

CONFRONTING CYBER-SIN

Introduction

- Media is virtually everywhere!
- From the moment we wake up in the morning until the time we go to bed at night, we are inundated with a stream of never-ending social messages that have been designed to lure our thoughts and contour our minds
- We now have constant access to an unprecedented amount of information about all kinds of topics, people, sports, trends, weather, and gossip
- With the click of a button on a computer, smartphone, or tablet, we can instantly retrieve an unending supply of information on an unending number of topics
- Trying to escape the influence of social media is like a fish trying to escape the influence of water;
- We swim in it...we breathe it in...we are surrounded by it on every side

- Not all of it is bad...there are a number of benefits and opportunities that come as a result of these technological advances:
 - Can carry the whole Bible on a phone
 - GPS and street maps now fit in our pocket
 - Can keep in close contact with friends and family instantly
 - Various social networking tools can be used to dispense useful resources and keep people updated
- There is no doubt that some things are better as a result of these advances
- So in discussing this issue, we must not become anti-technology or give into the propensity for overreaction and legalism
- In other words, the best answer for technology overload is not to rage against it or condemn all its forms or users

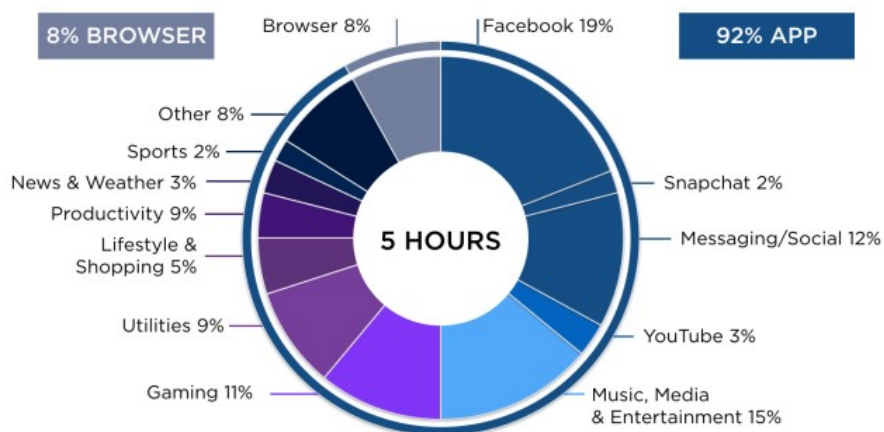
- However, we must recognize some of the dangers that come with this arena because we are called to submit every area of our lives to Christ's lordship – including how we use technology and social media

The Reality of Technological Temptations

- In 1985, Neil Postman, a media theorist and professor at New York University, published *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*
- In this book on the intersection of techno-amusements and the culture, Postman noted, “We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not by the printed word” (pg. 28)
- Postman believed “the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation” (pg. 8)
- He believed that the close of the 19th century brought an end to the Age of Exposition and the start of the Age of Show Business (pg. 63)
- “What I am claiming here is not that television is entertaining but that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience. Our television set keeps us in constant communion with the world, but it does so with a face whose smiling countenance is unalterable. The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter, but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining which is another issue altogether” (pg. 87)

- In a latter work, Postman would call this the *technopoly* – the surrendering of the culture to technology – and the last 35 years shows the surrender has not waned in the least
- Obviously, Postman could not have foreseen in 1985 how the world of ideas and the exchange of information would be transformed as we have it now
- Consider the following statistics to put this all into perspective:
 - In 2017, 81 percent of U.S. Americans had a social media profile, representing a five percent growth compared to the previous year. According to estimates, the number of [worldwide social media users](#) reached 1.96 billion and is expected to grow to some 2.5 billion by 2018. On a global level, the [market leader](#) is the American social network Facebook, in fact the first social media platform to surpass 1 billion registered accounts on both its desktop and mobile versions. As of January 2016, Facebook has some 1.5 billion accounts and is followed by Whatsapp and QQ, with 900 million and 860 million users, respectively ...A Pew Research Center report on social media usage released in 2015 shows that, among Americans, age is indirectly proportionate with degree of penetration. As such, 90 percent of those 18 to 29-year-old tended to have at least one social media account, while the probability decreased the more respondents advanced in age. Furthermore, the study showed that social media usage is highest in [suburban America](#) and among those [earning](#) over 75 thousand U.S. dollars a year and those with the highest degree of [education](#).¹
 - A recent national survey conducted by Common Sense Media, which included nearly 1,800 parents of children aged eight to 18, found that parents spend an average of nine hours and 22 minutes every day in front of various screens—including smartphones, tablets, computers and televisions. Of those, nearly eight hours are for personal use, not work.²
 - 39% of American adults confess to be “Facebook addicts;” 57% of women ages 18 to 34 talk to people online more often than they do face-to-face
 - The time U.S. users are spending in mobile apps is continuing to grow; according to [new data](#) released this week by analytics firm [Flurry](#), we’re up to 5 hours per day on our mobile devices.³

US Time Spent By App Category



Source: Flurry Analytics, comScore, Facebook, NetMarketShare. Note: US, Dec 2016

¹<https://www.statista.com/statistics/273476/percentage-of-us-population-with-a-social-network-profile/>

²<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/most-adults-spend-more-time-on-their-digital-devices-than-they-think/>

³<https://techerunch.com/2017/03/03/u-s-consumers-now-spend-5-hours-per-day-on-mobile-devices/>

The Danger of Technological Temptations

- There is nothing inherently wrong with these technological devices...on one level they are morally neutral: phones, computers, databases, silicon semiconductors, plasma televisions, iPods, and tablets are just wires, electricity, and bits of silicon encased in plastic...all essentially harmless
- However, we must understand that these morally neutral devices can become portals by which the lusts of the heart can draw us away and entice us (James 1:14-15)
- Failing to pay careful attention to these technological temptations can result in believers being seduced away from a walk of holiness and purity
- “We must realize that, as the presence of digital devices and digital dependence grows, with this growth comes new capability *and* new dangers. The question is not whether the digital revolution adds to the craziness of our lives or whether it poses threats to our souls and sanity. The question is, what are the threats and what can we do about them?”⁴

A Danger of Possible Addiction

- As believers, we must never succumb to enslaving habits, even habits that in themselves are morally neutral

1 Corinthians 6:12 ~ All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

2 Peter 2:19 ~ for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.
- For this reason, we must recognize that, at a minimum, the plethora of screens available to us today and the accessibility of such devices pose at least a threat of addiction
- This is evident in the number of people who describe being overcome by the urge to connect online

Internet addiction disorder (IAD), also known as **problematic Internet use** or **pathological Internet use**, refers to excessive [Internet](#) use that interferes with daily life. Addiction, defined by Webster Dictionary as a "compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal", was traditionally used to depict a person's dependence on the substance. More recently, the concept has been applied to behavioral dependence including internet use. The problem of Internet addiction evolves together with the development and spread of the Internet. As adolescents (12–17 years) and emerging adults (18–29 years) access the Internet more than any other age groups and undertake a higher risk of overuse of the Internet, the problem of Internet addiction disorder is most relevant to young people. Excessive use of Internet has been found by various studies to disrupt individuals' time use and have a series of health consequences. But the existence of Internet addiction as a mental disorder is not yet well recognized. The current version of [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(DSM-V\)](#) noted that Internet gaming disorder (one type of IAD) is a condition that requires more research in order to be considered as a full disorder in 2013.⁵

- The truth is many people cannot NOT click; many people cannot step away even for a few hours, let alone a few days or weeks
- The digital experience for many is exhilarating – social media updates, likes, retweets, the yearning to check email, click links, text, etc.
- All of this has the potential to become a dominating, controlling influence

The reason Internet addiction is so severe is all the senses are stimulated. The sound of the computer humming, visuals of the screen's images, sounds and touch of the keyboard and mouse, smells in the room all are part of the addiction stimulus...The dopamine released is your drug and you will return again and again to get more of it. Here are some signs of Internet

⁴ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 79.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_addiction_disorder

addiction: Feelings of guilt, Anxiety, Depression, Dishonesty, Euphoric feelings when in front of the computer, Unable to keep schedules, No sense of time, Isolation, Defensiveness, Avoiding doing work, Agitation when you cannot get internet time

Dr. Kimberly S. Young has created a questionnaire based on other disorders to assess levels of addiction. It is called the Internet Addict Diagnostic Questionnaire or IADQ. Answering positively to five out of the eight questions may be indicative of an online addiction.

1. Are you preoccupied with using the Internet? Do you think about your previous or future online activity?
2. Do you have the need to be online longer to be satisfied?
3. Have you made repeated but unsuccessful attempts to cut back, stop or control your Internet use?
4. Do you become moody, restless, irritable or depressed when you stop or decrease your Internet use?
5. Is your time spent online longer than what you originally planned?
6. Did your online use negatively affect a significant relationship, education, career or job?
7. Do you conceal the extent of your Internet usage from your therapist, family or others?
8. Does the Internet serve as an escape from problems or relief from a bad mood?⁶

A Distraction to Godly Thinking

- Our minds and hearts are command central...everything in our life is simply a manifestation of what is in our hearts

Proverbs 4:23~ Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 23:7~ For as he thinks within himself, so he is.

- Therefore, believers are repeatedly exhorted in Scripture to use our minds wisely

Matthew 22:37 ~ And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ”

1 Corinthians 15:34~ Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

2 Corinthians 10:5 ~ We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Philippians 4:8 ~ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Colossians 3:2~ Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

1 Peter 1:13~ Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

- Thus, we must recognize the danger that a continual consumption of media poses to godly thinking
- Danger #1 is worldly thinking
- A steady stream of input from social media, the Internet, newsfeeds, etc. can gradually erode godly thinking...it can slowly but steadily blunt the sharp, biblical edges of our thinking
- When the Christian mind succumbs to such a secular drift, the result is that after a while we begin to think more and more like the world and less and less like Christ

⁶https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/internet-addiction-can-change-the-brain-as-dramatically_us_5a10aabce4b023121e0e9372

- Our appetite for growth in Christ and a hungering for His Word is slowly replaced with a contentment to fill our minds with the banal trivialities of this world
- We must understand, as R. Kent Hughes stated, “[W]e must lay down as fundamental to our Christianity this truth: a Christian mind demands conscious negation; a Christian mind is impossible without the discipline of refusal.”⁷
- Danger #2 is shallow thinking
- Processing the content of much of what is found on social media requires little critical thinking...instead of processing information, we tend to simply consume information
- The communication of information through sound bites has resulted largely in a trivialization of meaningful things
- When believers consume themselves with much of what is found on social media, the ability to think deeply about the things of the Lord is muted
- “Christians must guard themselves against becoming theological pancakes. Thanks to the market-driven methodologies of the seeker-sensitive movement, the dumbing down of doctrine has characterized American evangelicalism for decades. In many ways, sites like Twitter and Facebook only exacerbate that problem because they provide a venue in which reductionism and extreme brevity simultaneously coincide with information overload and infinite distraction. But not every theological truth can be adequately summarized in just a phrase or two. And not every debate can be resolved in just one blog article. Many doctrines require extended time and thought to properly process. Mature believers reflect deeply on the things of God and the truths of His Word.”⁸

A Discarding of Precious Time

- As believers, we understand that life is short and, therefore, we must make the most of the time the Lord has given us
- We must be good stewards of the hours and minutes given to us each day, maximizing those moments and redeeming them for the Lord’s glory
- That is not to say that we should never relax or enjoy some down time...even those times are gifts from the Lord (Ecclesiastes)
- Rather, it means that the general tenor of our lives is to use what time the Lord has given us wisely as we understand the brevity of life

Psalm 39:4 ~ “LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am.

Psalm 90:12~ So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

Ephesians 5:15-16 ~ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

James 4:4~ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- Because we desire to utilize every opportunity for useful worship and service to the Lord, we must carefully guard the amount of time spent using social media, gaming, and surfing the internet
- We must be conscientious of the amount of time we actually spend jumping from link to link
- We must remember one day we will stand before Christ to give an account for how we used His resources

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 73.

⁸ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B101110/social-media-and-digital-discernment>

A Disruption in True Fellowship

- True biblical fellowship, whereby believers engage in loving, encouraging, serving, instructing, and admonishing one another, is one of the greatest blessings and privileges of being in the body of Christ
- God has given believers the gift of fellow believers within the church as a means of encouragement and mutual sanctification
- The number of “one-anothers” in Scripture demonstrate the blessings that come from genuine fellowship

Romans 12:10~ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Romans 15:14~ And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

Ephesians 4:2~ with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

Colossians 3:13~ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Hebrews 10:25 ~ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- Despite the belief that social media keeps people more connected, the opposite can actually occur
- Virtual relationships often increase people’s sense of isolation
- Social media has a strange way of luring people into isolation without them noticing it’s even happening
- We are living in a culture that is isolating us away from each other at the speed of light: We stare into screens not faces...we gaze into pixels not people...and we are becoming lonelier than ever before
- “[Social media] often distracts people from existing relationships. Instead of pouring themselves into the real-life friendships they currently have, people now spend hours with pseudo-friends online. This is especially seen within the family, where social networking constantly threatens to invade, bringing a barrage of cultural influence into the private world of family life. In the home, focused training in godliness is essential for the development of spiritually-healthy relationships and biblical worldviews. But instant distraction is only a text-message away.”⁹

A Display for Careless Words

- Scripture repeatedly instructs believers to speak graciously, kindly, in a way that edifies others and warns against the danger of careless words

Proverbs 10:18-19 ~ He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 25:11~ Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

Ephesians 4:29~ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 5:4~ and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Colossians 3:8~ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

Colossians 4:6~ Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt

⁹<https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B101110/social-media-and-digital-discernment>

- Obviously, social media provides a potential platform for numerous careless words to be expressed
- Tweeting about the inane details of life might not be sinful, but if it doesn't build others up spiritually, it might be better left unsaid
- Furthermore, believers must remember that once something is posted online it can be seen by anyone else and becomes a permanent record of the believer's public testimony
- As a result, believers must be cautious about their online presence and remember that Jesus said, "Every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it" (Matt 12:36)

Conclusion

- As believers, we walk a fine line between being in the world but not of it
- On the one hand, much of the technology we utilize is beneficial, enabling us to work more efficiently and effectively...our lives are in many ways more productive because of it
- On the other hand, "we must be wary of technology. Progress is not our god, innovation is not our salvation. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ and follow His Word, even though that puts us on a collision course with modernity. But today's idolatry charms many Christians. Many find themselves subtly distracted and gently allured by the benefits, entertainments, and conveniences technology brings."¹⁰
- Therefore, we must remember the admonition in Scripture to not love the world

1 John 2:15-17 ~ Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

- Some practical considerations:
 1. Cultivate an Element of Suspicion Toward Technological Progress
 2. Establish Boundaries and Fight Diligently to Protect Them
 3. Value Real Relationships Within the Church Over Virtual Ones
 4. Model for Your Children Restraint and Balance in Your Technology Usage
 5. Consider Some Helpful Resources
 - *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* – Tony Reinke
 - *iParent*– Don Pearson
 - *The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family, and the Digital World*– Tim Challies
 - *God's Technology: Training Our Children to Use Technology to God's Glory* – David Murray

¹⁰<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A310/the-trouble-with-technology>