

Stem cell results labeled meager, immoral

by [Bob Allen](#) in the [February 22, 2012](#) issue

A Southern Baptist seminary president has termed findings that embryonic stem cell treatments might have improved the vision of two blind patients "downright ominous."

Might is the key word, said Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He noted that researchers writing for the medical journal *Lancet* acknowledged that the results could have been due to a placebo effect.

"The use of human embryos in medical experimentation is absolutely immoral," Mohler said in his daily news commentary podcast January 26. "This research involves the intentional destruction of a living human embryo and thus a direct attack upon the dignity of human life."

Thirteen years after the discovery of human embryonic stem cells, Mohler said, the research is making little progress. "Tens and hundreds of millions of dollars have been poured into it, and yet the research is very meager," he said. "The results are very, very minimal."

He said "there is a great desperation" among scientists because adult stem cells, which do not require destruction of a human embryo, have proven "far more efficient and productive in terms of medical research." Mohler also asserted: "Medical researchers know if they ever acknowledge the actual moral status of the embryo, a good bit of their research will have to grind to a halt."

The study, funded by Advanced Cell Technology, a biotechnology company that specializes in both human and embryonic stem cell techniques, found some visual improvement in patients treated with subretinal implants for Stargardt's macular dystrophy and for dry age-related macular degeneration—the leading cause of blindness in the developed world.

Four months after surgery the implanted cells showed no signs of rejection, encouraging researchers that the procedure appeared to be safe. "Continued follow-up and further study is needed," researchers said.

Scientists say embryonic stem cells have potential to become any one of more than 200 types of tissue in the human body, and research using them could lead to treatments or cures for a wide array of injuries and degenerative conditions that are disabling and even fatal.

The research is controversial because viable embryos are destroyed in the process of harvesting stem cells. President George W. Bush limited federal funding to research using the 60 already-existing stem cell lines in 2001. President Obama reinstated the policy in 2009, calling the controversy "a false choice between sound science and moral values."

Mohler called the issue a sign of the times. "Medical ethics means nothing if there are not some treatments that are unethical," he said. "And that means nothing if the reason for that unethical judgment is the fact that it involves an assault upon human dignity, and thus upon all human life." —ABP