

R [REDACTED] Jensen

24 Running Deer Road
Phenix City, AL 36870

Office: [REDACTED]

Home: [REDACTED]

February 16, 1998

Watchtower Bible & Tract Society
25 Columbia Heights
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Re: **Blood and upholding righteous standards**

Dear Brothers

I am an elder in the C [REDACTED] congregation in C [REDACTED] Alabama. What I write about in this letter has nothing to do with any past, present or foreseeable judicial activity in our congregation. The contents are concerning my own activity in the ministry with persons in the health care industry. The letter is quite long and I appreciate your perseverance in both reading and responding.

In my secular employment I have need for somewhat close association with a few physicians and insurance claims examiners related especially to workers compensation issues. These individuals have heard expressions of my faith on opportune occasions, and beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses have been the subject of friendly and meaningful conversation. Our discussions regarding Jehovah's Witnesses have never been a point of contention between us, and indirect benefits have been reported by one physician regarding local publishers. On occasion some of these physicians or insurance claims examiners will call me with questions about Jehovah's Witnesses and the medical use of blood, usually they are quite simple questions. In the last few months questions have been presented for which I have no answer, it is these questions about which I write. Before getting to the meat of this issue I can tell you I have spoken with four (4) different elders and our current circuit overseer brother W [REDACTED] Skogsberg, none could provide answers for the particular questions asked. Before writing this letter or speaking to those brothers, I studied and reconsidered many scriptures on this issue, and countless articles in our publications. It was suggested by some that I call our assigned hospital liaison committee, but I really don't want to bother them and that is not their intended assignment, to answer questions from the field ministry. I was encouraged by all to write the Society, so I am writing.

On this subject the two type parties have different perspectives on this issue. Insurance claims examiners are interested in reducing the claims for their respective companies. Physicians are more interested in knowing how to deal with patients who happen to be Jehovah's Witnesses. All parties generally enjoy scriptural discussion. I have told both that our organization has a

hospital liaison committee that would likely be glad to address their concerns in person. Each insist they are more comfortable with the informal setting of our personal one-on-one discussions (our meetings are rarely formal, usually it happens that a physician or claims examiner simply drops by my office for a visit or we may have a business lunch together).

Of interest to the physicians is how our organization deals with persons who decide to accept blood components. They understand and respect elements of our judicial process, that of assisting those who have fallen into grave sin and protecting the spiritual interests of our brotherhood. They begin having the questions about which I write when we discuss how Jehovah's Witnesses deal with publishers differently due to particular blood components accepted. I have relayed to them what is stated in many publications (we spent considerable time in the w90 6/1 30-1). Specifically they question why *we do not* deal judicially with publishers accepting injections of blood components as long as they are from the fractions of protein, hormone, salts or enzyme components of blood, when *we do* deal judicially with publishers accepting any components of red cells, white cells, platelets or plasma (even if these have been accepted in their component form and not as whole blood). The most direct difference these physicians see between the two is in the relatively small measure of some blood components compared to other blood components and the amounts usually administered (they see all as being of blood), and that it appears our organizational tolerance (referring to actions left to conscience and not dealt with judicially) is somehow determined by individual conscience. They thus wonder why the entire matter is not left to personal conscience by our organization.

Regarding conscience I reminded them that all among Jehovah's Witnesses are free to do whatever they wish as individuals, our brotherhood simply establishes with scripture what practices we permit among ourselves and who we thus recognize as fellow worshippers. It was made plain that while acceptance of some blood components is left to publisher's individual conscience, Jehovah's Witnesses *do not endorse the use of any blood products*. Further, I reminded them *as physicians* they are not spiritual shepherds and should concentrate on treating the whole person, respecting personal religious convictions of individual patients.

They ask the following:

Regarding judicial / non-judicial status:

Is it the amount of blood or the particular components of blood one accepts that measures when we deal judicially with someone?

If it's the amount, what is the amount?

If it's not the amount is it simply left up to the conscience of the individual as to which component they are willing to accept and which they decline, or are there arbitrary reasons for the selection of some blood components for medical use requiring judicial action and others requiring no judicial action?

Regarding our understanding of the prohibition in Acts 15:29.

What is Jehovah's Witnesses' *definition* of blood?

Are all parts of blood “blood” or are there certain components of blood we do not define as “blood” as prohibited in Acts 15:29? (For example: Scripturally what makes red cells coming from whole blood *different* from proteins coming from whole blood, making one a matter of interest judicially and the other of no judicial interest?)

If certain components in blood are not “blood” as prohibited at Acts 15:29, *how is this determined?*

Are components of blood no longer viewed as “blood” once they are of small enough proportion, if so what is the amount?

Is it the *particular component* binding the relation to Acts 15:29’s prohibition? If so what are the *scriptural* reasons for allowing these components as a matter of conscience by our organization while upholding God’s requirements judicially in response to acceptance of other components?

I understand there is some overlapping in the questions above. I have categorized the questions in an attempt to provide the different contexts in which they were asked. Also, regarding Acts 15:29, there was discussion about the passage of antibodies and proteins via the placenta. This did not seem to satisfy their questions from a *scriptural* position and there was reluctance to accept that only antibodies and/or proteins passed through the placenta. One asked: “How do you think water is delivered to an unborn child if not *from* the mothers blood, specifically from the plasma?” He added: “Even though their blood systems do not actually intermingle, the *source* of nourishment for the unborn *is* from the mothers blood.” It seemed unlikely to them that God’s Law stated to Noah had anything to do with the inner workings between fetus/placenta/mother.

In the course of conversation I used the illustration of the alcoholic being advised by his physician to abstain from alcohol and how this prohibition would certainly include intravenous acceptance of alcohol. In response one physician asked: “If, as your doctor, I said “abstain from eating meat”, should I object to your acceptance of an organ transplant which could serve to sustain your life?” Further he asked: “If I told you to abstain from alcohol, does that mean I should object to some medical use of alcohol to preserve your life?” I explained that my illustration was intended *only* to show that drinking or eating is similar to intravenous transfusion into the body, reminding him that intentional eating of blood *is* prohibited by God. Otherwise I had no response to his illustrated questions except by reminding him in this case it is not a physician requiring abstinence but our Creator, and since his standards call for abstinence from blood, Christians should obey. He agreed, and then said “that’s all well and good except for this, it seems Jehovah’s Witnesses are selective on *how to obey* this command and *how to uphold* it in your congregations, either you should abstain from *medical* use of blood or not, it seems that “some blood” is allowed while “other blood” is not.”

We also discussed how Jehovah’s Witnesses view misuse of blood in other ways, and how blood should be disposed of when no longer part of the individual or creature. Regarding general misuse of blood, I was asked if I had any idea how much blood had to be “misused” (by Jehovah’s Witnesses’ standards) to produce the blood components which our organization leaves to conscience. I had no idea (and still don’t). He said it is a considerable amount, and that if I

thought a single unit of blood being transfused was objectionable and considered misused I should go to a facility where blood is separated and processed and just look at the amount of blood being misused in order to gain the "accepted" fractions. Being ignorant of this particular process I did not have a response, but it seems reasonable that misuse of blood would be an important factor regardless of whether transfusion or injection into humans occurs, because we consider any misuse of blood to be serious as described in the October 15th 1981 Watchtower and elsewhere. (w81 10/15 30) One comment made in this Watchtower is "such commercialization of blood would not be in accord with deep respect for the life-representing value of blood." Is not the handling and processing of blood for medical products (which are bought and sold for profits) considered a commercialization of blood? Wouldn't this commercialization then be just as reprehensible as accepting whole blood transfusions, especially if it is true that large volumes of blood must be processed for the intended purpose of commerce? Could a brother be acceptable spiritual association if he owned and operated an establishment which specialized in the handling of large volumes of blood in order to separate for sale and use certain blood fractions which are left to individual conscience as to their use? It seems that the voluntary acceptance of blood fractions clearly and directly contributes to the wholesale misuse of blood because of the obtaining, storage and handling of the blood. (w75 page 216)

These men have asked questions not simply because they work in the field of health care, they also seem to have interest in the Bible. They have not indicated to me any attempt to thwart our association, the subject of health care happens to be their interest and naturally because of our position on blood they are inquisitive. Obviously numerous questions have arisen from worthwhile conversations with these individuals. I have attempted to simplify this letter, but much is being compressed into these few paragraphs. Please respond to each point as there is potential of advancing these discussions to higher ground, possibly starting a Bible study with at least one of these individuals upon clarification of the aforementioned.

I too desire a better understanding of *how* we can determine Scripturally that elders should deal judicially with publishers because of a particular component of blood accepted, while not dealing with publishers accepting other components. Especially confusing is a statement made in the June 1st 1990 Watchtower on page 31, it says, "Others have felt that a serum (antitoxin), such as immune globulin, containing only a tiny fraction of a donor's blood plasma and used to bolster their defense against disease, is *not the same as a life-sustaining blood transfusion. So their consciences may not forbid them to take immune globulin or similar fractions.* They may conclude that for them the decision will rest primarily on whether they are willing to accept any health risks involved in an injection made from others' blood." (italics added) There are two things puzzling about this quote.

First: Doctors will admit that transfusion of plasma or red cells may save someone's life, but so does factor VIII. *Both save lives, both are life sustaining.* Without factor VIII hemophiliacs would be certain candidates for extremely short life. Since both save lives how can one be singled out for judicial action and the other ignored. Also there is the use of albumin for burn victims, this administered blood component certainly *saves lives.*

Second. The italicized portion also indicates that *individual consciences play a determining role* in our decision about what we tolerate morally. What if

someone's conscience allowed acceptance of components like plasma, concluding that their decision rests primarily with accepting health risks?

With this information how can elders show individuals Scripturally why we tolerate acceptance of some blood components while dealing judicially with acceptance of other components? I have read countless articles on these issues and find no answer, nor could the elders I asked.

Additionally there is another area I have questions about (briefly mentioned above). The w89 3/1 30 comments that Jehovah's Witnesses "DO NOT accept" certain autologous procedures. The reason for this is well stated: "We have long appreciated that such stored blood certainly is no longer part of the person. It has been completely removed from him, so it *should be disposed of in line with God's Law*: "You should pour it out upon the ground as water."—Deuteronomy 12:24.' This *bottom line reasoning* can be found several times throughout the same article. With this bottom line scriptural law in mind it seems of importance that *all blood fractions* for medical use come from whole blood which has been *intentionally*: donated (or even sold), stored, processed, sold for commercial profit, and finally introduced into another person. *How* can it be *Scripturally reasoned* that all of this misuse of blood, explicitly to sell, buy or use blood fractions, can possibly be accepted by any Christian conscience? I can understand that even properly bled meat is going to have *some* blood remaining which is eaten together with the flesh, however, this eating of blood is not intentional, reasonable efforts have been made to 'pour out' the blood at the *onset* according to God's Law. My question arises because in the case of blood fractions administered medically there *must* first have occur *several* procedures which we "DO NOT accept", leading *intentionally and directly* to the product offered. Would not acceptance (and purchase) of the intentional end product be directly supportive of the process when there is *no obligation* on our part to accept such? Is the described process acceptable? (reference: w81 10/15 30, w90 6/1 30)

Incidentally, regarding one insurance claims examiner (for workers compensation claims) who seemed initially concerned about the cost of nonblood medical management, I reminded him that many times workers compensation claims are astronomical, not because of the real needs of the individual but because of unscrupulous persons who are content to 'milk the system'. Some do this by feigning a work related injury when in fact the injury had occurred away from work, others by lazily manipulating some form of permanent total disability ('disability retirement' so-to-speak) on an otherwise resolvable though bonafide claim. After hearing how Jehovah's Witnesses teach good ethical and honest behavior in these areas he seemed convinced that these would not be issues with claimants who happened to be Jehovah's Witnesses and that in fact these claims likely would be easier to manage. Further I reminded the examiner that often claims can be resolved positively and more readily for all parties when the injured person knows and feels they are understood, appreciated and well looked after. He agreed and was glad to know more about Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs to that end.

I look forward to reading your reply. I have understood and appreciated the Christian directive to abstain from blood for most of my life, and as an elder have several times assisted friends under stressful and even life threatening circumstances. Reading and studying further into this subject has only strengthened my resolve to abstain from blood, consequentially I look forward to your response. My personal questions are not intended as quibbling over the

direction to allow mature Christians use of their own conscience in determining acceptance of certain blood products, I seek only understanding.

You brothers are very busy up there, and we all surely appreciate your efforts. It is not my desire to burden you with additional work, I just can't nail down the *scriptural answers* to the questions above and need your assistance. I thank you in advance for your kind spiritual aid in this matter. Also I wish to thank all for the wonderful (though exhausting) Kingdom Ministry School we attended in November/December 97'. I enjoyed the positive nature of the program, all assignments were handled with excellence. *Keep up the good work!*

Your brother in Jehovah's service,



R. Jensen