blood transfusion, particularly for us to pronounce a sanction of this medical practice.").

Anonymous, "Questions From Readers," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1958 8/1: 478 ("One of Jehovah's witnesses who claims to be of the anointed remnant recently went to the hospital and took a blood transfusion, voluntarily.").

Anonymous, "'Our 'Kingdom Unity' Convention--Why 'the Best Yet!'," *The Watchtower*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1984 1/15: 28-29 ("'Are You Tolerating Secret Faults?' How this talk made us think! It forcefully showed that whether we are observed by humans or not, God sees us and rewards faithfulness. Particularly dealt with were the secret faults of masturbation, excessive use of alcohol and yielding to pressure in the matter of blood transfusion on being assured that this sin would be kept secret. But all such tolerating of secret faults results in a bad conscience and Jehovah's disfavor.").

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