



Medical Science and the Unborn

Introduction – More and more over the last 20 years the boundaries of science and the unborn have been pushed back. From the development of IVF to embryo research, from stem cell development to genetic engineering, Christians are bombarded with so many new moral and ethical issues to deal with.

Discuss

- Q. How do you feel about all this new technology that promises to cure, heal and enhance people's life?
Q. What cases have you heard about in the news and how have they made you feel.

Background :-

In many cases related to science and the unborn, the issue is about how much do we see the embryo as a resource of material to be harvested for the good of already existing humans and how much do we see the embryo as a actual human being.

Two Main View points about the unborn Child held by Christians

View 1 – Right from conception the blue print of a unique human being is established. A new human being is initiated when egg and sperm fuse. At the time of conception a sperm with its unique sequence fuses with an egg with its unique sequence and we have the genetic blueprint for a new person. At this point full person status and full person rights should be established. To underpin this, Scripture declares that God values, knows and is involved in the development of the child in the womb.

Look Up – Jeremiah 1 v 4 – 5, Psalm 139, Luke 1 v 39 – 44, Galatians 1 v 15,

View 2 – The Embryo is not a person because it has not been ensouled. Only a foetus is defined a person for at this stage of development is when God endows the embryo with a soul. Early church theologians such as Thomas Aquina's and Augustine believed that the embryo went through different stages of development and about week 12 was when God ensouled it.

Stages of Development:- Vegetative, animal and finally human soul. :- it has to be said that those who took this view still did not necessarily believe in abortion and if it did take place, it should do so before the ensouling process began.

Until very recent times the overwhelming church view throughout history has been to declare that life in embryonic and foetal stage was both sacred and worthy of respect.

Some facts about the unborn:-

3 weeks after fertilisation – Brain and nervous system begins to develop.

4 weeks - Heart starts beating.

8 weeks - limbs, fingers and toes are all developed.

10 weeks - All organs are formed, embryo is now known as a foetus.

Next six months foetus grows, puts on weight and matures.

So what about science and the unborn? -

Read and discuss the following – looking at the whole argument and what a Christian response would be in regard to the different issues involved. If you take a particular view how would you deal with someone who has to take the consequences of the view that you hold.

In Vitro Fertilisation. – A number of eggs is take from a woman and are fertilised in a laboratory. The egg may be fertilised using the husbands sperm or if not a donor sperm. The most promising embryo is replaced back into the woman and the other embryo's that are not used are either destroyed, frozen or donated to medical science. This procedure was first done successfully in 1978 when the first test tube baby was born. - The procedure has moved on to the specific development and production of embryo's in the laboratory, for research purposes, eg stem research. Also the possibility of genetic manipulation of embryo's prior to implantation.