

The Cleansing Power of Blood against Toxins and of Forgiveness against Sins - A Perfect Analogue for Well-Being

Chapter 6: (BLOOD/Cleansing): Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – 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.

1 John 1:7 - ^{But} if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (NIV)

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

Dr. Brand opens this short but powerful chapter by sharing about leaving the hospital on a snowy day in London and hearing a Salvation Army band singing William Cowper's hymn – "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood". He said he thought of his rounds where real blood was being drawn from veins, transfused into others, etc. The hymn speaks of the cleansing power of blood yet he had just scrubbed out blood stains from his uniform. He wondered how one could understand the Christian theme of being "washed in the blood of the Lamb" if you don't know its context as a Christian symbol. He said "nothing in modern culture corresponds to the idea of blood as a cleansing agent." To clean, we use soap and water – not blood which soils and stains outside the human body.

Brand offers Scriptures that indicate that blood has a quality of cleansing (Lev. 14; I John 1:7; Rev. 7:14). A priest sprinkled blood on a person with an infectious skin disease. Jesus' blood cleanses us. Robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. How can we understand this cleansing nature of blood?

At that time, man had limited understanding of physiology and biology. Yet God the Creator of all things including the human body with its life saving blood "chose a theological symbol with an exact analogue in the medical world". Brand wrote that "modern medical science has shown that the symbol of cleansing conforms closely to the function of the actual substance" and that a simple test with a tourniquet on your arm would reveal how essential it is for blood to do its job effectively - providing essential oxygen and nutrients as well as cleanses the cells of harmful toxins. Not only will you feel weakness but severe pain, cramps, and real agony until blood once again rushes into your arm. Gradually your muscles move freely and the soreness vanishes. Brand says, "Physiologically you have experienced the cleansing power of blood" as the cells were not being cleansed by a stream of blood. It didn't take long to feel the agony of retained toxins – the waste products called metabolites which would normally be flushed away instantly in the blood stream.

Pain gets our attention for sure. C.S. Lewis in The Problem of Pain wrote "We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities, and everyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Prior to serving as a regional director for CMDA, I worked as an accountant in four hospitals over a period of ten years. In one of these hospitals, I had to work in an office on the floor with a Pain Clinic with patients suffering from chronic pain. It was a challenge listening to the constant moans and cries from those suffering from unrelieved pain.

Brand proceeds to offer a scan of the body's cleansing process. Amazingly, no cell lies more than a hair's breadth from a blood capillary so that poisonous by-products (toxins) don't pile up. The red blood cells release fresh oxygen and nutrients and instantly absorb the waste products (carbon dioxide, urea, and uric acid, etc.) from those cells. Those red blood cells then deliver the waste chemicals to organs that release them outside the body such as the lungs that do the necessary work of releasing carbon dioxide when we exhale. If too much carbon dioxide builds up, our breathing speeds up. Brand says he would like to write long chapters about the kidneys which some say is second in complexity to the brain. One fourth of the blood of each heartbeat travels down the renal artery to not just one kidney but also to a spare

kidney in case one doesn't do the job. We know now that we need only one kidney as my good friend in high school discovered when he damaged one of his kidneys in a car accident.

Dr. Brand wrote, "Filtering is what the kidney is all about but in very little space and time". The kidney extracts the sugars, salts, water and some thirty chemicals from the blood and deals with them separately. Urea is sent to the bladder to be expelled along with excess water the kidney expends. All of this is done in one second by an organ weighing less than one pound. Compare that with a large kidney dialysis machine which became available only in 1943 by Willem Kolff, a Dutch doctor. Prior to that, chronic kidney failure or disease was fatal. One wonders what motivated Dr. Kolff to invent such an important medical device that has saved so many lives and unfortunately is used by so many people today. I now better understand why some medical students chose Nephrology as their Specialty.

Brand continues to explain how the red blood cells retire after about a half million circuits or so. They nudge their way to the liver and spleen to be broken down for recycling. The heart of the iron is escorted to the bone marrow for reincarnation in another red blood cell that starts a new cycle of fueling and cleansing.

As for the Body of Christ (Church), Brand says that the blood metaphor offers an enlightened perspective on the problem of sin that drastically affects our relationship with a Holy God. Sins are like harmful toxins and must be cleansed from the Body of Christ. Without confession and repentance, these toxins separate us from God and others in the Church. We are talking about pride, egotism, lust and covetousness.

Brand's summary: "In blood, however, we have the perfect analogue to reveal the nature of sin and forgiveness with startling clarity. Medical knowledge has only enhanced our understanding. Just as blood cleanses the body of harmful metabolites, forgiveness through Christ's blood cleanses away the waste products, sins that impede true health."

The Lord's Supper (Mass, Communion) is the process used to get cleansed spiritually. No longer do we need a High Priest or a Day of Atonement or a Most Holy Place to approach God. In Christ, "we have the confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a near and living way, opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body (Heb. 10-19-20).

Wine or juice is taken in personally as a symbol of the same living blood that bathes every living cell (person in the Church) with the nutrients of life and also carries away all the accumulated waste and refuse. "By His blood we are forgiven – made clean". And, "This is His body, broken for you" – for your lust, your gossiping, - your sins.

Do you know why you go to Worship or why you join a Church Fellowship? Brand says it is to regain a spark of hope to be known, to be forgiven, healed and loved. He says we all yearn to celebrate the Lord's Supper. That is, to be in communion with our Creator. Christ gave us the wine and the bread as proof that we are forgiven, healed, and loved. Paul ends this powerful chapter with a story of a French Catholic Novelist who said that despite all of the failings of the Church, it has at least remembered two words of Christ – "Your sins are forgiven you" and "This is my body broken for you". My wish is for each of us to enjoy our next Lord's Supper celebration with a deeper understanding of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins for our well-being as an individual and as a society.

Questions for Personal Applications or Group Discussions:

1. Have you appreciated the cleansing power of blood in your body?
2. Have you understood how special (and essential) the celebration of the Lord's Supper / Communion is to ourselves as cells in the Body of Christ?
3. Various body organs serve vital roles for our well-being or true health. (Lungs, kidneys, liver, spleen, bone marrow, etc.) What are the parts of the Body of Christ (Church) that serve you for your well-being?
4. How often do you celebrate Communion? Hopefully, this study will help us all better appreciate how Christ intended for it to regularly remind us that we are forgiven, healed, and loved.
5. Many today neglect worshipping together as His people. They don't see the value of the "Church". What is your personal assessment about the value of the Church which needs you as much as you need it?