

Blood and Life, Law and Love

*The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.—
2 Corinthians 3:6, New Revised Standard Version.*

WHAT IS now discussed is not to imply in any way that the use of blood is not without its degree of risk. That there is risk is a simple fact. Nor does it in any way imply that the person who makes a personal, uncoerced choice to avoid transfusions (or any acceptance of blood components and fractions, for that matter) on purely religious grounds is acting improperly. Even acts that are proper *in themselves* become wrong if done in bad conscience. As the apostle puts it, “Consider the man fortunate who can make his decision without going against his conscience. . . . every act done in bad faith is a sin.”¹ Whether, in view of the evidence that will be presented, certain scruples regarding blood reflect a weak or a strong conscience, I leave to the reader to judge.

At the same time, the seriousness of an organization’s responsibility in imposing its views on an individual’s personal conscience in such critical matters should never be underestimated. What has happened with the Watch Tower Society in the field of blood illustrates forcefully how legalism can lead an organization into a morass of inconsistencies, with the possibility of its members suffering whatever unfavorable consequences result.

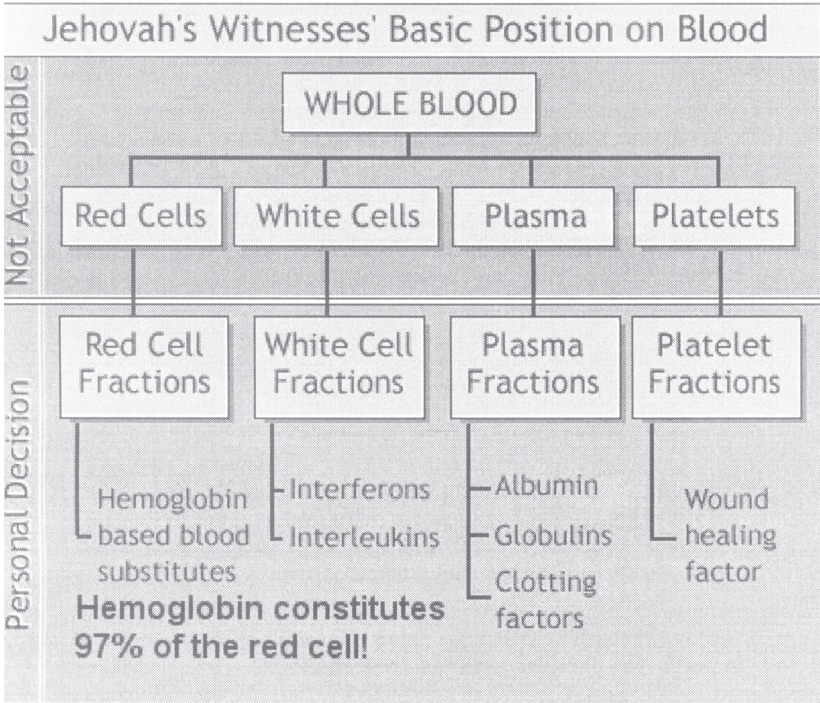
Starting in the late 1940s, the organization initially declared an outright ban on the acceptance of blood in any form, whole or fractional. Then, over the years, it added on new rulings that have entered into more and more technical aspects of the issue.

The latest ruling on blood fractions is that made in the *Watchtower*, June 15, 2000, pp. 29-31 and June 15, 2004, pp. 14-23, 29-31. This ruling deals with a new definition of what can be allowed as far as blood components are concerned. It is now claimed that four “primary components”—red cells, white cells, platelets and

1 Romans 14:22, 23, *JB*.

plasma - are forbidden but that “fractions” derived from all four “primary components” are tolerated.

The following chart basically presents the current position of the organization on the use of blood:



This position, specifying “Not Acceptable” blood elements (upper section) and elements left to “Personal Decision” (lower section), is spelled out in the *Watchtower* magazine of June 15, 2004. Analyzing the article and its reasoning, a correspondent from Sweden writes:

This means that the blood parts given the green light in earlier articles can now be explained as being merely “fractions” of the plasma. The obvious achievement is that the earlier approved parts of the blood (globulins, albumin, clotting factor VIII etc.) can be reduced in significance compared to red and white blood cells and platelets. Thus the inconsistency of the earlier position in differentiating arbitrarily between various blood components is now removed for the submissively trusting Witness. The Society had difficulty dealing with this inconsistency when challenged.² The solution to its dilemma of necessity had to involve new compo-

2 See the Appendix (for Chapter 9) for more information on these earlier rulings.

nents, such as “fragments” of red and white blood cells and platelets, specifically mentioned. Such tolerance, now clearly expressed, have been out of the question earlier. Since a refined red blood cell in the form of hemoglobin freed from its membrane is well under way—PolyHeme, Hemospan and Hemopure to name some of the promising products—the new position of the Society may have far-reaching consequences for the Witnesses. They may very soon be able to receive what for all practical purposes are red blood cells.

Apart for the latest green light for a number of new components, the understanding of “primary components” versus “fractions” of such had played absolutely no role when the earlier permitted blood components were gradually tolerated. It is now used as a rationalization only afterwards. A long list of other explanations have been given instead, one of which was clearly unworthy and some of which would have done away with all objections to the medical use of blood, if taken to their logical conclusion. Referring to “Luke 6:1-5” in the *Watchtower*, June 15, 1978, p. 31, was particularly disastrous. The text refers to David and his men who ate forbidden bread—not some allowable fractions of them, but loaves of whole bread! If that could legitimate taking in some blood components it certainly could legitimate the use of all components and even whole blood. As that Biblical account about David and his men shows, *need*, not *quantity*, was then the determining factor. [That the Watch Tower Society still finds the argument in the June 15, 1978, *Watchtower*, cogent is apparent by the fact that it refers to it as recently as 2004 (see Questions from Readers” *Watchtower* June 15, 2004, p.30).]

The new position since 2000 is arbitrary and out of harmony with the facts. For one, it is claimed that the Bible forbids taking in the “primary components” but that “fractions” of them are tolerable since the Bible “does not give details.” (The *Watchtower*, June 15, 2000, p. 30; June 15, 2004, p. 30) But since the Bible does not speak of “primary components” any more than it speaks about “fractions”, this argument is false. In fact, it would be more logical to tolerate even the so-called “primary components” and draw the line between them and whole blood. For another, one reason constantly used when forbidding medical use of blood is the claim that only one use of blood was tolerable, that of using it for atonement on the altar. The blood, it is claimed, belongs to God. But that is conveniently forgotten when the use of blood “fractions” is pronounced tolerable! But it would hardly do to accept for any secular use what exclusively belongs to God, because that would be the same as using stolen property! A stolen car is a stolen car and it would not make the theft more tolerable

if the car is separated into “primary components,” say the motor, coach and the transmission, and then separated further into “fractions” such as carburetor, pistons, hood, doors and drive shaft. Only if the car is *not* stolen would one have the right to take it apart and use or sell it as small parts. And if the car is not stolen, *all* parts, both big and small, can properly be separated and used at will. So if blood “fractions” can be tolerated, certainly the “major components” and even whole blood can!

Then the Society’s classification of “primary components” does not seem to fit what medical science says. That is no wonder, for albumin, Factor VIII and IX etc. are complete and functioning components just as red cells, white cells and platelets. All these components are carried in the plasma. The fact that some components (red cells, white cells and platelets) can be separated from the plasma by centrifugation and others only by different means does not actually make these latter components “fractions” of the plasma more than the others. Red cells and albumin proteins are not comparable to “uncles” and “nephews” but rather are “siblings”! It would take fractioning of an albumin protein to match a fraction of a red cell. Not surprisingly, a medical authority like *Modern Blood Banking and Transfusion Practices* by Denise M. Harmening (4th edition, Philadelphia 1999) includes Albumin, Immun Globulin as well as Factor VIII and Factor IX among “the major components” of blood and no mention is made of the specific classification now made by the Society. (pp. 237-240, 246-248) Similarly, the Swedish Handbook *Blodsjukdomar Handbok I Hematologi* by Gösta Gartho & Bengt Lundh, 1999 (*Blood Diseases Handbook of Hematology*), includes Albumin and Coagulation Factors among “some important components in the blood,” again without using the classification made by the Society. (p. 422) Clearly the explanation given by the Society in this regard is untenable. There is no room for differentiation between blood components, making some tolerable and others not.

But there is more. The *Watchtower*, June 15, 2000 and June 15, 2004, claims that “blood fractions” like immunoglobulins “move from a pregnant woman’s blood to the separate system of her fetus” and that some Christians “may conclude that since blood fractions can pass to another person in this natural setting, they could accept a blood fraction derived from blood plasma or cells.” (pp. 30,31) The problem here is that not only can “fractions” per the Society’s definition “pass into another person” in this natural setting, but “primary components” according to their definition can as well! Thus *Modern Blood Banking and Transfusion Practices* by Denise M. Harmening, quoted above, says on p. 423:

“Transplacental hemorrhage of fetal RBCs into the maternal circulation occurs in up to 7.0 percent of women during gestation.” So red blood cells can “pass into another person” naturally. That would make red blood cells just as acceptable as immunoglobulins.. Again the position of the Society is demonstrably untenable.

What about the “fractions” of red cells that may be available soon and that the Society now has given the green light? Such a “fraction” is just a slimmed red cell, the vital oxygen-carrying hemoglobin freed from the bladder it is capsuled in. Says the Swedish standard work *Människokroppen Fysiologi Ochanatomi* (“The Human Body Physiology and Anatomy”) by Jan G. Bjålie, Egil Haug, Olav Sand, Öystein V. Sjaastad (Stockholm 1998): “The red blood cells...can best be compared with small bladders, filled with the oxygen-binding molecule hemoglobin ...It is hemoglobin that gives the blood its red color. The hemoglobin make up 95% of the proteins of the erythrocytes and about 34% of its weight. The rest of the proteins are mainly enzymes participating in the energy turnover in the cells.” (p. 269)

Whether the new products will be PolyHeme or Hemospan the vital part will be hemoglobin taken from red cells from human blood. If Hemopure will be available it will be based on hemoglobin from bovine blood. It will be a good product that can last long, unlike stored red cells, and it will be free from contamination. It will be able to carry oxygen around satisfactorily, unlike Dextran and other so called blood substitutes used to expand the blood. But it IS BLOOD! It is just as much blood, just as much a red blood cell as a peeled orange is still an orange. With or without the peel an orange is still an orange. If a method to remove the segments of an orange and arrange the segments in groups of four without peel is invented, the product will still be orange, and nobody would call it anything else. In the same way slimmed red cells, freed and prepared hemoglobin, will remain blood. Therefore, to say that taking in red blood cells is a sin while accepting the freed vital hemoglobin is not is downright Pharisaic hypocrisy.

Realizing that this conclusion is difficult to avoid, the *Watchtower*, June 15, 2004, p. 24, stated: “Some products derived from one of the primary components may be so similar to the function of the whole component and carry on such a life-sustaining role in the body that most Christians would find them objectionable.” So it is considered a conscience matter to accept products made of red blood cells although it is said that “most” Jehovah’s Witnesses will regard these as objectionable. A Witness who accepts such red blood cell products is considered to be in good standing. A Witness who accepts unprepared red blood cells, on the other hand — even if

only such are available—will be considered a sinner that will have trouble with his or her local elders. Clearly Watch Tower credibility is now zero.

The use of blood components (“fractions”) obviously implies *storage of large, even massive, amounts of blood*. On the one hand the Watch Tower organization decrees as allowable the use of these blood components—and thereby the storage involved in their extraction and production—while on the other they state that they are opposed to all storage of blood as Biblically condemned. This is the *sole basis* they give for prohibiting the use of autologous blood by a Witness (that is, the person’s having some of his own blood stored and then returned to his blood stream during or following surgery).³ Clearly, the positions taken are arbitrary, inconsistent and contradictory. It is difficult to believe that the formulators, and also the writers of explanations and defenses, of such policy are so ignorant of the facts as to fail to see the inconsistency and arbitrariness involved. Yet that alone could save the position from also being termed dishonest.

To rule in matters of health and medical treatment—prohibiting this, allowing that—is to tread on dangerous ground. In the one case we may prove guilty of creating an irrational fear, and in the other we may create a false sense of security. The course of wisdom—and humility—is to leave the responsibility to decide on such distinctions where it belongs in the first place, with the conscience of the individual.

The risk inherent in transfusion of blood and blood components or fractions is real. At the same time it is also true that people can die in surgery due to massive hemorrhaging. The use of one’s own blood, stored until time of surgery, would logically appeal to persons concerned about the possibility of blood-related infections. Yet the organization assumes the authority to declare this outside the realm of personal decision, prohibiting even an “intraoperative collection” of blood (where, during the surgery, some blood is drawn off into a plastic container and later returned to the body).⁴ And many thousands of persons are willing to relinquish the right to make their own decision in such crucial matters, allowing an organization to decide for them, even though its history is one of unwillingness to acknowledge its responsibility for damage that its policies may produce.

3 The organization’s position on this is spelled out, with much technical detail and reasoning, in the *Watchtower* of March 1, 1989, pages 30 and 31.]

4 See *Awake!* June 22, 1982, page 25.

Fed almost entirely only those statements and experiences that are favorable, they are rarely, if ever, told of negative factors.

Consider just one example, taken from an article in *Discover* magazine of August, 1988. Beginning at age 42, a Witness woman had had surgical removal of recurring bladder tumors over a period of several years. This last time she had waited overly long to see her doctor, was bleeding heavily, and was severely anemic. She insisted that she was not to receive a transfusion and this refusal was respected. Over a period of a week urologists tried unsuccessfully to stem the bleeding. Her blood count continued to drop. The doctor writing the article describes what took place:

Gradually, as her blood count dropped further, Ms. Peyton became short of breath. The body's organs need a certain amount of oxygen to function. That oxygen is carried from the lungs to the periphery by hemoglobin molecules in the red cells. . . . The medical team gave Ms. Peyton supplemental oxygen through a mask until she was breathing virtually pure O². The few red cells she had were fully loaded—but there just weren't enough vehicles left to transport the fuel her body needed.

Her hunger for air increased. Her respiratory rate climbed. She became more and more groggy, and finally—inevitably—the muscle fibers of her heart declared their desperate need for oxygen. She developed crushing, severe chest pain.

The doctor writing the article relates her feelings on arriving at the patient's room:

As I walked into the room. . . I was awed by the scene in front of me. At the center of everyone's attention was a large woman with an oxygen mask, gasping for air, breathing faster than seemed humanly possible. At the head of the bed were three friends, fellow church [Witness] members, coaching her. . . . At her side were several doctors—one monitoring her falling blood pressure, another coaxing some blood from an artery. The fluid that slowly filled the syringe had the consistency of Hawaiian Punch; tests on the same revealed a red cell count of only 9 [normal would have been 40]. Hanging from the bed rail was a bag of cherry-red urine. The woman was dying. Her cardiogram tracings showed the deep valleys that signal a heart in pain. Within a matter of hours the damage they represented would become irreversible.

The woman went into cardiac arrest. A team of doctors and nurses began cardiopulmonary resuscitation, administered epinephrine and atropine, then an electrical jolt to the heart. It fluttered into activity, then stopped again. More CPR, more epinephrine and atropine, another electrical jolt, more CPR. This went on for one hour until there was no longer any hope or purpose. The patient was dead beyond recovery.

The physician describing this did not characterize the woman as simply a fanatic. She writes:

She was an intelligent woman, I was told, who totally understood the implications of her decision. But her judgment, it seemed to me, arose from a blind spot imposed by her faith.⁵

Here was a woman who had a recurring problem requiring periodic surgery. Knowing this, storing some of her own blood might have appealed to her as a safe, advisable procedure. “Theocratic law,” however, ruled this out. Obedience to “Theocratic law” left her no personal choice in the matter.

If the organizational policies were truly Biblically based, then whatever suffering that might result from adhering to those policies—such as a damaging postponement or avoidance of surgery due to concern or uncertainty about blood issues, even actual loss of life because of feeling under divine obligation to reject any but the “permitted” blood components—all could be viewed as simply the suffering a servant of God must be willing to face.⁶ Many of Jehovah’s Witnesses are very sincere in holding to the standards of their organization in this regard. Some have even seen their young children die as a result and it would be cruelly unjust to imply that this is due to any lack of parental love on their part. They simply have accepted that the organizational standards and policies—however complex, or even confusing—are Biblically founded and hence God-ordained. Yet few claims were ever more weakly based.

5 Elisabeth Rosenthal, article titled “Blinded by the Light,” *Discover* magazine, August, 1988, page 28-30.

6 My wife nearly bled to death in 1970 when her platelet count dropped from the normal range of 200,000 to 400,000 per cubic millimeter down to about 15,000 per cubic millimeter. After days of severe hemorrhaging, she was hospitalized at a Brooklyn hospital and both she and I made clear our rejection of platelets or any other blood-derived products (including those that have since been organizationally decreed “allowable”). Fortunately, after a two-week stay and continuing prednisone therapy, she recovered basic health. What I state in this book, then, is not evidence of any personal reluctance to face loss if I believed that adherence to God’s will called for it.

As noted, much of the Watch Tower's argumentation centers around texts in the Hebrew Scriptures, largely from the ordinances of the Mosaic law. Since the Society recognizes that Christians are not under that Law, the text at Genesis chapter nine, verses 1-7, is frequently cited. It says:

And God went on to bless Noah and his sons and to say to them: "Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth. And a fear of you and a terror of you will continue upon every living creature of the earth and upon every flying creature of the heavens, upon everything that goes moving on the ground, and upon all the fishes of the sea. Into your hand they are now given. Every moving animal that is alive may serve as food for you. As in the case of the green vegetation, I do give it all to you. Only flesh with its soul—its blood—you must not eat. And besides that, your blood of your souls shall I ask back. From the hand of every living creature shall I ask it back; and from the hand of man, from the hand of each one who is his brother, shall I ask back the soul of man. Anyone shedding man's blood, by man will his own blood be shed, for in God's image he made man. And as for you men, be fruitful and multiply and become many, make the earth swarm with you and become many in it.

It is claimed that, since all humans descend from Noah and his sons, these commands still apply to all persons. It is implied that the ordinances on blood in the Mosaic law are therefore to be viewed as simply repetitions of or elaborations on the basic law set forth earlier and hence still having force. Otherwise, since Christians are not under that Mosaic law, there would be no purpose in citing texts from it as having relevance in the issue.⁷ The divine decree regarding blood stated to Noah is claimed to be eternal in application.

If that is so, then should this not be equally true of the accompanying command to "become fruitful and become many," to "make the earth swarm with you and become many in it"? And if this is the case, how can the Watch Tower Society possibly justify its encouraging, not only singleness, but even childlessness among those Witness members who are married? Under the heading "Childbearing Today" the March 1, 1988, *Watchtower* (page 21) says that, in view of the "limited time" remaining to get the preaching work done, "It is, therefore, appropriate for Christians to ask themselves how getting married or, if married, having children will affect their share in that vital work." It acknowledges that

7 Roman 6:14; 10:4; Hebrews 8:6, 13.

childbearing was part of God's command following the Flood, but states (page 26) that "Today, childbearing is not specifically a part of the work Jehovah has committed to his people. . . . So the matter of childbearing in this time of the end is a personal one that each couple must decide for itself. However, since 'the time left is reduced,' married couples would do well to weigh carefully the pros and cons of childbearing in these times." If Jehovah's words to Noah regarding childbearing and 'swarming fruitfulness' can be thus set aside as no longer applicable, how can it consistently be argued that His words concerning blood must be viewed as remaining in force, and also use that as a basis to justify the application of ordinances in *the Mosaic law* regarding blood as in force for Christians today?

More significant, however, is that those words in Genesis are made to say something quite different from what they actually say. Any reading of the text will make plain that God there speaks of blood entirely in connection with the *killing* of animals and subsequently with the *killing* of humans. In the case of the animals, their blood was poured out in evident acknowledgment that the life *thus sacrificed* (for food) was only taken by divine permission, not by natural right. With man, the shedding of his blood called for the life of the one doing the shedding, human life being God's gift and nowhere authorized by Him to be taken at will by men. The shed blood of slain animals and of slain humans stands for the life they have *lost*.⁸ The same is true with regard to the Mosaic law texts regularly cited requiring that blood be "poured out." In all cases, this clearly refers to the blood of animals that have been *slain*. The blood represented life taken, not life still active in the creature.⁹

Blood transfusions, however, are not the result of the killing of either animals or humans, the blood coming from a *living* donor who continues to live. Rather than representing someone's *death*, such blood is employed for the very opposite purpose, namely the *preservation* of life. This is said, not to pronounce blood transfusions as a desirable practice or as having unquestionable propriety, but simply to show that there is no real connection or true

8 Contrary to the Watch Tower's claims, in the Scriptures blood, by itself, consistently represents—not life—but *death*, figuratively standing for the life *lost* or *sacrificed*. Compare Genesis 4:10, 11; 37:26; 42:22; Exodus 12:5-7 (compare this with 1 Peter 1:18, 19); Exodus 24:5-8; Matthew 23:35; 26:28; 27:24, 25, and so forth. Only when it is functioning as part of a *living creature* then blood can be said to stand for life or the living "soul."

9 Leviticus 17:13, 14; Deuteronomy 12:15, 16, 24, 25.

parallel between the Genesis mandate regarding slaying and then eating the blood of the animal slain, and the use of blood in a transfusion. The parallel is simply not there.

In December of 1981, a man then studying with Jehovah's Witnesses wrote to the Watch Tower Society, expressing his difficulty in harmonizing the policy on blood transfusions with the scriptures cited as basis. His discussion of the texts reveals conclusions similar to those just presented:

Thus, these passages quoted above seem to indicate to me that the prohibitions against eating blood in the Bible, refer only to the situation where man kills the victim and then uses the blood without returning it to God, who alone has the right to take life.

I was especially impressed, however, with this expression, made toward the close of his letter:

Another point in regard to this same subject that has bothered me is that Jehovah's Witnesses say that God prohibits eating blood because it symbolizes life, which is of high value in the sight of God, and that he wishes to impress upon man the value of life through the prohibition of eating blood. And this seems very reasonable to me. However, I fail to see how the symbol could be of greater value than the reality it symbolizes.

Admittedly, in most cases, blood transfusions are of little value or actually harmful, yet in a very small percentage of cases, blood is the only possible means of sustaining life until other treatment can be given, e.g., massive internal bleeding that cannot be immediately stopped. It seems to me that in this type of situation to let a person die in order to keep the symbol of life is a contradiction in itself and a placing of more importance upon the symbol than the reality which it symbolizes.

. . . I believe as firmly as Jehovah's Witnesses do that a true Christian should be prepared to give his life for his faith in God, if he is called upon to do so. But to give one's life when God does not really require or desire it, would not seem to be of any real value.¹⁰

Finally, to use laws commanding the *pouring out* of blood as basis for condemning *storing* of blood is to ignore the stated *purpose* of those laws. According to the context, Israelites were commanded to pour out the blood of slaughtered animals to insure that the blood was not *eaten*, not to insure that it was not

10 As one person put it, to place the symbolic importance of blood over that of life itself is somewhat like a man's placing more importance on his wedding ring (symbolic of his wedded state) than on his marriage itself, or on his wife. It is as if, faced with either the sacrifice of his wife or the sacrifice of his wedding ring, he would opt in favor of saving the wedding ring.

stored. Storage was simply not at issue. To employ such laws in the way that is done is both illogical and a pure manipulation of evidence, forcing a meaning on them that was neither stated or even implied.

Since Christians are not under a law code but under the “royal law of love” and the “law of faith,” these points certainly merit serious thought and meditation.¹¹ Does it truly show appreciation for the preciousness of life to allow arbitrary policies to dictate in crucial situations? Does it manifest either love of God or love of neighbor to do this with no clear statements in God’s Word for support?

Undoubtedly the principal Biblical text employed in the Watch Tower’s argumentation is that at Acts 15:28, 29. These verses contain the decision of a council at Jerusalem and include the words, “keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication.” The Scriptural evidence that this was not stated as some form of legally binding declaration is discussed later in this chapter. This matter is crucial since it is the prime basis for the Society’s argument that the ordinances in the Mosaic law are transposable to Christianity. While this point is dealt with later, it may here be said that the exhortation to “abstain from blood” clearly relates to the *eating* of blood. The *Watchtower* of June 15, 1978 (page 23), in fact, quotes Professor Eduard Meyer as saying the meaning of “blood” in this text was “the partaking of blood that was forbidden through the law (Gen. 9:4) imposed on Noah and so also on mankind as whole.” Such “partaking” was by *eating*.¹²

A major question, then, is whether it can be demonstrated that the transfusing of blood is an “eating” of blood as the Watch Tower organization claims. There is, in reality, no sound basis for such claim. There are, of course, medical methods of “intravenous feeding” whereby specially prepared liquids containing nutrients, such as glucose, are introduced into the veins and provide nourishment. However, as medical authorities know, and as the Watch Tower Society has at times acknowledged, a blood transfusion is *not* intravenous feeding; it is

11 Romans 3:27; 6:14; 10.:4; Galatians 3:10, 11, 23-25; James 2:8, 12.

12 The *Watchtower* of September 15, 1958 (page 575), states that “Each time the prohibition of blood is mentioned in the Scriptures it is in connection with taking it as food, and so it is as a nutrient that we are concerned with in its being forbidden.” This still seems to be the basic position and so the Society still argues that a blood transfusion is the same as eating blood, taking it into the body as food.

actually a *transplantation* (of a fluid *tissue*), *not* an infusion of a nutrient.¹³ In a kidney transplantation, the kidney is *not* eaten as food by the new body it enters. It remains a kidney with the same form and function. The same is true of blood. It is not eaten as food when “transplanted” into another body. It remains the same fluid tissue, with the same form and function. The body cells cannot possibly utilize such transplanted blood as food. To do this the blood would first have to *pass through the digestive system*, be broken up and prepared so that the body cells could absorb it—thus it would have to be actually and literally *eaten* to allow it to serve as a *food*.¹⁴

When medical practitioners believe there is need for a blood transfusion it is not because the patient is *malnourished*. In most cases, it is because the patient is lacking, not *nutrition*, but *oxygen*, and this is due to lacking sufficient carriers for transporting an adequate supply of oxygen, namely, the oxygen-carrying red cells of the blood. In some other cases, blood is administered due to need for other factors, as the need for clotting agents (such as platelets), immune globulins containing antibodies, or other elements, but again not as the means for providing “nourishment.”

In its effort to get around the evidence that a blood transfusion is not eating, does not have as its design the “nourishing” of the body, the Watch Tower Society often tries arbitrarily to broaden out the matter by coupling, or even replacing, the term “to nourish” with the expression “to sustain life.”¹⁵

13 *Awake!* October 22, 1990, page 9. In endeavoring to claim medical support for their view of transplanted blood as a “feeding” of the body, Watch Tower publications have always resorted to quotations from some medical source of an earlier century, such as the Frenchman Denys of the 17th century. (See, for example, the *Watchtower*, April 15, 1985, page 13.) They cannot quote a single modern authority in support of this view.

14 The Watch Tower Society has at times compared a transfusion with infusing alcohol into the veins. But alcohol is a very different liquid, already in a form that body cells can absorb as a nutrient. Alcohol and blood are completely different in this respect.

15 See, for example, the *Watchtower*, March 1, 1989, page 30; April 15, 1985, page 12. This diversionary tactic serves the sole purpose of confusing the issue. Nourishing the body by eating and the sustaining of life are not identical equivalents. Eating is only *one* of the means to sustain life. We sustain life in many other ways equally as vital, as through breathing air, through taking in water or other liquids, through maintaining body heat within a livable range of temperature, and through sleep or rest. In their references to blood, the Scriptures themselves deal, not with the broad aspect of “sustaining life,” but with the *specific act of eating blood*, and clearly with the eating of blood of *animals that are slain*. When an Israelite ate meat containing blood, he was not dependent upon the blood to “sustain” his life—the meat alone would accomplish that just as well without the blood as with the blood. Whether his life was “sustained” by eating the blood or not was simply not at issue. The *act* of eating blood was prohibited, and the motivation or ultimate consequences of the eating were not dealt with in the laws on blood.

The muddling of the issue accomplished by the unwarranted insertion of the concept of “sustaining life” allows the Watch Tower organization to impose on its members the idea that anyone accepting a blood transfusion shows disdain for the life-giving ransom accomplished by the saving power of Christ’s blood poured out in sacrifice. The duplicity in this line of reasoning is seen in that the blood fractions the Watch Tower organization *does* allow its members to receive, are often administered precisely to save or “sustain” the person’s life, as in the case of Factor VIII, administered to hemophiliacs, or that of immune globulins, injected to protect against certain life-threatening diseases or to prevent the death of an infant due to Rh incompatibility.¹⁶ It is unfair and unloving to impugn the motivation of those seeking to preserve their life, or the life of loved ones, because they do not hold to certain regulations and prohibitions originating with a religious organization, doing this by ascribing a denial of faith to their motivation when there is simply no valid basis, Scriptural or otherwise, for doing so. It is an attempt to burden them with a sense of guilt that is imposed by human standards, not divine standards.

‘Abstain from Blood’

The letter sent out by the apostles and older men of Jerusalem, recorded at Acts chapter fifteen, uses the term “abstain” in connection with things sacrificed to idols, blood, things strangled and fornication.¹⁷ The Greek term they used (*apékhomai*) has the basic meaning of “to stand off from.” The Watch Tower publications imply that, with regard to blood, it has a total, all-embracing sense. Thus, the publication *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, page 216, says: “abstaining from blood’ means not taking it into your body at all.” Similarly the *Watchtower* of May 1, 1988, page 17, says: “Walking in Jesus’ footsteps would mean not taking blood into the body either orally or in any other way.” But does this term, as used in the Scriptures, actually carry the absolute sense these publications imply? Or can it instead have a relative sense, relating to a specific and limited application?

16 See, for example, the *Watchtower*, June 1, 1990, pages 30, 31. The apostle Peter states that Christ “bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24; *NRSV*; compare Isaiah 53:4, 5; Acts 28:27.) But this certainly does not justify implying that one’s seeking to heal wounds or other physical ailments by medical means is tantamount to showing a lack of appreciation for Christ’s healing power in these vital spiritual respects.

17 Acts 15:20, 29.

That it may apply, not in a total, all-embracing sense, but in a limited, specific way can be seen from its use in such texts as 1 Timothy 4:3. There the apostle Paul warns that some professed Christians would introduce teachings of a pernicious nature, “forbidding to marry, commanding to *abstain* [the same Greek word used here as at Acts 15] from foods which God created to be partaken of with thanksgiving.” Clearly he did not mean that these persons would command others to abstain totally, in any way, from all foods created by God. That would mean total fasting and lead to death. He was obviously referring to their prohibiting *specific* foods, evidently those prohibited under the Mosaic law.

Similarly, at 1 Peter 2:11 the apostle admonishes:

Beloved, I exhort you as aliens and temporary residents to *keep abstaining from fleshly desires*, which are the very ones that carry on a conflict against the soul.

If we were to take this expression literally, in an absolute sense, it would mean we could not satisfy any fleshly desire at all. That certainly is not the meaning of the apostle’s words. We have many “fleshly desires,” including the desire to breathe, to eat, to sleep, to enjoy recreation and a host of other desires, which are perfectly proper and good. So, “abstaining from fleshly desires” applied only *in the context* of what the apostle wrote, relating, not to all fleshly desires, but only to *harmful, sinful desires* which do indeed “carry on a conflict against the soul.”

The question then is, *in what context* did James and the apostolic council use the expression to “abstain” from blood? The council itself specifically dealt with the effort of some to demand of Gentile Christians that they not only be circumcised but also “observe the law of Moses.”¹⁸ That was the issue the apostle Peter addressed, observance of the Mosaic law, which he described as a burdensome “yoke.”¹⁹ When James spoke before the gathering and outlined his recommendation of things the Gentile Christians should be urged to abstain from—things polluted by idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood—he followed this up by the statement:

For from ancient times Moses has had in city after city those who preach him, because he is read aloud in the synagogues on every sabbath.²⁰

18 Acts 15:5.

19 Acts 15:10

20 Acts 15:9-21.

His recommendation therefore quite evidently took into account what people heard when ‘Moses was read’ in the synagogues. James knew that in ancient times there were Gentiles, “people of the nations,” who lived in the land of Israel, dwelling among the Jewish community. What had been the requirements placed upon them by the Mosaic law? They were not required to be circumcised, but they *were* required to abstain from certain practices and these are outlined in the book of Leviticus, chapters 17 and 18. That law specified that, not only Israelites, but also the “alien residents” among them should abstain from engaging in idolatrous sacrifices (Leviticus 17:7-9), from eating blood, including that of unbled dead animals (Leviticus 17:10-16), and from practices designated sexually immoral (including incest and homosexual practices).— Leviticus 18:6-26.

While the land of Israel itself was now under Gentile control, with large numbers of Jews living outside in various countries (those doing so being called the “Diaspora,” meaning the “scattered [ones]”), James knew that in many cities throughout the Roman Empire the Jewish community was like a microcosm reflecting the situation in Palestine in ancient times, in that it was quite common for Gentiles to attend synagogue gatherings of the Jews, and thus to mingle with them.²¹

The early Christians themselves, both Jewish and Gentile Christians, continued to frequent these synagogue gatherings, even as we know that Paul and others initially did much of their preaching and teaching there.²² James’ reference to the reading in Moses in the synagogue in city after city certainly gives basis for believing that, when listing the things he had immediately before named, he had in mind the abstentions that Moses had set forth for Gentiles within the Jewish community in ancient times. As we have seen, James listed not only *the very same things found in the book of Leviticus, but even in the very same order*: abstention from idolatrous sacrifice, blood, things strangled (hence unbled), and from sexual immorality. He recommended observance of those same abstentions on the part of Gentile believers and the evident reason for this abstention was the circumstance then prevailing, that of an intermixture of Jew and Gentile in the Christian gatherings and the need to maintain peace and harmony within that circumstance. When Gentile

21 Compare Acts 13:44-48; 14:1; 17:1-5, 10-12, 15-17; 18:4.

22 Compare Acts 18:1-4, 24-28.

Christians were urged to ‘abstain from blood,’ this clearly was to be understood, not in some all-embracing sense, but in the specific sense of refraining from *eating* blood, something abhorrent to Jews. To take the matter beyond that, and to try to assign to blood *of itself* a sort of “taboo” status, is to lift the matter out of its Scriptural and historical context and to impose upon it a meaning that is not actually there.²³

Notably, James did not list such things as murder or theft among the abstentions urged. Those things were already condemned as much among the Gentiles in general as among the Jews. But the Gentiles did condone idolatry, did condone eating of blood and eating of unbled animals and condoned sexual immorality, even having “temple prostitutes” connected with places of worship. The recommended abstentions, then, focused on those areas of Gentile practice that were most likely to create great offense for Jews and result in friction and disturbance.²⁴ The Mosaic law had *not* required circumcision for alien residents as a condition for living in peace within Israel and neither did James urge this.

The letter that resulted from James’ recommendation was directed specifically to *Gentile* Christians, people “from the nations,” in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (regions stretching contiguously to the north of Israel) and, as we have seen, it dealt with the specific issue of an attempt to require Gentile believers to “observe the law of Moses.”²⁵ It dealt with those areas of conduct most likely to create difficulty between Jewish and Gentile believers. As will be demonstrated later, there is nothing to indicate that the letter was intended to be viewed as “law,” as though the four abstentions urged formed a “Quadrilogue” replacing the “Decalogue” or Ten Commandments of the Mosaic law. It was specific counsel for a specific circumstance prevailing at that period of history.

23 Here, again, if one assigned an *absolute* sense to the expression to ‘abstain from blood,’ viewing it as a some kind of blanket prohibition, this would mean that one could not submit to blood tests of any kind, could not undergo surgery unless it were of a bloodless kind, and in other ways would have to “stay away from” blood in every respect. The context gives no indication that such a blanket prohibition was intended and indicates instead that the injunction was directed specifically to the actual eating of blood.

24 As far back as April 15, 1909, the *Watch Tower* recognized this as the intent of the letter, saying (page 117): “The things here recommended were necessary to a preservation of the fellowship of the ‘body’ composed of Jews and Gentiles with their different education and sentiments.”

25 Acts 15:5, 23-29.

Preferential Rulings

While on the Governing Body I could not help but feel that there is a measure of discriminatory application of policy, one favoring those in a professional position. Teachers may teach evolution as a subject, doing so from “a purely objective viewpoint” and preferably initially explaining to the class their differing viewpoint.²⁶ As has been seen, attorneys are allowed to serve at political election centers. Perhaps most notable of all, however, is that doctors may not only belong to medical organizations which approve of such practices as blood transfusions and abortion, but they are also told that they themselves may administer a blood transfusion to a patient who is not a Witness and who requests this.²⁷ This is rationalized on the basis of the Mosaic law’s allowing Israelites to sell to foreigners meat from animals that had died unbled!²⁸ Yet the blood in those animals was still in their bodies where it had been all along, it had not been extracted and stored—a process which the organization condemns as showing contempt for God’s law.²⁹ All the intense urging to show “deep respect for the sacredness of blood,” all the warning of bloodguiltiness attaching to any misuse of blood, all the argumentation condemning any storing of blood as showing contempt for God’s laws, suddenly loses its force where such Witness surgeons are involved.³⁰

In all sincerity, and with no desire to demean anyone, when reviewing all the various organizational ordinances, rulings, policies and technicalities that have been considered, I cannot but believe

26 This is discussed in the proposed *Correspondence Guidelines* under “Schools, Secular Education.”

27 See the *Watchtower*, November 15, 1964, pages 682, 683; also the *Watchtower*, April 1, 1975, page 215, 216, on cross-matching blood for transfusions. The revised *Correspondence Guidelines* (as submitted) says the doctor or nurse may administer such transfusion if so “directed by a superior.”] This is ratio

28 Deuteronomy 14:21.

29 It should be noted that the same *Watchtower* of November 15, 1964, also leaves as a matter of conscience a grocer’s or a butcher’s selling of blood sausage to “a worldly person.” It would seem that, having decided to use of this portion of the Mosaic law to justify the lenient stand toward medical practitioners, the writer of the material felt also required to add this comment on grocers and butchers. However, once again, this is not selling meat from an unbled animal but the selling of a product made through the *collecting* and *storing* and *processing* of blood—elsewhere condemned by Watch Tower policy.

30 United States, Witness doctors and lawyers meet annually to discuss such matters as “confidentiality and privilege” in their relations with fellow Witnesses, and similar topics. I seriously doubt that any Witnesses engaged in occupations of lesser esteem could hold comparable gatherings without having these frowned upon or discouraged by the organization.

that if an individual were to use in the more “ordinary” affairs of daily life the kind of reasoning reflected in those positions and rulings, people would feel compelled to question that person’s sanity.

Why Do People Accept This?

In the apostle Paul’s day he spoke of those “who *want* to be under law.” (Galatians 4:21) Many today still do. Unlike the Judaizers of Paul’s day, men may not advocate submission to Mosaic law, but by a legalistic approach to Christianity they convert it into a law code, a body of rules. They create a form of bondage to regulations, traditional policies, and these govern people’s relationship to God.

But why do others submit to such imposition? What is it that causes people to relinquish the precious freedom to exercise their own moral judgment, even in the most private areas of their lives? What causes them to submit to the interpretations and rulings of imperfect men, even at the risk of losing employment, suffering imprisonment, placing marriage relationships under great strain, even risking life itself, whether it be their own or that of a loved one?

Many factors enter in. There may be social and family pressures, with conformity as the way to avoid disagreement, even conflict. There can be the sheer, paralyzing fear of divine rejection and eventual destruction if one should wind up outside the organizational “ark.” But there is another reason that is perhaps more basic, one that is often more at the very root of the matter.

Most people like things spelled out in black and white, like to have issues neatly catalogued for them as either right or wrong. Making decisions based on one’s own conscience can be difficult, at times agonizing. Many prefer not to make that effort, prefer simply to let someone else tell them, be their conscience for them. This is what allowed for the development of rabbinical control and a body of rabbinical tradition in Jesus’ day. Rather than decide something on the basis of God’s Word and personal conscience, it was a case of “ask the Rabbi.” Among Jehovah’s Witnesses this has unquestionably become, “Ask the organization,” or simply “ask Brooklyn.”

Another reason is the subtlety with which such legal reasonings and interpretations are advanced and imposed. Religious emphasis on law, legalism, has consistently been marked by use of technicalities and sophistry, reasoning that is not only subtle but also plausible, sometimes even ingenious—and yet, false. To unravel

such reasoning and see it for what it really is takes effort, an effort that many do not care to make and that others simply seem unable to accomplish.

Consider just two examples from ancient rabbinical sources. In early times, “teachers of the law” endeavored to make the injunction at Exodus 16:29 (“Let nobody go out from his locality on the seventh day”) more explicit. They ruled that on the sabbath a man could walk only a certain distance (somewhat less than 3,000 feet) from the outer boundary of his city or town. This was called a “sabbath day’s journey” (an expression in use in Jesus’ time; see Acts 1:12). Yet there was a way for a man to make a longer trip than this and, from the rabbinical standpoint, still be “legal.” How?

He could, in effect, “create” a second domicile at some home or place away from his locality (but still within the 3,000-foot-limit) simply by depositing at that place on the day before the sabbath provisions sufficient for at least two meals. Then on the sabbath he could journey to that second “domicile” and then leave it and extend his trip an additional 3,000 feet.

The statement at Jeremiah 17:22, which forbids bringing any “load out of your homes on the sabbath day,” was similarly amplified. The teachers of the law reasoned that there was no prohibition against carrying things *from one part of a house to another part*, even if the house were occupied by more than one family. So, they ruled that people living in houses within a certain sector (such as those living in houses built around a common courtyard), could construct a “legal” doorway for the whole section by erecting door jambs at the street entrance to the section, with perhaps a beam overhead as a lintel. Now, *the whole section was viewed as if it were one domicile* and things might be carried around from home to home within the area without violating the law.³¹

Compare now that method of reasoning and use of technicalities with the method the Watch Tower Society employs in applying its rules regarding certain aspects of medical practice. The March 1, 1989, *Watchtower*, in the “Questions from Readers” section, discusses the method of withdrawing blood from a patient some time before an operation and storing this for re-use during or following the operation. It then states categorically that Jehovah’s Witnesses “DO NOT accept this procedure.” The reason? The blood “is no longer part of the person.” The text at Deuteronomy 12:24, is cited, which says

31 See *Judaism*, Vol. II, by George Foot Moore (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954), pages 31,32.

that the blood of a slaughtered animal must be poured out upon the ground. By some reasoning this law regarding animal slaughter is viewed as presenting a parallel situation to the case of storing a living person's blood as just described.

But then the article goes on to discuss another method, where, during the operation, the patient's blood is diverted into a heart-lung pump or a hemodialysis machine (artificial kidney device) for oxygenating or filtering before returning into the patient's body. The article informs its readers that, unlike the other method, this method can be viewed as acceptable by a Christian. Why? Because the Christian can view it "as elongating their circulatory system so that blood might pass through an artificial organ," and thus feel that "the blood in this closed circuit was still part of them and did not need to be 'poured out.'"

How different is this technical "elongating" of the circulatory system from the rabbinical legalism that permitted the "elongating" of a sabbath day's journey's allowable distance through the technicality of an artificial second domicile? Or how is this classifying of the blood as being technically in a "closed circuit" different from the ancient legalism of making a "closed circuit" out of a number of houses by means of an artificial doorway? The same type of casuistic reasoning and legalistic use of technicalities is employed in both cases, ancient and modern.

In their own hearts, many Witnesses might feel that the first method, that of storing one's own blood, is really no more unscriptural than the second method, running the blood through a heart-lung pump and machine. Yet they are not free to follow their own conscience. An individual's life might lie in the balance, but the Watch Tower's interpretative reasonings and technicalities *must* be observed, for they are part of the "great body of Theocratic law." To fail to obey would be to risk disfellowshipment.

The Weakness of Law and the Power of Love

Law often produces an outward conformity that masks what people are inside. In Jesus' day, it allowed religious leaders, by their scrupulous 'living by the rules,' to "appear to people from the outside like good honest men, but inside *be* full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."³² It works the same in our time.

Law, then, is least effective in those areas that are most intimately related to the heart. Law can identify and punish a thief. But it cannot do the same for the man who is law-abiding, but who

32 Matthew 23:27, 28, *JB*.

is also greedy, and whose greed and stinginess cause others to suffer. Law can condemn and even execute the murderer. But it can do little to prosecute the man who hates, who harbors jealousy, envy or rancor and who seeks revenge—particularly if he is careful to do so by “legitimate” means. I have known men of that kind, including men in high places.

We can see a striking contrast between the legalistic approach of control by “policy,” rules and regulations, and the approach taken by the apostle Paul in his giving of admonition against wrongdoing. His appeal consistently gave primary emphasis, not to law, but to love. Thus, in his letter to the Romans, he writes:

Do not you people be owing anybody a single thing, except to love one another; for he that loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. For the law code, “You must not commit adultery, You must not murder, You must not steal, You must not covet,” and whatever other commandment there is, is summed up in this word, namely, “You must love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does not work evil to one’s neighbor; therefore love is the law’s fulfillment.³³

Paul exemplified this approach in his handling of problems. One notable example is that of the issue of eating meats offered to idols (one of the four things listed in the letter recorded at Acts chapter 15). In Corinth, some Christians were even going to idol temples where such sacrificed meat was thereafter cooked and served up (for a price) in the precincts of the pagan temple. For a Christian to eat there was in the eyes of many of their fellow disciples—particularly those of Jewish background—undoubtedly comparable to the way Jehovah’s Witnesses would view it if one of their members today were to share in a church supper, consisting of food earlier blessed by priests and served on grounds of St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic cathedral in New York, with the money payment going to the church. Though the viewpoint might be comparable, the issue itself was far more serious. How, then, did the apostle deal with the matter?

Did he threaten those eating this meat by warning them of judicial proceedings and probable disfellowshipping? Was his appeal to law, a body of rules, as the means for curbing this practice? To the contrary he showed that the action *of itself* was not condemnable. But it could produce undesirable, even tragic consequences. Counseling on the basis, not of law, but of love, he wrote:

33 Romans 13:8-10, *NW*.

It is easy to think that we “know” over problems like this, but we should remember that while this “knowing” may make a man look big, it is only love that can make him grow to his full stature. For if a man thinks he “knows” he may still be quite ignorant of what he ought to know. But if he loves God he is the man who is known to God.

In this matter, then, of eating food which has been offered to idols, we are sure that no idol has any real existence, and that there is no God but one. . . . But this knowledge of ours is not shared by all men. For some, who until now have been used to idols, eat the food as food really sacrificed to a god, and their delicate conscience is thereby injured. . . . You must be careful that your freedom to eat food does not in any way hinder anyone whose faith is not as robust as yours. For suppose you with your knowledge of God should be observed eating food in an idol’s temple, are you not encouraging the man with a delicate conscience to do the same? Surely you do not want your superior knowledge to bring spiritual disaster to a weaker brother for whom Christ died? And when you sin like this [that is, by a misuse of Christian freedom] and damage the weak conscience of your brethren you really sin against Christ.³⁴

Whether one ate or did not eat would not depend, therefore, upon law and concern over being found guilty of violating law. It would depend upon love and concern not to harm one’s brother “for whom Christ died”—truly a superior approach that caused the Christian to reveal what was in his heart, not simply his compliance with a rule.

That same counsel demonstrates as well that the apostle did not look upon the decision reached by apostles and others in Jerusalem (recorded in Acts chapter fifteen) as being “law.” Had it been *law*, Paul would never have written as he did to Christians in Corinth, stating frankly that the eating of meats offered to idols was a matter of conscience, with the determining factor being whether the eating would cause others to stumble or not. To view the Jerusalem letter as law and, on this basis, to claim that its reference to blood indicates that Christians remain under the Mosaic law’s ordinances regarding blood, is clearly to ignore the apostle Paul’s statements, in the corollary matter of “meats offered to idols,” showing that such reasoning is invalid. If no stumbling was probable, then no one could rightly judge Paul or any other Christian for eating such meat. As Paul states:

For why should it be that my freedom is judged by another person’s conscience? If I am partaking with thanks, why am I to be spoken of abusively over that for which I give thanks?³⁵

With regard to sexual immorality (or “fornication” in some translations), also listed in the Jerusalem letter, the apostle nowhere presents this as something that might be either right or wrong de-

34 1 Corinthians 8:1-12, *PME*.

35 1 Corinthians 10:29, *NW*.

pending upon whether it might cause stumbling. He evidently viewed it as having no justifying factors. Yet, neither is a *legal ruling* presented as necessary for the Christian to recognize the need to avoid sexual immorality. As Paul observes at 1 Corinthians 6:13-19, if the person is guided by the law of love, he will find it inadmissible, recognizing it as a misuse of his body which is joined to Christ. (See also 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6.)

Christian freedom should never make one insensitive to the conscience and scruples of others. At the same time, no person has the right to impose his or her conscience on others, thereby placing limits on the freedom in Christ these enjoy. Nor does any group or select body of men, casting themselves in the role of exercisers of apostolic authority, have the right to impose their collective conscience on others, handing down decrees on that basis.

In the previous chapter the distinction between law and precept was given, the one deriving its strength through imposition by authority, the other conveying principles through teaching. Jesus regularly taught by parables, stories that laid out no laws but brought home forcefully precepts, vital moral lessons. The parable of the prodigal son does not set forth a *law* that one must take back one's wayward children, have a feast for them, and so forth. But it emphasizes a loving *spirit*, a generous, merciful outlook. In the Scriptures we find a combination of methods employed—there are positive injunctions, true, but there are also accounts setting forth approved *modes of life* (living in love, maintaining peaceful relations with others); there are responses to highly contextual questions; Paul, for example, answers a number of these but clearly does not do so as establishing *law*, but as giving sound, spiritual counsel, designed for the particular question at issue.

How Genuine the Unity Achieved?

It is true that by establishing a legal control over others a form of unity and order can be achieved. But how genuine is it? Is it not in fact a unity and order based on uniformity and conformity? On the other hand, does refusal to allow men to exercise—through their legalistic interpretation—control over one's personal life operate against true unity and cohesion? Does it mean that each person strikes out in his or her own direction, self-willed, self-sufficient, self-satisfied? It need not and *should* not—if the person genuinely accepts the headship of the One who gives such freedom.

Just as one cannot love the invisible God and at the same time hate his neighbor, so one cannot be joined with the invisible Son of God and be at odds with or disconnected from any and all others who are so joined and who humbly submit to the same headship.³⁶ According to the Scriptures, it is love, not organizational membership, that is “a perfect bond of union,” for love is long-suffering, kind, not jealous, it does not brag or get puffed up or look for its own interests, but seeks the good of others.³⁷

Love does not coerce people into a cohesive relationship; it warmly draws them together. Any claimed Christian unity founded on another basis is fictitious, not genuine, and can only be maintained by unchristian means.

The Blessing of Christian Freedom

An incredibly complex set of rules is operative today among Jehovah’s Witnesses and it takes from them the exercise of personal conscience in a very wide area of life and conduct, makes them subject to an ecclesiastical legislature and supreme court composed of a few fallible men.³⁸ As a former member of that legislature and court, I am convinced that the root of all the problem lies in not recognizing the truth that, as Christians, we are no longer under law but are under God’s merciful kindness through Christ. Through God’s Son we can enjoy freedom from lawkeeping, rejoice in a righteousness that is the product, not of rule-keeping, but of faith and love.

The failure to appreciate this divine provision, the doubt that it is actually possible for an invisible Person to exercise effective headship and direction of his followers on earth without some highly organized, visible authority structure serving as a religious court, and the reluctance to believe that people can be protected against wrongdoing without being surrounded by a “fence” of laws, rules and decrees—this is what causes many, perhaps most, persons to be shocked at the thought of not being under law, to reject it as not only impractical but dangerous, pernicious, conducive to licentiousness. It makes them easily swayed and convinced by the arguments of those who wish to introduce and impose—to use the terms of the Watch Tower—a “legal arrangement of control,” one that is humanly “enforceable” by a religious judicial system.

It is because God’s holy Spirit given through Jesus Christ has superior force to that of law, through its power motivating the

36 1 John 4:20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:15, 16.

37 Colossians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

38 In a letter by Watch Tower attorney Leslie R. Long, dated March 29, 1987, he refers to a congregational judicial committee as “an ecclesiastical tribunal.” If the term applies on the congregational level, it is far more applicable at the uppermost level, where the Governing Body functions as a supreme “ecclesiastical tribunal.”

Christian to love of God and love of neighbor, that the apostle could say:

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law.³⁹

This is the grandness of Christian freedom, to know that one can enjoy the free and spontaneous exercise of those divine qualities with no religious authority having the right to step in and countermand expressions of love or kindness or gentleness or any other such quality. They can do this free from anxiety knowing that “there is no law,” no set of rules to hobble them in doing what they are convinced in their heart of hearts is the right and good thing to do, the kind and loving thing to do, approved by God, even though disapproved by certain men.

Surely, then, our not being under law but under God’s gracious kindness in no way minimizes our sense of responsibility as Christ’s freedmen. In reality, it increases it. For we know that we must “talk and behave like people who are going to be judged [not by some law code or by a humanly imposed set of standards, but] by the law of freedom, because there will be judgment without mercy for those who have not been merciful themselves, but the merciful need have no fear of judgment.”⁴⁰ That “law of freedom” is the one the disciple James had just mentioned in his letter as the “sovereign law” or “supreme law,” namely, “You must love your neighbor as yourself.”

There is a cleansing effect, a heart-strengthening effect, in knowing that our being pleasing to our heavenly Father will be determined, not by whether we have lived our lives according to law, a “body of rules,” but whether we have lived them according to love. God’s Son, our Head and Master, who grants us freedom from lawkeeping—and from human religious law imposers and law enforcers—exemplified that love for us. We therefore have no need to focus attention on committing to memory some complex set of organizational rules and policies or even to think in terms of law. Rather we focus attention on God’s Son and what we have learned of him through God’s Word and faithfully seek to exemplify his life in our own.

39 Galatians 5:22, 23, *NIV*.

40 James 2:12, 13 *JB*.