

Digital Technology: Its Use and Abuse

Shaun Willcock

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that... they that buy, [be] as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor.7:29-31).

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph.5:16).

We live in the Digital Age, and we have been told that it is a wonderful thing, changing our lives for the better. But this is only partly true. Although there are certainly many positive aspects, there are also many negative ones, which are very serious and potentially extremely dangerous to our spiritual well-being.

Computers, Tablets, Smartphones: Wasting Time, Discouraging Reading, Destroying Concentration

Computers are certainly extremely useful, and virtually indispensable in the modern world. However, although we may *use* the legitimate things of this world (as the text above says), we are never to *abuse* them. So many Christians, however, abuse these tools. They can be massive time-wasters, and we are to redeem the time; but many are guilty of wasting precious time on them. If the reader is a child of God, but comes home from work and fritters away his evenings playing with his various electronic “toys”, hour after hour and night after night, it is time to stop and take a good, long, hard look at exactly what is happening.

Many Christians used to read much; but it is safe to say that the majority of professing Christians do not read anywhere near as much anymore, or hardly at all. Why is this? They will say, “I don’t have the time.” Oh, but you do, brother or sister: you do! It is not that you lack time, but rather that you are not using it properly. You are wasting it away on other things – including on your laptop or your phone! You come home, and instead of picking up a book containing sound doctrine, or the biography of one of the servants of the Lord of the past, you surf the net, watch movies online, or play mindless, pointless, perhaps even sinful video games. Reading is now neglected in favour of electronic time-wasters.

Furthermore, many believers, who used to have much time for family and friends, now have so little of it. Why? Again, for many it is their slavish dependence on their electronic “toys”. They used to teach their children the Holy Scriptures, and read them a bedtime story; but very few do this anymore. It seems a lifetime ago when families used to sit together in their living rooms, enjoying the quiet evenings; but television destroyed those family times decades ago, and laptops, tablets and phones have made it far worse.

Computers, phones, etc., may certainly be very useful tools; but if we love them inordinately, then they have mastered us, not we them. Misuse and over-use of technology is the problem, not technology itself. The Bible tells us to redeem the time. If used properly and for legitimate purposes, these tools can save time; but if not, they waste it.

There is *so* much more to life than technology and gadgets! The Lord’s people have so much to do, and we should not waste a moment of the precious time the Lord has entrusted to us. *“For what is your*

life? *It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*” (Jas.4:14). “*The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.... So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*” (Psa. 90:10,12). How many believers, when their lives are drawing to a close, will look back and say, “I wish I’d spent more time on my laptop or phone”? When it comes time to die, the fact that they did not spend more time with their “toys” will definitely *not* be one of their regrets!

As for how these things affect the ability to read properly, to concentrate and focus, the following is excerpted from an excellent article entitled *The Dumbest Generation: Tech-Savvy, But Unable to Think*:¹

“Defenders of the electronic society point out that tech-savvy people do read online. They say it’s just a different medium than books and other ‘obsolete’ devices such as newspapers and magazines. Different for sure, but not necessarily better.

“It can be a maze of flashing images designed for visual appeal over substance. Concentrating on one item or article is strongly discouraged. ‘Surfers’ may gaze over headlines on several topics while also multitasking on their iPhones or other devices. The medium allows for a virtually unlimited amount of images and factoids at the expense of depth and focus.

“Writers who once handled magazine assignments and books have to drastically change their style for online audiences. Word counts usually have to be cut to the bone. Facts are pruned to the bare minimum, while creative literary nuances and deep thinking are strongly discouraged.

“So how do authors make up for such emaciated content? Photos and color – the more, the better – and other eye candy take the place of in-depth writing and thought....

“While many books are available via Kindle and online, new technology discourages that kind of reading. Books are meant to be absorbed at a pace that allows for thinking and reflecting on the content. The fidgety style and ever-present special effects found on computers can be incompatible with the quiet and calm mindset needed to enjoy traditional reading.”

Indeed, the inability to focus and concentrate for any length of time on one subject, to read and study it carefully, is all too evident everywhere. One sees the symptoms of it when one tries to hold a decent conversation with people these days. *They simply cannot concentrate; they cannot focus*. They have sound-bite concentration spans. Their minds constantly flip from one subject to another. Their eyes betray their minds: they are never still, flitting from one object to another and taking nothing in. They glaze over when any subject lasts longer than a few minutes, and they are very easily distracted by every little thing. These are the symptoms of a terrible addiction afflicting this generation: they are addicted to TV, surfing the net, phones, scanning rapidly over bright pictures and eye-catching headlines, but never actually stopping to properly take something worthwhile in, *and think about it*.

Others have noted the same dangers. Nicholas Carr, in his book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, stated that reading on the internet fundamentally changes how our brains are used. “Facing a torrent of text, photos, video, music and links to other web pages, combined with incessant interruptions from text messages, e-mails, Facebook updates, Tweets, blogs and RSS feeds, our minds have become used to skimming, browsing and scanning information.... now most of us infrequently read books, long essays, or articles that would help us focus, concentrate and be introspective and contemplative, Carr writes. He says we are becoming more like librarians – able to find information quickly and discern the best nuggets – than scholars who digest and interpret information. That lack of focus hinders our long-term memory, leading many of us to feel distracted, he said.” “What we are losing is a whole other set of mental skills, the ones that require not the shifting of our focus but the maintaining of our focus,” Carr said. ‘Contemplation, introspection, reflection – there is no space or time for those on the Internet.’” “If writers cater to a society that is chronically distracted, they will inevitably eschew writing complex arguments that require sustained attention and instead write in pithy, bite-sized bits of information, Carr predicts.”²

He correctly said people should slow down, turn off the internet, and practise the skills of contemplation, introspection and reflection. “It is pretty clear from the brain science that if you don’t

exercise particular cognitive skills, you are going to lose them,' he said. 'If you are constantly distracted, you are not going to think in the same way that you would think if you paid attention.'"

Christian: use digital technology for legitimate purposes, within reason, and within strictly controlled time limits; then get up, walk away from your gadgets, and go and do something else!

Ask yourself this: am I the master of my laptop or phone? Or has it mastered me?

The Internet

The internet is an amazing thing. It is one of the greatest technological inventions of all time, and Christians are able to make much use of this tool. But *tool* is the key word. It can be an instant worldwide library at your fingertips. It can be so many useful things. But it also contains a world of danger within it!

"The Internet started out with so much promise. Such a powerful tool for bringing people together would change the world – bringing us all closer together. There was little fear about crime or privacy violations. What we didn't realize was how easily this same technology could be turned from good to evil (i.e., weaponized). Whether it's hackers crippling an entire economy by causing major blackouts, scammers stealing the life-savings of the elderly, pornography exploding across the net (just a click away), or the government spying on its own people.... We see the obvious threats, but few of us ever thought social media would develop the power to alter societies, cultures, and entire nations."³

Here are some of the dangers of the internet for believers:

Firstly, it is a threat to the proper use of your time. How easily, and how quickly, it can become all-absorbing, and before you know it you have spent hours of precious time in idle and pointless screen-slavery.

Secondly, it is a place of great temptation. Well over half the world's internet usage is for accessing pornography. The devastating effects of porn are wreaking havoc across all societies.

And the porn industry also poses a terrible *physical* danger to children and to women. "Social media is destroying [we would say "has destroyed"] the way men think about women",⁴ because of the readily-available porn sites online. Unlimited porn is available at a click. The massive pornography industry online has resulted in a huge increase in rape and murder of women and girls. Huge numbers of teenagers have posted or sent sexually suggestive or nude pictures of themselves to others, which are then shared online, commented on, photoshopped, and gathered by sexual predators who troll the web for this very purpose. They target youngsters and are very successful at it.

"The US Department of State estimates that 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked each year in the US. Of these, 75% were at one point sold online. Here's how it happens. Traffickers first target their victims using chat rooms.... First, they view profiles and choose their victims. Then they make contact, starting by complimenting them or building false relationships to gain trust. They may offer them opportunities that sound better than their current situation. But here's the amazing reality: Once the trafficker secures trust, the victim is often trafficked within 24 hours. They move fast."⁵

Thirdly, it is riddled with false doctrine and false religion. It seems as if it should be unnecessary to even say this, but sadly it is not: not everything that is called "Christian" on the net is truly Christian. Not every website is sound. Not every "fact" is truly a fact. It is astounding how gullible people are. "I read it in the papers, or I saw it on TV, so it must be true" has now become "I read it online, so it must be true." But anyone with a computer is able to create a website! They do not have to know what they are writing about. They can make lies sound like truth. Although electronic publishing has been a tremendous boon to Christians as they seek to take the Gospel to the world, the same marvel which is such a blessing to them also allows everyone else to publish whatever they like as well. As a result the internet is flooded with religious rubbish.

Even in the pre-internet days, people had to exercise discernment when going to a public library and researching anything, for not all books are created equal. But it seems that when it comes to what is available online, so many people – even those professing to be Christians – show absolutely no discernment whatsoever.

Fourthly, another great danger of the internet is that it can so easily cause an information overload. The internet age is also the information overload age. There is just so much information flowing into people's heads every single day, and this is *not* a good thing. It exhausts the brain, and unfits us for more important things. So many people are mentally exhausted, going through each day barely half alive; and a major cause of this is that their brains never rest. They are constantly taking in information, making their heads swim.

Everywhere one looks, one sees people bent over their tablets or phones: in restaurants, as they walk down the street, on the beach, everywhere. And this is true of many believers as well, for they allow themselves to be swept along with the tide. This affects the believer's prayers, for even if he is faithful in setting aside time each day for private prayer, all too often his mind is swimming with information overload. It also cuts into his time of relaxation with family and friends.

And the technology is moving relentlessly towards everyone being even more "connected" than ever before. But such technology will make people *less* intelligent, not more so; and in proportion to how much more connected they will be, they will be far more *disconnected* from the real world – zombies living in their "virtual reality", their brains and senses completely overloaded with information and images. It is a constant bombardment. The fact is, our connected world is destroying us.

In his book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr pointed out that all this technology renders people less capable of deep thinking. He found this to be so by personal experience, as he was trying to do the research for his book: he was constantly being distracted because he was so "connected". "So, I abandoned my Facebook and Twitter accounts and throttled back on email, so I was only checking a couple of times a day, rather than every 45 seconds," he said. "I found those types of things really did make a difference."⁶ He said that at first he felt "befuddled" by his sudden lack of online connection, but that after a couple of weeks he was able to stay focused on one task for a sustained period of time. Millions of others, if they were honest, could testify to that feeling of befuddlement when not "connected". As explained in *Digital Cocaine*,⁷ a DVD about these matters, our electronic devices are addictive, just like a drug. Dopamine is released in the brain by their use. "Digital dementia" is an induced form of Alzheimer's in children: they begin to forget the little things, and as time goes by their ability to retain information deteriorates.

Fifthly, the internet is being used on a massive scale to terrorise people via what is called shaming. Jon Ronson wrote a book entitled *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, in which he said: "These are normal people who made a mistake – only to see it taken public on the Internet.... Once their transgression is revealed, collective outrage circles with a force of a hurricane, and the next thing they know they're being torn apart by an angry mob, jeered at, demonized, and sometimes even fired from their job. *A great renaissance of public shaming is sweeping our land.*" "We are mercilessly finding people's faults. We are defining the boundaries of normality by ruining the lives of those outside it. We are using shame as a form of social control."⁸ How true these words are: "The Internet has given people a boldness they never would have had in public."⁹ In days gone by, bullies were usually big, tough, strong boys or men – cowards at heart, but bullies because of their size and strength – but now a bully can be anyone online, including weak, timid people who would never dare to bully someone face to face, but are as bold as lions when it comes to sitting behind their keyboards. "The mob rule of yesteryear has manifested itself online."¹⁰

Christian: you simply *do not* have to be connected every minute of every hour of the day! You should not even want to be. There is so much more to life than this! Are you master of your internet

usage – or has it mastered you? Is it a tool, or is it a tyrant? Are you so busy “surfing the net” that you haven’t noticed you’re actually a *serf* of the net?

Smartphones

Today’s phones are amazing things, and they are becoming “smarter” all the time. But as with everything, their use must be controlled within proper limits. They can waste so much money and so much time. Most people do not control their phones – their phones control them. People are *slaves* to their phones.

You *do not* have to be in touch 24 hours a day! It is tragic to see people joined at the palm to their phones, eyes always downcast, gazing at their little hand-held electronic handcuffs. Is this what people have been reduced to – their lives controlled by their phones, always waiting for the next text message, so devoted to inane comments, etc., that they virtually have no real lives of their own anymore? Watch people in the street, in shops, even in their own homes with their families around them: conversation is constantly interrupted, people are endlessly tapping away on their phones. Much of the time people are only half-listening when someone is talking face to face with them; they always have their ears and hands attuned to that buzz or tune from their phones. Even with parents, children or friends *in the same room* with them, they still prefer to “communicate” with someone else, far away, via their phones. What strange addiction is this, that people are more concerned with what someone has to say to them from across the city or country, than what a person in the same room may be saying to them?

Proper conversation is a lost art today. People have become dumbed-down automatons, always wanting to see what some “friend” has tweeted or whether they have been “liked” or who has sent them yet another “selfie”. How utterly sad!

Just how addictive are smartphones, actually? Aza Raskin of the Centre for Humane Technology put it like this: “Behind every screen on your phone, there are literally a thousand engineers to try to make it maximally addictive, it’s as if they’re sprinkling behavioural cocaine all over your interface.”¹¹

“SecurEnvoy polled people in the United Kingdom and found that 66% of them have some form of nomophobia (an acronym for ‘*NO Mobile PHOne phoBIA*’) – in other words, a fear of not having a phone at hand. What’s astounding is that 41% of the participants admitted that they have two or more phones just to make sure they stay connected.”¹²

According to the book, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, by Tony Reinke, people are distracted and ignore others, especially those closest to them. They check their smartphone 85,000 times a year, or once every 4.3 minutes.¹³

“This addiction is so powerful that simply having a phone sitting next to a heavy user can affect their working memory and problem-solving skills. A study published... in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* found that a smartphone demands its user’s attention even when the person isn’t using it. In fact, the phone can be turned off and be out of sight in a briefcase, backpack, or purse, and it still affects the person’s brain. Adrian Ward, an author of the study and a psychologist [some psychologists may do good research just like other people, although psychology itself is a false science¹⁴] who researches consumer decision-making at the University of Texas at Austin, shows just how powerful this addiction is.

“Ward said, ‘We have limited attentional resources, and we use some of them to point the rest of those resources in the right direction. Usually different things are important in different contexts, but some things – like your name – have a really privileged status. This idea with a smartphone is that it’s similarly relevant all of the time, and it gets this privileged attentional space. That’s not the default for other things. In a situation where you’re doing something other than, say, using your name, there’s a pretty good chance that whatever your phone represents is more likely to be relevant to you than whatever else is going on.’

“Simply stated, for addicted people, their phone is as intimate to them as their own name. It’s become part of their identity. And it’s as if the phone is calling out their name at all times.”¹⁵

Every Christian should honestly ask himself: am I addicted to my phone? And if so, why? What *real* value does it add to my life? Use it, but do not abuse it. Control it, or it will control you.

And remember: most addicts do not even realise they are addicts!

Facebook/Meta

Facebook, or Meta as it was renamed, is utterly ubiquitous. Is it sinful to be on Facebook? No – not in and of itself. If Christians may use the internet, they may make use of Facebook as well. But there *are* great dangers, which every child of God who elects to use it needs to be well aware of, and to guard against.

First: as with the internet in general, the use of Facebook becomes sinful when it wastes time. Again, remember the Scripture: “redeeming the time”. Life on this earth is so short, and there is so much to do that really matters:

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,

Only what's done for Christ will last.

Believers must carefully use their time, not frit it away on frivolous things. There is a time and a place for legitimate relaxation, but this must be kept within reasonable bounds.

Leah Pearlman, a former Facebook boss who actually helped to create the “Like” button, said in 2018 that she became addicted to the sense of “validation” provided by Facebook. Her happiness began to depend on receiving “likes” and notifications. Speaking on BBC Panorama’s *Smartphones: The Dark Side*, she said, “I noticed I’d post something I used to post, and the like count would be way lower than it used to. Suddenly I saw uh-oh, I’m kind of addicted to the feedback. That’s when I started to realise I wasn’t sure that having somebody else in control was healthy.” She attempted to quit Facebook, but found it was very difficult to do so. She warned teenagers to get off social media. Norman Lamb, chairman of the Science and Technology committee which was conducting an inquiry in the UK into social media, said, “Leah Pearlman’s comments should be taken very seriously.”¹⁶

For many, Facebook consumes their time. It is often the first thing they check in the mornings, the last thing at night, and they go into it many times in the day as well – and for what? To see who has said what, who has made some inane comment about nothing of value, who has contacted them, or who has “liked” their pictures or statements. This is so trivial, brethren! How many professing Christians who spend so much time in trivial pursuits on Facebook ever read a solid doctrinal book?

Second: it can so easily become a substitute for writing properly to family and friends, and even a substitute for friendships themselves. When someone “likes” you on Facebook, is this real friendship? Those same people may not even like you in person! People who were not your friends in the past become your Facebook “friends”. But an online “friend” who was not your friend in the real world and is not your friend now, is not your friend online either! If they do not like you face to face, why do you think they “like” you on Facebook? Many of them become your Facebook “friends” simply because they are nosy and want to poke around in your personal life and see who you are “friends” with and what you are doing. *These people are not friends.* They are the fake friends of Facebook, and they are not worth having. Truly, if Facebook is what “friendship” has been reduced to, then the word has no meaning anymore.

As for finding long-lost friends via Facebook: it is true that one may be able to track them down in this way. But in many cases, the reason you were out of touch with most of those you may have now accepted as “friends” on Facebook is because they were no longer friends in real life! So has your life really been enriched by re-establishing contact with them again?

Here is a humorous look at the notion of Facebook “friends”, which shows up this folly so well:

“For those of my generation,” writes a senior citizen, “who do not, and cannot, comprehend why Facebook exists, I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles. Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment and what I have done the night before, what I will do later and with whom. I give these strangers photographs of my family, my dog and of me gardening, pottering around in my garage,

standing in front of landmarks, driving around town, having lunch and doing what anybody and everybody does every single day. I also listen to their conversations, give them a “thumbs-up” and tell them I ‘like’ them. And it works just like Facebook. I already have three people following me: two policemen and a private investigator.”

Facebook has also made people too lazy to write properly to a *real* friend, or even to call them for a proper conversation. Once upon a time friends wrote lengthy letters to each other. Then came email, and friends made use of this tool to keep in touch, as they had previously done with letters. True friends still do so, for in an email one is able to say so much, and with the added benefit of sending and receiving almost instantly. But when Facebook arrived on the scene, so many people simply became “one-line friends”, “conversing” (if such it may be called) in short sentences of no depth. It created a culture of shallow, “Hello, how are you”-type messages, no better than the kind of hurried exchange between two people passing in a street. People have become so shallow, and real, deep friendships have suffered.

Facebook may be compared with constantly being in the company of a group of people: if you only ever have conversations in a group, then by its very nature that group is only going to encourage a very shallow, flippant kind of “friendship”. It is no substitute for real, in-depth conversation with people who are truly close to you. This is what Facebook “friends” are, for the most part. It is an online group activity that is no substitute for closer relationships with real brethren and friends.

Third: Facebook is frequently nothing but a high-tech equivalent of the “peeping tom”. Think about it. Why does anyone *care* what so-and-so had for breakfast, or what they are eating in which restaurant at any given moment, or what they are wearing? And if someone has a relationship problem with someone else, why do they even feel the need to share such facts publicly with all their Facebook “friends”? Has life become so shallow? If this is not trivial, what is? But Facebook is full of rubbish like this. Such information is utterly irrelevant. It adds nothing to one’s life, it is meaningless, it is drivel, and it verges on voyeurism.

Fourth: Facebook is a massive surveillance tool for governments; a giant global spy system. Think about the Roman Catholic confessional: priests tell their duped followers that the confessional is private, and that what is spoken into the ear of the priest will never be repeated by him to anyone. But for centuries Rome’s confessional has been a worldwide, sinister information-gathering system, the greatest intelligence-gathering network on earth! The private details of unsuspecting Roman Catholics have found their way into the Vatican via this iniquitous data-collecting system, and this information has so often been used to blackmail people. *And this is precisely what Facebook is as well.*

It would be naive in the extreme to assume that Facebook’s privacy statements are to be trusted. When it was revealed that Facebook tracked and stored the internet browsing of its hundreds of millions of users even after they had logged off the Facebook site, Facebook claimed to fix the issue; but can the social media giant *ever* be trusted?¹⁷

Likewise, it would be naive in the extreme to assume that intelligence agencies have not harnessed the massive potential value of Facebook for their own sinister purposes. Years ago the Associated Press revealed that the CIA had an entire centre, called the Open Source Center, dedicated to monitoring Facebook and Twitter. It was established in 2005 by the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The CIA claimed it was only monitoring foreign activity, but there was no reason whatsoever to trust them on this.

If anyone ever had any doubt about the involvement of the U.S. government, at least, in Facebook’s activities, the 2020 election which brought in the crooked Joe Biden should have been the clincher for all right-thinking people. Various U.S. government agencies were conclusively shown to have used Facebook to promote a Biden victory and to demonise Donald Trump. Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg *admitted* to seeking to influence the election for Biden by suppressing damaging information – and he did this *at the “request” of the FBI*.¹⁸ He admitted to acting to suppress true and accurate information about the Biden family’s extremely shady international business doings.¹⁹ This suppression hurt the Trump presidential campaign and greatly aided Biden’s.

In 2022, Facebook was caught spying on the private messages of those who expressed anti-government or anti-authority sentiments, or who questioned the 2020 election which saw Trump removed and Biden brought in – and then reported them to the FBI. “‘Under the FBI collaboration operation, somebody at Facebook red-flagged these supposedly subversive private messages over the past 19 months and transmitted them in redacted form to the domestic terrorism operational unit at FBI headquarters in Washington, DC, without a subpoena,” said Miranda Devine of the *New York Post*. A source inside the Department of Justice told her, “It was done outside the legal process and without probable cause. Facebook provides the FBI with private conversations which are protected by the First Amendment without any subpoena.” All the targets were conservatives. The FBI admitted that it maintained “relationships” with private companies, including social media giants.²⁰

Imagine if you had a surveillance device of some sort mounted on your living room wall, whereby a government agency was able to spy on you and whatever went on in your house 24/7. George Orwell, as far back as 1949, wrote of just such a device eventually being created, in his book, *1984*. Well, it is here! It is not a monitor on your living room wall, but it amounts to the same thing. Facebook is a sophisticated surveillance tool in the hands of globalists. It is destroying what little privacy is left in the lives of millions. It has become the world’s most comprehensive database about people, their relationships, addresses, locations, and communications. And all this information is available to government intelligence agencies.

If you are prepared to live with this kind of surveillance or potential surveillance, that is your choice, and again, you are not sinning merely by having a Facebook site. Many Christians use it for evangelising, and for many businesses it can be very helpful. But every believer should be well aware of the dangers, and take reasonable and sensible steps to protect himself if he chooses to make use of this medium.

Children, Computers and Phones

Christian parents: are your children spending hours surfing the net? You are exposing them to great danger! Have you given them their own laptops, tablets, phones, etc., and left them to use these things as they like, whenever they like? Then you have failed in your sacred parental duty! As shown above, the internet is a very useful tool, if carefully controlled; but it can be a deadly trap as well. At their very fingertips is a world of wickedness, immorality, filth and false doctrine, such as previous generations never had access to when they were children. Would you drop your children off at a nightclub, a brothel or a false “church”? No good parent would think of doing such a thing. Why, then, do you drop an electronic device into their hands instead, and allow them to use it as they please?

Children should only be allowed to use the internet under *very strict parental supervision*, in a public part of the house where they can be monitored, not behind the closed door of their bedroom; and even then they should only use it for a very limited period of time each day, and for a clearly defined and useful purpose.

As for phones, these can provide instant access to all kinds of immorality, to sexual predators – to a thousand and one dangers. What are you *thinking*, parents? Your children do not need, and should never have, unrestricted, unsupervised access to phones. Otherwise you, by your negligence and foolishness, have placed a world of iniquity in your own child’s hands.

There is simply no need for a pre-pubescent child to even have his own phone, except for emergencies when separated from his parents for a time.

In 2019 Common Sense Media in the United States produced a survey of media use among children aged 8 to 18. The results of the survey were horrifying:²¹

Almost 1 in 5 eight-year-old children had their own smartphone;
53% of children by the age of 11 had their own smartphone, and 70% by the age of 12;
Teenagers averaged 7 hours a day on their screens; “tweens” averaged 5 hours a day.

Furthermore, an ever-increasing number of adolescents were suffering from anxiety, depression and an inability to focus. And what compounded this tragedy was that these adolescents were being sent to psychologists and psychiatrists – the very worst possible “solution”, for psychology is a devilish deception.²²

Occasionally, of course, a psychologist discerns the dangers, for all kinds of people, including psychologists, may at times carry out proper research into various issues. The *research* may be sound, but the *solutions* proposed by psychologists are the problem. Dr Jean Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University in California, USA, is one who has done the research. In her book, *IGen*, she examined why “super-connected kids” were “less happy and completely unprepared for adulthood.” “IGen” is the name which is applied to the first generation of children to spend their entire adolescence with a smartphone, i.e. the generation born from 1995 onwards. Twenge said, “That has had ripple effects upon their behavior, their attitudes.... Teens are spending a lot less time hanging out with their friends in person... That trend has been going on for a while, but it really fell off a cliff around 2010-11, right when smart phones became very common.... Teens who spend more time on phones are more likely to be unhappy, lonely, and have more risk factors for suicide.” She recommended limiting cellphone usage for young people to an hour a day, or less.²³

Astoundingly, huge numbers of parents are naively convinced that their own children can “handle” the use of screen time and make sensible choices, limiting their own use of phones, etc. Not so! Children need parental guidance, not freedom; they need boundaries to be set for them, as they are too young and mentally and emotionally unfit to make such choices themselves.

And even apart from these dangers, another major problem with phones is that your children learn to be chatterboxes, gossipers, spending more time texting their friends than they spend communicating with their own parents. If you are old enough to remember the pre-internet, pre-mobile phone days, think back to your own childhood. Remember how your parents would never allow you to sit and gab on the phone to your friends for hours? They were right! You were wasting time. But now we live in an age where self-discipline and self-control have gone out the window. An age when parents, wiser in their own eyes than the generations before them, see nothing wrong with letting their children fritter away precious time. It is just another indication of a society that has lost its moorings, imposes no limits or rules on children, teaches no self-control, and is raising spoiled, self-centred, know-it-all, arrogant, “I want it all and I want it now” young people.

And are your children endlessly playing video games? A simple question for you: *why*? What possible purpose do they serve? They waste time. They cause their brains to atrophy. There was a time when kids played on their bikes outdoors, or if indoors they played sensible and decent games, or were given chores around the house. No longer! Now they sit like junkies, playing mindless video games. Many of them *are* digital junkies, slothful layabouts with a concentration-span of no more than a few seconds at most. And although there may be a *few* decent video games, many others are introducing children to things with which their young minds should never be filled. We must not mince words on these things: you as a parent are failing your children, and you are disobeying the Lord you profess to love and serve.

But of course, if the *parents* are not setting the example, the children will quickly discern what hypocrites they are!

Children: Sadly Dumber, Not Smarter

Please, parents: let’s not hear this nonsense about today’s children being smarter than previous generations. They are not. The digital age has had quite the opposite effect on children, in fact. “The constant use of smartphones (in addition to reducing the constant user’s intellectual capacity) is also dramatically reducing young people’s social interaction/communications skills. Indeed, their communications skills are cratering. Many of those addicted to their gadgets can barely carry on an

intelligent conversation with an adult – and this is particularly true of millions of millennials.... In short, a whole generation is being dumbed down by their addiction to cell phones and social media.”²⁴

Mark Bauerlein, an English professor, wrote *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*. This title could just have correctly stated that it stupefies young people the world over, not just in America. Consider the following, taken from *The McAlvany Intelligence Advisor*, March 2010, which summarises some of the points in Bauerlein’s book:²⁵

“One of the main points of *The Dumbest Generation* is how skill and familiarity with computers, text messaging, blogging, and other devices are often confused with wisdom and intelligence. Equating Twittering skills with brainpower goes beyond comparing apples and oranges. Even those who are a part of the electronic generation sometimes recognize their shortcomings in basic skills.

“A 20-something poster on *USA Today’s* Generation Next blog summed up the problem. He wrote, ‘*Today’s young people don’t suffer from illiteracy; they just suffer from e-literacy. We can’t spell and we don’t know synonyms because there’s less need to know. What smart person would spend hours learning words that can be accessed at the click of a button? Spellcheck can spell. Shift + F7 produces synonyms. What is wrong with relying on something that is perfectly reliable?*’...

“So what happens to the person who is without their laptop while it is being repaired, or what are the results if they need to handle something that involves other skills? If they never learned to spell or use the language with any depth, those weaknesses will surely be exposed at crucial times. Face-to-face meetings can be especially embarrassing for the electronic whiz kid with gaping deficiencies in other areas (such as social skills; thinking on their feet; or making quick, well thought-out decisions).”

“Despite the information explosion of recent years, ‘*young Americans of today are no more learned or skillful than their predecessors, no more knowledgeable, fluent, up-to-date, or inquisitive, except in the materials of youth culture,*’ Bauerlein observed. ‘They don’t know more history or civics, economics or science, literature or current events. They read less on their own, both books and newspapers’...

“So what do young techies have to show for all their hours online? As Bauerlein points out, modern electronics allow this generation to disengage from and avoid contact with their parents and other elders.

“Endless hours of Facebook and Twittering only serve to feed a self-centred obsession with ever-changing youth culture and socializing. Time that could be spent accessing the vast amount of true knowledge online is used instead for endless and mindless chats (often filled with poor spelling, incorrect grammar, and profanity).”

What has been called “digital dementia” in children is a real danger. Children, addicted to their digital devices, start to forget the little things. And as time goes by their ability to retain information actually deteriorates. It can be described as an induced form of Alzheimer’s in children. Furthermore, children now get very bored, very quickly, because they are used to being constantly “entertained” and amused with instant digital stuff. They get bored applying their brains to mathematics or history or biology, so they constantly text their friends, or see who has “liked” them or some picture of themselves, etc.²⁶ They are *easily* distracted, because they are *constantly* distracted.

No, the digital-age generation is not smarter than previous ones. The very opposite is in fact the case. The following is reproduced from the same issue of *The McAlvany Intelligence Advisor*, as this perfectly summarises the fact that the digital-savvy generation is no smarter than earlier ones, and in fact is even less smart than they were. It is entitled *Who’s the Dummy?* Keep in mind that it was written in 2010. It is excellent:

“The media and education establishment is known for frequently proclaiming how the current generation of young adults is ‘the best and brightest’ to ever emerge. Does the hype from this smug mutual admiration society stand up to a comparison across the decades? Where do today’s under-30s stand when it comes to practical skills and the ability to deal with adversity?

“Let’s take a pair of 23-year olds from different decades. Jason is a recent college graduate, while Vernon lives in rural Nebraska circa 1931. A year-and-a-half of high school was sufficient for Vernon

to qualify as the most educated member of his family.

“Since his formal schooling is so much less than Jason’s, many would say the farm kid has already lost the contest. But this game is still in the first inning.

“Spending time in school and getting educated aren’t always the same thing. Vern’s training in a one-room schoolhouse with a library that could be measured in dozens of volumes might have provided him with a reading comprehension level that equals or even surpasses Jason’s.

“We’re not saying that Vernon is a genius. He’s a pretty average product of his times and geographic location. That means he can work 12-hour days without whining, and knows how to raise cash crops as well as a large garden along with tending and butchering livestock.

“Vernon can also repair most things from putting up fences to doing some work on the family’s 1922 Ford Model T. Jason’s skills lean heavily towards video games and creating the occasional short film for YouTube. Although he is in decent enough physical condition, Jason would quickly wilt if he had to toss hay bales or shovel manure like Vernon does on a regular basis.

“Speaking of work, Vernon can go for weeks and months and not expect a compliment. Jason’s fragile ego (largely a product of the times) demands constant stroking. Who is better equipped to deal with real life?

“Vern lives on little and does so without complaint. He truly appreciates any small gift or modest financial bonus. Jason can’t go more than a day or two without spending money (sometimes earned by his parents) on overpriced clothes, \$4 lattes, and the latest techno-gadget. This jaded young man has a narcissistic sense of entitlement that is dangerous for someone who is still unemployed after finishing school with nearly \$20,000 in student loans and credit card debts.

“Married for less than a year, Vernon and his wife Ida are expecting their first child. In his spare time, Vern is making the baby’s cradle and some other simple, sturdy furniture. Aside from being able to design a flashy-looking web site, Jason’s practical skills are all but non-existent.

“We’ll give Jason the clear edge on sophistication and worldliness. In addition to his dexterity with modern electronics, Jason has rubbed shoulders with people from dozens of different cultures, and he has traveled to Europe and Mexico.

“Vernon has ventured no farther than 100 miles from his home, and that was for a short honeymoon in Omaha. His contact with ‘outsiders’ has been limited to the well-dressed salesman from St. Louis who passed through town and the hobo who did a day’s work on the farm.

“The current economic slump combined with the mass exportation of tech jobs to India has crushed Jason’s hopes of finding work in his chosen field. He picks up some sporadic freelance assignments, but Jason’s ego and inability to understand the times have prevented him from considering other options. He refuses to seek low-wage labor as a way to make an honest dollar until something better opens up, and his indulgent parents refuse to put any pressure on their only child.

“With two brothers and three sisters in his family, Vernon knows that Mom and Dad can’t and won’t support him. He helps out on the farm and squeezes in other jobs as they can be found during the Great Depression. His older brother Chester – a seventh-grade dropout – sometimes has carpentry work for Vern.

“Despite his limited schooling, Chester can figure out and bid on jobs with nothing more than his brain, a tape measure, a pencil, and a piece of paper. Where would 21st-Century college grad Jason be without a calculator?

“Meat was a precious commodity in the ‘dirty thirties,’ and Vernon can take three bullets and his single-shot Stevens .22 rifle and bring home an equal number of squirrels or rabbits. Sometimes a sitting pheasant also ends up on the dinner table. The gun is Vernon’s prized possession.

“Jason has been conditioned and brainwashed to view gun ownership negatively. That doesn’t prevent him from spending numerous hours shooting hordes of zombies, ninjas, mutants, and assorted other make-believe villains on video games that are long on fantasy and have absolutely nothing to do with the reality of firearms usage.

“If you needed help or had to hire a reliable worker, would the ‘educated’ modern techie or the rural high school dropout be your choice? In a time of economic decline and instability, the practical mindset and skills of the past could easily trump a knowledge of the latest gadgets and electronic toys.”

We certainly need techies in this modern age. Computers are very useful, and techies are essential. But the point of the article above is clear: computer skills are only one set of skills, and do not make a young person smarter than either those who have other skills instead, or those of past generations who knew nothing about computers but a whole lot about the real world.

Amusing Ourselves to Death

In his excellent book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, which explores “the corrosive effects of electronic media on a democratic society”, Neil Postman compared the dark and chilling works of George Orwell’s *1984* with Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. He wrote:

“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.... As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny ‘failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.’ In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.”²⁷

Postman declared that his book was about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right. In truth, *both* men correctly foresaw certain things happening in the future, so that aspects of both their works have come to pass, or are in the process of doing so. Their fears have been realised. In some parts of the world Orwell’s nightmare vision predominates, in others Huxley’s does; in many a combination of the two is at work. These were not Christian men, but they were far-sighted enough to see what was coming, and to warn about it. Huxley was chillingly correct in believing that the day would come when people would adore their technologies to the point where they could no longer think critically for themselves, having no desire to read books, much preferring to sit passively in front of their TVs or computers, consumed with trivia, distracted from reality. That day has come! This accurately describes the vast majority of people in the West today.

Conclusion

As Christians, we may certainly make use of computers, the internet, smartphones, and other instruments of the high-tech revolution. They can be very useful, when used wisely. But wisdom in using them is greatly lacking amongst most people, including professing Christians. These things have their place, but the believer needs to be very careful, and greatly limit their use.

Let the Lord’s people obey the Scripture in 1 Cor.7:29-31: using, but not abusing, the legitimate things of the world! Keep all things in proper balance and perspective, redeem the time, and let nothing encroach on, and thereby take away from, the most important things: daily private prayer and Bible study, family worship, the reading of sound Christian literature, and time spent in fellowship with the saints and in the service of the Lord.

Shaun Willcock is a minister, author and researcher. He runs Bible Based Ministries. This pamphlet was first published in 2003, and revised and updated in 2014, 2017 and 2022, to keep up with changes in digital technology. For other pamphlets (which may be downloaded and printed), as well as details about his books, audio messages, articles, etc., please visit the Bible Based Ministries website; or write to the address below. If you would like to be on Bible Based Ministries' email list, please send your details.

Bible Based Ministries

info@biblebasedministries.co.uk

www.biblebasedministries.co.uk

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ENDNOTES:

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