

# **STEM CELL RESEARCH**

**IS THIS A LIFE ISSUE?**

*Written & Compiled by Mark Sutherland*

Currently across our great nation a new debate is emerging, whether stem cell research is ethical and biblically acceptable. The debate takes on many forms, with doublespeak being used on a regular basis from all sides. But what is the truth? Is this research creating life and then destroying it? What are the benefits? And most importantly, does the Bible give us any guidance on the matter?

As Christians who believe the Bible and its principles are applicable to every area of life, we are faced with a need to investigate this new area of medical research that if done ethically and right can, and is discovering cures and treatments for many diseases. However, if it is done wrong, it could result in the murder of countless unborn children, many more than have been killed through “legalized abortion.”

### **What Are Stem Cells?**

We must start at the beginning and research the issue fully. Once the facts are established, we must see what God says about those facts, because as Proverbs 1:7 states, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” and Hosea 4:6 adds, “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge.” As in all debates in life, we must first look to see what the truth about the issue is, and then see how God weighs in on the subject.

So what are stem cells? Stem cells are types of cells in our bodies that have the potential of becoming other cells. Serving as a sort of repair system for the body, they can theoretically divide without limit to replenish other cells as long as the person or animal is still alive. When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential to either remain a stem cell or become another type of cell with a more specialized function, such as a muscle cell, a red blood cell, or a brain cell.

These stem cells can be divided into two distinct categories, which is where we discover the controversy surrounding the issue of stem cell research.

The first category is that of **adult stem cells**. These stem cells can be taken from bone marrow, fat, umbilical cord blood, and a variety of other places in the human body. Once harvested, a relatively easy process causing only minor discomfort to the donor, these stem cells are used in a plethora of treatments. Recently it was reported that a paralyzed woman in Japan underwent stem cell treatment and ended up walking.<sup>1</sup> Another report came out of Russia where the same event took place.<sup>2</sup> This was done by using umbilical cord stem cells, which were taken from the blood in the umbilical cord of a living human being. There are no ethical concerns with this type of research.

The second category of stem cells is the **embryonic stem cells**. This is where the moral controversy arises. The use of embryonic stem cells requires either the killing of a naturally created human embryo, from which the embryonic stem cells are harvested, or the creation of a human embryo, using what scientists call “somatic cell nuclear transfer” and the rest of us call “cloning.” Human cloning is the process by which a scientist takes a human female’s egg and removes the material within the egg, leaving only the shell. Then the scientist takes the nucleus of a human donor cell and inserts it into the egg. The egg then develops into a human embryo

and after a few days the human embryo is destroyed and the stem cells from that human embryo are harvested and used in further research.

### **Does Cloning Create Life?**

The question that then arises is *does the combination of human cloning and embryonic stem cell research create and kill human life?* To fully decide this we must compare the human embryo that is created through cloning, and the embryo that is created through natural reproduction or invitro fertilization (test tube babies).

Through natural reproduction, or invitro fertilization, an egg cell and a sperm cell come together and create an embryo. Both cells contribute twenty-three chromosomes each, resulting in a total of forty-six chromosomes in the embryo that is created. Every cell in the human body contains exactly forty-six chromosomes. After the egg and sperm cells come together, then the created embryonic cell divides multiple times until eventually a full-term baby develops.

In the cloning process, the nucleus of the female egg is removed, with its twenty-three chromosomes, and the nucleus of a regular cell with forty-six chromosomes is inserted. The created embryo then has the same biological composition as a naturally conceived embryo and acts in exactly the same fashion. The embryonic cell divides multiple times, growing and developing exactly like a naturally conceived embryo, and after approximately five days the scientists destroy the embryo to continue their research.

The evidence is that both processes create the same human embryonic cell, which acts the same and has the same biological makeup. Those that support human embryonic stem cell research claim that this is not the case, that all they are creating is a regenerated part of an already living human being. But this is some of the doublespeak mentioned earlier. If it looks like a duck, acts like a duck, and has the same biological makeup as a duck; then it is a duck. Both the natural process and the cloning process create a human embryo, or an unborn child. So, the only conclusion we can make is that cloning does indeed create an individual human life, and in theory if this embryo were implanted in a womb it would develop into a full term baby. This is the same process that was used in Scotland a few years ago to clone Dolly the sheep, and we all know that Dolly was indeed a real sheep, rather than some regenerated part of another sheep.

The Bible states in Psalm 139:13, “You knit me together in my mother’s womb,” and then in Psalm 139:15-17, “My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.” It also states in Ecclesiastes 11:5, “As you know not... how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman, even so you know not the work of God, Who does all.” We believe the Bible teaches that at the moment of that weaving, the knitting together of the egg and sperm to create the embryonic cell with forty-six chromosomes, God considers it human life.

### **Do The Benefits To Society Outweigh Any Moral Concerns?**

The “benefit to society” position is an argument you will hear continually. Frighteningly, this is the same type of argument that has been made throughout history to sanction some of the most

brutal types of scientific experiments on humanity. This logic was behind the Nazi's conducting research on the Jews. This logic was behind the Soviet Union and China experimenting on their people. This logic is something a Christian should never embrace. Genesis 1:26-28 and 9:6 make it quite clear that we are all created in God's image and that in God's eyes all life is precious.

But to be fair, let us look at the benefits of stem cell research. By current count there have been over fifty recognized treatments from stem cell research including treatments for cancer, leukemia, multiple sclerosis, sickle cell anemia, spinal cord injuries and arthritis. This is a good thing. However what we never hear when these stories make the news is that **every single one of these treatments was developed through adult stem cell research**. Not one successful treatment has been developed by embryonic stem cell research. Not one!

"But that's because we haven't been allowed to research it" is the cry you will hear immediately. This claim is actually not doublespeak, but is a bold-faced lie. The truth is that there has been much research conducted on embryonic stem cells, just not with government money. Nations around the world are working with embryonic stem cells, with failure after failure after failure. But instead of abandoning this failed research, supporters of embryonic stem cell research would force taxpayers to finance them to keep their research going, while ignoring the success of adult stem cell research. One of the many under-reported facts is that the scientific community has been conducting research on mouse embryos for over twenty years now and has cured absolutely no mice. In actuality, the research has resulted in either there being no improvement in the mice's conditions, or a worsening of the mice's conditions. Many of these experiments have resulted in the development of tumors which have resulted in many dead mice.<sup>3</sup>

The scripture is quite clear in 2 Corinthians 12:14, that it is not the duty of the children to sacrifice on behalf of the parent, but it is the duty of the parent to make sacrifices on behalf of the child. We should not sacrifice our youngest in a vain attempt to better our lives; in fact, we should sacrifice everything to ensure that our children have the best possible life.

### **But If We Ban Cloning Won't That Drive Bio-Tech Jobs Away From Our Community?**

Some use this economic fallback argument to raise people's fears for the health of their local economy. This again does not bear true with the evidence. Michigan is a prime example. In Michigan research on human embryos created through cloning or fertilization is illegal. Yet over seventy new companies have begun life sciences work in that state in the last three years, earning Michigan the distinction of being the fastest growing area in the nation in life sciences research.<sup>4</sup>

Internationally, Germany has emerged as the leading European nation in the area of biotechnology. This is interesting since Germany also has Europe's most stringent law protecting human embryos from research. German law bans research both on embryos created through cloning and those created through natural conception.<sup>5</sup>

We must remember the promise of Psalm 128:1, that says "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours." A nation, or a state, that respects life will prosper financially

## **So Why Is There Such A Push For Embryonic Stem Cell Research?**

The simple reason that so many special interest groups are pushing hard to get embryonic stem cell research funded by the government and also to keep it legal comes down to money. There are the government grants consisting of millions and millions of dollars, which is very attractive to research facilities. These same research facilities have trouble getting voluntary private research dollars because of the immense failures in embryonic stem cell research. So they are trying to stick the American taxpayer with the bill.

And there are the patents that they can get on their lines of stem cells. They can't patent adult stem cells because you can't patent a human being. But if they are successful in denying the humanity of the cloned embryos, they can then patent those cells, and make money from every single cell that is created from those cells. It is all about the almighty dollar and as Matthew 6:24 states, "You cannot serve both God and Money."

From the scientific perspective, scientists have been caught up in an unfounded belief that they can control what these embryonic stem cells will become. The technical word for these theoretical "yet to be determined" cells is undifferentiated. This is a theory that has proven unfounded again and again, and yet they continue to believe that the destruction of the youngest form of life will make life better for the rest of us. The duty of the state is to protect life, not destroy it.

### **In Conclusion**

We believe the scientific evidence is there to conclude that embryonic stem cell research does create life and then kill it, and therefore as Christians we must oppose the embryonic form of stem cell research and all types of cloning, while fully supporting the benefits and successes of adult and umbilical cord stem cell research.

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For additional news and information please visit [www.stemcellresearch.org](http://www.stemcellresearch.org), [www.frc.org](http://www.frc.org), [www.cbhd.org](http://www.cbhd.org) and [www.thebc.org](http://www.thebc.org).

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2. Pravda, 1/11/2005, [http://english.pravda.ru/science/19/94/377/14803\\_stemcell.html](http://english.pravda.ru/science/19/94/377/14803_stemcell.html)
3. Interview with Dr. David Prentice, Senior Fellow for Life Sciences, Center for Human Life and Bioethics conducted 1/14/05.
4. Excerpted from a speech given by Senator Matt Bartle, 1/11/05.
5. Excerpted from a speech given by Senator Matt Bartle, 1/11/05.