

**Issues of Life Every Christian Faces
Technology: Servant Or Master?**

This is the sixth and final message in my series on Issues of Life that Every Christian Faces. Five weeks ago, I started this series on the issues we all face in the 21st century. They represent the areas of our lives that either draw us closer to our Creator, or ... pull us farther away ... and farther and faster than ever before. These are places in our lives that profoundly shape who we are as persons: how we think, act, relate, and where we are going for eternity.

We began with consideration of the mind: God's great gift to us. Either it is conformed to the world's way of thinking or transformed through Christ. Then we considered the body: is it something to be idolized (as much of our culture believes) or is the body to be a temple for worshipping God? Then wealth: is it a blessing from God (to be used as God directs) or is it a barrier to our relationship with God? After that we considered work and whether it is a calling directed by God or just a necessary burden, or even a curse. Last week Andrew spoke about our neighbors: are they strangers or are they to be friends ... friends for Jesus' sake? Today, I will share a few words about another issue all Christians face: Technology - our Servant or our Master? Does it make us more efficient and effective? Or is technology becoming the master of our lives?

Gifts of the Mind

From the first usefully shaped rock used to crack open a shellfish, or hack some fire wood, all the way to the latest digital device, technology is the product of God's great gift to us: our minds. Every new invention and innovation came with the potential to use it for great good or great evil. The mind goes to work to produce wonderfully useful technology to enhance life. That same technology is also used to manipulate, control, or harm human life. That is because our use of technology is a reflection of our human nature.

We live in a time when technology and science have grown exponentially and have given us the greatest time-savers as well as the greatest time wasters in history. Science has made it possible for humans to live longer than ever before ... and suffer longer than ever. Technology has given us the means to elevate and expand a virtuous message to billions around the world at lightning speed. It has also given us the means to spread untruth, debauchery, and evil to more places and people than ever before. What is the Christian to make of this?

The Blessing

First of all, technology is a blessing that has enhanced life for billions on this planet. Think of all the advances in medicine, construction, agriculture, food distribution, communications, and more, that technology has given us. I grew up in an airline family, my father working in airline communications. I have personally

witnessed the tremendous advances in technology that have made air travel common for common people. All kinds of technological innovations have made it possible for more people to travel to more destinations around the globe faster, easier, with less trouble than ever before.

Labor-saving devices (think of the washing machine, the dishwasher, power saws, sewing machines, forklifts, etc.) have given people more time with family, to read, to pursue artistic or intellectual interests, not to mention leisure. That's because technology has made it possible to complete many tasks in record time. Additionally, technological innovations have made possible improved living standards, not only among us, but in impoverished parts of the world. Think of hospitals in rural Africa that not only get medicines that didn't exist a generation ago but can also perform emergency surgeries because of lighting provided by generators. I think of my wife's home on a tiny island in the South Pacific. When she was a child they had no refrigeration, no lighting after sundown, and it took most of a day to go to town and the high school she attended, in a boat using wind power. These days there is light (solar powered) in homes and along the road up from the wharf, food can be kept for days and weeks with propane powered refrigerators, and the trip to town is 1-2 hours – thanks to a fossil fuel motor. (Tonga mission trips & getting building materials from town, a two-hour boat trip each way ... being able to call the hardware store and add to the shopping list.)

Technology offers several distinct benefits for the Kingdom of God:

- 1) It amplifies the voice of God's message; the ability to share the gospel to more individuals in person as well as electronically.
- 2) It increases the availability of good teaching; resources on-line.
- 3) It can speed discipleship; advancing believers from immaturity to maturity because of available teaching.
- 4) It makes possible multiple worship experiences.
- 5) It provides voice and involvement for the minority, those with disability, or the homebound.
- 6) Technology helps us to further God's kingdom by helping those in need more efficiently.

The Curse

Now let's talk about the downside of technology, and here I will mostly focus on internet usage and our digital devices. Did you know 9 out of 10 Americans are online every day? Did you know 8 out of 10 have a smartphone? Did you know 62% of Americans get all their news from the Internet? Did you know the majority of usage of the web is for social media, gaming, and pornography? Did you know 51% of households now own and use a tablet?¹

Before coming to Bakersfield, I lived in "Silicon Valley," CA during the time of the so-called "dot com" boom. Yahoo was a name with a lasso around it painted on the sides of blue Volkswagen beetles. Amazon was a radio commercial with the announcer sounding like he was in the cavern of an aircraft carrier as he described how they had room for the all the books they were trying to sell. Nobody had heard of these entities. There were thousands more internet startups ... some survived, many did not. The

movers and shakers of Silicon Valley waxed virtuous as they promised a bright new future of human communication and harmony as they facilitated global connections among friends, families, and even nations... as though they were building a heavenly, global community engineered with digital technology.

Now we find that some of the intrepid innovators of Silicon Valley have become super wealthy and have used their wealth and their companies to tell others what to communicate and how to live (even as they lived less than virtuous lifestyles. The social media giants, that began as idealist enterprises to facilitate and enhance widespread and easily accessed communication among people, are now barely distinguishable from any other monopoly that has gone before ... like railroad and telephone companies. They buy up their competition, buy political influence to protect them from government oversight, and censor facts and opinions that do not comport with their leadership desires. Yes, digital communication has revolutionized our world in many good ways. We have widespread, readily available, very affordable access to world-wide communication, but at what price? The tech companies impose their standards of speech – though it often appears they do so in an unequal and inconsistent manner. Is free speech a thing of the past? Will big government and big tech push us into a state of dependency and lost liberty? Have we become less patient because we expect instantaneous gratification? What happened to all the bright promises of a new era with technology?

Many would propose that technology is morally neutral, that it is but a tool that can be used for evil or good. But I wonder if that is naive thinking. Can humans say that their motivations are always and fully altruistic? Christians will admit that since the days of Adam, our hearts lean toward immoral. Our Fall from God's original goodness has cursed us with impure hearts. Tim Challies, in his book *The Next Story*,² says: "The things we create to assist us in overcoming the consequences of the curse also seek to dominate us, drawing our hearts from away from God rather drawing us toward Him in dependence and faith."

Advances in technology do not ensure that a utopia of happiness, contentment, leisure, and abundance will prevail. Why? Users and controllers of technology deny the fallen state of human nature. We always want a technological fix to problems that only faith in Christ can fix. Albert Einstein, world renowned physicist upon the explosion of the first atomic bomb said (1945): "The release of atomic power has changed everything except our way of thinking ... the solution to this problem lies in the heart of mankind. If only I had known, I should have become a watchmaker."

The issues technology creates for the Kingdom of God are:

- 1) It easily distracts from God's greater purpose and connection with Him**
- 2) It easily allows people to isolate themselves from others.**
- 3) It does not seem to really create Christian community, despite sincere attempts by some.**
- 4) It can easily reduce worship to a performance for the enjoyment of viewers, rather than praise and glorify God.**
- 5) It often advances the culture outside the church to redefine and reshape those inside the church.**
- 6) It fosters complacency in the pursuit of a relationship with God and others, as it**

promotes thinking we are self-reliant, masters of creation, and no longer in need of a Savior.

Have you noticed the new malady brought on by this digital age? It's called FOMO – Fear Of Missing Out? There is so much more to miss out on these days when we can capture the world on a tiny screen in our palms, that some people are stressed, diverted from productive use of time, and addicted to their need to keep up with the latest. The instant response becomes the most valuable response, and so information dissemination and those in charge of it have become choreographers of immediacy rather than midwives of thoughtful wisdom. This new set of expectations has slid into place without much conversation, resistance, or even notice.

We no longer use Google to search the internet. Instead, the internet now uses Google (and Facebook) to search us – our habits, beliefs, preferences, apparent worth, relationships, weaknesses, future actions, and more.³ All the more we need to beware of missing the greatest of all announcements: life with purpose, renewed by Jesus Christ.

Though counter-cultural to today's digital driven communication and information, the Christian faith and traditions still provide the greatest avenue for purpose, meaning, value and harmony in life and relationships. Christian spiritual maturity has always staked at least part of its claim on the value of "missing out." The experience of deep exploration, of closing off options, focusing attention, and accepting limits, fosters all possibility of commitment and love through the course of suffering and loss. Hasn't spiritual wisdom demanded patience, forgiveness, a grace that is shaped (not data-banked) by memory? And haven't the disciplines of restraint, choice, concentration, humility, and focus been essential to the work of prayer? Do not ethics require a healthy distinction between private and public, an orderly way of guarding the eye and deliberately missing out?

Christian believers allow the One who searches us to be Loving Personal Presence through the Holy Spirit, not a piece of impersonal software. The Holy Spirit searches us, not to feed our FOMO, but to fill it and so quiet it. The Spirit searches us to know our innermost thoughts, to unearth and reveal to us our deeper, hidden desires, and to shape our desires in ways that might teach us to say "no" as well as "yes," and transform our fear of missing out into a desire for love.⁴

Last week we celebrated Pentecost by remembering the first Pentecost when the first Christians gathered in Jerusalem. Suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them and they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance... And people from every nation under heaven heard them, each in their own language. We got a little taste of that with the video of our own church members saying The Lord's Prayer in their native tongue. Remember the Tower of Babel – we read that story this morning? Using their technology, people sought to be equal to God. Their efforts only divided them more by their languages. Now, the Holy Spirit unites believers in spite of different languages. The Holy Spirit brings the reverse-Babel effect. A little over a week ago I was meeting with one of our church members whose country of origin, native language, race, and upbringing are all quite different from mine (and the majority of our congregation). Yet, as he so calmly and wisely observed we are one in Jesus Christ. Technology can never take the place of that!

Christian Usage

The internet and technology have given the church the greatest opportunity and means to reach the world for Christ. But it also has given rise to an unprecedented danger for us to be impacted negatively with great evil and perversion.⁵ We could eschew technology altogether (the Amish) or we can recognize the blessings and dangers and seek Holy Spirit wisdom and power to choose the good. How we use it is a reflection of the human heart, and a mind not aligned with Christ will shape a heart of darkness.

Points to remember:

- **Technology can easily draw our attention away from God. Fast from digital communication regularly and commune with your Creator. Pray for discernment and Holy Spirit power to resist temptations that technology presents.**
- **When the technology interferes with your relationship with God or other people, restrict its use.**
- **Do not equate technological advancement with moral or spiritual advancement.**
- **Use technology to better the lives of people around you (and beyond). "Love people, use things. Don't use people and love things."**
- **When using technology ask:
"Knowing the nature of God, would this be honoring to Him and the message He wants for us to live and offer to others?"**
- **Lastly, if you can't live without your technology or your digital device, it's a sign that it is your master.**

All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything, 1 Cor. 6:12.

¹<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/>

² Tim Challies, *The Next Story*, Zondervan, 2011.

³ Wes Avram, "Connecting with a Theology of Technology,"

<http://reflections.yale.edu/article/ibelieve-facing-new-media-explosion/connecting-theology-technology>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bart Leger, Sermon Central; Jan 21, 2011; <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/it-s-the-best-of-times-it-s-the-worst-of-times-bart-leger-sermon-on-internet-153768>.