

## BAPTIST MINISTRY SEMINAR – SESSION 6

*Embryonic Stem Cell Research: The Witch's Brew*

*(Jer. 1:4, 5; Ps. 127)*

*“If we said that it is acceptable to clone a human being and strip mine it for its body parts, then what we are saying in the law is that life does not have value simply because it’s human.”*

*--Wesley J. Smith.*

- I. Cloning and Stem Cell Research
  - A. What is cloning?
    1. A working definition: “to make a genetically identical or almost identical copy.”
    2. The theory of cloning involves the removal of genetic material, the nucleus, from a mature cell and placing it into an egg that has had the nucleus removed. The egg, now fertilized, is electrically charged to stimulate growth. The fertilized, stimulated egg is placed within an animal or human until born.
    3. Dolly the sheep, born in 1997, was the first successful animal clone. Dolly, however, developed premature arthritis and has already died.
    4. The replication of mature human life is not, however, the primary aim of cloning. Most scientists are interested in growing human embryos for a later harvest of their stem cells—therapeutic cloning.
  - B. Are human embryos really human beings?
    1. Embryos are no different in their essential humanity from a fetus in the womb, a 10-year old boy, or a 100 year old woman.
    2. Embryos are what very young human beings are supposed to look like. Everyone was at one time an embryo.
    3. Religion aside, basic biology teaches that a human embryo is a human being. The word “embryo” describes a stage of development for every human being. A human embryo results in a human being—not a plant or a fish.
  - C. What is wrong with human reproductive cloning?
    1. The development of cloning techniques requires the destruction of hundreds, if not thousands, of embryos.
    2. Human cloning promotes the continued erosion of the family by removing procreation from a setting of committed marital intimacy. Children should not become the product of

manufacturer's protocols. Procreation must not be replaced by production.

3. Cloning also promotes genetic engineering, because parents would ultimately determine the features of the child. (Remember, a clone is the genetic twin of the parent donating the genetic information. If a woman contributes both her genetic material and an ovum, the daughter born would also be the mother's twin sister.)
4. As already hinted, cloning could eliminate completely the need for a man in the reproductive process. Such is not the plan of God.

D. What is wrong with therapeutic cloning?

1. In therapeutic cloning, the same identical twin embryo is created—not for the purpose of growth and maturation—but for the express purpose of *death*. Therapeutic cloning harvests cell tissue by killing the clone.
2. Therapeutic cloning is the explicit exploitation of one human being by another—the weak by the powerful. Therapeutic cloning would produce a subclass of human beings who can be freely and deliberately exploited.
3. Therapeutic cloning could eventually allow for the development of a cloned fetus for the purpose of harvesting its organs.

E. What about adult stem cell research?

1. Adult type stem cells may come from the umbilical cord, placenta, or from mature adults. Harvesting of adult type stem cells does no harm to the donor.
2. Adult stem cell research has resulted in successful human therapies for many years. (There have been no therapies developed as a result of embryonic stem cell research as of date.)

II. Stem Cell Research: A Bioethical Summary (from the Family Research Council)

- A. *Embryonic Stem Cells*—always morally wrong because the human embryo must be killed for the harvest of its cells.
- B. *Embryonic Germ Cells*—morally wrong when utilizing fetal tissue derived from elective abortions, but morally acceptable when utilizing material from miscarriages—if the parents give informed consent.
- C. *Umbilical Cord Stem Cells*—morally acceptable since the cord is no longer necessary to the life of a baby after delivery.
- D. *Placentally-Derived Stem Cells*—morally acceptable because the afterbirth is no longer needed to sustain the life of the baby.
- E. *Adult Stem Cells*—morally acceptable, assuming the informed consent of the adult donor.