



## *Bioethics and Biblical Principles*

A question coined by Ronald Reagan in his bid for the presidency back in the 1980's was, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" Bill Clinton addressed that same question to the public when he was running for the presidency. It makes our personal standard of living the benchmark for the success or failure for our elected leaders.

Perhaps a similar question could be asked in regard to the brave new worlds into which medical science is leading. Are we really better off for all the advances in stem cell research and reproductive science and cloning?

At the end of life the troubling ability of modern medicine to prolong our suffering in this world almost indefinitely has led to a movement to give a person the right to choose when his or her life will end. The Christian faces many ethical dilemmas. So-called "living wills" have become common, but many of the directives which have become popular stand in contradiction to the Fifth Commandment. Many fail to distinguish between nutrition and hydration, which aren't really medicine, and actual medical attempts to prolong life. Hurrying death by denying food or water are not compatible with God's insistence that our times are in his hands, regardless of the fact that the person may be in pain (Psalm 31:15). On the other hand, refusing heroic measures to resuscitate a person who is terminally ill may well be a way of confessing that our times are in God's hands. If you would like a copy of a living will that follows Biblical principals, the church office can provide you with samples put together by WELS Lutherans for Life.

At the beginning of life, human cloning has been pushed to the foreground of our attention again with the flying saucer cult known as the Raelians claiming to have successfully cloned a person. Over a year before this claim, Dr. John Brug commented on the subject in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly:

"We can't say with certainty what will happen if an attempt is made to clone a human (which is one reason why it shouldn't be done). Perhaps it cannot be done at all. Perhaps only some sort of monstrous being that was not truly human would result. It is clear that, at least in the early stages, the cost of every clone will be the production and rejection of many "defective products." Perhaps the result of cloning would be a normal, healthy person as happens in the division process that produces identical twins.

"There are a number of things we can say. If it is possible for cloning to produce a real human, that person would be subject to the same principles of sin and grace as any other human. Nevertheless, cloning of human beings should not be done



because it is a dangerous intrusion into the beginning of human life, which departs from the way which God established for such life to begin. The zeal for genetic engineering is an expression of the folly of reducing people to genetics, i.e., to their genes. Mankind was created with the capacity to receive and enjoy (or sadly, to reject and forfeit) a relationship with God. It is the image of God that sets man apart from other creatures. We are not a life form that evolved through a series of small steps to our current species, an animal separated from other species by mere genetic differences. Unless attempts at genetic engineering are controlled by this knowledge, they will lead to bane and not blessing” (Vol. 98, No. 4, p. 251-252).

We can say more. God created more than individual people. He created the family in which they could be nurtured and loved, and he set his creation up in such a way as to make each new person the product of one man and one woman committed to each other in a life-long relationship of love and service. Any attempt to bring new life into the world outside of this design risks upsetting the family environment necessary for the healthy development that new person. Cloning threatens to be just another in a long line of attacks on the healthy development of our children, including out-of-wedlock births, combative marriages, and unscriptural divorce.

Perhaps we can take a cue from our Savior during his temptation in the wilderness. Satan tempted him to use his power to turn stones into bread to feed his empty stomach—bioengineering of a sort that even modern science is not yet ready to tackle. Jesus had the power to do so. But for Jesus, the question was not just “Can I?” It was also “Should I?” He recognized that the heavenly Father has created our world in such a way that it provides our food, that the Father himself is in control of how that creation provides for us, and that he wants us to trust him to take care of us in the manner that he knows is best. “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Finding how God meets our needs in his creation is one thing. Altering his created order to suit our own purposes is another. Jesus refused to turn the stones into bread.

Pushing the limits of human ability does not always serve mankind, especially when those doing the pushing have not submitted their ability to the will of God. May God give us the wisdom to know when to stop tinkering with what he has made.