

A Spiritual Transfusion that reminds us regularly of the Finished Work of Christ

Chapter 8: (BLOOD/Transfusion): Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – MedicalMobilizers.org/Resources

Source: [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 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).*

John 6:51-58 – *Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. You ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”*

Dr. Brand states that blood transfusion has emerged as a kind of summary image of the Christian symbol of blood. In a time when blood transfusion was unknown to us, Jesus chose the perplexing figure of drinking His blood. What really happens in this ceremony when Christ’s body and blood symbolically become a part of my own? Brand suggests it is simply a physical expression of a spiritual reality. Communion is a metaphor or a vehicle for the presence of God. Most of us even get a bit somber when taking in the wine and bread as symbols of Christ’s blood and body.

Brand suggested that we are being transfused with Christ during this sacrament since this was our Master’s way of reminding His children of His forgiveness, love, healing, and acceptance. Christ is risen and alive and He makes us alive (spiritually) in Him.

Christ said, “I am the Living One.” (Rev 1:18) He is the real food and real drink (spiritually) for us. Obviously, our physical bodies need water and food but our souls need the real food and drink of Christ if we are to be alive spiritually in Him.

As an aside, Paul always had good advice. I recall him telling my wife, Penny, she was doing a good thing by letting our kids walk barefooted in their early years so that the growth of their feet wouldn’t be hindered by tight fitting shoes.

Brand offers us the history of blood transfusion and some of his own personal experiences after his training and return to India as an orthopedic surgeon. He shared again of the dramatic personal experience of watching a young girl return to life while receive a second transfusion in London’s Connaught Hospital and how that experience drew him into a life-long career in medicine. As a surgeon at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, he designed a device to suction out a patient’s own blood during a surgery to re-circulate it during a surgery. That worked for some patients while others needed a supply of five or more pints during surgery.

He wrote about the challenges faced by a colleague – Dr. Reeve Betts who was a thoracic surgeon at Vellore. Though Dr. Betts had the knowledge and skills to save many lives, he was prevented from doing so without a functioning blood bank. Dr. Brand said that developing and running a blood bank was his number one priority in 1949. He suggested that blood specialists today probably do not realize the challenges of developing a blood bank. This was so small task for Dr. Brand as he had to learn the skills of typing, cross-matching, and screening of donors for health problems. Vellore was a hot dusty atmosphere when many people were afflicted with parasites or hepatitis so it became extremely important to screen people to run a trustworthy blood bank. Sadly, he said, they damaged some patients unintentionally with a transfusion of contaminated blood.

But that wasn’t the main challenge initially. To people in India at the time, blood represented life and the family members of a sick patient in need of blood for surgery were not willing to give up any of their blood for fear of dying. Ignorance was a factor. Quite often in frustration and anger, Dr. Betts would reluctantly donate his own blood to prove that giving up blood was safe. Paul had to prompt Dr. Betts to regulate his blood donations so he could be able to do the necessary surgeries. As family members watched Dr. Betts give blood without any physical effects, they would reluctantly start donating blood to save a family member. Once the fears were diminished, Paul was able to start a successful bank.

Paul shared the history of blood transfusions. He preferred to use this image more than anything else to illustrate why Jesus chose the perplexing image of "drinking His blood." A Jewish doctor in Italy in 1492 tried transfusing blood from three young boys into ailing Pope Innocent VIII. All three boys died from hemorrhaging while the pontiff barely outlived them. Not a success story! Two centuries later, blood transfusions resurged in France by the personal physician of Louis XIV who restored a dying boy using lamb's blood. However, the second recipient who received a transfusion died promptly after heading to a tavern to celebrate.

Most physicians at that time believed that withdrawing (letting) blood - not injecting it - offered the best hope of recovery. One physician claimed to be cured of rheumatism after sixty-four lettings in eight months. Another physician in France claimed to have overseen the letting of 20 million pints of blood! At that time, there was a law forbidding the heresy of transfusion. However, physicians in Italy and England did not give up. Ultimately doctors succeeded in human-to-human blood sharing. It was finally during WWI when the benefits of blood transfusion began to outweigh its risks. Medics on the field were busy saving lives.

So what are the spiritual applications of this refined method of blood transfusions? Dr. Brand wrote that Jesus and His followers obviously did not envision a Red Cross blood supply depot. When suggesting that we regularly celebrate the Lord's Table (Communion) Jesus gave His followers a more contemporary example of the vine and the branches. Today with the success of life-giving blood transfusions (which we seem to take for granted at times), Dr. Brand suggests we have a better metaphor to understand the mystery of how we benefit when symbolically depend on Christ's "wise blood" becoming part of our own.

The sacrament /celebration remind us that Christ is not dead. Though removed from us, He is alive and present in us. Paul wrote that "every cell in His Body (Church) is linked, unified, and bathed by the nutrients of a common source (similar to the human body). Blood feeds life. The infusion of fresh blood also helps explain the process of cleansing. We learned already that Jesus learned "wise blood" which He freely shares with us to help us overcome the Enemy in our daily challenges. This is what we are to go and teach (disciple) the peoples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19)

Dr. Brand shared that he received in the Eucharist an infusion of strength and energy by availing himself of Christ's own reserves. Personally, I find myself more eager to enjoy the benefits of the Lord's Supper celebration with the family of God. This ceremony or ritual is to be repeated. Someone asked, "Why go to a party, when you can drink by yourself? Why kiss your wife, when you both know you love her? Why tell great jokes to old friends who have heard them before? Why take your daughter to lunch on her birthday when you are going to have supper together anyway?" Another author wrote, "Sex is to marriage what the sacraments are to Christianity: the physical expression of spiritual reality." It is part of being human.

We use material things like wedding rings, badges of rank, prizes, medal and birthday presents as a means of grace (of showing honor and love). The material items of bread and wine is authenticated by our Master's death and resurrection which proved He was Lord of all. He earned the right to command us to ingest His blood and body in a sacramental meal / ceremony. He does this to remind us who He is and whose we are (His). Brand said, "When we come to the table to celebrate whose we are, we experience the gracious flow of His forgiveness and love and healing – a murmur to us that we are accepted and made alive – forever. We are TRANSFUSED!" Christ said that the one who feeds on Him will remain in Him and will live because of Him (John 6:54-58). AMEN.

Questions for Personal Applications or Group Discussions:

1. Why do we experience when celebrate the Lord's Table (Communion) together? What new information did you learn in this section (5 chapters) on Blood that will be of value to you when you celebrate Communion?
2. Jesus said He is "real food and real drink" for us since He is alive today. He rose from the grave (resurrected) and ascended to be with God the Father. How can we effectively remind each other that Christ is alive in us?
3. Why does Dr. Brand say that a blood transfusion is a better metaphor than even the one Christ used (vine and branches)?
4. Would you be able to do what Dr. Betts did to prove that donating blood was safe and necessary at times?
5. Lastly, name the benefits we receive when we ingest the symbolic elements of wine (juice) and bread for his blood and body. Do you personally experience these benefits?