



## Journal of Exceptional Multidisciplinary Research (JEMR)

ISSN: 3007-8407 (Online)

Volume 2 Issue 2, (2025)



<https://doi.org/10.69739/jemr.v2i2.1010>



<https://journals.stecab.com/jemr>



Published by  
Stecab Publishing

### Research Article

## The Biblical Concepts of Blood Transfusion: A Religio-Ethical Analysis

\*<sup>1</sup>Osagie Sylvester Aimiehinor

### About Article

#### Article History

Submission: June 22, 2025

Acceptance : July 27, 2025

Publication : September 15, 2025

#### Keywords

*Bioethical, Blood Confusion, Judeo-Christian, Religio-Ethical, Sanctity of Life, Theological Ethics*

#### About Author

<sup>1</sup> Diocese of Benin, School of Ministry,  
Nigeria

Contact @ Osagie Sylvester Aimiehinor  
[fatherosas@yahoo.com](mailto:fatherosas@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

Blood transfusion is still a contentious topic in some religious communities, particularly when bioethical principles, medical needs, and religious interpretation are all intertwined. By examining the biblical conception of blood and its sacred nature, particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the implications of that theological understanding on moral reactions to blood transfusions, this article aims to examine blood: holy and unholy. The article offers a fair religious-ethical assessment by analyzing pertinent scriptural texts, theological viewpoints, and bioethical values from a hermeneutical and ethical standpoint. Although the Bible makes it clear that blood is sacred, the paper makes the argument that this does not necessitate a complete prohibition on life-saving medical practices like blood transfusions because of how the core theological ideas of compassion, healing, and life preservation are interpreted.

### Citation Style:

Aimiehinor, O. S. (2025). The Biblical Concepts of Blood Transfusion: A Religio-Ethical Analysis. *Journal of Exceptional Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(2), 55-60. <https://doi.org/10.69739/jemr.v2i2.1010>



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensed Stecab Publishing, Bangladesh. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the metaphorical power of blood is profound. In the Bible, blood is a sacred substance that symbolizes life, covenant, and atonement in addition to being a bodily fluid. Blood transfusions are a common component of all life-saving procedures as a result of the industrialization of modern medicine. Do the biblical blood laws, however, still prohibit transfusions? The answer is unmistakably yes for Jehovah's Witnesses, one of the Christian sects! Others read these directives in a different way, consistent with the ethical need to preserve life and the advancement of medical knowledge. By providing a thorough religio-ethical analysis based on biblical theology and modern ethical reasoning, this paper aims to resolve this conflict.

Throughout human history, blood has stood for sanctity, life, covenant, and sacrifice, particularly in Judeo-Christian theology. However, for religions that consider transfusion to be a violation of divine law, modern medical practices such as blood transfusions have raised serious ethical and religious concerns. This paper explores biblical ideas about blood and their ethical implications in order to ascertain whether biblical teachings categorically oppose or can support the use of blood transfusions in life-saving situations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Theological explanations of scripture's blood

The sanctity of blood is a topic that appears frequently in biblical literature. As mentioned earlier, Leviticus 17:11 is often cited in theological discourses to affirm the sanctity of blood as God's given life force. According to Milgrom's (1991) detailed analysis of the priestly texts, the blood's ceremonial use in Israel's cultic system was linked to its role as a means of atonement and divine possession. This understanding has affected the views of some religious groups, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, regarding modern blood transfusions (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2020).

But according to Christian ethicists like Meilaender (2013) and O'Donovan (1986), the New Testament's portrayal of blood is more Christological and metaphorical, particularly in passages like Hebrews 9:12–14 and Luke 22:20. These scholars contend that while blood retains theological significance, Christ's work fulfills and transforms its ritual restrictions, which do not directly align with current clinical prohibitions.

### 2.2. Views from a medical and bioethical perspective

The medical literature emphasizes the necessity and efficacy of blood transfusions in various clinical settings. The World Health Organization (2021) states that blood safety and transfusion practices are essential components of public health. Because blood transfusions are founded on four basic bioethical principles—autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice—they are morally acceptable when performed to save lives or improve health outcomes, according to Beauchamp and Childress (2019). The literature has also extensively discussed conflicts between medical intervention and religious belief. For example, Veatch (2013) and Childress (2001) examine how medical practitioners address religious objections, especially in the context of children, and advocate for moral principles

that prioritize life-saving care while, when practical, respecting religious conscience.

### 2.3. Literature's gaps

Blood transfusion is rarely linked to pastoral practice, Christian ethics, or biblical theology. There are medical and theological sources, but they are still distinct. A thorough religio-ethical analysis is provided in this study. Its foundations include theological tradition, biblical exegesis, and clinical ethics reasoning. To close this gap is the aim.

### 2.3. Theology of blood in the bible

#### 2.3.1. The background of the old testament

In Genesis 9:4, Noah is instructed not to drink animal blood because "the life of the flesh is in the blood." This is further explained in Leviticus 17:11, which explains that blood is offered as atonement for sin. This is the first time that blood is associated with life. This theological viewpoint links blood to the divine covenant and life. Blood was prohibited by Levitical law since it belonged to God (Leviticus 17:10–14). These prohibitions were part of Israel's holiness code, which set the community apart in terms of moral conduct and ceremonial purity.

These suggestions, however, were specific to the cult practices of Israel. They dealt with dietary laws, sacrificial systems, and ceremonial cleanliness. Rather than necessarily being a universal moral command against all uses of blood, as Milgrom (1991) argues, the holiness code emphasized blood as a sacred medium for atonement and sanctification.

#### 2.4. The viewpoint of the new testament

According to the New Testament, Christ's blood serves as a means of redemption and represents the New Covenant (found in Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:12–14). The conditions of the Old Testament atonement system are satisfied by his atoning death. Because of this, New Testament theology places a strong emphasis on using blood for more redemptive purposes rather than ritualistic, legalistic ones.

Acts 15:20 counsels Gentile converts to refrain from eating "blood," but academics like Bruce (1988) and Keener (2012) read this as a pastoral compromise rather than an indisputable moral precept. The ban was not intended to control medical ethics, but rather to preserve goodwill between Jewish and Gentile believers. Therefore, it is hermeneutically problematic to apply this apostolic instruction to contemporary transfusion practices.

### 2.5. Medical ethics of blood transfusion

An established medical procedure that has saved many lives is blood transfusion. It is utilized in cancer treatments, trauma care, anemia treatment, and surgery. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), having access to safe blood is essential to providing universal healthcare.

From a bioethical standpoint, the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence are paramount. Both are achieved by blood transfusion: it prevents harm and fosters well-being. Ethical issues arise when a transfusion is refused for non-medical reasons, especially when it causes preventable death or suffering (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).



## 2.6. Intercultural and interreligious consequences

Although biblical viewpoints are the main focus of this essay, it is crucial to acknowledge that opinions regarding blood transfusions differ depending on the religious and cultural setting. For example, blood is considered taboo and spiritually powerful in certain indigenous African religions (Mbiti, 1990). Transfusions are generally accepted from an Islamic perspective as long as the blood comes from a legitimate (halal) source. When providing pastoral or medical care, this diversity emphasizes the importance of contextual theology and the need to interact with local beliefs.

Pastors and Christian missionaries operating in multicultural settings must respect biblical and medical truth while navigating these beliefs with cultural sensitivity. Theological education should equip ministers to engage ethically and respectfully in these complex spaces.

## 2.7. The sanctity of life and theological ethics

According to Christian ethics, human life is sacred because it reflects the *imago Dei*, or the image of God in people (Genesis 1:27). The moral need to protect life is grounded in this theological affirmation, which makes medical procedures like blood transfusions morally acceptable.

Additionally, Jesus' ministry offers a compassionate healing model. He put human need ahead of ceremonial law, healed on the Sabbath, and touched the ceremonially unclean (Matthew 12:11–12). His deeds imply that human dignity and mercy transcend legalistic interpretations. Given this, refusing a life-saving transfusion for ceremonial reasons appears to be at odds with the gospel ethos.

## 2.8. Christian conscience and moral decision-making

A framework for examining contentious issues from a conscience-based perspective is offered by Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8–10. Paul encourages respect for one another and recognizes that believers may reach different conclusions on unimportant matters. But he also cautions against choices that are harmful or go against the law of love.

Scripture, reason, community, and prayer must all inform a Christian's conscience. This includes medical decisions about blood transfusions. Communities of practice are where moral formation takes place, as MacIntyre (1984) argues. As a result, churches need to develop morally developed societies that can discern God's will in challenging circumstances.

## 2.9. Aspects of public health, ethics, and law

Refusing blood transfusions can present legal and public health issues in pluralistic societies, particularly when minors are involved. Despite the religious objections of the parents, courts in many jurisdictions uphold the child's right to life. Theologically speaking, this is consistent with Jesus' reverence for children and his caution against making them stumble (Matthew 18:6).

Healthcare professionals must also think about their ethical and legal responsibilities to act in the best interests of their patients. While making sure that patients receive evidence-based, life-saving care when necessary, policies should also strive to respect religious beliefs.

## 2.10. Blood's theological significance in the bible

The Bible uses deep symbolism and reverence when discussing blood. Blood is portrayed as sacred and inextricably linked to life itself throughout Genesis through Revelation. The idea of blood as the life-principle of living things is introduced in Genesis 9:4 (New International Version), where Noah is given the early directive, "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it." This theology is further supported by Leviticus 17:11, which states that "for the life of a creature is in the blood... it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

The prohibition against consuming blood is emphasized several times in the Levitical laws, especially in chapters 17 through 19. This is often interpreted as an order to treat blood with the highest respect. The early Church counseled Gentile converts to refrain from blood, food offered to idols, and sexual immorality and these prohibitions were later restated in the apostolic decree found in Acts 15:20. According to some religious organizations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, these verses forbid accepting blood transfusions in any way (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2020).

However, these directives are typically seen as ceremonial or symbolic rather than strictly prescriptive in medical contexts by mainstream Christian theology (Grudem, 2018). It is crucial to understand that the biblical allusions to blood were mainly focused on ritual purity, dietary law, and sacrificial atonement rather than modern medical procedures.

## 2.11. Hermeneutical aspects: setting the prohibitions in perspective

The significance of interpreting biblical texts in light of their literary, cultural, and historical contexts is emphasized by the hermeneutical approach to Scripture (Fee & Stuart, 2014). The covenantal relationship between Israel and Yahweh served as the foundation for many of the Old Testament's blood-related prohibitions, particularly those pertaining to temple sacrifice and ritual purity.

Many of these ceremonial laws were fulfilled and changed with the arrival of the New Covenant in Christ. According to Hebrews 10:1–18, the old system of sacrifice was rendered obsolete by the atoning death of Christ. Therefore, in light of Christ's teachings on love, mercy, and healing, the ethical application of biblical laws regarding blood must be reinterpreted.

Additionally, the Apostolic Council in Acts 15:20 must be interpreted as a pastoral adjustment to Jewish-Gentile relations in the first-century Church rather than as a timeless bioethical decree (Keener, 2012). Given this, moral judgments regarding blood transfusions must be based on the larger framework of biblical ethics, which supports human life, compassion, and justice, rather than just a few verses.

## 2.12. Ethical Analysis: The Sanctity Of Life And Medical Necessity

According to Christian ethics, it is morally necessary to preserve life. Christians must act to preserve and protect life whenever possible in accordance with the *agape* principle, which stands for selfless love (O'Donovan, 1986). When used to save lives, blood transfusions are consistent with the healing



and compassion found in the Bible.

A helpful lens is also offered by the ethical framework known as principles, which consists of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. The principles of beneficence (acting for the benefit of the patient) and non-maleficence (do no harm) may be violated if a medically necessary transfusion is refused (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

Furthermore, there is no explicit biblical ban on blood-related medical procedures. Instead of using blood for therapeutic purposes, the scriptural focus is on avoiding its ritualistic or idolatrous misuse. Therefore, the larger theological mandates to preserve life and alleviate suffering serve as the ethical foundation for transfusion.

### 2.13. Current views on religion

Despite the well-known rejection of allogeneic blood transfusions by Jehovah's Witnesses due to their interpretation of Scripture, many Christian denominations embrace the practice, making a distinction between medical ethics and ceremonial law. For example, the Roman Catholic Church believes that blood transfusions are ethically acceptable and consistent with the double effect principle, which states that the positive outcome of saving a life outweighs the unintended consequence of receiving blood (Catholic Health Association, 2020).

Protestant ethics, on the other hand, tend to support the practice as being in line with Christ's healing ministry and the moral obligation to love one's neighbour, which includes both giving and receiving medical care (Thielicke, 1966).

### 2.14. Moving towards a medical compassion theology

The assertion that God is a healer (Exodus 15:26) and that Christ is the embodiment of compassionate care (Matthew 14:14) are two of the central tenets of Christian theology. Jesus broke religious and cultural taboos to heal in a number of ways, as the Gospels describe: healing on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17), touching lepers (Mark 1:40–45), and interacting with the ritually unclean (Luke 8:43–48). This theological path makes a strong case for the centrality of mercy, healing, and the reduction of human suffering in Christian ethics.

According to this theory, medical treatments, such as blood transfusions, are acts of divine compassion when properly motivated, rather than just technological fixes. According to Bonhoeffer (1995), a Christian's ethical behavior is defined as action "in response to the reality of God's grace." Therefore, declining a life-saving blood transfusion, especially when no biblical mandate calls for it, could be seen as a disregard for the need to love and protect life.

### 2.15. The function of personal autonomy and conscience

The role of conscience, which is influenced by Scripture and the Holy Spirit, is also affirmed by Christian ethics (Romans 14:5, 23). Paul, the apostle, advises Christians to follow their conscience and faith, particularly when it comes to contentious issues. As a result, even though churches may provide ethical and theological guidance, Christians must ultimately make morally sound medical decisions in front of God.

However, good doctrine and collective wisdom must be used to balance the idea of autonomy. The pastoral role is to help

believers develop their consciences through prayer, Scripture, and the Church's collective discernment, not in a vacuum (Hauerwas & Wells, 2006). Pastoral sensitivity, education, and communication are crucial when people refuse transfusions on the basis of sincere but potentially incorrect beliefs.

### 2.16. Ethical conundrums in pediatric situations

When minors are involved, this topic takes on a particularly difficult dimension. Courts in a number of jurisdictions have occasionally stepped in to override parental objections to children receiving blood transfusions, putting the child's right to life ahead of the parents' religious beliefs. Such legal actions underscore the moral obligation to protect the weak, even as they bring up significant issues regarding religious freedom.

Christian ethics affirm that parental rights are not absolute and uphold the dignity of children. Jesus' own teachings, found in Matthew 18:1–6, emphasize the importance of children and implicitly call for their protection. Therefore, intervention may be both legally and theologically required in cases where treatment refusal could result in avoidable death or suffering (Meilaender, 2013).

### 2.17. Implications for pastors and the church

Church leaders play a vital role in educating members about ethics, encouraging biblical literacy, and preparing them to make morally difficult medical decisions. This entails going beyond proof-texting in order to comprehend Scripture's moral vision holistically.

In order to promote trust in healthcare systems and offer wise counsel on medical ethics, churches should collaborate with medical professionals. Pastors must provide sympathetic, theologically based answers that separate ritual symbolism from clinical realities in situations where there are fears, particularly those related to blood mixing or defilement.

Additionally, communities can benefit from learning from one another's beliefs through interdenominational discussion. For example, although some Christians may allow full transfusion, others may only accept autologous transfusions (using one's own stored blood), and still others may reject transfusions completely. Rather than being grounds for condemnation, these differing answers can serve as a springboard for theological contemplation.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Biblical hermeneutics, systematic theology, and ethico-theological analysis were all combined in this study's qualitative theological approach. The Bible (Old and New Testaments) was one of the primary sources that were examined through the use of historical-grammatical and theological exegesis. Scholarly commentary, peer-reviewed theological and ethical journals, official denominational statements, and bioethical literature were examples of secondary sources.

Four main lenses were used to thematically synthesize the data:

- Blood theology in the Bible
- Theological ethics in relation to healing and life
- Medical viewpoints on transfusion
- Ecclesial and pastoral reactions

A thorough analysis that respects the authority of Scripture as





well as the ethical complexity of modern healthcare was made possible by this triangulated approach.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Important results

Blood transfusion is not expressly forbidden by Scripture. The biblical writings on blood mostly address dietary, sacrificial, and covenantal contexts. There are no explicit prohibitions against transfusion as a medical procedure in either the Old or New Testaments. It is best to interpret the often-quoted Acts 15:20 passages as a cultural accommodation to Jewish-Gentile relations rather than a medical rule (Keener, 2012).

Life-preserving medical procedures are supported by the Christian moral tradition. A fundamental tenet of Christian ethics is the sanctity of life. Jesus' and the early church's healing ministries support the use of all available resources to preserve life and advance human flourishing (Matthew 12:11–12; James 5:14–15).

Some religious interpretations misapply ritual laws to medical situations. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses interpret biblical blood prohibitions as prohibiting transfusions. These interpretations, however, ignore the distinction that many theologians recognise between transfusion—a medical procedure—and ingestion—a moral act (Grudem, 2018; Meilaender, 2013).

Ethical pastoral counseling and education are necessary. Many Christians are still unsure or conflicted because they have not received theological instruction on medical ethics. Church leaders and pastors frequently sidestep the subject or provide oversimplified responses. This emphasizes the necessity of interdisciplinary training in healthcare ethics and theology.

### 4.2. Tensions in ethics

There is a serious conflict between medical responsibility and religious freedom. In pediatric cases, the state frequently steps in, but in adult cases, believers may refuse transfusions out of conscience. According to Matthew 18:6, Christian ethics encourages the protection of vulnerable lives, implying that in certain situations, legal action may be morally acceptable.

In clinical settings, concerns about spiritual support and informed consent also come up. Healthcare providers have to strike a balance between honoring patients' religious convictions and making sure they are aware of the potential medical consequences of their decisions.

### 4.3. Suggestions

The following suggestions are put forth in light of the findings:

i) *Biblical Education*: Without distilling intricate medical issues to a few verses, churches should teach their members about the theological and symbolic significance of blood.

ii) *Pastoral Guidance*: Clergy members need to be prepared to accurately and compassionately discuss medical ethics, particularly during emergencies.

iii) *Respect for Conscience*: While directing their members, churches ought to honour each person's conscience and encourage well-informed, scripturally-based decision-making.

iv) *Medical Collaboration*: To promote ethical healthcare practices and give correct information, faith communities

should collaborate closely with medical professionals.

v) *Theological Reflection*: To sustain a strong and dependable Christian witness in healthcare ethics, there must be constant theological engagement with medical advancements.

Encourage biblical knowledge of medical ethics. Churches should teach about the value of life, the function of medicine, and the distinction between ethical application and ceremonial law. It is important to consider the theological and historical context when interpreting biblical passages pertaining to blood. Create theological resources to aid in healthcare decision-making. Seminaries and denominational bodies should create easily comprehensible guidelines that integrate medicine and theology, particularly when it comes to controversial topics like organ donation, blood transfusion, and end-of-life care.

Encourage interdisciplinary discussion. In order to handle ethical quandaries in a tactful and capable manner, pastors, theologians, and medical professionals should work together. Clinical ethics-trained chaplaincy services ought to be offered by hospitals and clinics.

While respecting the conscience of individuals is important, religious communities also need to correct misinterpretations of Scripture that cause preventable harm. According to Romans 14, instruction should make a distinction between dogma and contentious issues.

Encourage the moral treatment of children. Churches should uphold parents' moral obligation to safeguard their children's lives and to support any necessary medical procedures. Legal and moral safeguards should be in place to protect the child's welfare in cases of refusal.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Unquestionably sacred, the biblical idea of blood represents life, covenant, and redemption. However, a comprehensive ban on blood transfusion is not supported by a nuanced and context-sensitive interpretation of the Bible. Instead, the general biblical ethic, which is based on love, healing, and life preservation, permits and even promotes the use of medical procedures like transfusions when they are necessary to preserve life and promote health. Therefore, the whole and redemptive story of Scripture must be used to determine the ethical and religious acceptability of blood transfusions, not just specific proof texts.

Despite treating blood as sacred, this religio-ethical analysis has demonstrated that the Bible does not specifically prohibit blood transfusion, particularly in the context of contemporary medicine. Scripture makes clear the moral obligations to protect life, show compassion, and alleviate suffering; these principles ought to guide Christians' approaches to medical care.

## REFERENCES

- Bonhoeffer, D. (1995). *Ethics* (E. Bethge, trans.; N. Piper, ed.). *Touchstone*. (First published in 1949).
- Catholic Health Association. (2020). *Catholic Health Care Services: Ethical and Religious Guidelines* (6th ed.). Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States.
- Childress, J. F., & Beauchamp, T. L. (2019). *Biomedical Ethics Principles* (8th ed.). Oxford University Press.



- Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. (2014). *How to fully understand the Bible* (4th ed.). Zondervan.
- Grudem, W. (2018). *Christian ethics: An overview of moral reasoning found in the Bible*. Crossway.
- Keener, C. S. (2012). *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1*. Baker University.
- Meilaender, G. (2013). *Bioethics: An Introduction for Christians, Third Edition*. Eerdmans.
- O'Donovan, O. (1986). *An overview of evangelical ethics in relation to resurrection and moral order*. Eerdmans.
- Thielicke, H. (1966). *Volume 1: Foundations of Theological Ethics*. The Fortress Press.
- Tract Society and Watch Tower Bible. (2020). *How life can be saved by blood*. New York's Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc.
- Wells, S., & Hauerwas, S. (2006). *Christian ethics: The Blackwell companion* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Wiley.

