



## **Is there a biblical reason for or against the donation of organs?**

Over the past decades the practice of organ donations has become rather common and widespread. Transplants of a variety of organs are as accepted a medical procedure almost as blood transfusions. Not too many people object to blood transfusions (the Jehovah's Witnesses do), while the more complex and complicated operations of organ transplants and their subsequent rejection risks still make many people wonder about the question of right and wrong of this procedure. A kidney transplant in which the donor is a healthy member of the family, however, appears less problematic than the transplant of an organ donated by someone upon his or her passing away (even though risks of rejection remain a reality then too). In the latter case the transplant must take place as soon as possible after the death of the donor; a "good organ" for a transplant must be an organ that is still as much "alive" as possible. Modern medical abilities and technology have changed the criteria for the moment at which someone's death can be determined (e.g. when the heart stops or when brain death is established). These and other aspects related to the question regarding the acceptance of organ transplants, however, do not ultimately determine the answer to the question presented here.

The donation of an organ is done in service and/or love for the neighbour. The Scriptures speak very favourably about someone giving his life for the neighbour (John 15:13; Rom 5:7), about laying down his life for a friend, a brother (1 John 3:16). Such an act of love could be done as follower of Christ, who did the same for us. If this is how the Bible speaks about giving one's life, it cannot be wrong to give a part of our body for the well-being of a neighbour. Especially when the risks are small for the donor (e.g. kidney transplants), such an act of love is a responsible gift to the neighbour. In the case, however, in which the donor has died there are no risks for the donor at all, but the life of the recipient could be saved or his health greatly improved! Also, after one or more organs have been removed, the body of the deceased can still be buried. More people who have lost a limb or lung in the course of life are buried without. The act of love toward a neighbour, then, reflects a mercy similar to the mercy God shows to us (Luke 6:36; 10:25), by which we do good to any and all people the way God shows his benevolence to the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt 5:45).

In order for medical professionals to know that you give permission for one or more of your organs to be removed before the body is released for burial, you should carry in your wallet or purse a so-called "codicil" (a will of sorts; a small tablet or codex, literally). It's a carefully worded statement, dated and signed, designating specifically what organs you wish to donate after your death. Often in connection with the registration of a driver's license, for instance, such a codicil is composed, articulating when and what you wish to donate at the time when certain death has been confirmed. In this regard we should realize that certain organs, which are highly personal, such as our brains, our pro-creational organs for instance, should be excluded. It could be necessary as well that with regard to certain organs we wish to make our donation subject to the approval of our power of attorney. A decision to donate one or more organs for transplants may be recommended as an act of love, mercy, and benevolence toward the neighbour!

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