

## **“LEFT TO OUR OWN DEVICES: DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS AND ADDICTIONS.”**

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**Scripture Texts: I Corinthians 6:12, 20; 10:23, 31**

### **Introduction.**

In the first half of last century two chilling novels were written predicting what the future could look like. In 1932 Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World* and in 1949 George Orwell published *1984*.

They gave two very different pictures of what the world and culture would become like. In Orwell's prophecy the world is ruled by Big Brother and controlled by Thought Police. Picture communist controlled counties like North Korea or China or Russia. Huxley's was different.

Listen to Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, p. vii-viii:

Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, [amusing ourselves to death with an] almost infinite appetite for distractions. In *1984* people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we desire will ruin us.

People might rise up against a culture of oppression and coercion, but who will rise up against a culture of pleasure and entertainment and mindless amusement?

Consider this sermon one small attempt to wake us up out of our stupor and equip us for some form of resistance before we make shipwreck of our faith.

## **Technology.**

I realize technically technology refers to the development and use of tools, but for our purposes today I am using technology to refer to what first pops into your head when I use the word.

In our house we have an a Mac and three PCs, a tablet and a smart phone. We have high speed internet, cable and an unplugged Alexa. So while not cave dwellers we are behind many of you. We don't have an iPhone, or Xbox or Nintendo or Netflix, or The Ring.

Technology is altering our culture and our thinking and us at an increasingly faster pace. Technology is addicting us to distraction, making us crave immediate approval, turning us into what we "like," making us fear missing out, enabling us to conceal secret sins, and causing us to lose our literacy and become more lonely.

Technology is redefining our understanding and experience of *community*. It used to be that community was defined by your location or physical proximity, sharing the same house, who you are in class with or at work or worship with. Now our community is a virtual one, who is in our network or contact list.

Meeting together in one place at a set time is getting more challenging and less interesting compared to our self-created and self-promoting virtual world. We need to think about that.

Technology has changed the way we *communicate*. We don't communicate face to face anymore, all our communication is mediated through an electronic means, like a text message or email or post. Americans check our devices once every 5 minutes or 150 times a day.

## **Technology and the Bible.**

The Bible is not anti-smartphone or pro-smartphone. The Bible treats it like everything else in God's creation that is a gift from Him. But technology is not morally neutral, it can be used for great good and great evil.

Noah built a boat that he used for good. Jonah used a boat to flee from God. The Tower of Babel was technology gone bad, used to glorify man. The Temple was technology used for good, to glorify God.

Technology must be redeemed for the glory of God. If we can't use it for the glory of God then it becomes bad for us.

We live in a world filled with things that are legal but harmful, legal, but not necessarily edifying or beneficial to our souls.

To say it another way, all of us have freedom with regard to God's good gifts, but there are three conditions or limits.

*First*, we must use our liberty in a way that glorifies God.

Why did God make all the things He has made? To reveal His glory.

Why does God continue to give the ability to make things? For the sake of His glory.

What is the purpose behind all of God's good gifts? To glorify the giver and bless the receiver.

This is the universal principle for all Christian life. This is the underlying default setting of the Spirit filled life. This is the great end for which we are created and saved. If God is our focus, then everything else will serve that focus.

Glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Make this your OS, your operating system.

Don't miss the significance of what Paul is saying here. There is no part of our life or conduct, no matter how trivial or insignificant, that doesn't relate to God and His glory.

**Revelation 4:11** Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

*Second*, we must use our liberty in a way that blesses others. We are blessed by God to be a blessing, so all our attitudes and actions must edify and benefit others as well as our own souls.

Is what we do with technology edifying, beneficial, helpful, a blessing to others and to our own soul? Is what we post, text, like, read or see good, meant for good? Are we building up or tearing down? Think cyberbullying or Snapchatting inappropriate pictures.

If we think about and care about the good of others in all our activities and actions, then there is no way what we do will not be a blessing.

*Third*, we must restrict our liberty so we don't become in bondage to something or controlled by worldly desires or pleasures, under the control of outward things. Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Is any food or drink or device or hobby or work becoming my master instead of my servant?

We must not live for our own pleasures or desires or appetites or self-interests. But in our world, in our culture what wins out, personal and physical pleasures or spiritual joys and pleasures?

It is easy to see when this has become a problem. What happens if someone tries to take away or restrict your access to what you are in bondage to? If there is a major fight, that's a good indication something has become an idol. We fight for and defend our idols, whether it's a phone or tablet; or toys or trucks; clothes or money, TV shows.

We must not be under the power of anything but God. We cannot serve two masters.

O Jesus, Lord and Savior,  
I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement,  
Didst give Thyself for me;  
***I own no other Master,***  
My heart shall be Thy throne,  
My life I give, henceforth to live,  
O Christ, for Thee alone.

Anything that enslaves us is a great and serious danger, any persistent habit runs the risk of hardening our hearts until we start justifying it and adding more, and then one day self-denial and self-control drop out of your life.

Do you think you are beyond the possibility of making shipwreck of your faith? "Let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall!"

Why did Jesus say, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell"?

Everything in our lives has the ability to lead us in one of two directions. All our devices that connect to the internet can lead us toward God with Bible Apps, daily devotions, Bible study and research, missions updates. Or it can lead us away from God through wasted hours and mindless distractions, social media self-promotion and a whole lot of sexually explicit, soul-destroying, degrading wickedness.

Which direction are your devices leading you?

God said be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and *have dominion* over it, not let it have dominion over you.

**Proverbs 4:23** Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Your heart is the most valuable treasure you have.

Your heart is the source of everything you do.

Out of the mouth the heart speaks. Garbage in, garbage out.

Your heart is under constant attack by the world and the devil.

Kids need help to learn how to guard their hearts. They don't realize how precious it is and how destructive letting the world in is.

### **Technology and addiction.**

Lot was afflicted by the evil of Sodom, and his family did not escape unscathed from the sin of that place. Culture is powerful.

One reason our current technology is especially dangerous is it is designed to get us distracted and then addicted to want more of it. All of us who have it know what I am talking about.

How many quick checks of email or Facebook quickly become two hours later?  
How many carry their phone into the bathroom?

Have you noticed the bottomless nature of the feeds on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram? You can't get to the end, they just keep you scrolling.

I remember well my first computer and playing FreeCell. It kept track of winning streaks. After many months I finally reached 100 straight wins. And then I woke up. So what, who cares, what does this mean in the scope of eternity, why did I care so much about that, how did it get such a hook in me? And that was the end of that.

Part of the science behind our addictions involves a chemical in our brains called dopamine. When dopamine is released it tells our brain whatever it just experienced is worth getting more of, motivating us to do something again and again.

“In an unprecedented attack of candor, Sean Parker, the 38-year-old founding president of Facebook, recently admitted that the social network was founded not to unite us, but to distract us. “The thought process was: ‘How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?’” .... To achieve this goal, Facebook’s architects exploited a “vulnerability in human psychology.” ... Whenever someone likes or comments on a post or photograph, he said, “we... give you a little dopamine hit.”

“New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote: “Tech companies understand what causes dopamine surges in the brain and they lace their products with ‘hijacking techniques’ that lure us in and create ‘compulsion loops’.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/04/has-dopamine-got-us-hooked-on-tech-facebook-apps-addiction>).

Platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram use the same neural circuitry used by slot machines and cocaine to keep us using their products as much as possible.

### **Steps, strategies, and safeguards toward self-control.**

#### **How to negotiate with technology.**

Master your devices or they will master you. Dictate to it your limits and boundaries or it will be your dictator. Negotiate with technology, dominate it, rule it, make rules for it.

Parents, you have to help kids with this, they can’t do, they don’t have the maturity or wisdom. Kids don’t have the self-control to deal with the effects of dopamine.

Do we as parents exercise control over what our kids eat and when they eat? Do we limit sugar or soda or desserts or candy? If government can make rules about driving and texting, parents can make rules also.

Delay smart phones and social media as long as you can. Average age of kids getting smartphone in US has dropped to 10. It’s too soon, they aren’t mature enough and parents can’t be vigilant enough. Technology is a great tool, but immaturity makes it destructive.

For young kids use something like the Gizmo watch.  
For a little older get a flip phone, tell them it's the latest retro phone.

Stairstep when you will introduce each level of technology in your home for each child. You decide when, and how long until the next step based on maturity and experience.

Use parental controls, Net Nanny, Covenant Eyes, filters, monitor and control WiFi. Look into the Circle or OpenDNS. Covenant Eyes has a free booklet you can download on Parenting the Internet Generation. And they have just come out with better monitoring for mobile devices.

There are Apps that show how much time and where, ones that limit amount of time on a device.

Talk to other parents, Andrew Reenie is one good resource, and he is willing to help. Google "family firewall free." Parents, you don't have the luxury of coasting on this, souls are at stake.

LCS is sponsoring an Internet Safety seminar March 5.

Keep everything in the light, in public areas, no TVs, phones, tablets, gaming devices, computers in bedrooms. This helps reign in the endless social demands and breaks addictions. Put the charging station in parent's room.

Buy a real alarm clock. Don't let your phone be the last thing you touch and check at night, and the first thing you touch and look at in the morning. Give the first fruits of the day to God.

Redeem meal time and car rides and vacations for family time and conversation. Consider making Sunday a sabbath rest from devices. Unhook one day a week and see if the world stops spinning. The real world is better than the virtual world.

***A word to kids.*** Your parents love you and care about you and they see the big picture. When they set limits and restrictions and want to know passwords they aren't being mean, they are being the parents God gave you.

Your response is to honor your parents and respect them and obey them. If you can't do that then you are showing that you can't be trusted with technology.

Do you wish you had a closer relationship with God? Do you wish your kids had a closer relationship with God? Do you know why young Christian adults struggle

with God as a personal reality in their lives? Distractions and addictions. It's easier to tweet than pray.

Satan doesn't want you to find your joy in Christ. Satan's tactics are the same just in a new package. He distracts us with superficial things, junk food amusements, empty internet calories, time wasters. Satan has a "nothing" strategy designed to get us to the end of our lives and have little or nothing to show for it, but wasted hours in front of screens.

You have heard the old phrase, no one on their death bed ever said they wished they spent more time at the office. The updated version is, no one on their deathbed will say they wished they had sent more texts or got to the next level of that video game.

There is something better than Twitter followers and Facebook likes and Snapchat streaks and Fortnite levels. "Your joy is not found in cultural connectivity; it's found in union with Christ."

Don't waste your life, don't waste your emotional energy. Time is finite and precious, we get one life. When you get to the end, what do you want to say about it?

Don't let Jesus be just an App on the smartphone of your life. Make Him the operating system on which everything else depends and is filtered.

So, whether you text, tweet, post, like, chat, skype or just watch, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.