

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Trending: #statusupdate**

In the beginning God created and it was good. God created man and woman in His image and it was good, and ever since human beings have been following the command of God to create—to be in the image of God, creators. Some neat things have happened, but every time we turn away from the idea that God is at the center, bad things happen—the Garden of Eden turns into the Tower of Babel. So when we create we need to make sure that God doesn't just come with us, but that He goes before us.

Today we want to talk about technology, especially the internet and especially inside the internet—this area of social media—and I want to suggest that many of us have made this one of our gods. Before you protest—*No, no, I'm in control*—think about how you feel when you're without a smart phone and you know that you're supposed to answer a question, or the TV is gone for 24 hours, or somebody doesn't reply to you. Think about what it's like when the power goes off. Sometimes you don't realize how much the world has changed until you get a picture of it. This was Vatican Square in 2005...candles being held up to bless the Pope [shows picture]. This was that same Vatican Square in 2013, eight years later, with smart phones being held up to either take a picture of the Pope, or to take a selfie. In eight years the world changes on us. Now, in the face of that kind of drastic change, we can react in different ways. Some of us will become Luddites. Remember the Luddites from Britain in the 19th century? Their jobs were being destroyed by technology, so they went out and they started smashing apart the machines. Many of you are unthinkingly critical of this incredible thing, this small smart phone, that has more computing power than what sent people to the moon. We're dismissive of them, we're Luddites, or we almost become Amish, and people look at us like we're quaint. Did you think God stopped helping people create things in 1967? But another reaction is that people become servants of the new, servants of technology. They unthinkingly embrace the latest thing; they stand in line at the Apple store. Whether they go to church or not, they're fairly condescending to those of you who still think a flip phone is as far as technology should go. So, we can resist technology, or we can blindly embrace it, or we can walk through this world with a vision of what God did intend. That's different than *no, no, no, no, no, or yes, yes, yes, yes, yes got to have it*.

To prepare for this I read a book by one of Carrie's professors at Fuller Seminary. It's called *iGods* by Detweiler, and in the book he gave a little picture of the ever-changing internet world. He started with an image that everybody would understand—the apple—and said Apple solved our computer problem. We couldn't understand it, and then Apple made technology beautiful and human. Immediately after Apple came another one: Amazon, which covered our shopping needs. Made everything in the world available to you in the click of one button if you've got enough credit. And right alongside of Amazon

was this explosion of knowledge, far too much for anybody to understand. One of the reasons, by the way, that “Trending” has a hashtag in front of it is because the hashtag is a symbol that Google and the internet use to lump together all the words that come next. It makes groups out of those things. So, Google took all those bits of knowledge and said, “You want to know something? Just ask us and in the click of a button you can know anything.” Coming out of that was the idea that people were feeling more isolated than ever, and in response to this depersonalized world along came Facebook. Now two billion people on planet earth try to connect with others through Facebook and Twitter, and it’s probably the most visible of our internet connections.

Now being Presbyterian, if you come into a Presbyterian church you’ve got to expect that we aren’t blindly *no, no, no* and not blindly *yes, yes, yes*. We have the idea that the posture we should take is that Jesus is our king. He is the king of every square foot of this planet and on every square foot of every device, Jesus Christ says, “This is mine. This is mine.” And that ties in to the way that we are supposed to look at technology.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Greek church in Corinth and he said to them, “We use our powerful God tools for smashing work philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, and fitting every thought, and emotion, and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ.” Every thought, every emotion, every impulse, not into the structure of the internet, good as that may be, but into the structure of life shaped by Christ.

I want to ask you if you have those powerful God tools when you go online? Is your life being shaped by different philosophies? Are there barriers between you and God? Do you fit every thought, every emotion, and every impulse into the internet? Into the structure of Jesus, or not? Where do you get those tools? Can I just suggest you probably won’t get them from a 65-year-old philosopher who is more interested in reading Heidegger than he is figuring out what a hashtag is. Instead you should ask somebody who is following Jesus and walking into the culture of the internet, so I have asked three young adults if they would share with me how they are doing the balancing act of faith and technology. Most of the writing that I’ve seen coming out of church people in the area of technology is, “Don’t become distracted”, “Don’t become perverted”, “Beware the allure of the internet”, “Don’t do it!”, and I have to tell you I don’t think that does much good, but what else should we be saying?

A panel of three CPC staff (Carrie Gleeson, Maggie Keller, and Matt Ferris) speak to the congregation. Audio and video links can be found here:

<http://www.cpconline.org/sermons/trending/>
<https://livestream.com/cpc/events/7635484>

We’ve just barely scratched the surface. There is so much here. This is like an unsermon-like sermon that may be more important than anything you grapple with. It affects you more than you know. The apostle Paul says, “We use our power-filled God tools to make captive every thought, or emotion, or impulse into the structure of life

shaped by Jesus.” What are your power-filled tools? I think when I contemplate social media I want to have the power tool of God’s grace in the echo chamber. The power tool of grace in the echo chamber. In a world of terrible pictures that are posted to terrify, or to shame, or to cyber bully—or this trolling—grace is a scarce commodity, and yet when it comes it changes the conversation.

I was talking with Laura the other day about this and she said, “Who is that English guy?” And I said, “Well, you’re probably talking about John Wesley”, who was the evangelist who led millions of people to Christ. He often, because he was on the cutting edge, got criticized incredibly. He received critical letters and would write a reply. Wesley had a simple technique for bringing grace into the equation. First, he wrote the letter and then let it sit on the edge of the desk for seven days. One of the problems is the instantaneous nature of the internet: you respond first and then you think. It would sit there for seven days and then Wesley would take a critical letter, if he still believed in it, and give it to one of his friends to read. His friend would say, “I think you need to make it stronger.” And Wesley said, “More often my friends would say, ‘Here, try again. This fails of grace.’” What a great line. This fails of grace. Especially on the internet.

The second power tool I think you ought to bring from God to the internet is the power of better music, the power of a better word. The world is filled with words and it can seem so intimidating to be online with all the strong opinions and facts. We were talking about this the other day and Petey [Crowder] said, “If I had a symbol that I would use I’d have everybody wear phylacteries.” You know what a phylactery is? Of course you don’t! It’s from the time when God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. When he gave the law He said, “I want you to take this law of mine and wear it on your sleeves and put it on your doorsteps and strap it to your foreheads—that’s a phylactery—so that everyone who sees you will see that you are speaking with the word of God and every time you have it on, your words and your thoughts will go through the word of God. It has never been more important for you and I to have God speak to us before we respond, as we respond, after we respond. How are you hearing God’s music speak to you? God’s word?

The last power tool that I put into this conversation is the power of Sabbath. That’s what Carrie was talking about and Matt, too. The incessant, unending power of the internet means that many of you feel weird when you hear the buzz go off in your pocket, or your purse, and you have a twitch that tells you to stop what you’re doing to answer it. That can only be countered by turning it off. God knew that we are people who need to take a break, who need a rest, who need to be reset and refreshed. I would challenge you in your use of the internet to observe the power of the Sabbath, whether that is every seventh hour or every seventh day, to say, “I will this hour deal with the person who is in front of me instead of the buzz going off, instead of checking my Facebook page, or my Twitter feed, or Snapchat. I will instead be present to the God who is with me. And in my Sabbath from the incessant chatter, I may actually hear a word from God. I may actually have a word from God for someone else.” Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, I thank You for this morning. Thank You that You have shown us that each

one of us lives in this brave new world. I ask that You would allow us a moment to examine our hearts. There are some of us who have no idea what this sermon was about and wouldn't understand the "i" world if it bit them. I pray that You will give them the courage to enter in because unless they can speak to their grandchildren or have some idea what their peers are experiencing, God will lose a voice. Some of us have been convicted during this that we have retweeted or "liked" things that are appalling, or hurtful, or narrow-minded. I would ask You to not to make us feel bad; I would ask that You wash us clean and let us begin again. And some of us, Lord, even in this 20-30 minutes have felt that buzz go off and realized that maybe we are worshiping the wrong God and we need a rest; we need a Sabbath to come back into this world, this "i" world, as Your child instead of just one more chattering voice. Speak to us, show us Your love. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.