Technolatry II

Isaiah 44:9-20 Sun PM, October 26, 2014

# Introduction

1. We should not think that technology *necessarily* becomes an idol.
2. I doubt there are many women who have worshipped their sewing machines. Curling irons maybe; sewing machines, no.

* Although, there have been those ladies who carry the marks of having wrestled with their curling irons and lost --- the gods were not happy.

1. But it is foolish to believe that technology is neutral – that technology is neither good nor evil, and that it is entirely up to us and how we use the technology.
2. Technology is never neutral. In fact, there is not a neutral square inch on the face of this earth.
3. Last Wednesday, I introduced the idea of *Technolatry* --- the belief that “technology saves.”
4. Those who worship and serve their tools and their devices have fallen into Technolatry, as have those who find fulfillment and satisfaction in the life that technology offers.
5. The *Technolater* – the worshipper of technology – believes that technology makes life better, that it empowers the user, and that through technology, they will become better, will escape their problems and find redemption without needing Jesus Christ.
6. For the *Technolater*, their devices define them, sustain them, solve their problems and give meaning to their lives.

# Division

Last week, we started looking at two considerations about Technolatry: first, we considered 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.

* A thought experiment – if we removed lust from the human heart, would there be any market for pornography?
* That thought prompted Douglas Wilson to argue that the problem with pornography is not the pornography.
* We can apply that same line of reasoning to the issue of idolatry. In order for anything to become an idol, two things are necessary – an object to be idolized, and hearts that long for idols.
* John Calvin called the human heart an idol factory --- given the right circumstances, almost anything at all, or even nothing at all will serve as an idol.
* So then, there are two elements to *Technolatry:*
* First, there is something in the human heart that longs for a god other than the Triune God of the Bible.
* It is the product of our own fallenness.
* Because of our innate rebellion against the God of the Bible, we seek a replacement God, a surrogate to be our Savior, so that we don’t need to deal with the God of heaven.
* If we just consider the way man looks at God, we can (I think) see the thinking that leads to *Technolatry*.
* Mankind as a whole – and Christians are not necessarily exempt from this either – looks at God as if He existed simply to meet their needs and solve their problems, a servant to come at man’s bidding, to swoop in and rescue from the uncomfortable or undesirable
* By the way, God doesn’t exist simply to meet your needs and solve your problems.
* I’m sorry that I feel like I have to clear that up --- but some might feel that He does.
* God is not your servant. You are His.
* Yet, it is not unusual for a Christian to view God as the One Who answers their prayers.
* When I need something, I’ll call on Him. Otherwise, for many Christians, it would be preferable if God would stay out of the way.
* But of course, the God of the Bible doesn’t work that way.
* And so, man is always in search of a god he can control – or more comfortable god than the Lord God Jehovah, the great and terrible God, Lord of lords and King of kings.
* So it only makes sense that a god that can be held in the hand and controlled more closely and directly would be a more desirable god than the God of heaven.
* This is the reason men have had idols throughout history --- the Almighty God terrified them.
* Technology is a god that fallen man can control, that will serve his purposes, so that fallen man is not required to serve God’s purposes.
* Ultimately, man is interested in escaping God – the One True God, that is.
* Apart from the sweet influences of grace that convert the straying heart, man in his unconverted state wants nothing to do with the Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.
* Technology offers that escape.
* Sure, when technology is exalted to deity, what we thought we were controlling ends up controlling us.
* Yes, they control us. But we are comfortable with the control that our technologies hold over us.
* They make us feel in control --- every time they beep or buzz or vibrate or blink.
* Of course, they are controlling us by beeping and buzzing and vibrating and blinking.
* But it is the illusion of control that fastens our hearts to the technology.
* There is something in the human heart that longs for a god other than the Triune God of the Bible.
* And secondly, there is something in technology itself that lends itself to becoming an idol.
* One factor in technology itself is the way it makes us increasingly dependent on it.
* The more we depend on technology, the more power it has over us.
* The more our lives would be disrupted by any kind of technology failure.
* The more it displaces our dependence on God.
* Dependence on technology leads to another problem – a failure to examine it or our use of it.
* We are not likely to examine the things we depend on, to see whether we should be depending on them or not.
* John Dyer, “When technology has distracted us to the point that we no longer examine it, it gains the greatest opportunity to enslave us.” (p. 28)
* And that enslavement – which is closely related to addiction – leads us into idolatry.
* I talked on Wednesday night about the way a new technology, when first introduced into our lives, will challenge us to change ourselves.
* I’ll use the smart phone as an example --- it wasn’t that long ago that we switched.
* When someone gets a new phone, the first thing they do is to learn “how to use it.”
* That is good and necessary. But the phone is not inviting us to learn how to change itself. It almost seems to force us to change ourselves in order to adapt to the way it works.
* This is why it is both foolish and dangerous to believe that any technology is neutral.
* John Dyer, in his book *From the Garden to the City* uses the shovel as an illustration.
* Dyer points out that whether you use a shovel to break ground for a new orphanage or to bury stolen goods in your back yard, the shovel will still give you blisters and a sore back.
* Regardless of *why* the shovel is used, it will still need to be used the same way --- you will need to hold the handle and dig with the head, and not the other way around.
* So then, technology is not neutral. Nor is it *a*moral --- there is a *right* way to use it, and there is a *wrong* way to use it.
* There is a right way and a wrong way to use the smart phone.
* But that doesn’t mean that you simply need to read the instructions.
* The right way and the wrong way go beyond the phone itself --- and that is what we often fail to examine.
* When there is a phone problem, we tend to think that *we* are the problem. We don’t necessarily question the technology.
* And that was part of Dyer’s point about the shovel --- it doesn’t just shape the earth; it shapes us.
* And so do all of our technologies.
* Tim Challies: “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.” (Challies, *The Next Story*, p. 27)
* This is how technology gains control of us --- and would that not be a mark of idolatry?
* When technology controls us, it has become an idol. But this is one of those things that we don’t often examine.
* This is what happens --- man makes his own god, but ultimately he ends up serving the god he makes.
* Think of the ways we serve our technology --- the money we spend, the tethering, the constant referring to it and the inability to function without it – our dependency on it.
* Technology becomes an idol when we are distracted by it.
* It draws our attention away from God first.
* I know that I have preached it enough that you could quote it, but how easy is it to answer the phone, send a text or read one, check your e-mail or Facebook *during the time when you should be meeting with God in prayer or reading your Bible.*
* And in times of crisis, how many Christians turn to Facebook or their phone for comfort instead of turning to the Lord.
* I know you want to talk to someone who will comfort you.
* But that Someone isn’t on the other end of the line --- that Someone Who will comfort you is the God of heaven.
* Challies, “When we give our lives over to idols, we hand them the keys to our heart. We become ‘possessed’ by them, driven to use them, please them, and find our satisfaction in them. We become tools of our tools; rather than owning our gadgets we become owned by them. We begin to structure our lives around them, and our actions and choices are motivated by our need and desire for the blessings and benefits that idol provides for us.” (p. 29)
* Technology becomes an idol when we are either fulfilled by it or defined by it.
* When you can’t live without it, and consider it your lifeline.
* When your technology makes you feel powerful.
* When your technology gives you a sense of worth or identity.
* When you “gotta have it.”
* When gadgets or devices hold the position of preeminence in your life, and you view them as *ultimate.*
* And again, this comes with the very nature of technology --- technology is meant to serve us, to make our lives easier, to solve problems for us.
* It is only natural that we would assign godlike status to these devices – the more powerful they are, the more capable they are of making life easier for us.
* The more we rely on them, the more likely they are to give meaning to our lives. (Challies, *The Next Story*, p. 26)
* Technology becomes an idol when we believe that technology will *only* make life better.
* When you honestly believe that most of your struggles in life could be solved by better (or more up-to-date) technologies or devices.
* When you think that man could invent something that would cure society’s ills, that technological progress will *only* make life better, and when you measure human progress by technological progress.
* 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.