



IMMANUEL
BIBLE CHURCH

Proclaiming the Selfie or the Son?

BY ALEX SCHUBERT

In humans reside the *semen religionis*, the seed of religion. This means whether it be family, friends, hobbies, money, food, God, gods, or self, we all worship something. This core reality in all humans makes worship one of the essential purposes of mankind's existence. Christians confess the true design of life in unison with the Westminster Catechism: "The purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." We were made to worship, and by doing so we reflect, or mirror, the object of our worship. When the Israelites worshiped idols David said, "Those who make them [idols] become like them, so do all who trust in them." Positively, when Christians worship Christ they become conformed to His image. When humans worship, we use different physical, tangible instruments to express spiritual praise.

Whether it be bread and wine, a guitar, a paintbrush, a camera, or a phone, we use things as outlets for our pleasure, awe, and exultation of a praise-worthy object. Technology has become a major instrument through which people worship, committing idolatry and in return receive a custom-constructed identity. On the other hand, technology can be used as an instrument for right worship which conforms us to Christ. You are what you worship, but will what you worship lead to your dissatisfaction, disappointment and, ultimately, destruction?

Technological handbooks from major organizations like Facebook, Whatsapp (owned by Facebook), Instagram (owned by Facebook), Ebay, Spotify, Netflix, Microsoft, etc., always include privacy statements which contain insight into the purpose and function of data collection. Personal technological data consists

of who you are, what you like, what your behavior is, etc. There are many ways to track your data and many purposes for doing just that. Bigger companies tend to gather it for their own marketing schemes which tend to lead to monetary exploitation. In their marketing “activities,” they gather data by positively suggesting they are “customizing” or “personalizing” each product through geo-location services and data collection to “serve” or “benefit” you best in order to “enhance” your life and experiences. In the words of Spotify, their desire is to “soundtrack your life.” This includes collecting search queries, sports followed, items purchased, online relationships, mobile contacts, stocks traded, personal privacy settings, health interests, etc. These promises are what draw users in to the hope of enhanced life or “life abundant,” but they are also what companies use to retain customers so that they will continue to buy their products or use their viewing information for advertisement profit. Once the data is gathered, they analyze it so that they know how to best procure that viewing and purchase again. Once someone becomes enslaved to a product or “follows” it, how can they live without Nike or Apple? When asked “who are you?” we sometimes naturally point to these products as

our identity. We say, “Well, I like Dutch Bros, spend a lot of time on Instagram and Snapchat, play Fortnite, and binge watch on Netflix.” Douglas Rushkoff simply explains in the documentary Generation Like, the product is consumed, bought, liked, shared, searched for in Google or online shops from which the data of your consumption is analyzed, re-packaged, and sold back to you. Essentially, you purchase and work for your identity. Once you are categorized through giving over your data, then the company has ability to define you according to their marketed products. In giving over your data, you are pulled into a vicious, exploitative cycle of being defined by what you purchase and like. Products and experiences become essential to your very identity or being. When one begins to become enslaved to this type of idolatry, they begin to binge in a restless search to be identified by those products. We desire to be fully known by that which we worship, hence the reason we give ourselves, our time, our thoughts and our persons to our idol. You necessarily need to offer who you are to technology as an idol in order that you may attain the godlike promises it offers. While we are all prone to this idolatry as humans and should be empathetic to each other, it is a serious issue that should be raised with more zeal out of desire for all to

be conformed to Christ for the ultimate joy, satisfaction and life of a Christian.

The proverbial serpent's tongue is still hissing through the instrument of technology: "Do you want to be like God?" All idols promise to fulfill something, or else they would not be followed. Technology offers godlike qualities, but can it fulfill its promises? Aside from small glitches like when the PowerPoint does not work during a presentation or your phone freezes up when you need directions, technology makes audacious, messiah-like claims that must be questioned. Can it deliver? If it cannot fulfill its strong statements, they are false hopes, deterring the people of God from the living hope which bears the reality that all the promises of God are yes in Jesus Christ.

It is necessary to question these technological hopes offered:

- Can technology give eternal life? Eterni.me is a web site that promises virtual immortality through collecting one's data in order to present that one "alive" through video, picture, searches online, etc., once they are dead.
- Does the "all-knowing" Google offer true omniscience? When you don't know, to Google you go! Can Google mediate the knowledge of God when there is only one

Mediator?

- Can technology give you omnipresence through being everywhere at once by means of text message, Facebook Live, and Find my Friends? If we pretend to think so, let us ask, "How many emails do I have unread? How many prayers has God left unheard?"
- Can technology make us omnipotent through innovation? Is our seeming "omnipotence" going to be the very thing that makes us omni-infirma (all-weak)? Like all idolatry, we are "in control" to then be controlled. We are empowered to be enslaved.
- Can technology fully know you as intimate as God does? Technology requires collecting and analyzing all of our data to fulfill the godlike promises. Certainly, if humans as people were confined to data, then the data collectors would know you better than your own self. Is it not true that technology can only know your data in order to serve your flesh whereas God fully as well as relationally knows your person in order to love, satisfy and redeem, even amidst the suffering in your life?

Maybe I should have given this disclaimer in the beginning:

Technology is not bad in itself to an

extent. Hence the reason I am writing and dispersing this article using technology! Human hearts are what is evil in handling it so that they become the measure of the harmfulness of technology. This does not lead to all technology being merely neutral though, as human creations can also be evil, arising from the source of our evil hearts. Innovation then should not always be esteemed as good or progressive because humans are capable of being inventors or innovators of evil. There have been numerous inventors of good using the means of technology as a tool to help people medically, to spiritually edify the church, save the lost, and socially draw people into closer community! It is necessary then to be watchful that technology is righteously bridled to be used for the will and glory of God.

Addressing the heart of this discussion then, the questions to consider are, who do you allow yourself to be known by, technology or God? Are you giving yourself to data collectors or devoting yourself to God? Are you committing idolatry or true worship to the Father? Are you then being conformed to the image of marketers or the image of Jesus? Do you express the “selfie” or the Son? Do you proclaim Instagram stories which get deleted in 24 hours or the eternal story? Do you identify by a brand or as the beloved of Christ? What

then leads your life? That next advertisement that pops up or that next thought of desired products from your favorite brand? Will these lead your life until your steps are predestined by marketing schemes rather than God? What defines your person? Spotify teaches, “You are what you stream.” They even boast, “our fans put Spotify at the center of their very lives,” and they have the data to prove it. Facebook implicitly teaches that “likes” are valuable and define a person as valuable by them. What then defines your person, leads your life, identifies who you are and has your devotion?

In God’s sovereignty, He alone knows you fully, for the purpose of truly serving you for your good. The Scriptures say, “the Son of Man came to serve,” and to enhance: “I came to give life and life abundant,” and to conforming His children to the only blessed image, the man, Jesus Christ. At times, humans have a sinful desire to conform others to their own image for their own domination, but Jesus conforms those who believe in Him to His new, redeemed creation for their own salvation. This is the pure and continually purifying love that Christ has towards those who are united to Him by faith. To thoroughly “grow up into salvation,” the command remains, “put on the new self, which is being.”

renewed after the image of Christ."

This makes your identity as sure, true, and eternal as Christ is. Paul further confirms, "But if anyone loves God, he is known by God." If you worship and love the Triune God, you have identity in the Son. Only in Him do you find the true knowledge of yourself. If God knows you fully, then God, who alone is holy, can give the right judgment of your value. His standard of what is valuable, comes from the eternal standard of what is good and holy, sourced in His intrinsic goodness and value. This causes the human construct of the god of Facebook that defines value through likes to be judged and destroyed by the only true Judge. Even more so, this condemns the #swipelife of Tinder. To swipe a person away on the basis of outward appearance is un-godlike. The man, Jesus, is the standard for who is good, holy, perfect, accepted, and pleasing to the Father. Therefore, when united to Christ, who fully pleased the Father, you fully please the Father without merit accrued to your behalf. This value attributed to you through Christ Himself overwhelms all unrighteousness in yourself and makes you stand confident and secure before the Father. As you worship Christ, growing in the knowledge of Him, you are known fully, valued rightly, loved and redeemed in an ultimate way that transcends technology's ability to do

this, let alone all idols.

The temptation to find identity through the means of technology is synonymous with a temptation to worship ourselves by becoming like God through technology. When faced with the question "who am I?" turn the question into a prayer in order to flee this temptation. This means doing the day-to-day things in a godly manner rather than godless. Praying, "Father, who am I?" inclines your heart to know God in Christ and consequently be known in the communion of the Triune God. When everyone has "purpose" in a public place by having something to do on their phones, turn the awkward "what do I do?" feeling into prayer, and so be led by the Spirit. Rather than the leading of technology and the marketers predestined steps for you, be led by the Spirit who predestines you to be conformed to the image of the Son. Christians are to question the hidden purposes of technology creators in order to actively hold fast to that gospel which has been entrusted to us rather than be led by human purpose and ambitions. This is why Christians are called to analyze these analyzers, define these definers, question these online quiz creators, though not with the heart of monetary or identity exploitation but with a heart of contending for the faith and pure worship to God. This may lead to

getting a flip phone, but it does not have to be that extreme. If you train yourselves by the Word of God and prayer to have a frame that seeks the glory of God through the means of this world, then the Spirit will direct you through the complex relationship with technology and the many questions that may arise about what is right and wrong. In other words, the Spirit leads us to discern the distinction between worshipping God or idols through technology.

Social anxiety. Self-consumption. Slothfulness. Uncertainty of identity. Perplexity of purpose. Doubt of direction. Emptiness. Loneliness. It is so common to feel these things, but people rarely link them to technological idolatry. These bad fruits that are expressly from the flesh and starkly contrasted to the Spirit have confirmed technology as an instrument of idolatry. Repentance for this idolatry must be thorough. Faith towards God must be sincere. In doing so, you will escape the snares of technological idolatry and relish the life-giving fruit of the Spirit. When you worship Christ alone and use the instruments of the world as a means to this end, you will find your identity in Him to your own satisfaction, delight, and flourishing, fulfilling man's chief end: glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

If you have any questions, please contact us either by text here or by email here. Further, we would love to hear from you on more topics that you want us to cover.