

## Mourning Shed Blood (Death) vs. Celebrating Shared Blood (Life)

Chapter 5: (BLOOD/Life): Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – [MedicalMobilizers.org/Resources](http://MedicalMobilizers.org/Resources)

**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 good help of 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 thoughtful analogies. He writes of the connections and forces that unite and guide our human bodies (and the Body of Christ). These two books can become some great devotional resources.*

**John 15:5** - *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit..* (NIV)

**Matthew 26:28** - *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* (NIV)

**Hymn:** ‘My Hope is Built on Nothing Less Than Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness”

Dr. Brand draws a clear distinction between shed blood (death) and shared blood (life). We don’t mourn the death of Jesus but rather celebrate the life we have “in Christ”. He suggests that culturally most of us don’t live with experiences that help us understand certain metaphors Jesus used such as “drink my blood” so that His life would enter us. This was a radical transformation for that day. Most of us even today can better understand John 15:5 that implies we are like branches that benefit from the sap of the vine for life and bearing of fruit. Drinking the wine or juice offered during Communion celebration is like the sap running through the branches of the vine. Without it, there is no life and no fruit.

But when did you last slaughter an animal either for a sacrifice or for a meal? Growing up on a small farm in the beautiful mountains of West Virginia, I can clearly remember seeing the blood being shed from hogs, chickens and cows that we butchered in order to enjoy some great meals with drumsticks, cured hams, bacon, sausage and steaks. A rule to follow was to be sure to drain all of the blood of the animals. That rule was certainly prevalent in Jesus’ day when even the Gentiles were commanded not to drink blood or eat meat improperly butchered. Do you even wonder if this rule is followed today when you enjoy a hamburger?

Dr. Brand writes about the mythology and history of blood. The Gladiators drank the shed blood in the arenas believing it would give them more life. No doubt primitive tribes still do so today in ceremonies and feasts. Blood was used in oaths, contracts, and seals or to show loyalty. He described also some misconceptions such as “pure blood” or “hot-blooded”, etc. Religion honored blood as a sacred substance. There have been many blood sacrifices and blood battles. Even Christianity is a blood-based religion. New Testament authors used the word “blood” three times more than “cross” and five times the word “death”.

Medically, blood is obviously a measure of a patient’s health. We all are accustomed to getting our blood checked and then to understand the test results. Some of us have to learn to check our glucose level in our blood regularly. Brand says he speaks more as a surgeon than a theologian but most of us would argue that he was both. As a surgeon, his job at times was to stop and control bleeding and to quickly discern the difference between an artery bleed or a vein bleed, etc. The worst fear is a jugular bleed. Some surgeons will accidentally cause a bleed with an error in judgment or a loss of manual dexterity. He says every surgeon experiences a blocked suction nozzle or the lights going out. He says reactions to the nature of blood and the stress of the loss of blood is truly a test for medical residents to find a different field of medicine that doesn’t involve blood.

Dr. Brand shares a story about one of his students in London who accidentally nicked a woman’s jugular vein and how he had the opportunity to teach the value of using his thumb to stop the bleeding and that “time” was a surgeon’s greatest enemy as well as his or her greatest friend. If thumb pressure is applied, the bleeding usually stops because of the millions of cells in the blood do their designated job.

What was a challenge for him to understand was the difference between the common knowledge of medical professionals of the value of blood as identified with life but as a Christian symbol, there was a contradiction.

Historically, many seem to equate blood with death due to emotionally based teaching and to the awful acts against Jesus and his shed blood. Paul suggests that we keep in mind that blood is a “rich scarlet soup of proteins and cells that keep our body alive”. As we learned in the last chapter, medically blood signifies life since it feeds and sustains every cell in one’s body.

Most Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper (Eucharist, Communion, or Mass) on some regular basis as we were commanded to do. Jesus, our Master, Savior and Lord, commanded us to drink wine as a symbol of His blood – not poured out which would have been easier to accept but poured (ingested) in our bodies so He can live in us. Some believe wrongly that wine becomes His blood when ingested. As sap is to the vine flowing to the branches, Jesus gave us the means to toast or celebrate Him living “in us”. So, we are not only “in Christ” but “Christ is in us.”

So, yes, Jesus intended to offer a radical transformation regarding the concept of blood – both his shed blood in His death and His shared blood in our remembrance and re-dedication to Him in our celebration of Communion.

Paul closes this chapter with the story of Jesus’ first miracle – the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. He reacts so strongly because He knew that the time for the Last Supper was yet to come. The wedding was a joyful celebration so too our opportunities to take (ingest) the wine and bread as symbols of His blood and body are to be a toast or celebration to Life. That is, the life of Jesus that conquered even death and is now freely offered to us. That is why we call this Good News! We are to know without a doubt that our life is eternal (forever) either with the Lord or without the Lord. That it is either Heaven or Hell. His blood was shed so we can enjoy His shared blood.

#### **Questions for Personal Applications or Group Discussions:**

1. Do you agree with Dr. Brand that most of us don’t have a cultural understanding of blood and that we must preserve the Biblical symbolism of blood so that people will not rebel from faith in Christ?
2. In simple terms, do you seek for the sap (shared blood) that keep us celebrating life in Christ as we better understand how His life “in us”?
3. Dr. Brand’s main point is that we need to adopt the medical understanding that blood equals life and not death (both physically and spiritually). Discuss ways we can counter a death culture in favor of a life oriented culture.
4. Have you, like many, failed to understand the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (Communion)? Remember that even though Jesus said that His blood was poured out for the remission of sins, he commanded us to pour Him into us as we take in (ingest) the wine (or juice) and bread symbolizing His blood and body.
5. Many think of Communion as a very private celebration. It seems that it is more of a feast or group celebration as together we share His blood symbolically in order to have life together as the Body of Christ. What are your personal thoughts or preferences about the Lord’s Supper that he instituted at the Last Supper?