

The Stem Cell Question

This article is not a political article. It is not the pastor's job to tell you how to vote, and it's likely that you may not get this article until after you vote, anyway.

That said, it's important that Christians understand the stem cell debate, as it is much more than (and shouldn't be in the first place) a political issue.

What is a Stem Cell?

Most of the cells in your bodies are specialized to do specific tasks. Bone cells form bones; nerve cells carry information, etc. Stem cells, however, are "generic" cells that have no specialized function. They can be found in umbilical cord blood, placentas, bone marrow, fat, teeth, and other sources. Recently, Australian scientists found stem cells in baby teeth, so apparently, we know why the Tooth Fairy has been collecting them all these years!

What's an Embryonic Stem Cell?

If the stem cells being used by researchers were gleaned from the sources above--and more than enough are available from those sources--Christians would have no problem with such research, as it stands to benefit a large number of people with debilitating and deadly diseases.

However, stem cells can be obtained by another method: destroying a 4+-day-old unborn baby. You see, stem cells can form into any other kind of body cell, and in its early stages, these stem cells (All other body cells "stem" from them.) are abundant.

So, what's the problem?

In order to extract the stem cells from an embryo (what a baby is called until the 8th week after conception), the embryo must be destroyed--killed. A unique human being with a body and soul is killed for the sake of healing others runs counter to the fifth commandment: "You shall not murder."

So, what's the solution?

The Bible repeatedly commands us to care for the "orphan and the widow," which is an expression that refers to those who can't take care of themselves. (Widows had few civil rights and no property in Biblical times.) It's important that we as Christians and citizens who believe that all human beings have the right to life take a stand and care for the unborn. Each of us, according to our vocations, have different opportunities to defend the defenseless, and I encourage you to pray and ask God how He may use you to help those not yet born.

God is able to use the most unlikely people to accomplish amazing works. The most remarkable example is found in our Lord, Jesus Christ. He not only became an embryo by the power of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary, but by giving up His life for us, He has given us and all people the promise and assurance of eternal life. For our murderous actions, He was murdered. For our unwillingness to defend the defenseless, He defends us who have no defense by taking our place in God's judgment. And for His death, we have eternal life,

For more information about embryonic stem cell research, contact Lutherans for Life (888-364-LIFE) or visit www.lutheransforlife.org. One of their tracts on Stem Cell Research (#1000T--you can call and request one or more) is available on the shelf in the Fellowship Hall at church, along with some other tracts on abortion and life issues.