

Humans as Creators: Stewardship in a Rapidly Evolving World, by Jeffrey Scott Coker
E6070211 **Genesis 6:18-22 and Luke 6:6-11**
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Demo: Two bottles of milk and a hungry baby.

I want to start by asking you to solve a very simple problem by applying the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule of course is “Treat others as you would be treated.” The problem is that we have a hungry baby and two bottles of milk. Now one bottle has good, fresh milk and the other has old, sour milk. So you get to choose – according to the Golden Rule, which bottle should you give the baby? Obviously, the fresh milk is the correct choice. However, just knowing that fresh milk is the correct choice doesn’t solve the problem. There’s still a hungry baby here, and these two bottles look exactly the same. How can you tell the difference? Well, maybe you could take the cap off and smell, or test the pH, or do some other experiment to figure out which milk is good and which is sour. To summarize, knowing the Golden Rule is essential to making the right choice, but it doesn’t lead you all the way to solving the problem by itself. To solve the problem, you have to do experiments (otherwise known as science) to gather information, and then, you have to use your Christian faith, apply the Golden Rule, and solve the problem.

This simple example parallels many important questions about life in the Twenty-first century. And in every case, science and Christianity can work together in a constructive way. In fact, if we want to actually solve the growing number of real-world problems involving life, science and Christianity **MUST** work together.

I’d like to read to you a few headlines that appeared in the world’s most prestigious science journals over the last year or so.

- Bees and bee-pollinated plants are in decline in both Europe and the U.S.
- The North Bering Sea ecosystem is being transformed into that of the South Bering Sea.
- Bird migrational patterns are changing.
- Animal cloning is becoming more prevalent.
- The deadly 1918 influenza virus that killed fifty million people has been resurrected.
- Stem cell research is allowing the re-growing of damaged tissues and organs.
- Nearly all of our food has been selectively bred and then genetically engineered.
- We now know that human genes change very fast. The average colon or breast cancer has over ninety DNA mutations.
- The field of synthetic biology is creating new organisms that never existed before.
- Gene therapy (genetic engineering for therapeutic purposes) is advancing.
- U.K. embryos are being screened for cancer risk (selection of human traits)

To summarize the situation on an ecological level, more than ninety-five percent of Earth’s land has been transformed and life is currently undergoing the sixth Great Extinction.

To summarize the situation on a cellular level, humans can now control reproduction and prolong lifespans. We can literally control the creation and destruction of life.

To summarize the situation on a genetic level, humans can now engineer organisms in targeted ways and even create new organisms that never existed.

To summarize the whole thing, we are literally reinventing life! Humans are acting as creators.

Life on Earth has always changed, or “evolved,” but there is no precedent for the speed of modern change or the extent to which we control it. We are destroying and manipulating the natural environment at precisely the same time that we have gained the ability to create new life using genetics. The point of this sermon is not to convince you of exactly what to think about

any of these issues in particular. Instead, I want you to see the overall trend – that we are literally re-creating life on this planet. And then I want you to think about how science and Christianity should interact as we try to make ethical decisions.

So, what are Christian families to do? How are we to deal with genetic engineering, stem cell research, global warming, artificial intelligence, etc.? Should we act as creators? As new technologies and new challenges present themselves, how do we know what kind of creations are ethical? To answer these questions, I'd like to suggest two Christian principles that are completely consistent with modern science.

Principle 1: Christians are called to preserve life, not destroy it. This is just a restatement of the Golden Rule, "Treat others as you would be treated." In the Creation story of Genesis, there is a recurring line stated over and over and over. It says, "And God saw that it was good." It is repeated seven times in Genesis, Chapter 1. "And God saw that it was good." GOOD! Good as in worth saving. Good as in worth preserving. And the word "good" is used to describe all of nature, not just the day that humans arrived. The creeping things and the beasts of the earth are, in fact, good.

Later in Genesis, God instructs Noah to build an Ark and on this ark Noah is to put life of every kind. Genesis 6:20 reads, "Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the Earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive." Can you imagine what a different story it would be if Noah would have called back to God and said, "Sorry God, but I'll reduce my profit margin if I have to save EVERY species. No, I think I'll just save the ones that personally benefit me."

Christians are called to preserve life, not destroy it. Science tells us exactly the same thing.

Principle 2: Christians are called to create when, and only when, the creation supports life. Christ healed lepers, the blind, the maimed, and others. He healed over and over, even when it contradicted church doctrine (i.e. the Sabbath). Is it ethical to use genetic engineering to heal someone with cancer or AIDS? This is called "gene therapy." Well, would Christ have healed someone with cancer or AIDS? Is it ethical to use genetic engineering to hit a baseball further, or to have blond hair, or to be taller? Would Christ have done it?

Christ also fed five thousand people from a few loaves and fishes. He created a lot of food from a little food. Is it ethical to create a new plant with increased yield? Is it ethical to create genetically engineered rice that contains beta carotene so that twenty million Asian children don't go blind? Is it ethical to create a plant for profit that will lead to the extinction of another species?

Science and the examples in the Bible lead us to the same answers to each of these questions. I could go on and on with examples, but the most important thing to remember is the decision-making process. Use science to gather all the information you can and then look at Christ's example to make a decision. If we do that, there is no conflict between science and faith, and we will make the right decisions that lead to a better world.

As a final thought, I'd like to come full circle back to babies, my son Luke in particular. His full name is Luke Edison Coker. As you know, Luke created a Gospel and, in Greek, Luke means "light." And then Edison, of course, invented the lightbulb. This represents our dream for the next generation. Luke is a strong Christian name, and Edison is a strong science name. We desperately need for the next generation to be wise, Christian creators-- Christians who preserve life, and don't destroy it; Christians who create only for good; Christians whose love, compassion, and wisdom will ensure that our ability to create does not outrun our moral progress.