

# Can Christians Eat Blood or Blood Products?

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## Question

Does God forbid Christians today from eating blood and blood products like blood sausages, blood pudding, etc.?

## Response

To understand what the Bible says about this, it would be helpful to review the historical biblical accounts regarding consuming blood.

### 1. At Creation

First, it is helpful to remember that when Yahweh first created the world and mankind, He gave green plants to all for food. No one consumed meat.

#### **Genesis 1:27–30**

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup> And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground— everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

Humans, wild animals, birds and small creatures all consumed plants. None consumed meat and this also means that none consumed blood.

However, God’s instructions to mankind regarding this vegetarian diet changed after His global Flood judgment.

## 2. After the global Flood

After the Flood, God told Noah that He would now allow mankind to consume meat.

### **Genesis 9:1–4**

<sup>1</sup> Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. <sup>2</sup> All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. <sup>3</sup> I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables. <sup>4</sup> But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it.

Yahweh told Noah that mankind was now free to consume meat: land animals, birds, small creatures, as well as fish. However, there was a condition: they were not to eat meat with blood still in it.

Why did God place this condition on mankind? The Bible did not record God’s explanation at this point in history. We do know that God had explained to Noah about sacrifices of acceptable animals for after the Flood, we see that Noah knew how to perform the sacrifices correctly.

### **Genesis 8:20**

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose.

This tells us that though God’s instructions to Noah were not recorded in Scripture, Noah knew which animals were approved for sacrifice (the so-called “clean” animals) and he knew how to perform the sacrifices. So he understood the significance of the sacrifices.

But as we move to the time of Israel, Scripture reveals Yahweh’s instructions and explanations in detail.

## 3. Israel and Mosaic Law

When God called Abraham, His intention was for Abraham and his family to be a counterculture to the pagan people groups of the world. Yahweh wanted the nation of Israel to be visibly and spiritually distinct from other people groups. God’s plan was to use Israel to draw people to Himself. Their countercultural way of living was to be a witness for Him (Deuteronomy 4:1–8).

Hence, God gave specific instructions to the nation of Israel so they would be set apart from the other pagan nations. This included their diet and food. He specifically stipulated what was considered ceremonially clean for the Israelites and therefore could be consumed, as well as what was ceremonially unclean and should not be consumed.

As part of these instructions, He said that they must not eat meat with blood in it.

### **Deuteronomy 12:16**

<sup>15</sup> “But you may butcher your animals and eat their meat in any town whenever you want. You may freely eat the animals with which the LORD your God blesses you. All of you, whether ceremonially clean or unclean, may eat that meat, just as you now eat gazelle and deer. <sup>16</sup> But you must not consume the blood. You must pour it out on the ground like water.

God told the Israelites the reason why He did not want them eating blood was because the lifeblood of a creature represented its life and He was using the blood to teach the idea of purification from sin and substitutionary atonement.

### **Leviticus 17:10–14**

<sup>10</sup> “And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you eats or drinks blood in any form, I will turn against that person and cut him off from the community of your people, <sup>11</sup> for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the LORD. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible. <sup>12</sup> That is why I have said to the people of Israel, ‘You must never eat or drink blood—neither you nor the foreigners living among you.’

<sup>13</sup> “And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you goes hunting and kills an animal or bird that is approved for eating, he must drain its blood and cover it with earth. <sup>14</sup> The life of every creature is in its blood. That is why I have said to the people of Israel, ‘You must never eat or drink blood, for the life of any creature is in its blood.’ So whoever consumes blood will be cut off from the community.

Yahweh explained that the blood of the creature represented its life. It appears that God did not want the Israelites to be casual about the taking of life. Rather, God wanted people to understand that life is sacred.

So in commanding that the Israelites drain the blood from the animals they killed, the people would have to take the time to contemplate and reflect as they drained the animal’s blood from its body. As the animal fainted and then died, the one killing it would recognise that the animal had given its life so that the person could eat, be nourished and continue to live. God wanted people to value life and recognise that the animal died so that man could live. God was giving them a picture of how a substitute would die in their place to pay for this sin penalty. In a sense, the people were returning the life of the animal to God.

Throughout Israel’s history, they practised sacrificing an approved animal, and taking its blood to sprinkle on the altar. This act of sprinkling symbolically cleansed or purified them from their sins. They did this at a national level as well, using the blood of the sacrificed animals to cleanse all Israel from its sins.

### **2 Chronicles 29:22–24**

<sup>22</sup> So they killed the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. Next they killed the rams and sprinkled their blood on the altar. And finally, they did the same with the male lambs. <sup>23</sup> The male goats for the sin offering were then brought before the king and the assembly of people, who laid their hands on them. <sup>24</sup> The priests then killed the goats as a sin offering and sprinkled their blood on the altar to make atonement for the sins of all Israel. The king had specifically commanded that this burnt offering and sin offering should be made for all Israel.

### **Hebrews 9:22**

In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

After the Fall, God gave the first hint that He would send a Messiah who would crush Satan and evil and rescue mankind. This was what Yahweh said to the serpent.

### **Genesis 3:14–15**

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, you are cursed  
more than all animals, domestic and wild.

You will crawl on your belly,  
groveling in the dust as long as you live.

<sup>15</sup> And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

Yahweh mentioned that the offspring of the woman, or the seed of the woman, would suffer a wound. The Israelites understood that the Messiah (the offspring of the woman) would suffer to deal with their sins.

In performing the ritual animal sacrifices, they would have understood that the animal sacrifice was a foreshadow of what the promised Messiah would do. People who trusted Yahweh for this Messiah would be counted as righteous by the Messiah’s work.

Because God created this special role for the blood of animals, He did not want Israel to turn blood into a common food. God wanted them to appreciate the sacrifices and know that the blood of the animal was precious.

## **4. The Early Church**

The early church had the task of uniting believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Previously, it was the Jews who worshipped Yahweh and anyone wanting to become a Yahweh worshipper would have to become a Jew.

But after Christ’s death and resurrection, God was inviting individual Jews and individual Gentiles to put their faith in Him. This new entity, called the church, was therefore made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

### **Ephesians 2:14–16**

<sup>14</sup> For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.

<sup>15</sup> He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. <sup>16</sup> Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

But how would believing Jews and believing Gentiles live together harmoniously and as brothers and sisters in Christ? They had such different lifestyles, cultures, habits and practices. How would they share a meal together if one set of them was repulsed by the other because they were eating blood?

This was where the Jerusalem Council told the Gentiles to be sensitive to the Jews by refraining from eating blood. In this way, the transition to becoming one people in Christ would be smoother and more loving.

To be clear, the Jerusalem Council was called because some Jewish Christians accused the apostles of teaching that Gentiles need not follow Mosaic Law. These Jewish Christians held the wrong belief that Gentile believers in Christ must still obey Mosaic Law and get circumcised.

After this formal church meeting, the apostles and elders sent out a joint statement in the form of a letter to the Gentile churches in Antioch of Syria (where the dispute had begun) and the surrounding towns.

**Acts 15:23–29**

<sup>23</sup> This is the letter they took with them:

“This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

<sup>24</sup> “We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset you with their teaching, but we did not send them! <sup>25</sup> So we decided, having come to complete agreement, to send you official representatives, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we have decided concerning your question.

<sup>28</sup> “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: <sup>29</sup> You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.”

Notice however, that the apostles were not laying out a law. Firstly, God never given Israel the authority to make new laws. Even in the Mosaic Covenant, there were instructions on only two arms of the government: the executive (how to apply the law) and the judiciary (how to run the court system). God never gave them legislative power (the authority to make new laws).

A real law comes with real and enforceable penalties and consequences for breaking it. For example, under Mosaic Law, Israel knew exactly the consequences of disobedience (Leviticus 26:14–46; Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

The Jerusalem Council told the people how they should live, but it was not a legal requirement. There were no enforceable nor stated penalties for breaking them.

## What we have observed thus far

Here's what we can learn from these accounts:

- God wanted people to treat lifeblood seriously and with great respect. The life of the animal was in the blood. Draining the blood was returning its life to God.
- He also wanted them to understand the role of lifeblood in substitutionary atonement. This lifeblood was a picture, pointing to Jesus' work on the cross. (In other words, the instructions had a teaching purpose.)
- The Jerusalem Council's advice to refrain from blood was to smoothen the transition for the Jews and Gentiles to become one people group: the church.

## So now, we come to the question: can Christians today eat blood?

Here is what we can learn from Jesus and the apostles.

### 1. Jesus

When the Pharisees were criticising Jesus' disciples for not washing their hands before they eat, this is what happened next.

#### Mark 7:6–9, 14–19

<sup>6</sup> Jesus replied, "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,

'These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>7</sup> Their worship is a farce,  
for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'

<sup>8</sup> For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition."

<sup>9</sup> Then he said, "You skillfully sidestep God's law in order to hold on to your own tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "All of you listen," he said, "and try to understand. <sup>15</sup> It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart."

<sup>17</sup> Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. <sup>18</sup> "Don't you understand either?" he asked. "Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? <sup>19</sup> Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.)

Jesus was implying that the idea of ceremonially clean and unclean foods was a teaching point to the nation of Israel. It wasn't an inherent food restriction just for its own sake.

We know this because it was God Himself who later told Peter to take and eat ceremonially unclean things!

**Acts 10:9–16**

<sup>9</sup> The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, <sup>10</sup> and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. <sup>13</sup> Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."

<sup>14</sup> "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."

<sup>15</sup> But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean."

<sup>16</sup> The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven.

Peter understood what God was telling him. So thereafter, Peter was willing to step into the house of Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. And not only that, he ate the meal that Cornelius provided. The meal would have had ceremonially unclean food! But Peter ate it following God's instructions.

Food itself wasn't an issue any longer. Jesus did not restrict church-age believers with regards to food.

## 2. Paul

In writing instructions to the church, the apostle Paul also did not give any blanket prohibitions concerning food. In fact, this is what he wrote:

**Romans 14:1–4, 13–23**

<sup>1</sup> Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. <sup>2</sup> For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval.

<sup>13</sup> So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

<sup>14</sup> I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong.

<sup>15</sup> And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup> Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good.

<sup>17</sup> For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too.

<sup>19</sup> So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

<sup>20</sup> Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble. <sup>21</sup> It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble.

<sup>22</sup> You may believe there's nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who don't feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right. <sup>23</sup> But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.

Paul says:

- There are no prohibitions for Christians on what types of food to eat or not eat.
- However, if a Christian for whatever reason feels a certain food is wrong or sinful to eat, then they must not eat it. If they eat it, they would be sinning against God since they believe that it is a sin to eat it.
- If eating a particular food will make a fellow Christian suffer, don't eat it.

In writing to young pastor Timothy, Paul gives these instructions.

### **1 Timothy 4:1–5**

<sup>1</sup> Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons. <sup>2</sup> These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead.

<sup>3</sup> They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. But God created those foods to be eaten with thanks by faithful people who know the truth. <sup>4</sup> Since everything God created is good, we should not reject any of it but receive it with thanks.

<sup>5</sup> For we know it is made acceptable by the word of God and prayer.

Paul says:

- God created all foods to be eaten with an attitude of thanksgiving towards Him. God Himself has said that all foods were acceptable.
- Watch out for some people who will teach that it is wrong to eat certain foods. Listen to their rationale. It can be that they are teaching things learned from or influenced by Satan.



Paul also wrote instructions to the church in Corinth. The question that the Corinthians asked him had to do with eating meat that had been offered to idols. Pay attention to the principles that Paul was laying out.

### **1 Corinthians 10:25–33**

<sup>25</sup> So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. <sup>26</sup> For “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

<sup>27</sup> If someone who isn’t a believer asks you home for dinner, accept the invitation if you want to. Eat whatever is offered to you without raising questions of conscience. <sup>28</sup> (But suppose someone tells you, “This meat was offered to an idol.” Don’t eat it, out of consideration for the conscience of the one who told you. <sup>29</sup> It might not be a matter of conscience for you, but it is for the other person.) For why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks? <sup>30</sup> If I can thank God for the food and enjoy it, why should I be condemned for eating it?

<sup>31</sup> So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Don’t give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. <sup>33</sup> I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don’t just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.

Paul says:

- No food is prohibited for Christians; we should thank God for providing it and enjoy it.
- However, if someone, knowing that we are Christian, tells us that the food has been offered to idols, presuming that this would be a problem for us as Christians, then don’t eat it. We would be confusing in our testimony and witness to that person.
- The principle is this: in the way that we live, how do we live in such a way, including our approach to food, that would be a good testimony to God and loving towards others?

## **Concluding reflections**

God’s very visual teaching point that the lifeblood of the sacrifice animal was shed in place of the one who brings the sacrifice has fulfilled its purpose. This is because Jesus, the true lamb of God, has already died on the cross, shedding His blood for mankind’s sins. We no longer need that practice of returning the lifeblood to God.

And Paul said that there are no food restrictions for church-age believers. It is fine if church-age Christians want to eat blood and blood products. We should eat all foods with thanksgiving to God, acknowledging that He has provided food so that we can be nourished.

But if for some reason, a Christian believes that eating blood products is wrong and a sin, then for the sake of good conscience, this person should not eat blood or blood products. To be clear, there is nothing inherently sinful or wrong with eating it, but if the believer thinks it is wrong and then eats it, God would not be pleased with that believer for they are violating their conscience.

As an aside, the meat we eat today has been drained of blood when the animal was slaughtered. Even so-called bloody steaks do not have blood in them. The red liquid in rare steaks is actually a protein called myoglobin.

Ultimately, everything a Christian does should be done for the glory of God and also in love towards others. So if eating blood would stumble others, cause disunity among the family or loved ones, or give the wrong idea about God, etc., then we should refrain from it.

In whatever we do, whatever we eat or don't eat, God wants us to do it for His glory.