

# Tentatio May 2002 - Genetic Engineering

## GENETIC ENGINEERING

Respecting the integrity of genetic research and its outcome, as Christians we recognize the limitations God places on us as his faithful people. The following questions and statements are offered as a beginning of another discussion of these matters:

### 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS IF WE THINK TOO MUCH OF OURSELVES AS MERELY A COLLECTION OF HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY GENES?

If we think of human beings as merely the product of their genes we diminish the sense of responsibility or accountability for our actions and our future. We begin to think of ourselves in biological terms alone rather than as embodied spirits. This is in conflict with the biblical calling to repentance and the living of holy lives.

### 2. WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT A HUMAN EMBRYO IF WE USE IT FOR RESEARCH?

To use an embryo in research treats it as a "thing," a means to an end. The human embryo is a human life, a gift to parents, a child of God, created in God's image. A scientific materialism doesn't care about the spiritual life of man either as embryo or as adult. The taking of an innocent human life in its earliest stages of development, even for "the betterment of mankind," violates the Law of God and denies the Gospel that Christ died for all people regardless how young.

### 3. WHAT PROBLEM MIGHT THERE BE WITH GENETIC SCREENING FOR DISEASE IN AN EMBRYO (OR FETUS) TO BE USED FOR IN VITRO FERTILIZATION?

The likelihood in today's world is that the embryo would be discarded or the fetus aborted. The Law of God says, "Thou shalt not kill." Christians don't judge the worth of a human being by its physical or mental well being. The Gospel proclaims God does not judge human lives on the basis of these things, but on the basis of Christ as our "well-being." "While we were yet helpless

. . . Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom. 5:6) People made in the Image of God are embodied eternal beings who ought to be cared for, not destroyed.

#### 4. HOW MIGHT GENETIC RESEARCH FOR ENHANCEMENT LEAD TO THE "TYRANNY OF THE POSSIBLE?"

The phrase "the tyranny of the possible" means to be coerced to do whatever science is able to do. As genetic research makes possible things that are morally and spiritually unacceptable, Christians will have to look to God for guidance and not feel obligated by the "tyranny of the possible" to do what is expected. There is no tyranny that Christ has not overcome, "For I am sure that neither death nor life . . . nor principalities nor powers, . . . nor anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8: 38 - 39).

#### 5. WHY IS THE HOPE GIVEN BY GENETIC RESEARCH MORE APPEALING TO SOME THAN SPIRITUAL HOPE?

Genetic research is under the control of man, but ultimately accountable to God. It is always appealing to take charge of our lives and not have to be responsible to God. In genetic research we ought not merely be concerned with the outcome of our accomplishments, but also with the meaning of what we are doing in relationship to the limits God has placed on us. Those who disregard God in their research join the descendants of the builders of the Tower of Babel who brought God's judgment on the world. They take charge of their lives at the expense of losing their souls. But our hope is in Christ and we are grateful for whatever gift he gives us through genetic research that is compatible with the Word of God, the Bible.

#### 6. IS THERE A MORAL PROBLEM WITH ALTERING THE HUMAN GENOME TO AFFECT FUTURE GENERATIONS?

Human life is not ours to do with as we wish. Nor are children our possessions to manipulate, as we desire. Each of us is a child of God, made in his Image. We must treat each other as the redeemed man or woman of God that Christ has made us. If we do decide to affect future generations in this irreversible way, we ought to do so minimally, with caution, and with exact knowledge of what we are doing. For "we ought to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ." (Gal. 6: 2.)

## 7. WHAT DO FUTURE HOPES FOR PREVENTION OF AGING AND DEATH THROUGH GENETICS SAY ABOUT HOW WE UNDERSTAND AGING AND DEATH TODAY?

Ultimately, suffering and death have meaning only in relationship to God. Otherwise, they appear as meaningless and in need of elimination. The focus on preventing aging and eliminating death is both impossible and diverts attention from the one whom we will stand before as Judge at the end of life. Aging and death are spiritual problems; a result of the Fall. But Christ has overcome them and promises us eternal life with him. It is not wrong per se to work toward the extension of human life, but it is not where our hope lies. "Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7: 24 - 25).

## 8. WHAT DOES THE HOPE OF HUMAN CLONING SAY ABOUT HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN BODY?

We always risk thinking of the human body as a machine in need of replacement parts when it is, in the greater reality, a living organism created and supported by God, in whose Image we are made. The integrity of the human body requires that we think of it wholistically, not merely as the sum total of its individual parts. We are more than our bodies, but not less than them either. We are, in truth, embodied spirits and we believe in "the resurrection of the body." Christ was made flesh and blood for us and won our salvation for body and soul.