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Some thoughts on Cloning

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The word cloning conjures up a lot of emotion. To the moral and upright person the very thought of replicating copies of the same individual is both distasteful and wrong. However the feelings or notions that something is wrong are insufficient grounds for opposition. The Scriptures must always be the basis on which we decide the legitimacy of any practice.

Many people look at a modern concept like cloning and immediately think the Bible will have nothing to say about it — a book completed nearly 2000yrs ago. They fail to recognise that it is the living Word of the living God, and therefore as up to date today as when it was written.

What is Cloning?

The human body is made up of microscopic building units called cells. Each of these cells has a control centre known as the nucleus. It contains information for the maintenance and functioning of the cell. Although there are many different types of cells the nucleus of each cell is identical and contains the information capable of running any cell in the body. In simple terms cloning involves removing the nucleus of a fertilised human egg and replacing it with a nucleus taken from a cell of the person to be cloned. This egg is then allowed to grow for some days in the laboratory before being implanted into the womb of a mother.

The Genetic code.

The nucleus of a cell consists of long chains of genes called chromosomes. These genes hold the code for every part and characteristic of our body. Things like skin pigment and eye colour, together with all the control mechanisms for the functioning of the body, are all coded for, in the nucleus of every cell in the body. In normal conception half of the genes to make up that first cell of a new individual are contributed by the mother and the other half by the father. The blending process of the genes is so elaborate that no two children of the same parents will have the same combination of genes. Thus each person has a set of genes which are unique, — at conception two totally unique sets of genes are blended to produce another totally unique individual.

What the Bible says.

Psalm 139 is the key passage giving divine direction on the matters of conception and development. In verse 14, David stands back in amazement and exclaims we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Verses 15 and 16 give us an insight into the superintendence of the Lord in conception and early development. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did



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see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. The word substance in verse 15 can also be translated bones or body. Therefore we can read the verse, my body was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Although concealed from human view, in the womb, the body of the developing child was in full view of the eye of providence. Moving on to verse 16, we find the word translated substance is different. The word in the original can be rendered embryo or fetus. So the fetus (or developing child) was under the eye of God, and going on we read that the blueprint for this development was written in the book of God. David elaborates on the entry in this book. Which in continuance were fashioned (or what days the members or parts should develop) — and what is more, when as yet there was none of them. The plan for every day of development was written in God's book even before any organ or member began to develop.

So how does this relate to cloning?

At conception, the nucleus of that first cell of that new individual, contains all the information necessary for development. Within the nucleus is the blueprint for the formation of all the members of the body, and also the exact time at which they should be formed. From verse 16 we have seen that the blueprint for development is in the book of God. At conception, the Almighty has designed the way to produce a new individual by a unique blending of the characteristics of a man and woman within a marriage. In cloning we have already seen that the nucleus, with the information corresponding to the entry in the book of God, is removed, discarded and replaced with another. In essence the divine blueprint within that first cell is destroyed. The scientist is usurping the role of the Almighty, altering the plan already prescribed in the book of God.

Other issues.

There are other issues like IVF, embryo freezing, egg donation and surrogacy which are linked to cloning. They, equally, deserve proper and accurate evaluation in the light of Scripture, but are beyond the scope of this article.

The issue of the soul is another consideration. At conception the new individual is endowed by God with a soul. Subsequent tampering with the genetic code will not alter this fact. Just because two individuals share the same genetic code does not mean they share the same soul. If produced, a clone of an individual will not be that person, but simply another soul who happens to have the same genetic make-up.

The Benefits?

Science will argue the potential benefits of cloning. Spare-part surgery, like heart and kidney transplantation, is greatly hampered by the problem of rejection of the new organ because it is not genetically identical to the recipient. If however embryos with the identical genetic make up of the sick person could be produced by cloning, the possibility of perfect spare-parts would become a reality. This is, at present, much closer than many would like to admit. It would also involve the destruction of the embryos produced, in order to harvest the required organ. While there is great potential here for treating those with serious disease, the price is too great, and contravenes the law of God. The end can never justify the means.