

Communion

1. Our life is in our blood.

- *Genesis 2:7, 9:4*

2. Our death is in our blood.

- *Romans 5:19; Psalm 51:5; Romans 6:23a; Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22*

3. Abundant life is in Christ's blood.

- *Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:13-14; John 6:53-55; Romans 5:7-9*

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New Year, New Life in the Blood

How many of you have donated blood before? I hope you know that our church hosts a Red Cross Blood Drive every other month, so you can give regularly here at the church. Teri Fleming does an excellent job organizing these for us and making it as easy as possible for folks to sign up and to donate. I would highly recommend it! It is a great way to make a difference in the lives of others.

I don't even know how many times all total in my life I've given blood – dozens, I suppose – but I know that it doesn't even come close to how many times some people in our church have donated.

I'll never forget the first time I donated blood; I was in high school in Salem, Oregon. (This was over 40 years ago. I can tell you that what I experienced back then in high school would never happen here! I don't want to discourage you from giving blood.)

But the first time I donated, I had just turned old enough. *Now* they start out by poking your finger in order to get a blood sample, but back then the first thing they did was draw a drop of blood from the ear lobe. But they couldn't get their little gun to work, so they tried again and it sort of worked, but then they couldn't get enough blood out of it, so then they switched to trying on my right ear lobe. That one started bleeding, but by then my left ear must've opened up, so I had to sit there holding both my ear lobes with cotton balls while I waited to give blood. Finally my turn came and I could move on to the gurney where they were going to draw my blood from my left arm. But for some reason, they had difficulty getting the needle into my vein. By this time there were three ladies working to figure it out. They tried three times, and on the fourth time they backed all the way out and got a running start, jabbing me in the arm. That time they got the vein...and went right through the other side of it. So they tried fishing around in there with the needle while it was in my arm. It was a little painful. Before long I was getting a bruise on my arm, so they backed out again and went to the other arm – my right arm, meanwhile my left arm started really bleeding. They were so focused on getting the needle into my right arm that they quit paying attention to my left arm. They finally get the vein in my right arm when they noticed the puddle of blood from my left arm and got all worked up, so they ran over to the other side of the gurney, frantically stopping the bleeding on my left arm. They were flinging my left arm up in the air like I'm a rag doll, when they notice that not only had a lot of blood drained from my arms, but the blood drained out of my face, too. They told me I'd better lay back, which I was more than happy to do. My right arm kept pumping into the bag, and I was able to finish my donation, and I finally walked out of there, tired and pale, with bandages on both ears and both arms. How many of you get squeamish at the sight of blood? Especially if it's your own!

It's a wonder I ever gave blood again. But I did and I have, many times since, and have not had near the problems I did then. I'm glad whenever I can do it. I hope you will, too, and I promise it won't be like my first experience was.

But what is it about blood that holds such fascination for us? Our language reflects it; terms like "blood brothers," "blood is thicker than water," "bad blood," "blood bath," "blood relation," "blood thirsty," "blood hound," "pure blood," "blood curdling," "in cold blood," "blue blood," "bloodshot," "bloodlust," "bloodshed," "bloodline," "life blood" ... all speak of the strong interest we have in blood and even the mystical power that we sometimes attach to it.

In fact, it's not been until within the last 100 years or so that we've even allowed blood transfusions. Some primitive cultures still do not allow "sharing" blood because they believe doing so means you are giving away a part of yourself – your very life and essence and personhood to someone else. Some myths and traditions about blood *still* survive in our culture. There are some backward religions and cults today that won't allow blood transfusions – and their children die because of it.

Also, did you know that when people marry, they put a ring on their third finger because that was once known as the "leech finger" – it was believed that it contained the major vein leading directly to the heart. The ring on the leech finger meant that you were joining your life blood with another.

Blood is a big deal in the Bible, too. I want to shed some light on this for us today about why blood is so important for our spiritual lives as we prepare for communion today.

All that leads to the first point of what I believe God wants to say to us...

1. Our life is in our blood.

As we prepare for communion today, we need to realize that blood is our life.

When you go to the doctor for an annual physical, what is the one thing you have to do to check your health before you see your doctor? You have to go to the lab, and they do a blood draw – filling several different vials with your blood so they can test it. A blood test is the first indicator for the health of your life. Your life is in the blood, and the lab tests will help determine how healthy your blood is, and therefore how healthy your life is.

You can survive up to a month without food, a day or two without water, but only a couple minutes without enough oxygen-rich blood.

Now follow me here: if we go back to Creation in the book of Genesis, we see that in order for Adam and Eve to become alive, God breathed into Adam the breath of life:

"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."
(Genesis 2:7, niv)

That breath of life – oxygen – is what we *must* have to live, and it is transported in our bodies *through our blood*. By the way, that's why God says in Genesis 9:4...

“...you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.” (Genesis 9:4, niv)

That means that very early on in the existence of people – long before the Old Testament law was given, God made it clear that humans must not eat meat from an animal that still has its blood in it. Why would God establish that rule? Well, for one, the blood in an animal spoils really quickly, and spoiled blood spoils the meat very quickly. In a hot desert region, you want the meat to cool down as quickly as you can so it will last longer. But there was far more than germ warfare going on here. When you eat the blood, it is symbolic of eating the animal's very life. Blood represents life.

It's not just true biologically; it is true spiritually too. In the Bible, referring to Christ and in relation to the sacrifice he made for us with his life, the New Testament talks about Christ's blood *three times* more than the cross, and *five times* more than his death. Blood is important; it is our life. It is true physically and spiritually.

Blood also identifies who you are. It is your heritage, your story, part of your identity. You have your biological parents' blood in your veins, whether you like it or not! It's your blood that is used to prove whose kid you are. Have any of you done a DNA ancestry test? What was your biggest surprise?

My point is that, biologically, spiritually, and relationally our very life and essence is in our blood. It shows whose we are.

Unfortunately...

2. Our death is in our blood, too.

We've already said that you have your parents' blood. That means you also probably inherited whatever genetic defects and problems they had, which *they* got from *their* parents. And there are some pretty serious blood diseases. But if I were to ask you what the most serious blood-born pathogen was, especially from the end of the last century, would anyone want to guess what it is? It's HIV-AIDS. There is still no cure, although science has figured out how to manage the symptoms. It isn't the deadly disease that it once was, although it is a chronic disease. Tragically, even innocent bystanders were infected, often through unsterilized needles and transfusions. We are still saddened every time we hear of a baby born with HIV-AIDS, having been infected in its mother's womb.

As tragic as that is, there is a blood-epidemic that faces us that's even *worse* than HIV-AIDS. Millions of babies are born infected by this blood disease, and it is a disease that is always 100% fatal. *Every* human being is infected, and you and I are carriers as well. That blood disease is called sin. We got it from our parents, and they got it from theirs, all the way back to the first parents – Adam and Eve. That's why the Bible says:

"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned." (Romans 5:19, nlt)

When you get to the New Testament, you'll see that it simply reinforces what's been clear since the Old Testament. King David himself wrote in Psalm 51:

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."
(Psalm 51:5, niv)

That's why the Apostle Paul wrote:

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a, niv)

In other words, wages are paid for work you've done – for what you've earned – and what we've earned as a result of our sin is death. Sin is a 100% fatal blood disease, and we all have it – 100% of humans.

The Good News about this is that there is a blood transfusion of un-diseased blood that can cure you. We all have sin-diseased blood, so we need pure, clean blood. The bad news is that every person born of man has the same diseased blood.

So in the Old Testament, God provided a temporary solution – a blood substitutionary system. In that system, an animal without a disease or blemish could be killed and have its blood shed as a substitute for our bad blood. In Leviticus 17:11 God explains it:

"For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Leviticus 17:11, niv).

This shedding of blood is necessary; we have no cure without it:

"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22, niv)

The problem with the old system of bloodshed was that it only treated the *symptoms*, not the disease. It wasn't a cure.

Many of you know that I have struggled with chronic headaches for the last 11½ years since that person on his motorcycle caused my auto accident. I've tried four different types of nerve medications to block the pain, but those have only had marginal success and significant side effects. By the way, I refuse to take any kind of pain medication or opioids. I'd rather be in pain with a clear head than be in a fog without pain. I've had numerous injections in my neck and head and twice I've gone in for them to burn the nerves to try to block the nerves from sending pain signals, again with marginal success and painful side effects, and even nerves grow back after they've been burned. But all of those attempts haven't solved the issue; they are pain blockers.

That's what the problem is with the old system of blood shed – it didn't remove the disease, it only covered it and gave you an idea of what life *could* be like, but the pain killer would soon wear off and you'd need another dose. The problem was that the sin was still there.

What we need is a total transfusion of untainted blood. But remember we said that every human has diseased blood. If only there was someone whose life *did not* originate in man...are you beginning to get the picture? Jesus' life originated with God, yet he was born of a woman. If you were to give Jesus a paternity test, you would find his Father's blood coursing through his veins. And you would know that because of the absence of sin in his blood. So, while *our* life is in our blood, unfortunately our death is also in our blood, but thank God that...

3. Abundant life is in Christ's blood.

Remember that passage we read in Romans 6:23 that said that the wages, or the payment we have earned for our sin is death? Well that was only half of the verse. That's the bad news. The other half of the verse is the Good News. Let me read that to you again:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23, niv)

We no longer need the *old* system of temporarily covering our sin because in Christ we have the *new* system which is curative and permanent. Christ has provided for us a transfusion of clean, un-diseased blood. That's why the Bible says this:

"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are *outwardly clean*. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, *cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death*, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:13-14, niv, *italics added*)

The reason that we share together in communion is to remind and reinforce that we've received that blood transfusion. That's why it doesn't mean much if you aren't a Christian. But there's something else here. Remember I mentioned that it was against Old Testament law to eat the blood of an animal? Jews felt so strongly about it, that they had an entire process of preparing food that was developed to make "kosher" food – food without blood.

But do you realize that every time we receive communion, it appears that we are breaking the Old Testament law – because we are "drinking" blood? Listen to what the Bible says:

"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.'" (John 6:53-55, niv)

Wait – what did he say? To the Jews, this statement was extremely offensive. So why would Jesus say such a thing, especially since he himself was a Jew? He said it because he was making the point that the old system no longer worked, that we need a transfusion – we need *his* life in us – trading our blood for his blood. Of

course, Jesus didn't mean that we *literally* drink his blood and eat his flesh, but the spiritual reality is just as true. The old system was not the answer; it just pointed us toward the cure. That's why the Bible says:

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:7-9, niv)

You know what amazes me? If you had a cure for HIV-AIDS, and you asked a person who was dying from it if they would like to have the cure, do you think they would walk away and say, "No thanks, I'd rather keep dying – I'm very comfortable with it. Besides, those of us with AIDS have all the fun; those of you without AIDS are no fun." NO – of course not; that person would do anything to be cured. Yet why is it, with a blood disease that has killed millions of times more people than AIDS ever will – in fact, without God's cure, sin kills 100% of us (for the wages of sin is death...) – why do people walk away and say, "No thanks, I'd rather die – I'm comfortable where I am. Besides, I'm having more fun." It's absurd!

So here we are...and the question for us is, first, have you accepted the cure? Have you had this total blood transfusion? Have you been walking away from the cure you need? Or are you convinced that the old system is good enough – just an occasional sacrifice of going to church, or praying, or doing enough good deeds, or putting some money in the offering once in a while, to cover the pain without curing the problem? Why not have a complete transfusion – get rid of your diseased, poisoned blood completely and receive from Jesus his clean, holy blood. Begin to live resurrection life today – a life of abundance here that goes on for all eternity. You can do so by receiving communion, in faith today.

Maybe you simply need a check-up – you need to run a blood test to remind you who your Father is. You can do a self-examination as we receive communion in faith today.

Worse yet, many of us in this room have the cure, and we refuse to share it with those who are dying. I would contend that *receiving communion without a commitment to share the cure with others is nothing more than greedily, gluttonously, consuming it only for yourself.* (repeat)

As we prepare for communion, in a moment we will pass out the communion elements. I encourage you to take one. You do not have to be a member of this church to join us in this.

Ushers please serve us at this time. Please hold on to the elements until we consume them together. But as you receive the juice and the bread, consider your own blood; have you let God cure you? With communion, we remember that because Christ shed his blood and gave his life for us, we are cured of sin and death. But for you, this might be your opportunity to accept that cure. So take a moment and talk to God about your blood condition. Allow him to forgive your sin and accept his blood. Or if you already have, then use this time to examine your own heart and be sure

you are affirming what he's done for you, praise him for it, and commit yourself to sharing the cure with others.

Pause and pray

As I said, you don't have to be a member of this church to share in this time with us. You don't even have to be a believer in Jesus. But if that's you, this will mean nothing to you – it won't be anything more than some sour grape juice and a gluten free stale cracker. But for those of us who have accepted Christ – even if you did that just now – this is the greatest meal we could ever share.

Communion:

The Apostle Paul writes, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." (*eat the bread*) In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (*drink the cup*) For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Prayer of committal and thanksgiving

Please stand for the benediction:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21, niv)