

The Christian Smartphone 9-10-17

We begin today with a picture depicting the evolution of man. I don't know which technology has led to a bigger revolution of human society, the desktop computer or the smartphone that essentially puts the computer in your hand and pocket and car and everywhere you want to take it. What is obvious is that these techno advancements have made a huge difference in the way we live. I read now that nearly 80% of adult Americans own a smartphone. 80%! That is counting senior Americans in care facilities who don't have one. So, it means that many people who can hardly afford their next meal still own a smartphone. And, let's face it, these devices are simply astonishing. The original Star Trek series was based on an imagined existence in the 23rd century. Over fifty years later, we have made no progress toward warp drive or a teleport machine, but our communications device is way in advance of what they imagined. I mean, what is this thing? It is a radio, a cd player, a movie theatre, a telephone with visuals. It is a calendar, a secretary, a library, a personal tour guide, a camera, a travel agent, a post office, and on and on. Someone called it a god in our pocket. Now, the Bible does not directly speak to the issue of smartphones, but it does speak a great deal about idols. It speaks a great deal about temptations. Is the smartphone good or bad? Has it done more good or more harm? The jury is still out on that. But this much we likely can say – the smartphone is like that first great human discovery – fire. It can be used for great good, or it can be destructive. Titus 1:15 offers us some wisdom on this. **15** *To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.* Point is that a smartphone can be a blessing or a curse depending on the state of one's heart. The heart of the matter is always the matter of the heart.

Our goal this morning, as Jesus people, seeking to live wisely in 2017 is to figure out how to handle the opportunities and the dangers of the smartphone. Let's talk about the dangers first, and the first one to be mentioned is the danger of temptation. Temptation. We could say, "corruption." This is no different than what is offered by a computer. There is just a boatload of unsavory, wrong, unhealthy things to do with your device. The most obvious may be the pornography, but there is also ungodly flirting that goes on through all kinds of social sites. I hear that 60% of extra-marital affairs begin online, most of them using Facebook. Your device can be a tool of the devil to lead you into the paths of death if you are not alert. Psalm 101:2-3 is a good one

to memorize and keep in mind every time you pick up your phone. Psalm 101:**2b-3a** (NLT) *I will lead a life of integrity in my own home. 3 I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar.* In the first part of our Psalm 73 series, I quoted someone who said, *Maturity comes through the making and keeping of personal commitments.* May I suggest that those Psalm 101 verses would make a great commitment to make and keep concerning your computer and your phone. *I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar.*

Beyond the sites and shows that feature pornography and vile language, there is also the temptation presented by the ever-present device to become too oriented to the public. With Facebook and YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter, all of us can be public persons. We have a following of sorts, and you get the impression that, for some, the public image is carefully cultivated, creating a mindset that is always asking how this will look online as opposed to how it is viewed by heaven. Check this out. In a world where we can get instant feedback on what we ordered for dinner or thought of the ballgame or even where we went to church – where we can be on-stage every waking moment, it is easy to forget the vertical, to forget that we live ultimately, not before our Facebook friends, but before the face of God who doesn't need us to post our thoughts and doings. He knows them all. The enemy of your soul wants you to forget that, to forget God and a smartphone can be useful to him in achieving that goal. So, the first commitment we must make concerning our smartphones is to flee temptation and stand resolutely and seriously against it in your own disciplines by establishing and maintaining careful boundaries.

The second danger we must mention is that of distraction. The smartphone can lead you into clearly sinful behavior, or it can lead you into clearly frivolous behavior. Following the stars. Watch ESPN, Netflix, Pokémon Go, Angry Birds and a multitude of other games and media. With these the problem is not the sinful behaviors they may lead to but the positive behaviors they prevent because you are too focused on the screen. A month ago I was getting dressed in the locker-room at LA Fitness where ESPN was blaring. They were interviewing D'Aaron Fox, who was a top draft pick in the NBA this last year. They asked him what he did for fun and he commented that he doesn't do the party scene like so many players. No, he doesn't go in for that temptation. I was thinking, *Well that is refreshing to hear.* Then he goes on to say that he spends six hours a day playing video games. What? Six hours a day? I wanted to cry. That is 135 entire days per year spent playing video games. Not evil, just a waste, a distraction from all the good

things you could be doing. Such as? Such as your work. Such as your ministry to others. Such as getting to know your God. Such as connecting with people in your life. It may be too obvious to point out that relationships suffer because of our smartphone habits. Oh, we are in touch with all our Facebook friends, but the child, the spouse, the sibling in the room with us gets only a fraction of our attention. Something like this. That is pretty much it. I must admit that I can easily slip into the bad habit of dividing my attention like this when I should be focused on my wife or my grandchildren. Beth has to remind me not to fall into the distraction pit. Sound familiar at all? I heard recently that teenagers are now at home with their parents notably more than they were twenty years ago --- but do you know why? Do you know what they are doing while they are home? It is not family worship. It is not their homework. It is social media and games. Social media and games. For a few years there we gave our NPC high-school graduates the book by John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, and I can think of few more insidious life-wasters than some of the apps available on your phone. Beware of the distractions!

The danger of temptation, of distraction, and thirdly the danger of addiction. Technology gives us new ways to sink into idolatry, to hand ourselves over into bondage. The smartphone can surely become an addiction and we must beware. I Corinthians 6:12 gives us some great wisdom from the apostle. Paul says I Corinthians 6:**12** *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.* If you have a “can't live without it” attitude toward your phone you may be approaching addiction. If you feel the constant urge to check your messages, your email, your Instagram account?? I like this one. There is an app for that. Grandparents like Beth and me, appreciate the amazing technology that allows us to facetime or skype with our distant grandchildren. So nice – Praise God for that. The next advance I am hoping for is a capacity to translate two-year old talk into intelligible English. That would make facetime potentially addictive for us. There are so many things this little device does, that can meet some deep personal need, can get ahold of us and can drag us down. You can own a smartphone, but be careful that the smartphone does not end up owning you. The shrewdness of Satan, because he can't create anything, is to take the good things that come from God and make them destructive. Beware of addiction. A good gift, (and I think this device is a good gift) makes a bad god. A good gift makes a bad god.

Okay, having looked at the possibility of temptation, distraction and addiction, finally let's get positive and talk about edification, about how to use that phone for good, for the purposes of the kingdom of Jesus, for human flourishing. And truly, here, the possibilities are endless. I look at my phone and see all the good things that are there. There is a calendar. It reminds me of the things I am planning to do. It helps me keep my word when I say I am going to be somewhere. That is good. In a similar way there is my reminders app. I have with me almost all the time now, a friend to remind me of things I need to do – little things, big things. It is like a second brain, a personal assistant, and I appreciate that. Also here I see is a Bible App. Preachers have mixed feelings about these things because we see people looking at their phones while we teach and we suspect they are checking their Facebook page, but there is always that possibility they are reading the text in a variety of translations and even in other languages. Maybe someone is checking out what other teachers have said about the passage. Good things can happen. My day begins most often now with my Bible app opened to my Scripture for the day. It ends with Beth reading from her phone from Proverbs. Here too there is my Audible app by which I listen to great books, and some merely good books. There is my podcast app which is very enriching for me. I listen to one sports show just for fun, but the others all have something to do with filling my mind with things true, honorable, right, pure and good. Finally, here is my music app which helps me in my meditations, and draws my heart heavenward in praise. Can you tell I am excited about what my smartphone adds to my life? I truly am. It has been a boon for my soul. I am guessing I am not alone. So, we are going to do a little mid-message sharing about ways we have found we can use the smartphone to advance the purposes of God in our lives. Maybe you can tell us about your favorite app, or a way you have learned to use the smartphone for good. We have travelling mikes available for this – who would get us started?

Now, this is really sad because nobody mentioned the North Park Church App—but I will. We have an app that will remind you of what is going on around our church, you can read the Bulletin or the FYI, it will give you access to any sermons you missed or want to repeat (which you can also get through iTunes), and you can make a donation – right there on your phone. Even without the app you can send a text message to the pastor – maybe an idea you have that you didn't want to stand and mention out loud. My number is on the back of your bulletin. Unless hackers take down our cell-phone grid, these devices are here to stay. Being wise disciples of Jesus means we

learn to use them for God's glory. Can a smartphone be a tool of evangelism? Anyone finding a way to use it for that? Obviously, podcasts can do that, social media can do a little of that. I haven't heard many testimonies of people coming to Jesus by means of a smartphone but I expect it will be part of the testimony of many in a decade.

Andy Crouch is a Christian writer who has done the church a service by writing a little book entitled, *The Tech Wise Family*. I learned about it on the Eric Metaxas podcast, on my phone. It is an attempt to help parents manage the onslaught of temptations for themselves and their children that come from smartphones. In some respects, these devices have made parenting easier. You can be in touch with your child almost everywhere. That is a big plus. But – wow – the downsides are notable. Smartphones, as we said at the start, are like fire – great potential for harm as well as good. But who do you want in charge of your fire? Not your average 12 year-old. So, parents want their kids to experience the benefits of the phone without the downsides. How can that happen? Crouch's book is a good place to go to really start the conversation around those issues. As a starting place for the discussion, Crouch offers a perspective on what a parent's goal is – even a family's goal. He proposes the goal is to advance in wisdom. Proverbs 8:**11** *Wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her.* As parents, we want to grow wise. We want our children to grow wise, as God's word defines "wise." The smartphone can help. The smartphone can hurt. Do you have some family rules to achieve the good and avoid the bad? Are the phones out at dinner time? What is their role at bedtime? Might it be good to have a no-tech day once a week? A tech fast from time to time. What are the rules in your vehicle and on trips? If you sincerely make wisdom your objective, have some conversation about these things -- how to use the devices for edification while avoiding temptation, distraction, addiction.

One of the rules the Crouch family has that I will weigh in on is the no-secrets rule. The no-secrets rule. Spouses should be able to check everything that happens on each other's computers and cell phones. Parents should be able to check everything that happens on a child's computer or cell-phone. *Oh no, I feel it is important to let my child know I trust him, I trust her.* Listen, you may have a wonderful child, but God's word tells me that child was born a sinner. If a teenager says, *Dad, you just need to trust me.* The response is, "No, I don't, and I am disappointed that you think you should trust yourself." In church we sing, *Prone to wander Lord I feel it;* then we go home and say, *Trust me.* Wouldn't it be better to say, "No, I want you to hold me accountable for the websites

I visit, for the movies I watch, for the songs I download, and for the friends I maintain. All of it.” I would love to think you or your 15 year-old will always do the right thing just because you love Jesus – but in my experience, that has sometimes not proven to be enough. Some additional restraints put up by self or by parents can help. My last fun picture for the day. As silly as that strikes us, the reality is that it is wise to establish restraints against our natural, often sinful tendencies. For Dad, for Mom for Jr.

So, here is where I hope we can take this. Let’s thank God for his gift of the smartphone. Let’s dedicate it to the Lord. You get a new phone, pray over that device. Pray over your old one. Baptize it. Make it a Christian smartphone. And, I can tell you from experience, baptize it the Presbyterian way. God did not design this for immersion. He also did not design this to be your Lord and Savior. Smartphones are nice. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is necessary. These we can do without. How is Jesus like your smartphone? He can make you wise. He can help you connect with others. He is always there with you. How is he different? Well, he will never lead you into sin. He can’t distract because He is the focus and center of everything. And He is the only “addiction” or obsession that brings life and health, instead of death to our souls. So, bring your device under the Lordship of Christ. Make Him the master of your phone. And if you have recognized that, in truth, you have allowed your smartphone to lead you into sin, you have allowed it to distract you from the good, you have become too caught up with it – then, well there is no app for that, but there is a Savior, a Redeemer, one who died in our place so He could forgive our sin and make us whole. Turn to Him for grace to help in time of need whether you need to totally reboot your life or recharge your battery, Jesus is where you look. Let’s close together in prayer – And oh, go ahead and take out your phones, hold them in your upturned palms and let’s commit them to the Lord. If you left your phone at home or in the car, just imagine it is in your hand. Let’s pray over them and over our hearts.