Technolatry

Isaiah 44:9-20 Wed, October 22, 2014

*14 He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it.*

*15 Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto.*

*16 He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire:*

*17 And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.*

# Introduction

1. I’m sure that it is only a coincidence, but the Bible describes idols as “the work of men’s hands” six times.

De 4:28 And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

2Ki 19:18 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

Ps 115:4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

Ps 135:15 The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

Isa 37:19 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

Ac 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

* As I said, I’m sure that the number six is only a coincidence.
* I am pointing it out because of the fact that men are most likely to worship what they make with their own hands.
* The passage in Isaiah that we just read gives a colorful and (appropriately) sarcastic description of the foolishness of idolatry.
* Pr 14:8 The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.
* Pr 15:21 Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.
* Pr 26:11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.
* Jer 23:13 And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err.
* Isaiah loved to poke holes in the idolatry of his day.

Isa 46:5 To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?

6 They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship.

7 They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

Isa 40:18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains.

20 He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.

* An idol is anything that *dis*places or *re*places God, whether in the heart or in the life.

1. The Bible identifies two kinds of idols: graven images and idols of the mind.

* Of course, graven images are the most common in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.
* Graven images are the things men make with their hands and then worship with their hearts.

Ps 115:4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:

6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:

7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.

8 They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

* This passage is repeated in Psalm 135:15-18.
* But the Bible also speaks of idols of the heart: particularly, of stubbornness (I Sam 15:23) and covetousness (Eph 5:5 and Col 3:5).
* So we have idols made with hands and we have idols of the mind and heart.
* And technology merges those two kinds of idols. It is made with hands, but it quickly becomes an idol of the heart.
* In the past, I have pointed out the power that these heathen gods had over the people who worshipped them.
* I have argued before that their power over the people would have increased exponentially if they had had the power to come to life.
* And I am arguing that today’s technology has that power. We make it, and it comes to life in our hands.
* It is the unique ability of our modern technology, and especially of the smart phone, that gives a life-like quality to the things we make, and that in return demands our unwavering allegiance, our cult-like service, even our worship.
* It is a new form of idolatry – I call it *Technolatry.*

1. *Technolatry* is a new kind of idolatry.

* Those who engage in Technolatry worship and serve their tools and their devices.
* They find fulfillment and satisfaction in the life that technology offers.
* They believe that technology makes life better, that it empowers them, and that through technology, they will become better, will escape their problems and find redemption without needing Jesus Christ.
* For the *Technolater*, the worshipper of technology, their devices define them, sustain them, solve their problems and give meaning to their lives.
* How many people have believed that their financial problems would be solved if only they had a certain software program for tracking their checks.
* How many people have believed that their dating life would improve if they registered for some online dating service?
* How many people have believed that buying a new car would make them happy again?
* How many people see the newest iPhone advertised and “sell all that they have” in order to buy it.
* It is their pearl of great price, their treasure hid in a field, the one lost coin.
* *Technolatry* leads us to believe that we are made better people, even that we are made new creatures because we have the various powers given us by technology.
* *Technolatry* is an idol very much in the tradition of the stumps and stones of old Canaan.
* We make it with our own hands. Only it has taken on the features of man, has become more life-like and more like us, which explains the great power it has to control us and to deceive us.
* *Technolatry* is a more *sophisticated* idol.

1. In the beginning, when God created Man in the Garden of Eden, God commissioned Adam to make, to be a maker.

* The first thing man made was words. He made names for the creatures.
* He did not seek to make autonomously or independently. He made in submission to God, imitating what he saw God making.
* God made Adam out of the dust of the ground and named him after that dust (Adam (Man) from the *Adama* (ground).
* We do not know what names Adam gave to all the creatures; the one name we know is the name Adam gave to his wife.
* He called her “woman” because she was taken out of man.
* “Woman” translates the Hebrew “Isha”; “Man” in that verse translates the Hebrew “Ish.”
* This making of names was the beginning of language, and the first steps (the *Genesis*, if you will) of man’s attempts to subdue the earth and have dominion over it.
* If you think of it, *language* is the most powerful tool that man has in his dominion over the world.
* The gift of speech is one of the gifts that sets man apart from the rest of creation (along with the gift of reason).
* But when man fell, his purpose in making changed to reflect the change in his heart.
* Man began to make in order to escape God, and in order to provide salvation for himself independently of God.
* We can trace this through the book of Genesis, which was not only the Genesis of the world and of our race, but also the Genesis of man’s rebellion against God.
* We recognize all the forms of rebellion against God in that beginning.
* The first thing man made after he sinned were clothes, made in order to hide from God.
* Later, when Cain sinned, he made a city, in order to escape the curse God placed on him --- see Genesis 4:11-15.
* Notice that God promised Cain protection. But notice that Cain provided protection for himself that did not include God (Gen 4:16-17).
* And so it has been since the time of Cain. Man in his rebellion against God has always built in order to escape God or else to escape from his need for God.

# Division

There are two points to be made then: first, we should consider technology in terms of *rebellion*, and then in terms of *redemption*.

## Rebellion

There are two ways that technology lends itself to idolatry: first, by *becoming* the idol; secondly (and more commonly), by *enabling* and *enhancing* idolatry.

1. When technology *becomes* the idol.

* Tim Challies, in his book *The Next Story*, points out a number of ways that technology *becomes* an idol:
* “The things we create can – and will – try to become idols in our hearts. Though they enable us to survive and thrive in a fallen world, the very aid they provide can *deceive us with a false sense of comfort and security, hiding our need for God and his grace*.” (p. 24, emphasis mine)
* “Because it is meant to serve us in fulfilling our created purpose, because it makes our lives easier, longer, and more comfortable, we are prone to assign to it something of a godlike status. We easily rely on technology to give our lives meaning, and we trust technology to provide and ultimate answer to the frustration of life in a fallen world. Because of this, technology is uniquely susceptible to becoming an idol, raising itself to the place of God in our lives.” (p. 26)
* “It seems easier to change ourselves and adapt to the new technology than to change it. Often we assume that we *must* or *should* change to accommodate the new technology. We doubt that the technology could itself be the cause of a problem. We give technology the power to shape and change and fashion us, remaking ourselves in its image.”   
    
  “Rather than changing the technology to fit our understanding of what is right and wrong, we change ourselves and our society’s rules and mores, and we reshape ourselves in the image of the mobile phone.   
    
  “What becomes mythic is only one step removed from becoming idolatrous.” (p. 27, emphasis his – “mythic” comes from Neil Postman, who used that word to describe the way technologies “seem to have always existed in their current form.”)
* “The trouble with … these is not in the things themselves, but *in the position we give to them in our lives*. …These become an idol when we take something good and make it into something ultimate.” (p. 30, emphasis his)
* “…because it is so effective in meeting our needs, it can easily begin to replace the one true God.” (p. 30)
* “Technology becomes an idol when we start to believe that humanity’s hope, humanity’s future, will be found in more and better technology. It becomes an idol when we place greater hope in technology than in God and when we measure human progress, not by the state of our hearts, but by new innovations in technology.” (p. 30)
* “For technology to become a god in our lives, it does not require … a comprehensive commitment. We can make an idol of technology as we flip through the weekly advertisements, looking for something, anything, that will make our lives just a little bit better and fill the void in our hearts. The fact that technology is so effective is part of what makes it such an alluring idol. It delivers what it promises. For a while, at least.” (p. 31)
* Why it happens – a comfortable god, one I can control; a desire to escape the One True God
* Evidence that it has happened –
* Robs your devotion, disconnects you from God and/or from relationships that matter (remember that our love for God is demonstrated in our love for man).
* Disables your ability to focus on God, controls you (note the constant battle for control between you and your technology).

1. When technology *enables* idolatry.

* It happens so easily --- so much more subtly, in fact.
* Your devices and social networks might not be an idol to you at all.
* But they may very well enable the idols that you have --- they might serve to enhance the experience.
* So often, technology serves to strengthen the grip that your true idols have on your heart.
* Think of the way covetousness is enhanced by technology.
* Think of the way sexual obsessions are strengthened by it.
* Think of the way your lust for acclaim and your need for approval or applause from men is dramatically enabled by technology.
* Some have made an idol of possessions --- you are constantly scouring the web for anything that you might want.
* I know, you are looking for steals. You don’t want to miss that great bargain that you can later boast about.
* But that is a kind of idolatry, and the kind that is enhanced by technology.
* I am reading right now about Amazon --- Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s creator has made it clear that Amazon is not selling books. Amazon is selling a *shopping experience.*
* “We have evolved from a culture of instant gratification to one of constant gratification.” (iGods, p. 65)

1. I know what you are thinking --- that I am making too much of this. That most of this is harmless.

* In our world, technology invites us, urges us in fact, to trust in it instead of God.
* Of course, when we obey the promptings of technology, the sin is in our own hearts, not in the technology itself.
* It is wrong to allow ourselves to be led captive or taken captive by our technology.
* When we put our trust in it, when we become enamored with it, when we covet it and the power or status that it gives us, then we are in sin.
* The irony of it is that the technology that we trust in, that we believe brings us to honor and makes us better, really has the opposite effect.
* So much of technology revolves around this thing of status.
* Your phone does not make you a better person. It might be a “smart phone,” but that doesn’t make you smart for owning it.
* Facebook and Twitter and Pinterest and Google Plus and all the other social networking technologies do not add one cubit to your stature. They do not make you honorable.
* In fact, so much of the Twitter revolution has been all about Twitter, and not at all about the so-called “revolution.” (see pp. 192-193 of *iGods*)
* The irony is that what we think makes us more honorable actually brings us to dishonor and disgrace.
* How very quickly do we become pawns of our technologies, serfs in the fiefdom of Facebook, twits in the Twitterverse.
* The more our technologies define us and control us, the more they bring us dishonor.

## Redemption

When man has been redeemed, he is delivered from his idols. He then has the power and ability to see technology in a true light: first as *wisdom*, and then as *wealth*.

1. The means of redemption

* Redeemed man makes for a different reason than fallen man. Fallen man makes in order to find redemption on His own terms and to escape the demands of a sovereign God.
* Redeemed man makes in order to serve that same sovereign God.
* It is sin that drives man to invent in order to escape God.
* And so long as man’s sinful nature remains intact and unmolested, man’s tendency to make idols of the things he invents will remain unchanged.
* Only through redemption, as God replaces the heart of stone with a heart of flesh and makes a new creature, will man’s tendency towards idolatry be altered.
* “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” 1Pe 2:25

1. Technology as wisdom – technology (etymology – *techne = art or skill*) the way we apply our knowledge to problems in order to find solutions, using tools to improve our tools; wisdom is the practical application of knowledge
2. Technology as wealth – every good gift and every perfect gift is from above

# Conclusion

Technology used in submission to God.