

How to Make Moral Decisions
David Cook

I am a hit-and-run speaker. You come and you hit people and then you run away. Then you really worry. You are worried about the people who have to come and pick up the pieces afterwards. I have to tell you this morning, I'm not at all worried because I met with your faculty yesterday, and you are fortunate people. Because they'll be able, not just to pick up the pieces, but to build something really worthwhile.

I want us to read together from God's Word. I want us to read from Matthew, a very well-known passage. Let the Scripture really soak into our hearts and minds, reading from Matthew 5 beginning at verse 13. Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth, but if a salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." Amen. God always blesses the reading of His Word.

I began lecturing in the Holy Land, which you all know is Scotland. Now, Scottish people are very, very polite. I would go in the morning and I would say to the students, "Good morning," and they would say, "Good morning, *sir*." They spell it c-u-r. That's the way they spell in Scotland. Then, as I told you yesterday, I moved to the Midlands of Great Britain to an Episcopalian college. That was a depressing experience, probably as much for them as for me. I would go in to lecture, and I would say to the students, "Good morning." They would all ignore me. Then I moved to Oxford, the city

of the dreaming spires. They tell me that we have some of the finest intellects of the world who gather together in the lecture theater. I would go in to them, and I would say to them, “Good morning.” And they would all write it down.

Yesterday we were looking at how people outside the church in our secularized society make moral decisions, and how they approach issues of life and death. Today I want to think how we as Christians properly use God’s Word. There are people who use what I call the Little Jack Horner method. They put in their thumb, and they pull out a plum. They forget about the strawberries, the pineapple, the fullness of God’s Word. God has not left us without guidance and direction. He’s given us the gift and the grace of His Holy Spirit. He’s given us His Word. His Word is a lamp to our feet, a light for us.

We can understand how to approach issues of life and death, but where do we begin? I will tell you where most Christian evangelicals begin. They begin with Jesus. But where did Jesus begin? Jesus began when He was asked questions about divorce and marriage. He began by going back to the beginning. I believe that is what we need to do as well, especially if we are going to engage with a culture which does not accept our Lord, which does not worship our God, which does not believe in the living reality of Jesus.

We begin where Jesus began, “In the beginning, God.” That tells us that standards are not human standards. They are not a human idea, they are God’s idea. God reveals Himself because we have a God that loves us enough to reveal His will and His nature and His standards and a way of living for humanity. “In the beginning, God.” God creates morality. He wills life, not death, and we are His creatures. So we are God-made; we have the mark of God on us, made by Him and for Him. So we need to follow the

Maker's instruction. Where is that even more evident except in Scripture itself where God has given us rules for how to live as a community and as individuals. We are to live and to flourish. It is not just a question of surviving.

Very often when I am at Oxford, people will say, "How are you doing?" Of course, when it comes to halfway through the term (we have terms not semesters), I tell them, "I'm surviving." That is a minimal thing. God does not want you just to survive. God wants you to flourish. God wants you to grow. God wants you to develop. God wants you to be the very fullness of humanity, the very gifted being that he has created you to be, to serve Him and to serve our world.

We are made in His image. You know there are tomes written about what it means to be made in the image of God. That is what gives people worth and value and dignity, because they bear the image of God. It is not always obvious, but that image is the source of value for human beings. That is why human life matters. That is why human dying matters, because here are men and women who are made in the image of God. That is why evangelism, missions, apologetics matter. It is because we are made in the image of God and those we seek to minister and to bring into faith are made in the image of God.

What does that mean? Sometimes that means rationality. We are able to think. When I am trying to explain to my students what is the nature of rationality, I say to them, that there is an inherent intelligibility in the nature of things and an inherent intelligence in the nature of people. Now what that means is that the world makes sense. Our God has made a world so that it makes sense. We can do science. We can

understand. We can engage with the world. The world makes sense because God made it in that way.

But He also gave us the capacity, the ability to make sense of that world. I sometimes say to my students, “Tell me, what does the UN stand for?” They say, “The United Nations.” Then we have the group called the TUC, the Trade Union Council. I say, “What does TYBN mean?” and they say, “I don’t know.” I say, “Well, actually, it doesn’t mean anything. I just made it up.” I made it up, but what do they try to do? They try to make sense out of it, because that is what human beings do. That is what drives science, sociology, psychology, all the studies are trying to make sense because that is the human way. God made us like that so that we can make sense of the world that makes sense. That is what rationality means. The world has an inherent intelligibility because God gave it. We have an inherent intelligence because God gave us that capacity.

But I believe there is much, much more to being made in the image of God, and part of that is the sense of morality, that ability to discern the difference between right and wrong. I express it this kind of way. I believe that God calls us as human beings to be responsible. That word is very simple. It just means able to give a response. “Adam, where are you?” God calls Adam, and Adam responds. “Cain, where is your brother?” God calls, and Cain is able to give a response. That is what responsibility means. That is what judgment means. On Judgment Day, it is about being able to give a response to God for all that we are, all that we have done, all that we have thought, all that we have failed to do, failed to say, failed to act. Responsibility means that we are called to be responsible, answerable to the living God for the way that we live, for the things that we do. We are made in the image of God. We are responsible.

God has made the world so that it not only makes sense, it carries morality. It carries morality because what we sow, we reap. That's the way that the world is. God has designed it. If I abuse my body, if I smoke 140 cigarettes a day, if I drink three bottles of whiskey a day, my body will be affected. It will be affected because God created me so that certain ways of living are good for people and certain ways of living are bad for people. You have to be careful in Baptist circles to say that is natural law. Well, it does not matter if you call it natural law or if you call it God's creation pattern. Jesus took us back to God's creation pattern, not just in the pattern of nature, but in the pattern of human beings, the ways of behaving that are good for people.

I was preaching in a Baptist church in London. I was preaching on how Jesus touched a leper. This elderly lady came up to me at the end of the service, and she said, "Dr. Cook, would you touch me?" Now this is not the usual response of ladies when I preach, but I said to her, "Why do you want me to touch you?" She said, "Nobody has touched me for six weeks." Here was a single lady living alone, and no one had given her the warmth of human contact. There is appropriate touching and inappropriate touching, but we need to learn that as human beings, we flourish. That is why we hold babies. How can you resist picking up a baby? How can you resist smiling at the baby? There is something about touch, something about relating which is fundamentally good for people, and to be deprived of that is bad for people. That is God's natural law. The natural law in the hearts and minds, the very nature of the being of humanity.

God has given us His standards. God has revealed them by making us in His image. He gives us worth and value. He gives us His law in nature itself and in human nature. But, but, but. I really like that dress, but.... That is a great book, but.... I had a

friend who wrote a commentary on Malachi, and one of the reviewers gave him this compliment, and he regarded it as a compliment. “This book will not seriously mislead students.” Obviously, it was going to mislead students, but not seriously. That was a big compliment. That is the way the British love to understate things.

But, there is always a but. But we live in a fallen world. You see, it’s hard to see the image of God in people. I was taught pneumatology by an Anglican monk, an Episcopalian monk who said, “How can you see God in the eyes of a drunk Irishman on a Saturday night?” He was an Irishman. Every Saturday, and almost every night, I fear, he was drunk because he was an alcoholic. He knew how hard it was to see the image of God. If you have been in an emergency room and seen people come in with attempted suicide or people who have come in covered in vomit and you have to minister to them, it is hard to see the image of God. Let us not pretend it is always easy. We were just talking in the President’s Office about Richard Dawkins. I had dinner with him, and here he is again attacking Christianity, attacking all kinds of faith, and it is hard to see the image of God in a man like that. But that is what gives him worth. That is what gives him value. That is what drives us to long to know the living Lord in a real and a personal way.

But we live in a fallen world. It is hard to see the image of God. It is hard to see the natural law. Is the way that nature functions today a result of the Fall or not? Take the fact that we know about thirty percent of all fertilized eggs are lost in the monthly cycle. Now, is that God’s good providence trying to protect people from severe handicap, or is that the result of the Fall--transforming the God-given gift of bearing children into something which is painful, which is marred, which is affected by sin? It is hard to read the book of nature. It is hard to read human nature, because we are so twisted that, of

course, even our understanding can be affected. We live in a fallen world. We are fallen people. But God knows that. That's the good news.

And because God knows it, what does He do? He gives us His law. So often when people talk about the law, they think it is some perfect standard for perfect people. Good news, my brothers and sisters, the law is for fallen people living in a fallen world. God in His goodness has given us His standards for fallen humanity in a fallen kind of world. They express His will and His nature. If we want to understand the law of God, we have to look to the God Who gives the law. Because when God speaks, when He reveals Himself, He reveals Who He is. He reveals What He is. That is why we say that God is good. That is why His values, His standards, His laws are good, because that is the very nature of God. It is an expression of His very will and His nature for a fallen humanity in a fallen world.

But it embodies an ideal for a living community. In the Western world we are so individualized. We are so personalized. When I say to you, "You are the light of the world; you are the salt of the earth," you think, "Isn't that nice *I am* the salt of the earth. I am." That is not what Jesus is saying. He says, if I can say it in a Texan accent, "Y'all are the light of the world. Y'all are the light of the world." See, it is not about individuals, it is about the community. God's law is how we should live together in community. It regulates every kind of relationship, because relationship is fundamental to what it means to be a human being. It covers every aspect of life. You go through Deuteronomy, you go through Leviticus, there are details about public health, details about worship, and details about legal arrangements. Why? Because God is concerned about every aspect of life, but there is no part of your life or my life or our life together that God is careless about. God

wants to be the Lord of every aspect of our life. That is what the law is expressing to us. It deals with everything, not just issues of life and death, but issues of daily living, issues of daily relationship. It is there for our good. The law is always there for our good. It is good in itself, and it is good in its benefit.

It carries with it blessing and cursing. We become mealy-mouthed in talking about judgment. We become mealy-mouthed in talking about blessing and cursing. God says, "If you will be my people, and if you will keep my law, these good things will happen to you. If you will not be my people, if you will not keep my law, then these bad things will happen." That is not a threat. That is not meant to frighten people into the kingdom of God, into following God. It is a statement of fact. It is a description. If we will obey God's law and follow His law, then we will all flourish. If we break God's law and do not follow His way, then we as a community, we as a society, we as a nation, we as a world will be affected.

But. . . . But as the fall came and affected God's creation pattern, so the sin of the people of Israel, our sin, keeps coming and breaking God's law. We are not able to fulfill all the standards of the law. We disobey. So God in His goodness gives us His wisdom literature. I like the wisdom literature because it seems to me like rules from heaven for life on earth. When you read books like Proverbs, it seems so silly. It says, if you want to do well in business, this is what you do. If you want to find a good husband, this is what you do. If you want a good wife, this is what you do. If you want to bring up your children properly, this is what you ought to do. Why? Because God is intimately concerned about every aspect of our life. He knows there is a godly way of living and relating, being, and there is an ungodly way of living, relating, and being. Wisdom

literature gives us God's advice for daily living. It is practical. It is down-to-earth. It is about parents, children, marriage, business, and our relationship to God.

Still, that was not good enough for the children of Israel. So God sent His prophets. I love to read the prophets. It's like swallowing a gramophone needle. It has not affected me, affected me, affected me. Justice and mercy, justice and mercy, justice and mercy. It is a theme wherever you read in the prophets. Not just justice. That would be too harsh. Not just mercy. That would be too easy and soft. But it is that balance of justice and mercy, because that is the very nature of God Himself, the God Who is just and merciful. The prophets are expressing the nature of God and saying that in new relationships with each other, this is how you ought to treat each other, with justice and with mercy. As Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery, "Woman, who condemns you? I do not condemn you. Nobody condemns you, but sin no more." Justice and mercy, balance between grace and truth.

The prophets came, but still the people of Israel did not heed the warnings of the prophets. All the prophets did was reiterate God's word. All they did was reiterate God's pattern--- God's pattern from creation, God's pattern from the law, God's pattern from wisdom literature. So, the prophets are not bringing something radically new and different. They are reiterating the very standards of God, the very nature of God, the way for humanity to live. Humanity's response is thank you, but no thank you.

So, in the fullness of time, at the right time, the right *καιρος*, God sends His Son, Jesus. Jesus did not arrive *ex nihilo*. He didn't come from nothing. He came as part of the Jewish tradition. He came as part of the God Who created the world, the God Who reveals Himself in His law, the God Who reveals Himself in wisdom literature, the God

Who reveals Himself in the prophets, the God Who reveals Himself in the dealings with the people of Israel. Jesus comes as a Jewish man. We like to think of Him as a nice, white, Anglo-Saxon, preferably Protestant man. But actually He was a Jewish boy. Not quite sure whether He's a Southern Baptist or just a Baptist, but we will leave that one. In England, I always describe myself as a Scottish Baptist. That is so they know I am not like these English Baptists. We always have to make these careful differentiations that mean so much in baptistic circles. Jesus came as a human being, God incarnate.

I attended a meeting of theologians. I was not just there to take notes; they allowed me to take part as well. And in the conversation, it was mostly with people who used to be in the Eastern Block, the part of the USSR sphere of influence. We were having a discussion about whether or not we should change the notion of kingdom. They said, "We shouldn't talk about the kingdom of God. We should talk about the republic of God. Everybody is equal in the republic." That would be much more acceptable for people who come from the communist tradition. I thought long and hard about that, because I wanted to contextualize. But I wanted to contextualize in an appropriate way. Whether we like it or not, Jesus is the King. I think the problem is that we then talk about the kingdom as if it is a place, when what the New Testament is really talking about is Kingship. It is talking about a relationship. If Jesus is the King, we are to be His followers. So we should be talking about the Kingship of Jesus. How can we bring that living relationship of Christ the King and me (us) as His followers into every aspect of our life, showing the Kingship of Jesus, the King Who comes to usher in His manifesto?

I have a wonderful privilege in America. I am not allowed to vote. So you are all responsible for your government. I bear no responsibility whatsoever. But sadly I do not

manage to escape from all the literature that candidates send. At my home in Wheaton, I get all this literature, and what I get is the manifesto of this candidate, of that candidate, of this party, or of that party. Jesus has a manifesto. It is called the Sermon on the Mount. You read the Sermon on the Mount, and you will find a manifesto. This is not just what Jesus stands for, this is what we, the people of God, are meant to stand for and with and to integrate into every aspect of our lives. Here are the values of Jesus, the values of God expressed for active community. We are to be members of the Kingship of Christ.

Christ brings something that is new and different. He brings something called the Golden Rule. Some scholars say the Golden Rule existed long ago. It existed in rabbinic literature. Hillel had a form of the Golden Rule, and so he did. Buddha had a form of the Golden Rule, and so he did. What was the form of the Golden Rule for Hillel and Buddha? *Do not do to other people what you do not want them to do to you.* It was purely defensive. Jesus takes that Golden Rule, and He turns it around. He says, “You do to other people what you would have them do to you.” You may *not* do it. You do not do it *so that* they will do it. But do as you would long to have people treat you. Treat them with the value, the dignity, the worth that you would like them to give to you, even if they do not.

If you have looked at *Time* magazine, you will see that there is a debate there between Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins. Look not just at the content; look at the style. Look at the difference between a man who speaks with grace, with loving grace even when he disagrees, and a man who is bitter, who speaks with venom, especially when he disagrees. See, we are called to be like Jesus. We are called to do to other people as we would have them do to you. Jesus embodied that. Jesus treated people in the way

that He longed that they would treat Him. They did not, but that does not change the way. When the ten lepers came, all of them were healed, but only one said thank you. Jesus ministers to people as is good for them.

But He also gives them, of course, a new commandment. “A new commandment, something new and different I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you and in the same way, to the same extent.” That is what we are called to do as Christian people. We are called to fulfill that new commandment.

I want to talk a little more about salt and light, but before I do that, I want to say one thing more about New Testament ethics. You see, the New Testament church was a place where disagreement was rife. Twenty-first century Christians think we’re unique. We have never been so divided as a denomination – Arminian, Calvinist, first blessing, second blessing, all kinds of divisions. And if you think Baptists are divided, you should spend a little while in an Episcopalian setting. Boy, oh boy, they know how to disagree with each other, big time! Now in that world of disagreement, we think we’re unique. Not at all. Most of the epistles of the New Testament would not exist if the church agreed upon everything, but they didn’t.

You see, the Scots and the Jews, they knew a bargain when they saw it. They went down to the marketplace, and they saw cheap beef. BSE free Scottish beef, there they saw it. So the Scotsman and Jew said, “Wow, what a bargain! Let’s buy it and eat it. Let’s enjoy it!” And the English and the Pharisees said, “Oh! You must not eat that meat! That is disgusting! That meat is cheap for a reason. It is cheap because it has been offered to idols. It is contaminated! Therefore, do not eat the meat.” Here was the early church divided. How are we going to decide whether it is proper for Christians and Christian

freedom to eat the meat which has been offered to idols (agree with the Scots and the Jews) or go with the English and the Pharisees (no, let us keep ourselves unspotted; do not eat anything that is tainted in any kind of way). The church disagreed, and Paul knew that. You go to Romans chapter fourteen and chapter fifteen; you will find that Paul deals with that whole issue of how to cope with disagreement in the church.

There are four simple rules. The first rule is to be fully convinced in your own mind. Fully convinced means I do not stick a pin. I do not toss a coin. I do not think of the first thing I think of. I do not feel the first feeling I have. Being fully convinced, then, implies hard work. You go to seminary. You must know what hard work is like. Where you actually have to drive, you have to struggle, you have to go deep to really understand what's going on here. Why? Why? Why? Why? You need to keep asking yourself that to drive yourself deeper. Fully convinced in your own mind, not in what the pastor says, not what I read in my notes from college days, not what some nice loving person said. Fully convinced in your own *mind*. There it is again – loving God with our heart and soul and *mind*. Have this *mind* in you which was in Christ Jesus. We are to resist being squeezed into the world's mold by the renewing of our *mind*. Our mind is fundamental here. We need to understand and be fully convinced in our *own* mind. There is no escape.

Christians all the time, my students in particular, all say, “Never mind explaining on the one hand and on the other hand, just tell me the answer.” I say to them, “What will you do with the answer? I will tell you. I have the answer. I have all the answers. But if I tell you, what will you do with it?” Will you say, “Oh, well, David Cook says...so it must be right.” That would be tragic. Or they would say, “David Cook, who does he think he is? No, he's wrong. I know better.” So, there is no point in my giving them the answer.

There is no point because in thirty-five years' time, when they are running some church or they are teaching on some faculty or they are running some kind of business, and somebody says, "Here is a brand new problem," then they are not going to be able to say, "Well, David Cook says..." They are going to have to work it out for themselves. That is my desire, and I am sure it is the desire of all the faculty here at Southeastern. Not to make you parrots. Parrots can regurgitate, but parrots can not be creative. You will have to face brand new moral dilemmas.

I was sitting in my office in Oxford, and I got a call saying, "They've just done a test-tube baby. What should we do about it?" What is a mother and what is a father? It seemed simple. A mother and a father are the biological mother and father. But now you have one man who can donate sperm, a biological father, and one man who can bring up a child, a social father. Women, of course, women are always much more complicated. One woman can donate an egg; she is a biological mother. One woman can carry a fertilized egg, a surrogate mother. And you have another woman who can bring up a child, the social mother. So, on Mother's Day, who gets the Mother's Day card? You see, that is the problem, and it was a brand new issue.

So, you have to be able to think from first principles. You have to be able to work it out for yourselves. So when your faculty refuse to give you *the answer*, say "hallelujah." Say, "That's great," because they want you to work out the answer, not to today's problem, but tomorrow and ten/twenty/thirty/forty years' time problem. We must be able to deal with the brand new issues that medical technology is creating at the beginning of life and the at end of life, and unless we teach you how to do that, you can never be fully convinced in your *own* mind.

But that is only one reason. Paul says much more than that. He says not just be fully convinced in your own mind, remember one day you will answer to the throne of God. Now, I have to tell you, one day we will all stand before the Judgment Seat. I always think of that when I go places to speak, and I have to tell you, Southeastern is absolutely unique. It is absolutely unique because every other seminary I have spoken in, when I arrive in the chapel to give the chapel address, there is a sound technician. The sound technician comes forward and gives me the lapel mic and a little box, he hands it to me, and almost always without fail, he says, "If you go to the men's room, please switch off." Now I am not quite sure why he tells me to switch off the sound system before I go to the men's room, but I know that he is worried that one day, everything will be broadcast.

See, that is a picture of the judgment, that one day everything will be made public. All the things that we think are secret and private, one day will be made public. If one day we have to give answer to God, then today we have to give the same answer to God. That was the strength of the WWJD. We have to realize that God is with us. God is with us everywhere we go, and everything we do, God sees, God knows. So if I am going to make a choice, if I am going to do something, if I am not going to do something, if I am going to say something or not say something, I have to be able to look God in the face and say, "My God, this is why I do this," because that is what judgment day will be. If we cannot today do God's will, there is no hope for judgment day. There must be no disconnect between how we make decisions today and what we say on judgment day. So practice, and practice well. Live, and live well. Because one day all of us, Richard

Dawkins, Francis Collins, it does not matter who you are, all of us will have to give answer before God.

Paul says, be fully convinced in your own mind. One day all of us will stand before the Judgment Seat of God. But then Paul says, don't cause your brother or sister to stumble. Of course, we tend to think of giving a little trip, that kind of thing. But Paul, when he uses the word stumble here, is talking about so falling that they fall out of the kingdom of God. Yes, of course, we are our brother and our sister's keepers. Yes, of course, we have a responsibility to those who are in Christ, not to cause them so to be offended that they fall out of the kingdom of God. That does not mean to say that every little, isolated reflection they have is the same as falling out of the kingdom of God. It is not peace at any price. But it is being aware of our fundamental responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Not to exercise our Christian freedom so it becomes an excuse for license, so it becomes a stumbling block, so that people fall out of the grace of God.

I do not need to go to church, ever. I do not need to go to church because I went to an Episcopalian seminary. In this Episcopalian seminary, you have chapel seven days a week. Here? Three times! Oh, what kind of Baptist college is this?! Here you have chapel three times a week. When I was an Anglican-Episcopalian, even as a faculty member, I had to be in chapel fourteen times a week! Every day, morning and evening. For seven years, I went morning and evening to daily prayer, morning prayer, evening prayer. I do not need to go to church again. I have a treasury of merit of services that I have attended, and if I miss on a Sunday, on a chapel, I can withdraw from my treasury of merit. One of the effects of being at an Episcopalian seminary is that whether you like it or not, you

learn the liturgy. Of course, we Baptists, we do not have liturgy. We just do things the way we have always done them.

Liturgy rubs off, and I can assure you that if I hear a Baptist pastor pick up some of the words from the liturgy, I begin to repeat them because it is so deeply ingrained. At the end of the communion service, they say, “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and build up our common life.” I used to think those were nice words, and then I read the Bible a little more carefully and discovered it was actually a quotation. See, most of liturgy is actually quoting the Bible. That is why liturgy is worth studying, worth soaking ourselves in, because biblical truth is embodied there if we look. Let *us* (together) then pursue (actively seeking) what makes for peace (shalom, salvation). Baptists believe in salvation. Here we should be pursuing what makes for peace, shalom, wholeness, perfection, salvation, and what builds up, not my spiritual life, not my well-being, not my ministry, but builds up our common life. I cannot grow properly unless my brother and sister in Christ are growing properly. This notion of me in my small corner and you in yours is the death of biblical Christianity.

Biblical Christianity is about community, when we make moral decisions. There are many churches, many groups, even governments who say to me, “David, tell us what to do.” You know, I am tempted. I really am tempted. They are asking me, the little boy from Hawick. I can give them the answer, Wow-ee! But that is the most dangerous thing in the world. It is in the community that we come to decide God’s will. That is what we as Baptists believe. God guides and directs, not just me on my own, but me in the context of my community. That is how we check that someone is really speaking God’s Word. The community uses God’s Word as the standard and by that is able to assess--- yes this

is of God, no this is not of God. We make moral decisions, not as isolated individuals, but as part of the community, remembering that when there is division.

We are called, first of all, to be fully persuaded in our own mind. Secondly, to remember that one day we'll all stand before God's Judgment Throne. To remember, most crucially, not to cause our brother and sister to stumble. And we are actively to pursue what makes for peace, shalom, wholeness, salvation, perfection, and builds up our common life. That is Paul's advice where there is division, and we should follow that. I want to leave you this morning, in your reflections on how do we make moral decisions, just to take you back to that passage from Jesus. You see Jesus not only went back to creation, He offered us a picture of what we as a community should be. He said you, you all, are the salt of the earth.

As a hit-and-run speaker, I was up in Inverness, up on the borders, sorry, in the Highlands of Scotland. That shows how much my geography is good. If you are not on the borders, you are nowhere. That is what we understand. The people in the town I come from, Hawick, say, "A day out of Hawick is a day wasted." They realize that the most important place is the center of the universe, Hawick. Well, I left to go up to Inverness to speak at a Bible convention. I was staying in the home of a lady doctor and her husband who was a chaplain in the hospital. They brought a huge tureen of soup to the table, and they set it down. Because I was the guest, the lady took out the ladle and gave me the first bowl of soup. I picked up my spoon and took the bowl of soup, and I spat it out. It was absolutely disgusting. She said, "Oh! I'm sorry! I forgot to tell you. We are on a salt-free diet." And it tasted like it. It was absolutely disgusting, because salt brings out the flavor.

You are the salt of the earth because you are meant to bring out the flavor of what it means to be a human being, what it means to be made in the image of God, what it means to be a redeemed son and daughter of the living God, what it means to have the Holy Spirit live and dwell within us. You are the salt of the earth.

In Inverness, I went down the street, and I saw the fishmonger. When you are traveling around at places to speak, you wander around a lot. So there I was wandering the streets, and I look at the fishmongers and there they have salted herring. They were around my heart like a hairy worm. Salted herring! I haven't tasted it for years, because of course, long before refrigerators (I love American refrigerators. They're like walk-in closets, nice and small), before there were refrigerators or freezers, there was salt, because salt did two things. It prevented decay. You are the salt of the earth. You, we, are meant to prevent decay in our community, in our society, in our world. That is our God-given task. That is why we need Christians in politics. That is why we need Christians in business. That is why we need Christians in science and in every aspect of life. The task is to be salt preventing decay, but not just that. Salt also preserves the goodness. When I tasted that salted herring, yes it was salty, but oh! that herring taste, that smoked herring! It preserved what was good, good in itself and good for me. We are meant, as Christians, to be salt preserving what is good and preventing decay.

Then it says that if salt has lost its saltiness, it is good for nothing but to be thrown into the street. That sounds really ecologically friendly, does it not? I had a friend, an Anabaptist. Seriously, he did some study, and he discovered that in certain other parts of the Holy Land (Israel I think it is called, or something like that) there was a shortage of salt in the earth. So salt was used as a fertilizer. If salt was salty, it was used as a

fertilizer. If it was not, you threw it in the street and trod on it. If a salt loses its saltiness, it is good for nothing but to be trodden under the feet of men. But if salt has its saltiness, it will help people grow. It will help people develop. Talking with the faculty yesterday, it was quite clear what their desire is. Their desire is to do not just their own scholarship, not just to do their own work, not just to be the teacher of the year. Their desire is to help you, all of you, to grow and develop into the full person in Christ that God has created for you that the Spirit longs to, is working in you to achieve. Salt helps people to grow. You are the salt of the earth. You are to preserve what is good, you are to prevent decay, you are to make sure the full flavor of what it means to be human, what it means to be in a living relationship with God comes out.

You are not just the salt. You are the light of the world. My study in Oxford and in Wheaton (I have two studies), they are both very particular. I have a unique filing system. It involves extensive use of the floor. Everything is very carefully filed in huge lines of all kinds of papers. I have a cleaner, Dorothy. She comes in and says, "Shall I move the papers?" "Oh, no! Everything is very carefully filed! I know where everything is (roughly). Please do not." Every year in Oxford, once a year, the sun shines through the window, and it shows up all the dust on all the papers. Because when the light comes, it shows up the dirt and the evil and the dust. You are the light of the world to show up the evil.

One of the hardest things in hospital settings, one of the hardest things in working with leading medical or mercy groups is that sometimes you have to name evil for the evil that it is. You have to identify it. That is not always popular. It is not always easy, but it is part of our God-given task. If we have to be light of the world, we have to show

people and tell people when evil is evil. Let us not be mealy-mouthed. Let us not mince our words. Let us call evil as it is. You are the light of the world which shows up evil.

I have two sons. They have two crosses to bear in life. One is they live with me, the other is they look like me. When they lived with me, they did everything they could to get away. They joined the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts were very different in their generation from my generation. The big thing with the Boy Scouts in the UK region was all night exercises. These two young men would go out for all night exercises. I have to tell you, you have no idea how much food is required to keep one young man alive overnight on an all night exercise. They would have a huge knapsack, as huge as they were, and they would be packing in all kinds of snacks and goodies. I would say, "Where are the other 4,999 that we're feeding here?" They would say, "No, no, this is just for me." They took all this food, but the thing they also took was a flashlight. Because in the darkness, they needed to see where to go. You are the light of the world, showing people where to go, showing people how to live, showing people the true values of God. You are the light of the world.

My mother loved to have a present at Christmas. She always like to have a bowl, and the bowl was filled with earth, and in the earth were three hyacinth bulbs. They did not show. You could not see them. They were all just there in the bowl. I would give my mother every Christmas this present, and you know what she would do with it? She would put it under the bed. Then, around about February, she would go and bring out from under the bed our hyacinth bowl, and she would take and put it into the light. Come Easter Day, there would be three hyacinth blooms, because when the light came, it brought life.

That is John's gospel in a nutshell. You have a choice, light and darkness, life and death. Our God is a God Who believes in life. That is why we are pro-life. Pro-life at the beginning, pro-life at the end, because our God is pro-life, because when light comes, it creates life. That is what the physicist will tell you. That is how life is generated. "Let there be light," God says. There was light and then there was life. That is the source of life. We have the secret of eternal life. We have the truth of eternal life. So we can share the Light of the world with humanity.

We live in a very complicated world. We live in a world where there are questions, not just of life and death. We could have talked about the environment. We could have talked about war and peace. We could have talked about justice. We could have talked about poverty. We could have talked about hunger. We could have talked about sexuality. We could have talked about all the issues that you will face and that your people will face. How are we going to make decisions? I believe that we need to go back to God's Word, the whole of God's Word. We need to look at His pattern in creation, in law, in wisdom literature, in the prophets, and then the culmination, the summation, the fulfillment in Jesus Himself and in the teaching of Jesus.

At the Last Supper, Jesus enacted, acted out His sermon. He washed the feet of the disciples. Then He sat down and said to His disciples, "Do you know what I've done?" And they all like good students said, "Yes, teacher." He said, "Well, blessed are you if you do it." Blessed are *you* if you do it.

Dr. David Cook
Arthur F. Holmes Professor of Faith and Learning
Wheaton College
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