THE CHRISTIAN AND TECHNOLOGY

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EP

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Preface

Technology is an ever-growing facet of our lives, and so, I have spent the last few years trying to keep up with the latest trends and developments. On the one hand, I am an avid user of technology. My smartphone is probably the most useful device I have ever owned. Not only is it my lifeline to my wife and family, but my phone also functions as my pocket-sized library and classroom. On the other hand, my research has taught me that technology is a double-edged sword that requires cautious and intentional use.

When my former colleague at Westminster Seminary California, Julius Kim, asked me to do a semester-long chapel series on a topic of my choice, I immediately thought of collating all of my research

and reading into a small devotional book that would serve as the basis for my chapel addresses. I enjoyed writing this book and hope it proves useful and edifying for the church. Some of my greatest fears are based on the uncritical use of technology, that we will erode our capacity for God's word, become more self-centered, and turn our useful devices into idols. If I were to visually present my fears, perhaps Apple's 1984 Super Bowl advertisement that unveiled the Macintosh computer would aptly paint the picture. People sat entranced in front of a massive screen — a scene deliberately evocative of a dystopian Orwellian future — until a woman ran into the arena and threw a massive sledge hammer and shattered it. I do not bring a hammer to destroy technology; I am not a Luddite by any stretch of the imagination. Ease, entertainment, and convenience are not always godly pursuits. At the same time, I hope and pray that each of these devotional thoughts will cause us to carefully evaluate how we think about and use technology.

I am grateful to a number of people who have helped me see this book to publication: to my colleague, Julius Kim, for giving me the opportunity to deliver the series of chapel addresses; to the students who attentively listened and gave me helpful feedback;

and to my brother, Lee Eric Fesko, who read a draft of the manuscript and provided me with some good comments. Thank you to my mother-in-law, Linda Jones, for reading through the manuscript and giving me good feedback. And thank you to Graham Hind and the whole team at Evangelical Press. I am also grateful to my children, Val, Rob, and Carmen Penelope, for all of the love you give to me. Above all others, you are the three people in the whole world that I want to take this book to heart and pass it on to your children.

I am most thankful to my wife, Anneke, who listened attentively when I read draft chapters and then attended chapel to hear me deliver the devotionals. Thank you, Wife, for your love and interest in my work. You are my beloved wife, best friend, mother of our children, and love of my life. Therefore, I dedicate this book to you, Anneke Carmen.

Introduction

The bright white light of our smart phones is often the first thing to greet us in the morning. We wake up bleary-eyed in our darkened bedrooms. The sunlight has yet to pierce into the room. We reach for our phones and begin consuming data. We scroll through tweets, e-mails, news, and various social media outlets. In addition to this flurry of information, many people undoubtedly open their Bible apps and begin their day in prayer and Scripture reading. The use of our smart phones extends far beyond our devotional lives. I know of pastors who deliberately avoid saying, "Open your Bibles," from the pulpit on Sundays because they do not want to alienate those without a physical copy of God's word. Instead, they say, "Open your copy of

God's word," so that people with Bible apps do not feel ignored. Where physical copies of the Bible used to dominate, smart phones, iPads, and e-readers are quickly gaining ground and look like they might soon surpass Bibles. On the one hand, should it really matter what type of Bible you bring to church as long as you bring one? Moreover, why carry a bulky physical copy of the Bible when you can download a relatively inexpensive or even free Bible app? The app, after all, lets you carry a large Bible wherever you carry your phone, perform word searches in split seconds, highlight and bookmark key passages, record notes, and for more advanced apps, look-up words in the original Greek and Hebrew. Surely all of these benefits outweigh any of the potential drawbacks to using the Bible app on your smart phone?

On the other hand, we should ask, how is our use of technology shaping the way we live and think, and what is the impact upon us as we live the Christian life? Research shows how addictive smart phones can be, and how reading on screens is detrimental to your physical well-being. There are educational, physical, and mental drawbacks to using your smart phone: people who read physical copies of books have better long-term retention rates; physical books do not cause

macular degeneration with prolonged use the way the blue-light emitting smart phones do; and reading on your smart phone screen re-wires your brain in such a manner as to affect your attention span negatively. There are benefits and drawbacks to this wonderfully useful and amazing invention. But what if I told you that the same pattern unfolds with every technological invention. For every two steps forward, we might actually take three steps backwards. We grow in our abilities in some areas with new technological advances and become weaker in other areas. If this pattern clearly emerges with smart phones, what other technological advances have shaped the way we live, both positively and negatively, and how have they impacted our Christian lives?

This small book reflects upon six different technological advances and considers how they have positively and negatively shaped our lives. How have screens, social media, the automobile, the book, virtual reality, and unfettered access to the world through the internet changed the way we live? How have they have the benefited and hindered our growth in grace? The apostle Paul exhorts us not to conformed to the patterns of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Many believe that

technology is morally neutral and has no inherent negative effects on us, let alone on the quality of our spiritual lives. Conversely, there are certainly benefits to using technology but we must always beware of the drawbacks so that we profitably use the technology rather than allowing the technology to use us. In other words, we need not retreat into an enclave that shuns all forms of technology but neither should we use it uncritically. This book presents food for thought on how critically to use technology so we are aware of both its benefits and dangers lest we adversely affect our physical and spiritual lives.

Plan for the Book

In order to help people think through the implications of the various ways technology has impacted the church and to foster discernment, I present reflections on six different technologies. In the first chapter, I discuss screens — they are all around us: computer screens, phone screens, tablet screens, tv screens, jumbotron screens. Technology experts predict that they will only continue to spread. This chapter therefore asks the question: Have we become addicted to our screens? Should we allow something else other

than God captivate our hearts? We have to ask the question: Are we using our screens or are our screens using us?

The second chapter discusses social media and its influence upon the church. Social media is not simply a digital meeting place for interaction with friends and family. Rather, it is a digital bazaar where companies want you to click on their advertisements and gaze at their websites. Social media is a money-making platform and the only way to generate cash-flow is to get users to click on links. News media outlets, therefore, will promote a cash-making agenda, which does not always reflect reality. News outlets also promote their own agendas. If this is the case then, we should ask ourselves: Who sets the agenda for the church? Are we meeting the needs of the church and our local communities or are we imposing someone else's agenda? Again, are we using social media or is social media using us?

The third chapter examines a technology that most of us likely take for granted, namely, the automobile. While we probably do not give our cars too much thought, it is one technological development that has radically changed the church. People used to go to church in their local community but now they can go

wherever they want. Just because we can drive away from one church to another does not mean that we should. Has the automobile changed us from church members to church consumers? Are we members of a church that seek to serve and worship or customers who want to ensure we have a good experience?

The fourth chapter explores another ignored technological development in the book. Have we considered that inexpensive mass-produced books have only existed for the last five hundred years? How has the invention of the book changed the way we read and use Scripture? Correlatively, how have e-books changed the way we read our Bibles? There are undoubtedly many benefits to books and e-books, but we should not use them uncritically. This chapter challenges us not to allow books to keep us from memorizing Scripture because we now own a copy of the Bible. It also challenges us to recognize that the Bible is not a form of entertainment. Should we read our e-Bibles on the same screen where we watch movies, tweet, text, and surf the internet? Can we set aside those distractions and create sacred space so we can lose ourselves in God's word? This chapter asks and answers these important questions.

Chapter five investigates the benefits and dangers

of virtual reality. On the one hand, there are great benefits. Doctors can perform surgeries from a great distance where patients cannot access quality healthcare. Pilots can train in simulators without endangering lives. But to what extent should we use virtual or augmented reality if it displaces the good creation that God has given us? If virtual reality allows us to create a world tailor-made to our own liking, will the real world appear broken because it does not meet our expectations? Virtual reality technology can be fun, entertaining, and beneficial, but we must beware that we do not allow ourselves to create our own world that becomes an idol which displaces God's good creation.

The sixth and final chapter delves into the amazing access that technology like the internet gives us: We can buy all sorts of things with the click of a mouse; Google has scanned a fifth of the world's published books, which gives us unprecedented access to books, and we can purchase all sorts of services. But we also now have unconstrained access to evil and wickedness such as pornography and death as a form of entertainment. Pornography and death have slick websites and advertising and thus take on mundane forms, but the thin marketing veneer covers

wickedness and even the demonic. Seeing that this evil is only a few mouse-clicks away, how do we handle our new unrestricted access to it?

Conclusion

In the end, we need not flee from technology but we must understand it in order to use it well. One of the primary themes of this book is encouraging us to look past technology and dig into our own hearts. It encourages us to ask whether Christ so fills us that nothing else can drag us away from him. Have you turned your screen into an idol? Have you allowed social media to become the rose-colored glasses through which you see the world? Have you allowed your automobile to flee from a church when you should stay? Does the fact that you own a copy of the Bible discourage you from memorizing God's word? Does God's beautiful creation seem broken in comparison with the virtual world that you have created? Does your unfettered access to all sorts of things through the internet encourage you to look at, read, and watch things that do harm to your soul? All of these questions represent the need to make Christ

our chief priority in our lives. In the words of the old hymn:

> *Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart*
> *Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art*
> *Thou my best Thought, by day or by night*
> *Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

When Christ fills our vision, we will be able to use technology aright — we will not allow it to lead us into temptation and will be savvy to the tendencies towards idolatry and spiritual sloth that accompany it. When we feed upon Christ, the manna from heaven, all else pales in comparison. We find satisfaction in the Lord and seek no other table at which to feed our hungry souls: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matthew 5:6).