

“Technology Rules!”
May 24, 2009 * Genesis 11:1-9

I. *An unthinking acceptance of technology is probably not wise. Who have given us warnings about its dangers?*

II. *Where do we see God encouraging us to develop technology?*

A. *Genesis 1:27-28*

B. *Genesis 2:15-17, 19*

C. *Genesis 4:20-22*

III. *Where do we see God warning us about the dangers of technology?*

A. *Genesis 2:16-17*

B. *What was the error of the builders of Babel?*

The Impact of Technology On Us
based on the book “Flickering Pixels” by Shane Hipps

IV. *“The medium is the message.”*

A. *What are examples of ‘mediums’?*

B. *What are examples of mediums that God used?*

V. *How do the two sides of our brains work?*

A. *The left side:*

B. *The right side:*

C. *What was worship like in the Middle Ages when people couldn’t read?*

D. *How did worship change when the print age dawned?*

VI. *How Does Technology Impact Us?*

A. *The impact of television on creativity & imagination*

B. *The impact of the Internet on community*

C. *The impact of the Internet on knowledge vs. wisdom*

D. *The impact of digital technology on family life*

VII. *How Do We Respond To These Challenges?*

“Technology Rules!”
May 24, 2009 * Genesis 11:1-9

I. *An unthinking acceptance of technology is probably not wise. Who have given us warnings about its dangers?*

There are groups like the Amish who passionately resist the advancement of technology, and see it as a threat to the community they experience together, and to their very lives of faith. Without taking such extreme steps, maybe we ought to be aware of how technology negatively affects our experience of community, and of God. And if we won't listen to them, there are plenty of other warnings all around us in the world of popular culture. The two most popular movies out today give differing views of technology. We have “Star Trek” with its optimistic, positive message of using technology to go where no one has gone before. And we have the fourth installment of the Terminator series with a very different worldview and message. Be careful what you ask for. Maybe the technology that you create will turn around and enslave you, or wipe you out altogether.

II. *Where do we see God encouraging us to develop technology?*

A. *Genesis 1:27-28*

B. *Genesis 2:15-17, 19*

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III. *Where do we see God warning us about the dangers of technology?*

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B. *What was the error of the builders of Babel?*

If you read the story wrongly, you might conclude that God is against us developing technology. But that's not it at all. He's against us developing technology as an idol, as a replacement for him. “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we might make a name for ourselves,” the builders of Babel boast, ancestors interestingly enough of Babylon,

which later on in Scripture becomes a symbol of humanistic, satanic resistance to God's rule. God comes down and destroys their tower, he turns back the clock on them for awhile. He knows the thirst for technology is in us because he put it there. “The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.’ God is paying us the highest of compliments there. But when the thirst for technology is combined with a godless heart that refuses to accept any moral boundaries, that says, ‘There's no right or wrong, and if there is, then we'll make it up!’ that's one dangerous cocktail. The tower of Babel is actually God protecting us, for a time, from ourselves.

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IV. *“The medium is the message.”*

A. *What are examples of ‘mediums’?*

A newspaper is a medium which brings us the message of the news. A radio is a medium which brings us the message of sports, or talk, or entertainment. TV is a medium. The Internet. Cell phones.

B. *What are examples of mediums that God used?*

To communicate to Moses God used a burning bush. He used stone tablets. He used a talking donkey. He used prophets. A voice from heaven. And God's ultimate medium to speak to us: a baby in a manger.

V. *How do the two sides of our brains work?*

A. *The left side:*

The left-side is the logical side, the side that reasons, categorizes, can think abstractly. It is the side that flourishes through the medium of the printed page.

B. *The right side:*

Then there is the right side of our brains which specializes in perception, intuition, wholistic thinking. It is the side that

flourishes when exposed to images, pictures, and is especially activated by the digital media of the Internet.

C. What was worship like in the Middle Ages when people couldn't read?

Sermons were shorter, most churches had no pews or chairs for sitting, the worship service centered around the serving of the Mass, the Lord's Supper, and when you walked into the church what did you see above and around you usually? Stained glass windows telling the stories of the Bible and especially of Jesus. The writings of the apostle Paul were unpopular and unknown.

D. How did worship change when the print age dawned?

It was because of the medium of print that Martin Luther was able to rapidly spread his ideas to the masses, and the Reformation was born. But with it came a dramatic change in the way people related to God. As people learned to read, and then started reading, the left-brain approach to faith kicked in. Reason, logic, linear arguments, abstract thinking became doable. Sermons grew longer. Pews appeared in sanctuaries. And notice the layout of pews. Linear, logical, straight rows, reflecting the new way in which people were thinking about their faith. And the faith was not being communicated now through pictures and through the bread and wine primarily, but through words and preaching. The pulpit came front and center. The famous American preacher Jonathan Edward drew great crowds to hear sermons with titles like: "A Preservative Against Unsettled Notions, and want of Principles, in regard to Righteousness and Christian Perfection." The medium is the message. We shape technology, then technology shapes us.

VI. How Does Technology Impact Us?

A. The impact of television on creativity & imagination

"Believe it or not, the flickering mosaic of pixilated light repatterns neural pathways in the brain. These new pathways are simply opposed to the pathways required for reading, writing and sustained concentration. The television image is extraordinarily stimulating to the brain...like sugar. The televised brain candy we consume doesn't develop – or even require – any mental capacity.

Reading, on the other hand, is brain protein – it demands concentration and sustained neural energy. This practice is also generative. Powerful capacities are created which are not naturally developed by the brain, resulting in ever-more nuanced skills of discernment, logic and reasoning. The underrated virtue of patience is also developed by reading, since it requires one to be seated, focused and disciplined for extended periods of time. While television also invites long periods of focused time, it encourages a catatonic state rather than an engaged one...In a very real way, image culture is eroding and undermining imaginative creativity. Imagination is extremely important to our functioning as healthy, creative people. This goes way beyond the creation of good art of entertainment – our imaginations are what help us change the world. A weakened imagination means it will be increasingly hard for us to solve the problems that confront us on a daily basis. Our minds become lethargic and passive....This malaise even affects what we might call spiritual imagination. This is the kind of daring imagination that helps us expand our experience and understanding of God, the kind of imagination that allows us to enact God's compassion in a broken world."

Also: Protestant Christianity is a by-product of a single medium – the printed Bible. But our culture has a shrinking preference – and even aptitude – for reading books, especially complex ones. And the Bible is an extraordinarily demanding library of books. Bulging left-brain muscles are an essential tool for understanding the Bible, but now our left-brains are becoming like old uncle Jerry after Thanksgiving dinner, nodding off.

B. The impact of the Internet on community

The Internet has a natural bias toward exhibitionism and thus the erosion of real intimacy. Paradoxically, it created a kind of illusion of intimacy with people we've never met. Disembodied digital acquaintances (ironically called 'friends') create 'anonymous intimacy'.

"In a virtual community, our contacts involve very little real risk and demand even less of us personally. Vulnerability is optional. A community that promises freedom from rejection and makes

authentic emotional investment optional can be extremely appealing, remarkably efficient and a lot more convenient. It's like cotton candy though. It goes down easy, but doesn't provide much sustainable nutrition yet spoils our appetite. We no longer feel the need to participate in authentic community which involves high degrees of intimacy, permanence, and proximity. Not opposed to cotton candy. Concerned though that virtual community is becoming our preferred way of relating. The Internet is seen as the Holy Grail of 'building community'. "Digital social networking inoculates people against the desire to be *physically present* with others in real social networks...The convenience factor is just too high. We love the efficiency of our interactions."

C. The impact of the Internet on knowledge vs. wisdom

The first encyclopedia (1771) required one editor, 3 volumes, 2,500 pages; the encyclopedia printed in 1860 needed a few hundred contributors; 21 volumes, 18,000 pages; by 1970, over 10,000 contributors, 30 volumes of increasingly brief articles. Now Wikipedia with no single editor, only the 'wisdom' and 'morality' of the anonymous digital mob. Software revealed that largest number of edits made by major corporations or government agencies. Not just misinformation which is the danger, but confusing information with wisdom

"Information alone is strength without coordination... The Information Age does little to encourage the development of wisdom. This requires time, experience, contemplation, patience, suffering and even stillness to obtain."

"If we are not alert, the Information Age may stunt our growth and create a permanent puberty of the mind."

"Electronic media not only nurture the right-brain; it can even suspend activity in the left-brain. The Internet is stunningly effective at enticing us to open a Pandora's box of perpetual links, sights, sounds, people, places, feelings, and ideas. Our intellects are spread a mile wide and an inch deep. e.g. blogs. "Blogs are ill-suited for deep-level analysis and thoughtful reasoning. The Internet makes a flat stone of the mind and skips its across the

surface of the world's information ocean. A book, by contrast, is a study submarine, diving the mind deep into the sea." Andrew Sullivan: "The blogging mind does not easily adjust to reading a book or allowing an unformed through to say unformed...And the danger of burnout is real." (115)

D. The impact of digital technology on family life

It as led to the *Benjamin Button* syndrome in the world today, where children surpass their elders in their knowledge and ability to navigate the world. Today with technology, parents are undocumented immigrants, while kids are native citizens of the land and serve as interpreters and gatekeepers.

This shift marks the first time in the history of the world that parents have limited access to the world of teens and children. In print age, printing empowered adults. "A child wanting to access adult information was required to learn a complex code – phonetic literacy – which could take decades to master. Today children hold the power as parents strain for glimpses inside the mysterious world of their teenagers' digital life. (e.g. text messaging – an invisibility cloak to adult eyes)

Effect: "This alters cultural values, norms and expectations... When the parents become the children, they have little ability to provide oversight, boundaries or direction to their kids. This is not trivial. Establishing boundaries is of paramount importance to the development of young people. Boundaries are a powerful expression of parental love and protection. Without them, kids experience unconscious anxiety and insecurity. Eventually, they will go looking for boundaries. They will push, prod, and test limits in search of love and protection. When they fail to experience boundaries, security begins to fade. When emotional security is compromised, development actually stalls. And if development stalls, we will begin to see adolescence extend well into adulthood."

VII. How Do We Respond To These Challenges?

“The right brain offers powerful gifts that went out of favor in the print age. The power of intuition, emotion, holistic perception, and pattern recognition are all gifts of the right brain. The right-brain is the hemisphere that allows us entry into spiritual practices like contemplation, centering prayer and silence. The left-brain is allergic to such practices; it is the dogmatic theologian rather than the intuitive mystic.”

In Tai Chi – “When someone pushes you, do not resist the force, or it will overtake you. Instead, you must understand the force and cooperate with it. Only then will you disarm it.” We must do the same with the cultural and technological forces at work today.

Nothing is inevitable. There is not some predetermined and unstoppable effect of all media. In fact, the chair will continue to be pulled out from under us only if we remain unthinking. Our lack of awareness is what empowers the media to bully us.