SPIRITUAL SAFETY

IN THE

ACEBOOK AGE

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Introduction

This book builds on the following books:

Keeping the Kids: How to Keep the Children from Falling Prey to the World (2010) - [www.wayoflife.org/keeping/].

The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church (2015) - [www.wayoflife.org/mobile/].

These books are collective efforts that are packed with practical information we have gleaned from interviews with godly pastors, youth workers, and parents, testimonies and feedback from readers, and from large numbers of articles and books.

Spiritual Safety Requires Understanding the Times

On one hand, the enemies of God's people are the same as they ever were: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The flesh hasn't changed since man's fall. Adam's character was corrupted by the fall and he passed that along to his offspring. It is called "the old man" in Scripture. For the born again child of God, the old man is crucified with Christ (Ro. 6:6; Col. 3:9), but it is also still present and must be dealt with on a daily basis (Eph. 4:22-24).

The devil hasn't changed. He is the enemy of God, of God's Word, and of God's people. He has been "the god of this world" since the fall (2 Co. 4:4).

And *the world* hasn't changed. In 1 John 2:15 the "world" refers to the world system created by fallen men under the headship of Satan. The Greek is *kosmos*, which refers to a system, an order, an arrangement. The world is "that moral order which is antagonistic to God" (*Preacher's Homiletical Commentary*). The "course of this world" is defined in Ephesians 2:2-3. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." The world system began in the days of that rebel Cain, who went out from the presence of God and built the first city (Ge. 4:16-22). Cain's world was full of technology, enterprise, and entertainment (Ge. 4:20-22), but it was a civilization bent on living independent of God and in rebellion to His laws. It was characterized by polygamy, murder, prideful boasting (Ge.

4:19, 23-24). The world system was further developed in the days of Nimrod (Ge. 10:8-10; 11:1-9). After the Flood, God had instructed mankind to fill the earth, but instead they congregated in the region of Babel and built a society characterized by enmity to God, rebellion to God's laws, the exaltation of man, and idolatrous religion under the leadership of an antichrist forerunner. With the confounding of Babel, men were divided by languages and spread across the world, carrying the essence of Babel with them as they built the nations. Babylon is called "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Re. 17:5). The devil is "the god of this world" because he is the head of the world system (2 Co. 4:4). John tells us that the world system is universal: "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 Jo. 5:19).

So, on one hand, the enemies of God's people are the same as they ever were: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

On the other hand, we are living in a time of increased danger.

Spiritual safety requires understanding our times, and it is a gift in value beyond estimation that we have God's *infallible* Word as a light in the darkness.

> "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Pe. 1:19).

> "The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness..." (Ec. 2:14).

> "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going" (Pr. 14:15).

> "And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Ro. 13:11).

In brief, it is a time when

• the average teen spends almost 11 hours per day in consuming electronic media (TV. radio, internet, etc.)

• 53% of children go online with no parental supervision

• 38% of teens have received sexually suggestive content via a device

• very young children are becoming addicted to online pornography, with their first exposure as young as 8 years old

• 56% of children 8-11 and 69% of 12-year-olds in America have a smartphone

• the average smartphone user touches his phone 2,600+ times every day

• By 2016, youth 13-18 were spending nearly nine hours a day consuming entertainment media (*Business Insider*, Jun. 22, 2016).

• 66% admit to *nomophobia* (<u>no</u>-<u>mo</u>bile-<u>pho</u>ne-pho<u>bia</u>), the fear of not having your phone

• 40% of smartphone users check their phones in the middle of the night

• 52% of teens sit around in silence, staring at their smartphones when together with friend

• 88% of American youth 18-29 use social media and 45% say they are online "on a near-constant basis

• there are 2.5 billion monthly Facebook users (one-third of the global population)

• 90% of teens use Snapchat and 72% use Instagram

• "If you walk into any middle school in the United States and stop a random 13-year-old girl and ask her how many followers she has on Instagram, she will tell the exact number as of 5 minutes ago" (Jesse Weinberge, *The Boogeyman Exists*, p. 138).

• new apps like TikTok can explode in popularity from zero to half a billion users in a matter of months

• 95% of the most watched YouTube videos are highly sexualized music videos

• the top YouTube celebrity is a video gamer nicknamed PewDiePie with 102 million subscribers, a young man who has made about $90 million through the social currency of his YouTube channel

• one very liberal, anti-Christ company (Google) controls 73% of all internet searches (on all devices) and 93% of smartphone searches

• six very liberal-minded, anti-Christ corporations own most of the news and broadcast media in America, controlling 90% of what people read, watch, and listen to.

Even non-Bible believers are waking up to the fact that we are facing new dangers.

Jesse Weinberger, who teaches internet safety to thousands of parents and teachers each year, says,

> "As parents raising 21st century digital citizens, it is critical that we become educated in order to understand the reality of where our children live, who they interact with, and who they become once they enter the digital sphere. ... The entire landscape of parenting has changed; some for the better, much for the worse. AD era (After Digital) parenting holds all of the same issues from the BD (Before Digital) era, plus a full slate of new ones. ... The constantly changing landscape of digital risks demands constant parental engagement" (*The Boogeyman Exists, And He's in Your Child's Back Pocket*).

If the world is waking up to the unique dangers of this age and unregenerate parents are increasing their vigilance, how much more should God's people!

Understanding the times requires much more than understanding the internet. Let's look at this age through the lens of Scripture:

The Age of Apostasy

It is a time of increased danger because it is the time of apostasy (2 Ti. 3:1-5; 4:3-4). The New Testament prophesies

that the church age will be characterized by a turning away from the truth among professing Christians.

> "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. ... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Ti. 3:13; 4:3-4).

The Lord Jesus Christ described this apostasy in the parables of the mystery of the kingdom in Matthew 13. The final one, the parable of the leaven, summarizes the course of the church age. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Mt. 13:33). The leaven of apostasy will increase until the whole professing "Christendom" is corrupted. The end of the church age will witness an explosion of apostasy. The vast majority of churches will not follow the "faith once delivered to the saints."

This is exactly what we see in history. Roman Catholicism developed over a period of a few hundred years after the apostles and eventually spread false Christianity throughout the world. The Protestant Reformation had many Scriptural elements and resulted in many social and political benefits, but it did not reject all of Rome's errors (e.g., infant baptism, universal church, state church, amillennialism, replacement theology). In the 19th century, there was an explosion of apostasy: German higher critical thinking or theological liberalism, Darwinian and theistic evolution, Unitarianism, end-time cults such as Jehovah's Witness, Seventh-day Adventism, Swedenborgianism. Today, even most "evangelicals" are leavened by apostasy.

Pervasive apostasy means that this is a time of great danger.

With the coming of the internet age, apostasy has spread phenomenally. Any false doctrine is available at the click of a mouse or the tap on a phone screen. This is having a serious effect on churches, as one friend commented recently:

> "Here we are, living in the 21st century, and we have had the entire New Testament for 20 centuries, and yet we live in an era that is filled with confusion about many things including church. One might think with all the technology and social media that people have at their fingertips, it would lessen confusion and increase their learning and that it would help believers to grow in the Lord as well, but in general, that is not the case. I believe I'm right to say that social media has had the opposite effect. Here is why. The addictive social media exposes people to live, world-wide wickedness, to world-wide false teachers, to world-wide church services of all flavors, and people feed on all kinds of strange doctrines. Of course, social media is not the only reason for all the confusion, but it has contributed to it."

Living in the age of apostasy calls for the spiritual wisdom and strength that comes only by a strong knowledge of God's Word and by abiding in Christ and walking in the Spirit and not being conformed to the world. And yet this exactly what we do not see in a great many "Bible believing" churches today.

The Age of the Great Commission

We are also living in the age of Christ's Great Commission, which will last until the Rapture of church-age saints. After His resurrection, Jesus emphasized this program to His disciples. It is emphasized by being repeated in every Gospel in the book of Acts (Mt. 28:18-20; Mr. 16:5-16; Lu. 24:44-48; Joh. 20:21; Ac. 1:8).

Consider the first mention of this in the Gospel of Matthew:

> "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power
> is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye
> therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the
> name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy
> Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I
> have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always,
> even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Mt. 28:18-20).

We observe that this command is to be kept "unto the end of the world." "World" is the Greek *aion*, referring to the age. Thus, we are still in the Great Commission age, even as we are in the apostasy age.

There are two major supernatural programs at work in this present age, and that is the devil's program of the mystery of iniquity, which is his plan to put his man on the throne of the world (2 Th. 2:6-12), and God's program of worldwide gospel preaching.

God is in control, of course. There are not two Gods. Christ sits at the right hand of God and has all power in heaven and in earth (Mr. 16:19; Mt. 28:18; Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:2). "... Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Pe. 4:21-22). In the major passage on the mystery of iniquity, we are told that the devil's program is being withheld or restrained. This restrainer is called "he" and we believe it is the Holy Spirit (2 Th. 2:6).

Thus God's people are not instructed to form communes or live in caves or join the prepper movement and build armored escape dens and store up food and weapons.

Until the Rapture, church-age saints are to keep doing what we see the church of Antioch doing in Acts 13-14. This is the pattern until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in and God turns His attention, so to speak, to completing His program with Israel according to Daniel's 70 Week prophecy (Da. 9:24-27; Romans 11:25-27).

God's people can use any technology and any legitimate means to fulfill the Great Commission. Every modern communications technology that has been invented, beginning with the printing press in the 15th century, has been a two-edged sword, so to speak, with one edge being used by the devil and the other by God.

The Age of Scoffing and Open Rebellion

We live in the age prophesied in 2 Peter 3:3-7.

> "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

It is the age of scoffing at God's Word and denouncing eternal judgment.

It is the age prophesied in Psalm 2 when the very rulers of the world take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed. Man has been in rebellion against God since the fall, but this prophecy describes something more. This is not making false gods and pretending to serve them, as in Egypt, China, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. It is the determination *to have no God whatsoever*.

The prophecies give the fundamental reason for the scoffing and rebellion. Peter says it is because they walk after their own lusts (1 Pe. 3:3). David says it is because they want to cast away God's "cords," referring to His holy laws. Men know there is a God; it is written everywhere in creation; it is

shouted from the heavens; it is written in their very hearts and consciences (Ps. 19:1-4; Ro. 1:20; 2:14-16). But they hate His holy laws and refuse to submit to His authority over their lives. Atheism is a smokescreen for moral anarchy.

It is the age of Friedrich Nietzsche's God is dead *Ubermensch*, Karl Marx's dialectical materialism, Thomas Huxley's agnosticism, Raymond Bragg's *Humanist Manifesto*, Richard Dawkins' *God Delusion,* and Margaret Sanger's *Woman Rebel* (her motto was "No gods, no masters!"). Scoffing rebellion has permeated the public school systems, higher education, the entertainment industry, the news industry, social media. At every mention of biblical truth and righteousness, the scoffing rebels get into an uproar like howler monkeys.

Scoffing rebels are in control of the vast majority of multi-billion dollar global commercial enterprises, such as Apple, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Amazon, Google, Facebook, DuPont, Coca-Cola, Nike, News Corp, Alphabet (Google, YouTube), Facebook, Disney, Sony, General Motors, Hilton, IBM, IKEA, Johnson & Johnson, Levi Strauss, MasterCard, Visa, Monsanto, Procter & Gamble, and Xerox. These companies support abortion rights, homosexual rights, and same-sex marriage. The captains of global industry are thumbing their noses at God precisely as the Bible prophesied.

The Age of Music

It is a time of increased danger because it is the age of music. If ever there were an age when God's people need to take particular heed to the issue of music, it is today! This could be called "the age of music" because technology has made it ubiquitous. Most people are immersed in music every day of their lives.

This is a brand new thing in human history. There was no music on demand from Eden until the 20th century, except

for kings and the most wealthy who could afford to have musicians on their payroll, and even their choices were severely limited.

The music revolution began with the phonograph (record player). It was invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison and he rightly predicted, "The phonograph will undoubtedly be liberally devoted to music." Twenty years later he observed that "people are willing to pay to be amused more than anything else." How right he was! Modern communications technology has made this the age of amusement, and music is at the very heart of the amused culture.

By the turn of the 20th century, record companies were popularizing music recordings. In 1920, "Crazy Blues" by Mamie Smith sold one million copies. The explosion of commercial radio in the 1920s hastened the popularity of music listening and increased record sales. Music pieces began to be written to fit the time available on a record. The result was the three-minute pop song. It was the first time in history that an individual could listen to whatever music he pleased, and the first time that an individual could immerse himself in music in isolation. It was the dawn of the age of "me."

RCA's 45 rpm vinyl record of 1949 was another major step in the music revolution. The 45 rpm players were small and more portable than anything that had previously existed, and some featured tall spindles that could automatically play stacks of records. It was the inexpensive, portable 45 that propelled the rock & roll revolution of the 1950s. It was the record of the rock party, the record shop, and the ubiquitous jukebox. In 1955, Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" sold 3 million copies. When I began my personal venture into the world of rock in about 1962, the 45 was still a prominent technology of the pop culture. The popularity of 45 rpm records peaked in 1977 with 200 million sales.

Beginning in the 1950s, television furthered the music listening craze, particularly of pop music, with shows such as *American Bandstand*.

The handheld, battery-powered transistor radio of the 1950s took portability of music to a new level. The Sony Walkman of 1979, that played the compact cassette tape, was revolutionary in making "my music" available 24/7, even while walking, running, etc.

The iPod digital music player (2001) and then the iPhone (2007), with its constant connection with the internet, took this to an even higher level. The iPhone plugged the listener into the vast world of streaming services and on demand music such as Spotify, iTunes, and Amazon. The technology-empowered music revolution is the heart and soul of the global pop culture with its licentious "me first" philosophy.

Today YouTube is the world's most popular movie house. There are 1.9 billion active monthly users, and 95% of YouTube's most popular offerings are music videos. Rock videos with more than 3 BILLION views include Justin Bieber's "Sorry" (3.21 billion), Psy's "Gangnam Style" (3.44 billion), Mark Ronson's "Uptown Funk" (3.69 billion), Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You" (4.46 billion), and Luis Fonsi's "Despacito" (6.5 billion). Without the music, these videos would have little allure and the views would probably be more along the lines of thousands than billions.

God's people live in the Age of Music, and they must understand its dangers and deal with it or be devoured by it.

The Sexualized Age

Never has there been an age so sexualized. Ancient kingdoms had Aphrodite temple prostitution and Bacchus orgies, but they didn't have color printing, movies, television, MTV, and the internet.

Man's fallen nature has an endless appetite for promiscuity. The first four characteristics of "the flesh" are "adultery,

fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness" (Ga. 5:19), all of which have to do with illicit sexuality. For the fallen nature, "stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (Pr. 9:17). The sinful appetites cannot be filled. "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Pr. 27:20). This is why depravity increases as the flesh is fed. It explains bisexuality, homosexuality, sadomasochism, pedophilia, and bestiality. It is why the legalization of prostitution is a bad idea.

Proverbs describes the immoral (strange) woman in the 11th century BC. She is wearing the attire of a harlot and has flattering lips (Pr. 7:10-21). Her eyes are painted (Pr. 6:25). She is out "in the evening, in the black and dark night," finds a young man and says, "Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves" (Pr. 7:18).

In that day, the strange woman had to lurk in the darkness and find a man, and a man had to find her.

Today, the "strange woman" appears in billions of photographs, movies, YouTube videos, and anyone can communicate with her at the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen. The goddess is omnipresent; the strange woman is everywhere!

The music industry is sexualized. "... that is what rock is all about--sex with a 100-megaton bomb, the beat" (Gene Simmons of KISS, *Entertainment Tonight*, ABC, Dec. 10, 1987).

The fashion industry is sexualized.

The advertising industry is sexualized.

The movie industry is sexualized.

Social media is sexualized.

The news media is sexualized. It is filled with soft porn that seems mild by today's standards but is adulterous by God's standards "that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after

her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) warns, "The pornification of culture (i.e. softcore, hypersexualized imagery) is widespread and evident everywhere, from the grocery store checkout lane to advertising, popular entertainment, unsolicited email, and beyond. ... [P]ornography constitutes a public health crisis."

The sexualization targets an ever-younger age group. In the 1990s, it was younger teens. "*Seventeen Magazine* is a great example of normalizing hyper-sexualization. If you take a look at their media kit you will find that they 'sell' their advertisers access to the teen market beginning at age 12. ... Much of the content focuses around topics like: how to flirt the right way, how to become a greater kisser, and knowing when you're ready to have sex" (Weinberger, *The Boogeyman Exists*).

Smart phones and social media are lowering the age of sexualization even more. A study by the parenting app Jiminy published in December 2019 found that 15% of 8-year-old girls with smartphones are exposed to sexting, 24% by age 10, 37% by age 13, and 44% by age 16. Nearly 25% of 13-year-old children were asked to send nude photos of themselves (blog.jiminy.me). The report warned, "Sexting is quickly becoming a normative form of sexual exploration among preteens and teens. As such, parents should expect the real possibility that their children may be approached by others, known or unknown, or approach others in a sexually explicit manner."

A 2016 study found that among college males, 49% first encountered pornography before age 13 ("Pornography and Public Health," National Center on Sexual Exploitation).

A 2020 study by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) found that "**viewing pornography has been normalised among children from their mid-teens onwards,**

with more encountering it on networks such as Snapchat and WhatsApp than on dedicated pornography sites" ("Porn survey reveals extent of UK teenagers' viewing habits," *The Guardian*, Jan. 31, 2020).

The sexualized age has produced unisex and the LGBT movement, which is all about the liberty to do whatever I please with whomever I please whenever I please.

It is obviously a time to be hyper-alert to moral danger, more than at any time in history, both for individuals and for church leaders and for parents.

The Age of Advertising

Since the late 19th century, we have lived in the age of advertising.

This history is given in the fascinating book *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get inside Our Heads* by Tim Wu. (Wu is also the author of *The Master Switch*, another highly informative book.)

Attention Merchants are advertisers who compete for our attention. They can't sell anything unless they can get someone's attention.

> "I use the crop metaphor because attention has been widely recognized as a commodity, like wheat, pork bellies, or crude oil. Existing industries have long depended on it to drive sales. And the new industries of the twentieth century turned it into a form of currency they could mint. Beginning with radio, each new medium would attain its commercial viability through the resale of what attention it could capture in exchange for its 'free' content. ... the winning strategy from the beginning has been to seek out time and spaces previously walled off from commercial exploitation, gathering up chunks and then slivers of our unharvested awareness. Within living memory it was thought that families would never tolerate the intrusion of

broadcasting in the home. ... Now, however, most of us carry devices on our bodies that constantly find ways to commercialize the smallest particles of our time and attention. Thus, bit by bit, what was once shocking became normal, until the shape of our lives yielded further and further to the logic of commerce--but gradually enough that we should now find nothing strange about it" (Wu, *The Attention Merchants,* pp. 5, 6).

Penny Newspapers

Wu begins with the penny newspapers of the mid-19th century. Benjamin Day founded the first penny newspaper in New York, with the idea that he could undercut other newspapers by selling the paper under the cost of production, at a price that people could easily afford and might buy impulsively, and make profit on advertising rather than subscriptions. Day's *New York Sun* appeared in 1833 and soon passed up *The Morning Courier* and *New York Enquirer,* which sold their papers for 6 cents. What Day did was "a break with the traditional strategy for making profit: selling at a price higher than the cost of production. He would rely on a historically significant business model: reselling the attention of his audience, or advertising." Day got the attention he wanted by featuring stories of lurid or comic fascination, such as suicides and murders. He hired the first full-time news reporter to dig up "must read" headlines, particularly from the police court. He also included a ton of gossip and insults (such as calling the portly editor of the *Herald* "bloated"), anything to sell papers and thus increase the advertising revenue. The consequence of Day's business model (draw attention with apparently free stuff and then resell the attention) is that "under competition, the race will naturally run to the bottom; attention will almost invariably gravitate to the more garish, lurid, outrageous alternative, whatever stimulus may more likely engage what cognitive

scientists call our 'automatic' attention as opposed to our 'controlled' attention, the kind we direct with intent" (*The Attention Merchants,* p. 16).

Paris Billboards

Another early example of successful attention merchandising was billboards designed by Jules Chéret. "The giant Parisian poster wasn't the first mass-produced poster; it was, however, a technological and conceptual innovation. For despite being static, the Parisian posters evoked a sense of frantic energy in their bright, contrasting colors, and beautiful, half-dressed women--elements that made them nearly impossible to ignore. ... Chéret would print thousands of them, producing their mesmeric effects on millions of passersby" (*The Attention Merchants,* p. 19).

Commercial Radio

Successful commercial radio began in 1928 with the *Amos 'n' Andy* program, sponsored by Pepsodent toothpaste. By the next year, the program "had become a craze, the first bona fide hit serial in broadcast history." Families across America were addicted. An estimated 40 million people (out of a population of 120 million) set aside a block of time every evening, five days a week, to gather around the radio and give their full attention to a comedy with no redeeming value other than silly entertainment. "[D]uring the height of the *Amos 'n' Andy* craze ... the 7 p.m. time slot ... began to influence the schedule of everything. Hotels, restaurants, and movie theaters would broadcast the show for their patrons. Fearing displacement, movie theaters advertised the installation of radios to broadcast Amos 'n' Andy at 7 p.m., before the newsreels and features" (*The Attention Merchants,* p. 90).

Sales of Pepsodent doubled in one year. 1928 marked the beginning of the merger of the entertainment industry with business. It began "a race for the conquest of time and space

that continues to this day. *Amos 'n' Andy* demonstrated that an industry could, in effect, wholly 'own' a part of the day ... across the land" (*The Attention Merchants,* p. 92).

Commercial radio was a major step in the secularization of America and in the widespread addiction to mindless entertainment.

By 2016, youth 13-18 were spending nearly nine hours a day consuming entertainment media ("Teens are getting almost all of their news," *Business Insider*, Jun. 22, 2016).

Commercial Television

By 1956, televisions were in 72% of American homes, and the dawn of the "boob tube" had arrived. From then until the 21st century, television was the most influential technology in human history. And it was an Attention Merchant's dream. "Once ensconced in private space, it immediately began to devour time--nearly five hours a day by the end of the decade" (*The Attention Merchants,* p. 124).

Watching the evening news, followed by prime time programming, became a habit of millions. It was called "the prime time ritual." *I Love Lucy*, which ran from 1951-1957, was the first television super hit, with 50 million viewers. In 1953, 71% of television viewers were glued to Lucy's ridiculous exploits. In 1956, Lucy's popularity was surpassed when 82% of viewers watched Elvis Presley's first television appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. (The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Doors were also launched to popularity on *Ed Sullivan*.) Television viewers got a few minutes of entertainment, followed by a commercial, and advertisers made millions. The Marlboro Man ad campaign, which began in 1955, increased sales of Marlboro cigarettes 3,000 percent in one year. For the programmers and advertisers, television was all about money. It was all about the manipulation of people through empty but fascinating

entertainment that a great many people found impossible to ignore.

Commercial radio and television created the age of a-musement (no muse, no thought).

Children were targeted beginning with the *Howdy Doody Show* in 1947 and the *Mickey Mouse Club* in 1955. The Saturday morning cartoon rituals began in the 1960s. Toy makers, such as Mattel (the Barbie doll), made a mint by garnering the attention of children.

Video Games

The first commercially successful video game was *Space Invaders*, which appeared in 1978, and users found it immediately addictive. A *Washington Post* reporter said, "I dropped in a quarter and saw 55 rectangles waving little arms and dropping laser bombs on earth, which is at the bottom of the screen. I fired back with my three laser bases, which got bombed out in about 30 seconds. ... I was still pounding on the FIRE button at the end of the game. End of quarter. Start of addiction." That report stated, "It's like drugs. They'll tell you: 'I got a $4-a-day habit.'" In 1981, Dr. Robert Millman told *The New York Times* that video games were like "sniffing glue" and were "a seductive world."

By 1982, *Space Invaders* was the biggest money making entertainment product in the United States. It was only available in gaming arcades and was sold in little chunks of time that cost 25 cents, but it earned more than $2 billion (8 billion quarters)! Soon, video games were earning $5 billion a year. In the early 1980s the first personal video gaming consoles appeared. By 1982, Atari was the fastest growing company in America.

The Internet

The Attention Merchants struck gold with the commercialization of the internet. Never before have they been able to garner the attention of so many people for so

long. We cover this history in the sections on the Age of Social Media and the Age of the Smartphone.

The Age of Global Commerce

International commerce has existed since ancient times (e.g., the Phoenicians, the Silk Road, the spice trade), but it has exploded in power and wealth in these last days by means of modern machinery and automation, global travel and communication technology, international banking, container shipping, air delivery services, world-spanning corporations, the modern advertising industry, and a multitude of other inventions. This age began with the Industrial Revolution and the invention of things such as steam ships, the locomotive, and the transcontinental telegraph.

Some international corporations are richer than some entire nations. The top eight media empires (AT&T, Alphabet, Comcast, Sony, Disney, Facebook, National Amusements, News Corp) had an annual revenue of $709 billion in 2019. Only 20 nations have a GDP greater than that.

Global commerce and the frenzy for wealth is prophesied in Revelation 18. It is commercial Babylon.

The merchants have grown rich from her (Re. 18:3). The great merchants of this world, the secular business corporations, are a part of the Babylonian system and are not in submission to God and His Word.

Commerce in itself is not wrong. God instructs His people to work with their hands so that they can fulfill their earthly obligations. See Eph. 4:28; 1 Th. 4:11; 2 Th. 3:12; 1 Ti. 5:8. The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the wisdom of working hard and avoiding slothfulness (Pr. 6:6-11; 12:24; 13:4; 14:4; 18:9; 19:15; 20:13; 21:25; 22:29; 24:30-34; 27:23-27).

But what Babylon's commerce stands for is not merely hard work and making an honorable income; it stands for

selfishness, greed and covetousness, idolatry, occultism, oppression, unrighteousness, injustice, and the satisfying of the flesh. We see this in the world's music, advertising, price gouging, high interest, confiscatory fees, low wages, shoddy workmanship, deceptive advertising, social media's frenzy to monetize its users.

The large business corporations are often at the forefront of supporting unrighteous causes such as "abortion rights" and "homosexual rights." According to the 2006 report from the Human Rights Campaign, which advocates for homosexual issues, 138 major U.S. corporations earned the top rating of 100 percent and 436 include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. This is why it is foolish for professing Christians to yoke together with secular corporations, such as when Contemporary Christian Music publishers allow themselves to be bought by, or enter into distribution arrangements with, corporations such as Word Entertainment, EMI, and Sony, and when CCM artists like Michael W. Smith accept sponsorship from Chevrolet and other secular corporations.

In 1865, Bible commentator Joseph Seiss presciently described the god of global commerce at the dawn of the telegraph age as follows:

> "In what, indeed, does the mightiest and farthest reaching power on earth now already center? A power which looms up in all lands, far above all individual or combined powers of church, or state, or caste, or creed? What is it that today monopolizes nearly all legislation, dictates international treaties, governs the conferences of kings for the regulation of the balance of power, builds railways, cuts ship-canals, sends forth steamer lines to the ends of the earth, unwinds electric wires across continents, under the seas, and around the world, employs thousands of engineers, subsidizes the press, tells the state of the markets of the world yesterday that everyone may know how to move today, and has her

living organizations in every land and city, interlinked with each other, and coming daily into closer and closer combination, so that no great government under the sun can any longer move or act against her will, or without her concurrence and consent? Think for a moment, for there is such a power; a power that is everywhere clamoring for a common code, a common currency, common weights and measures; and which is not likely to be silenced or to stop till it has secured a common center on its own independent basis, whence to dictate to all countries and to exercise its own peculiar rule on all the kings and nations of the earth. That power is COMMERCE; the power of the ephah and the talent--the power borne by the winged women of Zechariah 5; the one with her hand on the sea and the other with her hand on the land--the power which even in its present dismemberment is mightier than any pope, any throne, any government, or any other one human power on the face of the globe. Let it go on as it has been going, and will go, in spite of everything that earth can interpose to hinder, dissolving every tie of nationality, every bond of family or kindred, every principle or right and religion which it cannot bend and render subservient to its own ends and interests; and the time must come when it will settle itself down somewhere on its own independent base, and where Judaism and heathenism, Romanism and Protestantism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism, and every distinction of nationality--English, German, French, Italian, Greek, Turk, Hindoo, Arab, Chinese, Japanese, or what not-- shall be sunk in one great universal fellowship and kingdom of commerce" (Joseph Seiss, *On the Apocalypse*, 1865).

In 1935, William Newell listed seven characteristics of global commerce in his day.

First, it enables man to avoid as far as possible God's command to till the earth and to live by the sweat of his

brow. Second, it tends to unify the humanity that God has definitely divided into nations, for the very purpose of covering the earth with the spirit of self-confidence and rebellion as before Babel (Ge. 11). *Third, it enables individuals, cities and nations to become unduly swollen with riches*. It begets universal covetousness, which is idolatry--in that the man who has money, can be independent of God. *Fourth, it is contrary to God's will that each man live beneath 'his own vine and fig-tree,' content with such things as he has.* **'Big business' is an abomination. It will be the ruination of the world.** We scarcely know how far we have drifted. Our forefathers were content with their living. They had domestic ties, 'family reunions,' quiet church affiliations, gladly worshipping in the same old church, generation after generation. They had deep, kind, loving patriotism. But **the forgetting of God is fast falling upon earth under the soul-stifling power of universal greed.** Everybody wants to be rich--which damns its tens of millions! 'Get up in the world.' 'Get on in the world!' What lies! what will-o'-the-wisps of Satan to be followed by folks whose feet shall shortly stumble into open graves! *Fifth, it is an excuse most common in the thoughts of men for not serving God (and yet shortly they will stand before God!).* Millions of men really think that 'business' has a real claim upon them. *Sixth, it is atheistic; it is self-indulgent; it is self-confident. Seventh, it is fast blotting out real human ties* (home, church or country). The difficulties experienced by God's dear saints of all days on account of 'business' claims are proverbial. The spirit of commercialism has seized upon the human race. *Eighth, it brings spiritual deadness and insensibility as nothing else does.* Once consent in your heart that 'business' has a claim upon you and your spiritual life begins to shrivel. For a man to do an honest day's work is not to yield to the claims that 'business' makes upon humanity. God told us to work, to work with our hands, to do with our might what our hands find to do, to do the humblest

tasks, even those of a slave, as unto the Lord. The thing called 'business' has to be discerned distinctly by you if you are to understand the hideousness into which the whole world will leap, and alas, how shortly! (adapted from William Newell, *Revelation*).

God's people must understand the times and not be carried along blindly by the present world system. Christian individuals must put Christ first and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness rather than pursue the things that the world pursues. Christian parents must follow God's Word rather than the culture, the father, as the spiritual leader of the home, putting God and church and home first rather than business, the mother, as the keeper of the home, putting her family first rather than career or self-centered hobbies.

The Age of the Celebrity

Celebrities are the gods and goddesses of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The age of the celebrity began with the moving picture industry. There were prominent people before then who drew the attention of the public--national and world leaders, the very wealthy, prominent criminals, and those who did special exploits, such as Nellie Bly, who traveled around the world in 72 days in 1889-90--but it was the moving picture industry that created the age of the celebrity. They were called "movie stars," "movie queens," and they became household names. The first were the silent movie gods and goddesses, Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, Lillian Gish, Carole Lombard, Rudolph Valentino, Billy Dove, Greta Garbo, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Laurel and Hardy. They tended to live scandalous lives from that era forward.

Ever since, a large portion of the public has been fascinated with media celebrities, even though this pursuit is pure vanity, pure a-musement, of zero eternal value. It is the very opposite of "redeeming the time, because the days are

evil" (Eph. 5:16). These are not wise people who can help me be wise.

This fascination is a major element of social media. Never has there been a time when following one's favorite celebrities has been easier and more effectual. "Nowadays celebrities and social media have a special bonding" (SEOTechyWorld).

The vast majority of the most popular Twitter feeds are owned by movie, television, music, and professional sports celebrities. The top thirty include Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, Rihanna, Taylor Swift, Christiano Ronaldo, Lady Gaga, and Ellen DeGeneres, Ariana Grande, Justin Timberlake, Kim Kardashian, Selena Gomez, Britney Spears, Shakira, and Jimmy Fallon, LeBron James, Miley Ray Cyrus, Jennifer Lopez, Bruno Mars, Oprah Winfrey.

The most popular YouTube channels are celebrity driven: PewDiePie (video gamer), T-Series (Indian pop music), Canal KondZilla (Brazilian music videos), Justin Bieber, World Wrestling Entertainment, Zee Music (Indian pop music), Dude Perfect, Eminem, Ariana Grande, Ed Sheeran (rocker), Taylor Swift, Ellen Degeneres, Rihanna, eirubiusOMG (gamer), Fernanfloo (gamer), Marshmello (rocker).

The 10 most popular Facebook pages are owned by Taylor Swift, Michael Jackson, Will Smith, Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Leo Messi, Eminem, Vin Deisel, Shakira, and Cristiano Ronaldo.

The 20 most popular Instagram accounts are Chistiano Ronaldo, Ariana Grande, Dwayne Johnson (The Rock), Selena Gomez, Kylie Jenner, Kim Kardashian, Lionel Messi, Beyonce, Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Kendall Jenner, Nicki Minaj, Jennifer Lopez, Khloe Kardashian, Miley Cyrus, and Katy Perry. These have a total of more than 2 billion followers.

But social media has done far more than facilitate following one's favorite media celebrities. **It has made it**

possible for every individual to be a celebrity. A person who only knows a few people in real life can use social media to gain hundreds, sometimes thousands and even millions, of "friends" and "followers" who "like" their postings.

The "selfie" is me as a celebrity.

Through social media, I can create myself as a brand.

With the aid of high-tech smartphone cameras and filters, the individual can enhance his image even more effectively than the professional techniques used by movie stars and models of a past generation. The average Joe can make his own high quality movies with himself as the star. The average Jane can build her own Facebook world, Snapchat story, and Instagram life.

"Instagram is the crowning achievement of that decades-long development that we have called the 'celebrification' of everyday life and ordinary people" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 314).

God's people must understand these things and not be swept along by vanity of the celebrity age. Those who know Christ personally and have His indwelling Spirit and love His Word know better than to pursue a "selfie" life and to try to create themselves as a "brand" via social media. They have far better, wiser things to do with their fleeting time.

The Internet Age

It is a time of increased danger because of technology, particularly communications technology.

When I was born in 1949, there were no personal computers, communication satellites, digital cameras, digital books, internet, smart phones, or social media.

It was the introduction of these things in the late 20th century and early 21st that has so dramatically changed society and increased spiritual and moral danger.

The internet is the major change agent. Without the internet, there would be no social media or smartphones.

The internet was invented in the 1960s by the U.S. Defense Department and first used to connect government research labs. In 1990, the World Wide Web was created. The internet is the global network for the transfer of information, and the World Wide Web (www) is the information. The internet is the infrastructure, and the Web is the information and service that moves through the infrastructure.

In 1993, the first popular web browser appeared (Mosaic), and the *New York Times* wrote about the web for the first time, calling Mosaic "a map to the buried treasures of the Information Age."

In 1994 and 1995, Compuserve, America Online, Yahoo, Amazon, Craigslist, Match.com (first online dating site), Netscape, Explorer, and eBay appeared, and the U.S. White House launched its website. In 1996, Nokia produced the first phone with internet connectivity. In 1997, Google was born. In 2003, Skype and iTunes. In 2004, Facebook.

In 2007, the appearance of the iPhone marked the dawn of the smartphone era. (Smartphones existed before then, but were not ubiquitous.)

Consider words *that did not exist before the 1990s or were used in a different way*: texting, surfing, browsing, posting, clicks, selfie, offline, spam, streaming, tweet, cyberspace, cyber age, cyber community, cybercafe, cybercrime, cyber espionage, cyberthreat, cyberbully, cyber banking, cyber shopping, online banking, direct marketing, wifi, network, netcast, blogosphere, search engine, Google, the Net, Skyping, the Web, website, web address, web browser, web crawler, hyperlink, keyword, navigation, home page, posting, e-book, e-reader, e-currency, e-link, e-zine, e-business,, e-publishing, e-learning, chatroom, hashtag, tablet, phablet, like, unlike, unfriend, troll, avatar, meme, geek, the cloud, cloudware, dot-com, dot-org, dot-gov, viral, spyware, mp3,

jpeg, PDF, freeware, upload/download, information superhighway, blog, vlog, mass media, VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), crowd source, podcast, smartphone, online/off-line, firewall, chatroom, social networking, phishing, cookies, traffic, friends, shaming, banner ad, popup ad, bricks and mortar, shareware, adware, multitasking, web conferencing, digital divide, online dating, virtual reality, trojan, bitcoin, filtering, hot spot.

Number of people connected to the internet worldwide

1995 - 44 million

2000 - 412 million

2005 - 1 billion

2010 - 2 billion

2016 - 3.4 billion

2019 - 4.4 billion

Fundamentally, the internet is simply a electronic communications system. It is no more inherently good or evil than the telephone, the radio, or the television. It simply provides an unprecedented capacity for communicating everything that man wants to communicate, good and evil, true or false, innocent or vicious.

The internet is a marvelous forum for good. I have stayed on the cutting edge of the internet age since the early 1990s, using it for good personal benefit and for the ministry of the Word of God.

The good benefit of the internet is *very good*. I think of international communication, research, education, advertising, preaching and teaching, planning, and social connections.

But the internet is also a forum for evil, and the evil aspect of the internet is *very evil*.

Consider some testimonies about the negative changes that have come because of the internet:

"I have been a missionary for over 40 years. We have seen a drastic decline in the spiritual lives of God's people. We had a thriving Bible institute ministry from around 1987-2000. Then the iPhone craze hit and we have seen much more interest in what is posted there than paying attention to the Word of God. I think this movement of the Facebook and iPhone era has deadened the power of the Spirit of God in the lives of the lost and the saved."

"Pornography is everywhere now, and it is an addiction worse than drug addiction. Speaking highly confidentially to the youth we are dealing with in a nearby development, they all admit that having this curse in their pockets [smartphone] is far easier than seeking it [pornography] in the movies or in books. Truly, brother, this 'affliction' has affected many, as you know, from the highest (pastors and other leaders) right down to the lowest (primary school children and the poor)."

"My wife and I are missionaries in Ireland; and, just as it is in the U.S., even very young children here are permitted to have cell phones, iPads, etc. I consider this to be the height of foolishness. It is opening up children to all manner of spiritual dangers. At the very least, it draws them into a world of their own where they are not learning how to carry on true conversation or to have real relationships with people."

"I teach math to twelve- to fifteen-year-old children in public school in a heavily Protestant-churched community in North Carolina. The students are absolutely addicted to cell phones. Many walk around campus plugged into their devices. Music and games are the most addictive. Posting of 'selfies' on Snapchat is very popular. All the immorality that we had to work hard to find when we were young is available to children in a second. Few, if any, are strong enough to resist

biting the apple. Teachers have to call parents because children are distracted by devices in the classroom."

For better or worse, God's people live in the internet age, and they must learn how to have spiritual victory in this age, which is the subject of this book.

The Age of the Smartphone

A "smartphone" is a mobile phone and computing device.

It is a powerful, simple-to-operate, pocket computer, with more computing power than all of NASA during the Apollo moon program. Today's smartphones are more powerful than previous super computers (such as IBM's Deep Blue). The smartphone is a prominent product of the explosion of knowledge in the end times. It is a product of the vast increase in computing power and the vast decrease in computer size over a mere half century. The 70-pound Apollo Guidance Computer onboard Apollo 11 in 1969 was designed by MIT and was cutting edge, but the tiny iPhone has 100,000 times more processing power, one million times more memory, and seven million times more storage capacity.

The smartphone was introduced in the 1990s (e.g., Nokia 9000 and Blackberry), but its use exploded with the introduction of the Apple iPhone in 2007, the brainchild of Steve Jobs. The Android operating system was introduced in 2008 as the direct competitor to Apple and by 2012 had the largest share of the smartphone market.

In 2020, there are 5 billion smartphone users worldwide, which is 67% of the world's population (Smartinsights.com, Jan. 5, 2020). In America, 77% of the general population and 95% of teens have smartphones.

In America, 56% of children 8-11 have a smartphone, and 69% of 12-year-olds ("The majority of 11-year-olds own smartphones," *The Guardian*, Nov. 1, 2019).

17.5% of all global internet traffic comes through mobile devices. In Asia and Africa it is 25%. In China, 98% access the internet via smartphones.

The average smartphone user touches his phone 2,600+ times every day. Ten percent touch their phones more than 5,400 times per day. A touch is a swipe, a tap, or a type.

The first generation to grow up with the smartphone was born in 1995. They were 12 years old when the iPhone was introduced.

The following statement should be a very loud warning to Christian parents who understand the moral and spiritual danger inherent in the teen culture:

> "The smartphone is the main avenue your kid has to teen-culture" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Dr. Jean Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University, has studied this generation extensively. In her book *IGen*, she says that today's kids who are "super-connected" are "less happy and completely unprepared for adulthood." Teens who spend more time on phones are "more likely to be unhappy, lonely, and have more risk factors for suicide" ("Smart phone era: Is it damaging teenagers?" BBC, Sep. 3, 2017).

Smartphones are highly addictive. 66% admit to being addicted. It's called *nomophobia* (<u>no</u>-<u>mo</u>bile-<u>pho</u>ne-pho<u>bia</u>), the fear of not having your phone. The average smartphone user checks his phone 150 times per day. 69% check their phones within five minutes of waking up. 40% check their phones in the middle of the night. 86% constantly check their phones while talking to friends. 52% of teens sit around in silence, staring at their smartphones when together with friends. North American users spend 3-5 hours a day looking at their smartphones ("Your smartphone is making you stupid, antisocial and unhealthy," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Apr. 10, 2018). In reality, it's probably a lot more

than that, but even at three hours that is 1,095 hours a year (45 days or 6.5 weeks), 76,000 hours in a lifetime (452 weeks or 8.7 years)!

God says, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*" (Eph. 5:15-17).

The smartphone is an instrument for good and for evil just like all of the inventions of the past 100 years:

- commercial radio (1920)
- television (1940)
- tape recorder (1947)
- portable radio (1950)
- personal computer (1977)
- portable video camera (1982)
- internet (1985)
- portable cell phone (1989)
- email (1990)
- texting or SMS short message servicing (1993)
- digital camera (1995)
- MP3 player (1998)
- social media (2003)

The smartphone is *all of these things in one device*! How an individual uses its features depends on his or her heart and character.

The smartphone and the internet are simply tools. There is untold potential for good and for the glory of God.

Our web site has helped tens of thousands of people around the world, including teens, and more than 50% of the visits to our web site today are on mobile devices.

We use our smartphones for good in the service of the Lord, for communication, for Bible study, for personal education, for creating Bible teaching materials, for research, for innocent recreation, and for a great many other things.

A smartphone is the most effectual instrument for study, research, and education ever conceived. I carry around in my pocket the equivalent of a room full of Bible commentaries and lexicons and other study tools, all electronically linked with Bible translations and texts. Extensive word studies in English/Greek/Hebrew are a tap away. On the same minuscule device, I have the equivalent of a large library of other books that I carry with me wherever I go. With that same device I can access a vast and ever-growing library of books and reports on every conceivable subject, dating to ancient times. The last time I visited the British Library, I realized that I would probably never renew my reader's card. Not everything in the British Library is online, of course, but the vast majority of what I need is, and I can access it anywhere, anytime. Google has scanned the world's books!

But there are great dangers in this brave new world of communications technology. And a vast number of Christian parents simply are not in this battle in an effective way. They are in spiritual snooze-land, and oftentimes it can be traced to weak church leadership.

> "I'm a deacon who is over a bus route and children's ministries and am a youth worker. One of the greatest dangers of cell phones from what I've witnessed is the ignorance of the parents. Older generations think of them as phones, when in reality they are portable computers with the ability to access the internet nearly everywhere. Parents don't seem to see the obvious dangers because of this mental disconnect. The same parents who wouldn't dream of having a computer in their home without a filter don't give a second thought to providing their teenage children with a cell phone without a filter. Those who place their computers in public areas of the home for accountability are providing their teenage boys with on-demand porn access. Those who would never let their kids have unchaperoned discussions with the opposite sex will

give them the freedom with their phones to speak with or text (or send inappropriate pictures to) anybody without any safeguards, supervision, or accountability."

This is the frightful situation in thousands upon thousands of Christian homes, and we are referring to homes in the most "conservative" Baptist and fundamentalist churches.

The Age of Social Media

Social media refers "to web- and mobile-based technologies used to facilitate dialogue between individuals, organizations, and communities." Social media is "an electronic platform which encourages user generated content and community engagement."

Note the words "dialogue" and "engagement." It's all about communication, association, networking, befriending.

The use of social media has skyrocketed. In America, 88% of those between 18-29 use social media; 45% say they are online "on a near-constant basis." In the U.K. 99% of those between 16-24 use social media an average of 2.5 hours a day.

Email

Email was the first social media tool. The internet was created for communication between government agencies and universities, but with the invention of email in 1971, the social aspect became prominent.

"By 1973, a survey of network usage revealed that 75% of capacity was consumed not by, say, the transfer of important research documents but by email traffic. To use another phrase coined later, email was the internet's first killer app ... its lasting importance to the individual would be the ability it conferred on him to connect with virtually anyone, whether for business, social reasons, or whatever else. **As the content of those connections proved to be nothing less than astonishing in its**

potential variety, the internet would begin devouring human attention" *(The Attention Merchants*, p. 185).

As we have seen, Stephen Lukasik, director of the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), was the first email addict, lugging around a 30-pound machine to check emails wherever he went.

America Online's chat rooms

In the 1990s, social media got a major boost with America Online's (AOL) chatrooms. Anyone could open a private chatroom and host up to 23 people. By 1997, there were 19,000 rooms. This was the dawn of the sexualization of the internet.

"With its wide-open chat rooms, AOL seemed to tap into the excitement of what people then called 'cyberspace,' and its tantalizing possibility for a new disembodied kind of human connection. Chat rooms could be used to discuss anything, and ... no one had to use a real name ... One of AOL's employees, **Joe Schober, called them 'frontier towns.'** ... **The AOL chat rooms developed a reputation for excitement and transgression**. There was 'the feeling that this was a new and semi-lawless space, that unexpected things could happen.' ... **chat rooms catering to seekers of anonymous sexual titillation and flirtation were by far the most numerous and popular ... Here was the harbinger of the sexual future**" (*The Attention Merchants*, pp. 202-203).

"**AOL had, over the 1990s, decisively proven that the surest allure of the new computer networks were social**--the prospect of interacting with other people. The point is more profound than it may at first appear. The discovery that traditional content was not the only basis for capturing attention, that our friends and acquaintances (or at least representations of them)--to say nothing of the attractive strangers we might hope to

meet--that they, too, might have the same potential **was nothing less than revolutionary**" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 206).

In the year 2000, a youth pastor in Ohio told me that the worst problems he was having with young people in the church pertained to chat rooms.

MySpace

MySpace was the next big social media environment. It was launched in 2003 and soon attracted 75 million users.

By 2006, MySpace was America's most visited website.

That year, we published a report "Myspace or God's?" It was a warning to church leaders and Christian parents about the youth frenzy to join MySpace. That year, a friend wrote as follows:

A few days ago someone wrote to me and said:

> "You ought to do an article on www.MySpace.com. A LOT of people are on this site, including kids from our church, I'm very disappointed to say. Our pastor has preached against the things these kids have posted, but some of them now have just made their sites private. It's very sad how these things are manifesting themselves in fundamentalist churches. You ought to warn pastors to check up on their youth and they might be surprised what they find."

We reported as follows:

> "MySpace is a MASSIVE, SUPERCHARGED, VISUALLY-ENHANCED CHAT ROOM. A recent survey found that 61% of Americans aged 13-17 have a MySpace profile. The site features 87 million profiles with 270,000 new ones added every day. During any given week it has 36 million active users. It grew 752% in one year, probably the largest expansion in the history of the internet. ... MySpace is a 'social networking' web site. It is a meeting place, a dating connection, a chat

room, an instant message service, a place to blog or write about your life and opinions (like an online diary), a place to download music (it is a major site for the distribution of 'indie' or independently published rock), a place to post your personal information, photos, videos, and music clips, and a way to link to your friends' pages. It allows people to sign up for a free account wherein they create their own personal 'spaces' and associate with others. When you sign up you answer demographic questions about yourself to facilitate searches by others who are looking for certain characteristics. The user can list things such as date of birth, schools, favorite movies and music, astrological sign, body type, and 'sexual preference.' MySpace users can post messages and pictures to one another's pages. It's vast online community. It's a cyber youth hangout. It's a web publishing house for private expression. **One newspaper article described MySpace as 'one, huge, free-of-charge warehouse for e-flirting**.' And it's super cool."

Wanting to learn more about MySpace, I sent out a notice to the Fundamental Baptist Information Service mailing list asking for feedback. The response was large and overwhelmingly negative, meaning that the vast majority of those who replied gave the strongest warning against Christians being on MySpace.

Consider some examples, and all of these warnings apply to social media today, even though MySpace is largely history:

"What MySpace allows the people to do is become whatever they want or whoever they want. They create a site that may be nothing like them (except in their fantasies). Most young people give up on those fantasies when they come to Christ, but by being given the opportunity to become something they are not, and it being in private, there are some devastating results and they are put into incredibly risky situations."

"I find MySpace.com scary. I am a Criminal Justice major, and I hear much talk about MySpace.com at the Community College I attend. It seems to be a way to say and do things you would not normally do in public. To make it more plain, they act out in ways that they would not normally behave because they are free from any influence of their parents or adults. It's a completely different world!

"One unique thing about it is that a person can create several MySpace webpage profiles. It is very easy to disguise your page from those that know you and may be looking. This is a big draw to many youth; like having their own hiding place and only those they want are invited. They seem to let their sinful nature come out fully and unrestricted on their pages. You can also create a MySpace account for someone you know and they not even know about it."

"We had a business meeting to place three young men on church discipline because they refused to get off the wicked websites. They had built their own websites there proclaiming to be Christian but having rock and roll and even rap as background music. There were almost totally naked women pictured either as backgrounds or as 'friends.' There were four letter words of the foulest nature used as screen names. There were married men carrying on conversations with other women, some of whom were former girlfriends. Some of them even discussed meeting for lunches. Most of them carried on conversations with former backslidden members as well and hurt the name of the church as well as the cause of Christ. I cannot believe that those who claim the name of the Lord could not see or want to see the evil of this 'meeting place.' Sad to say, all three men who would not repent grew up in good godly homes and went to our church school. On a better side, three people have gotten off. They have chosen the right path. AMEN!"

"The worst thing about MySpace is the fact that people constantly spam porn pictures onto everyone's page. A person must constantly be on guard and get rid of them and turn them in but it never ends."

"As I was checking our computer to make sure both my sons were not visiting sites I was unaware of, I discovered they both had pages at MySpace and I was stunned at the ungodly stuff they are exposed to. Even if the child has nothing wrong on his or her own 'space,' the devil and the world are certainly in other spaces. I won't even share the stuff I've read there -- wicked stuff."

"I am a researcher for a number of Christian Ministries and a subscriber to your site as well. I have done some research into MYSPACE.COM and I have to say very, very strongly to avoid it like the plague. The reason why I say this is because it is full of abominations from Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, the esoteric to pagan and wiccan to black satanic sites. Why they even have a 'hardcore' christian site, and I do not want to even explain what is involved with that. Warn your readers strongly because what I have seen is a spiritual death trap to those who are new in the Lord, teenagers who are easily impressionable, and the undiscerning. Tell them to Stay Clear and to warn their children!!"

"My wife had begun hearing about MySpace a year and a half ago, and had heard that some of the kids in the homeschool group had web pages on MySpace. So she did some investigation, curious about what the kids were blogging about, etc. Some were ok, nothing to worry about, but some were filled with wretched vile language. This from homeschooled kids from Christian families. One in particular was extremely violent in nature, and obscene."

"Unfortunately I have had many dealings with MySpace as a result of ministry. The first appearance of this came roughly one year ago when the Lord, I believe, revealed

that several of our youth were involved in it. Some of them had MySpace pages for over a year. ... [You cannot] navigate the pages without being exposed to foul language, nudity, etc. ... **When I was dealing with this we had nearly 15 youth involved; from 9 years to 19 years, from Christian school kids to bus kids and even a couple of kids in college**. I found it to have been introduced to our youth by those in the world (other kids at school, relatives, etc.). When we first began to investigate the pages, what we found was literally heartbreaking and very revealing as to the true condition of the inner man of those involved. The pages revealed very much. Of course the parents were for the most part oblivious to this and when they did find out it required someone with some personal computer abilities to help them close the pages down. One of the youth had a page and everything on it was above board and good. However, his friend's messages, etc., with the links to their pages, caused him to be guilty by association. All you have to do is click on the link and watch where you will end up. Not to mention some of the things the friends posted to his page, as well."

"We had no idea what MYSPACE was about just up to last week when a young person whose family we know quite well sent us an invite to her MYSPACE page. Her page was very nice, not something to be concerned about. Once we began searching the site, though, we soon found out that you can click on another person's photo or logo & then get onto that person's page. These are called 'my friends.' This is when we began to worry. From just the short time on the site we soon realized how many of these 'Christian' young people are overtaken by 'pop' Christianity--the mainstream. Oh yes, Jesus' name comes up, but in a very unpersonal way, sort of a 'cool Jesus, not the Jesus of the Bible that we are familiar with. Another thing that was surprising to us, considering that these are professing Christians, was reading their descriptions of themselves. Questions such

as orientation? Three of the young people we know personally all answered 'straight'! ... It is odd to think that that is asked, but I guess it's the only way you can really find a 'date'? Also on their MYSPACE page they tell how they are physically built and what astrological sign they are. All of them had answers! Even more saddening was really that it should be called a 'pick-up' joint. It's a way for young people to tell the world who they are and what they want. They are there for friendships and dates! The music groups that are on their MYSPACE pages are no different than the world. We were shocked and saddened how these professing children of God look, act and talk! It was a rude awakening for us. Actually, we talked about it most of the next couple of days, it bothered us so much. There is no separation. NONE. They are no different than anyone else who is in the world. Personally, we were offended. Now, mind you, these were just the 'Christian' pages we saw; I can't imagine what other pages look like. As we did click on more and more 'friends,' it got uglier and uglier. The scary thing about it all is that there were young girls aged 15 who were involved and the things said were directed toward dating. ... It certainly isn't Christian."

"I recently checked out the MySpace.com website out of curiosity due to publicity in the media of a public school teacher from a nearby town who used MySpace to contact a 14-year-old boy whom she had been molesting. The first clue for your readers as to the character of MySpace is that in order to access the site, they will first have to disable their internet filter. What I discovered was that when I searched for people in my area by zip code, I was astounded by the people that I knew who professed to be Christians (adults as well as teenagers who come from Christian homes). A couple of things that concerned me was that: (a) There is a definite separation issue involved. If I were to set up my own personal profile on MySpace.com, and you were to

search for my profile, you would not only find my page, but several others as well. The thumbnail images from these pages are often very suggestive, and some are even downright perverted! My picture would be there on the same page as these other ungodly images. (b) It encourages young people to meet and develop a strange sort of cyber relationship with people whom they have never met. This can lead to romantic feelings which we do not encourage our young people to develop outside of a godly courtship relationship and under strict parental supervision. In some cases the person they meet may not be who they portray themselves to be. Child molesters and perverts have been using this type of tactic to contact their victims and find new ones, according to police agencies. The recent rash of teacher/ student pedophilia is one such example. I even found that there were women on the site who are Christian wives and mothers, and they are ostensibly using MySpace to contact family and friends. I definitely don't believe that a Christian wife and mother ought to be spending her time on an internet social site (the same goes for husbands and fathers). There is too great a danger for improper relationships to develop, and even if that were not the case, would it be a wise use of time? Of course, these same cautions apply to the internet in general, but MYSPACE BRINGS TOGETHER ALL THE DANGERS OF THE INTERNET INTO ONE PLACE."

"I belong to MySpace. A friend of mine got me on to it a couple of months ago. I found some old friends from school on there, but you do get a lot of spam from women that want to be your friend and to see pics of them inappropriately dressed to go to another link to see them."

"It is interesting that you sent out your most recent communiqué on the subject of MySpace.com. I am a Pastor of an Independent Fundamental Baptist Church

and I recently had a student from one of our IFB
Colleges with me over the summer. She was helping in
ministry at our church. ... While her younger sister (who
is in high school) was visiting, we overheard the girls
having a discussion about whether MySpace.com was a
safe, clean and wholesome environment for Christians.
This college student's sister assured her that it was and
so she registered for an account. This piqued my
curiosity so I created a new e-mail address, signed up
for an account and then deleted all of my personal
information so that I could peruse it without anyone
being suspicious. In order to remain accountable myself,
I have shared what I have found with my wife and we
have discussed this site and its ramifications on our own
home and on us as parents of two future teenagers.
What I discovered is absolutely shocking. I went and
looked up every teenager from the church that I used to
pastor and the teens from the church I am pastoring
currently. Some of the accounts were set to private so
that they could only be viewed by people who had
permission of the person hosting the site, so I was
unable to see everything. But the things I was able to see
were disturbing. In the accounts that had public access,
there were montages of teens being intimate with their
boyfriends and girlfriends, swearing in the message
boards, sexually suggestive photographs and anecdotes
with vile double entendres. This is only the tip of the
iceberg in respect to what I was able to see just by
browsing through about 20 or 25 'Christian' pages. I was
able to simply click on the picture of some of the people
in their 'friends' list and see the depravation of their
websites as well. These things that I have mentioned go
beyond the things that are evidently overlooked by most
believers like dress, self-photographs of young men and
women scantily clad, the love of contemporary
Christian music and infatuation with materialism. In
fact, there were not only connections to CCM, but it
seems very evident that this music has provided a bridge

to secular music of all styles and even videos that can be put into the pages themselves. I know that the CCM artists claim that they are providing an alternative in many respects, but it is obvious that the fruits of this movement have helped many young people make the transition from CCM to secular music with little effort. It has become more of a bridge than an alternative. ... I am very concerned about this. My wife approached this student that we had with us over the summer, and she did not see anything wrong with MySpace after having an account there for a couple of months. She even went and changed her settings to private so that others could not see her information or maybe so we could not inspect her site anymore."

"It is impossible to describe how harmful it is to young people. We have a granddaughter, age 13, who has a MySpace page, and I have been appalled to see the type of thing with which she is involved. Recently she set it to 'private' -- meaning that only her approved 'friends' have access to her page. The granddaughter of a good friend of mine has done the same with hers. They are able to post extremely suggestive pictures of themselves. The language is beyond description. To create a personal 'page,' the kids access advertisers, songs, etc., and download that stuff to make it more interesting, sensual, whatever. ... Most of the kids are posting their ages as several years older than what they are. We live in a small community, but there have been several cases of girls being lured to meet men they have met on MySpace. These have resulted in rape, but in other places girls have been murdered. Of course, these men present themselves as 'cute, 18 year-old football players,' etc., not as child molesters, and they can easily find girls in their vicinities."

"Whenever you make a transition on MySpace, like finishing posting a bulletin, a message, or when you log out, you are informed of finishing that task along with

an advertisement. The advertisements vary (find your friend from high school, apply for University of Phoenix, etc.), but also include a very risqué singles website called True. They use provocatively dressed women to advertise their sites, and you CANNOT avoid it on MySpace. If you do what is available on MySpace (add friend, sign out, post bulletin, post message, etc.), you will eventually see ads for True. I have received several 'add me as a friend' messages from (supposedly) women who send form-letter e-mails saying they were interested in my MySpace. Then, when you add them as friends, they send you bulletins advertising their 'other' websites (all I've seen so far is dance clubs, messaging names and picture sites solicited, but possibly also webcams). If you have a MySpace, you will eventually get unsolicited 'add me as a friend' messages."

"I have personally gone on MySpace.com and impersonated a 12 yr old girl with a very unstable home life. The numbers of men who answered me were sickening. Some, though kind in word, were 'concerned' about me and approached me via that mindset. Why did I go to this degree? I am a Fundamentalist, Bible-believing single mom who needs all the ammo I can get against this monstrosity of evil. My girls needed to see how many of these people are out there and what their intentions really are. MySpace is the number one access site which law enforcement across the country use in attempt to catch predators. Any good from this site ('Oh mom, there are Christians there too') will never be something to consider because of the overwhelming evil."

"I have a myspace page. I started it as a way to be able to keep an eye on what some of the younger people in my family are doing and to follow what students in the school where I am a principal are doing. I regret that I started the mess. I have found many old army friends, I was in the Army 21 years and it was good to run into

them. The problem is that they have a lot of ungodly stuff on there. Whatever you can imagine is there... I have asked all of my children to not have a page, and I will soon be changing jobs, and when I do, I will say goodbye to myspace."

"I personally have experienced the results of MySpace. Just as an experiment, I placed the names of Christians I know into the search engine at My Space. What I found was shocking. I found several people at my church had ungodly things on MySpace. I even found that the son of my pastor had a listing there with things not befitting a Christian."

"It is Satan's recruitment center, his playground, his training facility, and launching platform to wreck the lives of those whom he gleefully destroys. ... The precious lives of innocent and not so innocent people have been sucked into its void and become trapped there with no possible hope of escape. ... I have counseled brothers in the faith who are losing their families (and that means wives, children, and even themselves) to this latest curse of man's inventions inspired by Satan himself. Never once have I had any good dealings when it came to the use of MySpace.com. It is a danger to the spirit, mind, and body like none other that I have seen before. Only when the plug is literally pulled and the Lord Jesus Christ is introduced to the person (or re-introduced for the brethren) is there any hope of recovery. The problem is that with wireless devices, cell phones with internet capability, etc. it makes it harder to pull the plug."

"I signed up for an account, mainly to use it to let those I went to high school with know that I am now saved and preaching. Many I did get in touch with that I otherwise wouldn't have, probably. But the ads that were displayed on the site were too much flesh. Young girls, not nude, but they weren't in modest apparel either. I canceled the account after a few weeks. Did I get in

touch with others? Yes. But seeing those pictures could have led to other stuff being looked at **so I thought it better to be safe than sorry**."

"Obviously, MySpace and sites like them are just going to contribute to the exponential explosion of evil and that is going to increase more and more until the last day. It's shocking what passes for Christianity in a lot of circles these days."

"I tried to maintain a Myspace site as a means of witnessing, but was bombarded with smut and porn. So, I deleted my account."

"Worst of all, MySpace gives the illusion of being controllable. Many good Christian teens are allowing themselves to be sucked into this world by this wolf in sheep's clothing. 'My' implies possession and anything I am thought to 'own'.... I control. Herein lies the fundamental problem with MySpace.com. When you think you can control sin, you have already lost control."

Dean Hunsucker, Jr., a fundamental Baptist youth pastor, warned:

"The sweetest savor to a sinner's mouth, are secret sins that won't be found out. It used to be easier to catch your kids in sin. If you thought they had a problem with music, pornography, or language you could (as good parents should) look under the mattress, in the closet, in their car, or listen in on the other line or from the other room. (My parents probably did all these things and I am extremely grateful.) But in the late 90's and even earlier this century, many parents got a wake up call as many teenagers turned to the internet to fulfill the lust of the flesh through porn, music, and chatting online. So the education began and many parents learned to check the computer's 'History' and 'Cookies.' Good parents still found a way to track their teens. As the old adage goes, you can make a better mouse trap, but the world will always make a smarter mouse. Welcome to a

parent's worst nightmare: 'MySpace.com.' It is possible to create a space, add music, take digital photographs of yourself and upload them to the internet, and walk away from the computer without any evidence that you were ever there. Our kids now know about 'history' and 'cookies.' If you think they don't, I now laugh at you and shake my head at your ignorance. Anything teens are able to keep from their parents will grow more and more out of control.

"While MySpace claims to be against pornography. What they mean is 'we cover the important parts of the important parts.' Also images that are blatantly pornographic can still be posted, and must be reported as pornographic by other MySpace users (assuming they are offended and not already desensitized). The advertisements alone are soft core porn at the very least and aim to be as seductive as possible without 'crossing the line.'

"From Screamo to Punk, from Dead Metal to Verbally Pornographic Rap. You can find it all on MySpace. Not to mention it is extremely easy to link music to your 'space/site' either as a 'click to listen' or as a background so that whoever clicks on your site will automatically be connected to the music. With the background music setting you have about one second after you click on the person's 'space/site' to hit the mute button or be prepared to expose yourself to whatever they deem appropriate.

"As you gain friends on your new MySpace site, you soon realize that MySpace takes the liberty of 'linking' your site to their site. It even takes the picture they use as their identifying logo (usually a photo of themselves) and places it on your 'space/site.'

"Our teens are savvy, smart, and computer minded, but they are still ignorant kids. Ignorant, green, absentminded, and they do not understand the criminal

mind!!! It doesn't take much to find your kid on MySpace. I can search and type their name. It's that easy. The real 'street-smart' (I say that tongue in cheek) teens tend to attempt to use other names and nicknames as to not give away their identity. So to find them you can just click on their school (yes, MySpace lets you search by school; bet you feel safe). Once in their school you just scroll down till you find their PHOTO!!! I worked in a homeless shelter for nearly 10 years of my very short life and I have met hundreds of prison hardened criminals. I have seen these men take less than 10 minutes on the internet to find SS numbers, address, and phone numbers--and that was before your teenage daughter posted them next to her picture on her Website!! Many of these sites list: Where I like to hang out after school... This is the car I drive... On Friday night I will be..."

Evangelist Brad Courtney, who wrote "An Ounce of Prevention: A Parent's Look at MySpace.com" (*Baptist Bible Tribune*, Sept. 2006), warned:

"In May, I learned that my 13-year-old daughter had opened a MySpace.com account at the urging of some of her friends. When I became aware, I admit I knew little about MySpace, so I was unprepared for what I was about to encounter. ... During the first two weeks of my MySpace.com investigation, I was more than shocked on several occasions, and I finally insisted I would have full access to my daughter's account or I would cancel it and remove her profile. The things I found that shocked me were not contained on her personal site, but still I decided it was important for me to be more informed as to what was taking place on her site. ... The materials I saw were posted by 13- and 14-year-old boys and girls ... every word in the cursing vocabulary, including the vilest ones; references to every sexual act imaginable; a poem that was so sexually graphic, I cannot print it in this public forum; a picture of a young boy smoking

dope; sensuous pictures of young girls that are borderline pornography."

Articles about the dangers of MySpace appeared even in secular publications. In April 2006, for example, the *Los Angeles Times* ran Catherine Saillant's "How Shocked Parent Navigated Perils of Teen's Hot Web Site."

"I've covered murders, grisly accidents, airplanes falling out of the sky and, occasionally, dirty politics. But in nearly two decades of journalism, nothing has made my insides churn like seeing what my 13-year-old daughter and her friends are up to on MySpace.com."

Saillant spoke of the shockingly open talk about immoral acts and the "coarse language and often profane messages that are plastered all over the social networking site like graffiti on bathroom walls." Even though this writer did not appear to live by Bible standards, she was wise enough to know the great danger that MySpace posed for her daughter and required that her daughter follow strict guidelines.

Jonathan McKee warned about the browse feature on MySpace:

"The 'browse' feature on MySpace is where people can really wander into racy areas. Browsing is when you do a search for other people who you want to meet, or to just gawk at their pictures and profile anonymously. You type in the zip code (if any), age range, gender, status (single, married, divorced...), and what you're looking for (dating, networking, friends, or relationships). Then click 'Update.' This will bring up a list of thumbnail pics for you to look at. 'Advanced' browsing features are also available that allow you to select sexual orientation (straight, gay, bi...), body type, etc. There might as well be a button that says, 'Click here to see half-naked skanky women.' After a few times browsing, I told my wife that EVEN I should not browse unsupervised. Certain girls post graphic pictures of themselves--rarely

naked, but you'll find a lot of underwear and bikini shots. But the pictures aren't the only thing that can be risqué. The language, the dialogue and even the fictitious names people select would achieve an 'adult' rating on many of the pages" (Jonathan McKee, "A Window into the 'MySpace' Generation," Feb. 14, 2006).

This was the first investigation we did into social media, and we concluded, "Never has strict separation from the world been more urgent for Christian homes and churches, and never has it been less practiced among those who claim to be Bible-believing people. We are in an awful, desperate battle for the souls of young people, and churches and families that do not get serious about this battle will surely regret it" ("MySpace or God's?" Sept. 30, 2006, Way of Life Literature).

This was 14 years ago! Warnings were not widely heeded. Social media has gotten ever more spiritually and morally dangerous, and the corruption of youth, homes, and churches has progressed.

By 2008, MySpace had ceased to be cool for young people and was overtaken by Facebook.

Facebook

Facebook is the largest social media site by far. As of September 2019, there were 2.45 billion monthly Facebook users. (This is one-third of the world population of about 7.7 billion.) 1.62 billion log onto Facebook daily, a 9% increase over 2018. 71% of American adults use Facebook (38% use Instagram and 23% use Twitter). 50% check Facebook when they wake up (*The Social Skinny*). 76% ages 18-24 use Facebook; ages 25-29 - 84%; ages 30-49 - 79%. Among youth ages 12-17, 40% use Facebook, but only 10% say it is the social network they most often use.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, who was studying psychology and computer science at Harvard

University. It had a lascivious, devious origin. It began in 2003 as a website called Facemash, which was intended to be used to rate the attractiveness of female student's faces (are they "hot or not"?). Zuckerberg fraudulently hacked into Harvard's security network and copied student ID images to populate his web site. After a few days, the school shut down Facemash for breach of security and violating individual privacy.

In early 2004, Zuckerberg launched a new website called "The Facebook," which was intended to help students get to know one another better. He was sued by three Harvard seniors who accused him of stealing their ideas for a social network website called HarvardConnection. The lawsuit was eventually settled out of court for 1.2 million Facebook shares (Dominic Rushe, "Facebook IPO sees Winklevoss twins heading for $300 million fortune," *The Guardian*, Feb. 2, 2012).

Zuckerberg enlisted help from some fellow students, and Facebook was launched in 2005. By 2009, it was the world's largest social networking service. That was the year the "Like" button was introduced.

Facebook is global. 85% of Facebook users are outside of the US and Canada. In 2019, there were 307 million Facebook users in Europe, 17 million in Australia, 17 million in Korea (33% of the population), 74 million in the Philippines (68% of the population), 35 million in Bangkok, 16 million in South Africa (28% of the population), 9 million in Nepal, a number that represents a large majority of the nation's youth.

Facebook stores approximately 300 petabytes of user data on its computer servers. One petabyte is 1 million gigabytes. "The entire written works of humankind, in every known language from the dawn of recorded history, would occupy approximately 50 petabytes" ("21 Amazing Facebook Facts," Dan Shewan, Nov. 7, 2018). 300 million photos are uploaded

daily; 4.75 billion pieces of content are posted daily; 500 million people watch video on Facebook daily.

Female Facebook users have an average of 166 Facebook friends, while men have an average of 145.

Facebook owns Instagram, which is more popular with teens. Thus one company controls the main two social media sites used by all age groups. Facebook also owns WhatsApp and Messenger.

Instagram

Instagram has 1 billion users (2019). 72% of teens use Instagram. 100 million photos and videos are uploaded daily. Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012.

Teens love Instagram because they can create a profile of themselves, post photos and videos, create broadcast channels like YouTube, document their daily lives, send and receive messages, and follow their favorite celebrities.

"If you walk into any middle school in the United States and stop a random 13-year-old girl and ask her how many followers she has on Instagram, she will tell the exact number as of 5 minutes ago" (Jesse Weinberger, *The Boogeyman Exists*, p. 138).

Instagram suggests friends and celebrities based on what the social media site knows about you.

There is a Snapchat-like feature that lets users send a timed photo or video that disappears after viewing. "It's likely they'll see mature content (including sexy stuff, swearing, and substance use), mean or sexual comments, and hashtags about suicide, anorexia, and other concerning topics" ("Parents' Ultimate Guide to Instagram," Commonsensemedia.org, Mar. 28, 2019).

Instagram's image sharing, with its enhancing filters, is particularly attractive to girls, though guys are attracted to this, as well.

Instagrammers create "an Instagram life, telling their own stories, or at least a stylized and idealized version of it. ... Instagram is the crowning achievement of that decades-long development that we have called the 'celebrification' of everyday life and ordinary people, a strategy developed by attention merchants for the sake of creating cheap content" (*The Attention Merchants*, pp. 311, 312, 314).

There is great pressure to pursue likes and to check friends' updates. Instagram "demands interacting with strangers to make them feel engaged or heard, the way a politician or other public figure might ... 'This is the hardest part because it takes something money can't buy, and that is TIME. It takes a LOT OF TIME'" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 312).

Peer pressure is taken to new heights via social media. Teenagers "pod" together by agreeing to like and comment on one another's posts. If you don't aggressively participate in likes, you will be asked to leave the pod.

Twitter

Twitter, launched in 2006, is "an online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets." It is called "microblogging." The messages are limited to 280 characters (originally 140), but they can include photos and videos and links to web sites, social media accounts, etc.

Twitter defines the age: shallow, immediate, impulsive, frivolous, amusing.

Twitter is one of the top ten websites. Twitter has 330 million active users (first quarter 2019). It is very popular among young people. 47% of teens use it; 40% of 18-29 year olds.

In the third quarter of 2019, Twitter broadcast 96 million hours of live user-generated content.

A user's tweets are received only by those who subscribe to them or go online to view them.

Twitter can be used for person-to-person communication simply by means of tweets and feedbacks. Following is an explanation:

> "Think of Twitter as a room full of people, all sitting in a circle. It's a conversation. When you update your status, you are speaking to the whole group. Everyone can hear what you have to say. REPLIES - If you want to direct your comments to one specific person in the circle, but loud enough that everyone else can hear, use the 'Reply' function. You address the person by using their Twitter user name preceded by the @ symbol. For example: '@spencesmith I get my haircut at Dion's South in downtown Franklin.' Everyone who is following Spence and me will see the message, but I am specifically directing it to Spence. (Those who are not following both of us will not see the message.) You can also use the Reply function to refer to someone by name. For example: 'I'm headed to dinner at Tin Angel with @gailhyatt and @meghmiller. I am looking forward to trying the new menu.' The thing about replies is that they are 'clickable links.' DIRECT MESSAGING - If someone who is following me, clicks on one of the names, they will automatically go to that person's Twitter page. This will give them the opportunity to follow that person, too. Direct Messages. Continuing with the metaphor of a conversation with a room full of people, you can also use the 'direct message' function. This is like whispering in one person's ear. They can hear you, but no one else can. You are directing the message to them and only them. For example: 'd lnobles Can you bring my Business Review notebook down to the cafeteria conference room?' Twitter direct messages have largely replaced simple text messaging for me and many people I know" (Michael Hyatt, "The Beginner's Guide to Twitter").

Twitter is used to broadcast information on any type of subject that people are interested in: business, finance,

manufacturing, crafts, hobbies, history, technology, science, space, humor, music, religion, philosophy, etc.

There are endless educational, interesting, and wholesome recreational accounts, such as @TEDtalks, @mittr_insights (MIT Tech Review), @ThatsHistory, @dayinhistory, @IAM_Shakespeare (tweets the complete works of Shakespeare, line by line), @BrilliantAds, @MerriamWebster, @NASA, @PreschoolGems, @TweetsOfOld, @NatGeoPhotos, @BabyAnimal, @BEAUTIFULPICS, @EarthPicturz @dscovr_epic (earth photos from NASA's DSCOVR satellite).

(We aren't recommending these Twitter accounts, merely mentioning them as examples of what is out there.)

Twitter is used by a myriad of people to document their daily lives for whoever might be interested.

Twitter has become the most popular forum for live news and firsthand reports from ongoing events.

It has also become hugely influential in politics. U.S. President Donald Trump's Twitter account is in the top ten most popular, with 71 million followers.

Twitter is above all an entertainment forum. Eight of the top ten Twitter accounts in early 2020 are entertainers: Katy Perry (108 million followers), Justin Bieber (108m), Rihanna (97m), Taylor Swift (85m), Cristiano Ronaldo (82m), Lady Gaga (80m), Ellen DeGeneres (79m), and YouTube (72m). Thus, the majority of Twitter attention is devoted to entertainment, reflecting the shallowness of the age and the omnipresence of the pop culture.

Twitter is hugely addictive because of the endless variety of tweets and because of its "real-time" nature. You can read messages the moment they are published anywhere in the world. "Twitter's strength is real-time. No other social platform comes close on this front" (SocialMediaToday, Mar. 18, 2016).

A large percentage of Twitter communications are poisonous. There is a massive amount of pure hate. Twitter is "filled with rage and arguments" ("Top 20 Most Popular Twitter Accounts," Timesnext.com, Dec. 24, 2019).

> "If one wants a barometer reading of a culture in the full flood of terminal decadence, one need only spend an hour or two on Twitter. One can observe the lynch mobs on the march. One can note the collective pageant of the mentally deficient in full array. One can see how depravity manifests as self-righteous exhilaration" ("Why Twitter Is Bad for Cultural Health," *PJMedia*, Mar. 12, 2020).

Twitter has become a major tracking and monitoring tool by researchers and governments. It is used to track flood damage, earthquake activity, civil unrest, virus outbreaks, predict crime, stock market trends, and many other things.

"Twitter has some porn. Buyer beware. Comments and roasting can be toxic at times. Cyberbullying is the big one [problem] here" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Twitter allows users to set up multiple accounts with user-assigned names. Thus a teen can set up a Twitter account that does not have his name attached and can invite a list of friends to subscribe to his messages. He then sends out tweet messages to that list that are sent as text messages to their phones.

Snapchat

Snapchat has 203 million active users (2019). 90% of 13-24-year-olds use it.

It promotes sharing of images and videos that "self-destruct" in 10 seconds. 3.5 billion snaps are created every day.

Filters and digital lenses can alter the user's appearance in dramatic ways.

"Snapchat offers the element of instant gratification that attracts teenagers and young adults. It's done a great job so far at giving teenagers a product which they like to play around with."

Snapchat is a major forum for selfies.

Snapchat is a major forum for cyberbullying and sexting.

> "Snapchat is full of threats. With disappearing snaps, a culture of sexting, and a very sexually graphic stories section ... there's nothing quite like Snapchat. ... The disappearing nature has encouraged many to use Snapchat to 'sext' without fear of being seen by the wrong eyes ... but as any teen can tell you, images can always be captured via screenshot and distributed to others in a matter of seconds" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Snapchat is addicting and potentially time-wasting in a multitude of ways.

The **Snapstreak** keeps a record of how many days in a row two users have snapped each other. "If you want to start World War III in your home, simply threaten to take away your kid's phone access for 24 hours so that all their Snapstreaks end" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Then there are **Stories**. A Snapchat story is a set of snaps (photos and videos) that document something in an individual's life and disappears in 24 hours, thus motivating people to access the app endlessly in search of the latest live stories. One user says, "My first experience with a Snapchat Story was in college ... It mostly consisted of lots of pics of alcohol-fueled partying." The stories of celebrities are particularly popular and addicting.

Live Stories are assembled by Snapchat staff. "Live Stories is one of the main ways of watching content on Snapchat. Just like television, the temporary Stories give the users a glimpse into someone's life" (Snapfluent). Snapchat Live Stories have been called "the most powerful new social media." They feature music concerts, travelogues, sporting events, and

many other things, **with a major glorification of worldly partying**.

Then there is the ***Discover*** section. It features articles and videos chosen by Snapchat for entertainment value. "[A] great word to describe much of the content in the Discover section is 'smutty'" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

One Snapchat filter is "gender-swap" which can change the gender of a photo.

> "If I were talking to the youth, the one social media that I would address is Snapchat. To me this is the most dangerous because it is geared toward the youth. It is liberal slanted in politics and has a celebrity orientation and sexual orientation, including homosexuality."

TikTok

TikTok was launched in 2016 and by 2019 had half a billion users. It is the most downloaded Apple app and the sixth most downloaded app in the world. "With 315 million downloads in the first three months of 2020, TikTok set a new record for the most installs by any app in a single quarter" (*Business Insider*, Apr. 16, 2020).

TikTok is an app for creating and watching 15 second videos. It is a self-expression forum. "It's very user-centric." "What makes it so attractive is that practically anyone can become a content provider because of the simplicity of using the app." "It is a way to express themselves and create short-form video clips to gain a following and build a community around their passions. It also features some great special effects that users can apply to their videos to make them more unique. You can also cross-post the content on other platforms to share it with more people" ("TikTok app safety," Internetmatters.org, Dec. 3, 2019).

"TikTok has the video prowess of YouTube, the immediacy of Snapchat, and the concise artistry of Instagram, making it

an ample playground for aspiring influencers" ("TikTok Tricks," *Kim Kimando Show*, Mar. 1, 2020).

"TikTok trends are spilling over onto Instagram, YouTube, and TV shows like Saturday Night Live. Its stars are appearing in Super Bowl ads and late-night talk shows. And songs that become popular on TikTok are topping Billboard charts--the music artist Drake recently used TikTok to release his latest single, 'Toosie Slide'" ("TikTok is breaking download records and taking over pop culture," *Business Insider*, Apr. 16, 2020).

TikTok is especially popular in Asia. It has 124 million users in America, 173 million in China, and 466 million in India. It is also very popular in Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

It was initially launched in China as Douyin, and in 2017 it was renamed TikTok and launched by ByteDance for markets outside of China. ByteDance purchased Musical.ly and merged it with TikTok.

The United States military banned TikTok from government-issued smartphones and strongly discouraged them from keeping the app on personal devices. This is due to the possibility of TikTok being used by the Chinese government for spying purposes.

41% of TikTok users are aged 16-24, but there is a trend toward increased use among adults.

"TikTok is especially popular among teens, who typically use it to post videos of themselves singing along to their favorite songs, short comedy sketches, or a variety of viral 'challenges'" ("Does TikTok Allow Strangers," Snopes.com, Feb. 18, 2019).

TikTok asks users to sync their contacts and sends notifications to the contacts announcing new videos.

Like all youth-oriented social media, TikTok tends greatly toward sexualization.

> "The fame-seeking, music-video ethos of the app has given rise to an uncomfortable trend of young teens engaging in sexually suggestive dancing and behavior" (Snopes.com, Feb. 18, 2019).

It was reported in 2020 that TikTok has become a dating app. Users are posting "cute, short videos sharing a little about themselves" with hashtags such as #datemeplz, #someonedateme, #wouldyoudateme, $reasontodateme, and #plsdateme. These receive millions of views. Interested parties can leave comments, follow them, or send a direct message (DM).

> "Users flirt through comments and DMs on TikTok, then they might switch over to another platform (like Snapchat) to talk further, and then make their grand entrance back on TikTok as a new couple" ("TikTok is the Latest Dating App," Axis.org).

> "The possibility of receiving unwanted DMs from older people, even predators, is always within question when it comes to the internet, but openly inviting others to reach out with their interest in dating you obviously leaves a wider chasm for inappropriate behavior to occur" (Axis.org).

Like all social media, TikTok has the potential to be a massive time waster. "Sometimes it's funny, sometimes it's cringey, but it's definitely addictive" ("10 TikTok Statistics," Oberlo.com, Nov. 22, 2019). 90% of TikTok users access the app on a daily basis.

TikTok recommends videos based on AI (artificial intelligence) algorithms that study the user's behaviour, and by swiping down the user keeps watching whatever is offered. "It gives them a sense of mystery and makes them excited ... it's easy to stay in the loop of watching more and more videos" ("Why Is TikTok Sweeping over the World?" UXDesign.cc, Mar. 13, 2019).

YouTube

YouTube has 1.9 billion active monthly users. YouTube was launched in 2005 and was purchased by Google in 2006 for $1.65 billion.

It isn't strictly a social media platform, but it is a major influence in the internet society, so we will include it in our study.

YouTube has a vast amount of education and innocent entertainment, but it also has a vast amount of filth, error, heresy, lies, and empty nonsense.

In America, 80% of 18-49-year-olds watch YouTube. Worldwide it is watched more than any broadcast or cable TV network.

95% of the most watched YouTube videos are music videos. The top ten include Katy Perry's "Roar" (2.94 billion views), Justin Bieber's "Sorry" (3.21b), Psy's "Gangnam Style" (3.44b), Mark Ronson's "Uptown Funk" (3.69b), Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You" (4.46b), and Luis Fonsi's "Despacito" (6.5b).

These popular rock videos are filthy by Bible standards, but they are much less filthy than a lot of the videos. "... sometimes they are videos of the most horrible things imaginable" ("The majority of 11-year-olds own smartphones," *The Guardian*, Nov. 1, 2019).

YouTube is a major forum for narcissism. Many young people aspire to YouTube celebrity. The current top of the heap is Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie), a gamer with 102 million subscribers. The top 25 include Dude Perfect (athletics, 47 million); Like Nastya Vlog (about a little girl named Stacy, 38 million), El Rubius (gamer, 36 million); Luisto Comunica (travel vlogger, 27 million); Yuya (beauty vlogger, 24 million); Ryan's World (toy reviews by an 8-year-old, 22 million).

Some have become millionaires via their YouTube channels.

"YouTube stars/influencers can normalize wrong beliefs or behaviors all to make a little cash" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

The number of social media followers is called social currency, but it can be converted to real currency if it is large enough. Businesses will pay social media stars to advertise and review their products. Since 2012, PewDiePie has made about $90 million through the social currency of his YouTube gaming channel. All he does is video record himself playing games with a running commentary.

In 2018, the top YouTube earners other than PewDiePie were Ryan (a 7-year-old boy reviewer, $22 million), Jake Paul ($21.5 million), Dan Middelton (gamer, $18.5 million), Jeffree Star (cosmetics, $18 million), Mark Fischbach (gamer, $17.5 million), Evan Fong (gamer, $17 million), Sean McLaughlin (gamer, $16 million), Paul Logan ($14.5 million).

YouTube has the potential to be a great time waster, and it has the potential of drawing your attention to unwholesome things. YouTube's goal is to keep its users looking at videos as long as possible. It has no interest in helping you use your time wisely or in protecting you morally and spiritually.

First, there is the danger of a constant stream of suggested or "related" videos. The offerings that appear on the right side of the screen are presented with an endless scroll feature. Often there are more than 100 offerings, and every video you select brings up a new set of offerings. Many of the offerings are closely related to the video you are watching, but many are geared to take you far afield into other areas. The potential for time wasting, even on innocent things, is *massive*!

Second, there is the danger of the autoplay feature, which was added in 2015 for laptops and desktops. This feature automatically plays another video (of YouTube's choosing) at the end of your selected video. You have the choice of stopping the next video from playing by clicking Cancel, of

course, and the autoplay feature can (and should) be disabled under settings. "To disable the feature, click the **blue Autoplay slider** switch that sits at the top of the right-hand column of Up Next videos."

Third, there is the danger of comments. These can be as much a time waster as watching an endless stream of videos. And a great many of the comments are inane and toxic.

"Whole afternoons can disappear into the void of YouTube, mostly (no) thanks to the irresistible allure of the 'related content' tab. Technically speaking, some of the most popular aren't even videos – they're even more inane gifs" ("The 7 best ways to waste time on the internet," *The Telegraph*, Dec. 30, 2014).

Tumblr

Tumblr is a social media networking site that allows users to create a blog and publish multimedia content.

Tumblr was launched in 2007 and as of January 2020 had 488 million users (up from 392 million in January 2018). It is the 25th most popular web site in the U.S. and 51st worldwide ("96 amazing Tumblr Stats," *DMR Business Statistics*, Feb. 1, 2020).

Tumblr is popular with young people under age 25, though its popularity has fallen off in recent years.

Tumblr is popular with youth because they can create a personal blog and limit it to a few friends ("Tumblr Is Not What You Think," *Tech Crunch*, Feb. 18, 2013).

Most Tumblr content falls into three categories: (1) Photos of young people's daily lives, (2) entertaining memes and gifs, and (3) porn and near-porn collections ("Tumblr Is Not What You Think").

In late 2018, after being removed from Apple's App Store due to child pornography concerns, Tumblr banned pornography (though we have read that it is still filled with filthy content). Tumblr was subsequently reinstated to the

App store. Tumblr lost one-third of its users due to the ban, dropping from 521 million monthly page views in November 2018 to 369 million in February 2019 ("Tumblr loses almost a third of its users," Mashable, Mar. 15, 2019).

Google

Google isn't social media as such, but it is probably the one most influential, controlling element of the internet today. In 2006, Google purchased YouTube for $1.65 billion, so a massive amount of internet traffic is under its influence.

By early 2020, Google controlled 73% of all internet searches (on all devices) and **93% of smartphone searches**. Its closest competitor is Bing, which has 10% of net market share (desktops and mobile) and 3% of mobile (Smartinsights.com, Jan. 5, 2020).

Google and Facebook (with the services they own, YouTube, Instagram) control over 70% of all internet traffic.

Google has dramatic control over internet users' lives by what it offers as returns to searches.

Google is a path to every type of evil and error.

When you search for something, Google offers endless lists of choices, both innocent and evil, moral and immoral, truth and error. It has no spiritual discernment. It has no biblical moral compass. It doesn't care for you. It isn't seeking the best choices for you. It is a programmed robot. And it is programmed by people whose chief motive is making money off of you.

Google knows a lot about its users, and it uses that information to make advertising money.

> "It didn't take a genius to see that the safest and most immediate revenue stream for a firm with Google's potential to harvest attention was in advertising. And that way it went. 'Every day, millions upon millions of people lean forward into their computer screens,' John Battelle, cofounder of *Wired*, would write in 2005, 'and

pour their wants, fears, and intentions into the simple colors and brilliant white background of Google.com.' If radio had promised a 'relaxed' audience, here was something better: people who really wanted something and were ready to tell exactly what—'intentional traffic,' in the jargon. Google could serve up minds to advertisers in this particularly valuable mental state— open, desirous, and impressionable. Thanks to the attention merchant's proprietary alchemy, advertising would make Google feel 'free' to its users—as if it were just doing them a big favor. ...

"As soon as AdWords launched, it 'accelerated past the outer moons of Jupiter on its way to some distant galaxy made entirely of money,' to quote Douglas Edwards, Employee Number 59. ... [W]ith Google's direct proof of clicks and tracking of customers, advertisers could finally see a direct link between their ads and eventual purchases. The beauty, once again, was that Google users were advertised to at a moment often very close to purchase. There was no need to prove the search engine could build brands—instead, it found users who were like travelers coming out of an airport, in a hurry, looking for a taxi, and there was the advertisement —'click.' **With these innovations, the money started pouring in, first by the millions, then by the hundreds of millions, and finally billions upon billions**. **Google would soon become the most profitable attention merchant in the history of the world**" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 258, 263, 264).

Google is not only a search engine, it is an entertainment tool. It has the potential to be a great time waster.

"You don't even have to leave the search engine page to watch hours of your life go down the drain. Google's infamous 'hidden features' include typing the following phrases into the search bar: 'do a barrel roll' (for a quirky 360 degree spin); 'tilt' (adjusting the angle of the screen) and 'I'm feeling lucky' (for Google to take you

directly to the webpage of the first result in the list of searches). The latter has led to a number of 'Google bombs,' whereby searches are booby-trapped to give comic results" ("The 7 best ways to waste time on the internet," *The Telegraph*, Dec. 30, 2014).

The Google Selfie App allows users to compare their selfies to faces in famous works of art.

We don't use Google. We despise the liberal philosophy of its owners and top managers,* its attempt to control legitimate free speech, and its relentless tracking.

(* See the chapter "Spiritual Victory Requires Understanding Social Media Dangers" - "Social Media's Anti-biblical Worldview.")

Since early 2019, we have mostly used DuckDuckGo, which is a search engine that doesn't commercialize its users by collecting data and isn't designed to take control of your life. I have found it to be a good search engine, generally. Once in a while I use Google and other search engines for specific search purposes, but I always return to DuckDuckGo.

Kik

Kik has about 300 million users. It is used by 40% of teens in America.

It is a freeware messaging app for transmitting and receiving messages, photos, videos, etc.

It preserves users' anonymity and thus is facilitates stalking, child exploitation, and other forms of abuse. It has been called "the most dangerous app for kids." Pedophiles use it to stalk children. In 2016, a 13-year-old girl was murdered after being stalked by two 19-year-old men. "Kik allows absolute strangers to gain access to a user's inbox ... Automated spam bots have been created to distribute explicit images and texts to Kik users" ("What is Kik Messenger?" Metro.co.uk, Aug. 22, 2017).

Because of its anonymous nature, it is extremely difficult for law enforcement agencies to find abusers. "Law enforcement agencies report one of the most common tactics sex predators use is to convince children to submit nude photos of themselves then threaten to send those photos to their parents unless the child sends them other photos" ("Kik: The worst, most dangerous app for kids," ABC7, Fort Myers, Florida, Jul. 19, 2016).

Spiritual Victory Requires Understanding Social Media Dangers

Contents

If something can be used in the will of God for the glory of God, for truth and righteousness, without spiritual and moral stumbling, then it can be used legitimately, and that goes for social media.

Following is the testimony of a missionary who uses Facebook profitably, and these could be multiplied:

> "Not having the expertise or help to build and maintain a website or blog, Facebook has been a tremendous blessing to allow me to update our supporting churches and friends instantly with pictures and reports from the field, using only my phone. That is a blessing. This allows those who are most invested and interested in our ministry to keep closer tabs and pray more

specifically and regularly for us. I personally 'unfollow' most of our 'friends,' so I'm not wasting time, energy, attention and effort on the inconsequential junk that many post. I only 'follow' those who post things that challenge me spiritually. I know most may not do such a thing, though."

Yet, the dangers of using Facebook and other social media are great, as this man hinted at in the last two sentences: "I only 'follow' those who post things that challenge me spiritually. I KNOW MOST MAY NOT DO SUCH A THING, THOUGH."

Indeed, *the vast majority* are not so careful.

At the very least, believers need to be *EXCEEDINGLY* careful in the use of Facebook and every other social media forum.

A blanket rule against social media can be a wise thing, *definitely* in the case of children and teens.

But not just in the case of youth. Most of the testimonies that we have received of the negative effect of social media are from adults.

Social media is a vehicle for evil communications

In a nutshell, the main danger of the internet in general and social media in particular is evil communications.

> "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Co. 15:33).

Evil communications refer to any kind of associations, relationships, communion, conversation, and fellowship that is evil, bad, wrong, or harmful by the standard of God's Word.

"**Evil**" is the Greek *kakos*, the common New Testament word for evil. It is usually translated "evil." It is also translated "wicked" (Mt. 21:41), "harm" (Ac. 16:28), "ill" (Ro. 13:10), and "noisome" (Re. 16:2). Evil is anything that is contrary to God's standard of righteousness and holiness. God's standard

for His redeemed people is very high. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Co. 7:1).

"**Communications**" is *homilia*, "to converse, to have companionship." It is from *homileo*, meaning "a multitude, a crowd, a company." It is translated "talked together" (Lu. 24:14) and "communed together" (Lu. 24:15).

"**Good manners**" is *chrestos* (profitable, fit, good for any use) and *ethos* (custom, habit, morals, character). It refers to the right way of living and thinking.

"**Corrupt**" is *phthero*, "to waste, pine, destroy, spoil." It is translated "defile" and "destroy" (1 Co. 3:17). It is used for the corruption of the mind by false doctrine (2 Co. 11:3).

The Bible warns, therefore, that any association or company or companionship or communion with any form of evil corrupts and spoils the right and biblical way of Christian living and thinking.

God's Word says, "**Be not deceived**" on this point. You are not an exception. If you associate with, commune with, company with, converse with evil, you will most definitely be injured by it.

The word *homilia*--communion*, companionship, a crowd, a company--is an exact definition for social media!

There has never been a more powerful forum for evil communications in the history of this fallen world. Let God's people take heed!

On the positive side, 1 Corinthians 15:33 calls for a testing mindset. It is an unequivocal commandment to judge everything by the standard of whether or not it is an evil communication and to avoid everything that fits that standard. This is contrary to the "judge not, be tolerant, lighten up, mind your own business" thinking that is predominant within 21st century Christianity.

Note the following testimonies from Bible-believing Christians about social media as evil communications:

> "Upon subscribing to Facebook I was immediately struck with the way in which this social media tool tapped into my contacts, and then very easily made it possible for me to look up information and learn about people I knew personally, but had lost contact with over the years. Living in a foreign country, it gets lonely at times for fellowship, and I found myself delving more and more into the FaceBook world, seeing photos of friends and acquaintances, including edifying and wonderful news of churches/ministries, pastors, missionaries, etc. It was a very convenient and fun way to learn of people we had known over the years, but had lost track of. However, as I began looking at shared photos that these people I knew had posted, though many of the people whose FaceBook pages I viewed hold to the same conservative standards I do, **the 'trickle-down' effect of the 'friends' tab on FaceBook pages is a very quick way to drift away from the circle of friends/family that I know personally, so that without realizing it, a person starts viewing FaceBook pages of a friend of a friend of a friend, etc.** One of the dangers I see is that through this technology, committed Christians can quickly find themselves viewing/connecting with people they would never personally associate with, whose lifestyle, convictions, standards, etc. are far from godly living. The ease at which a person can enter the photo galleries of people they would normally not choose to run with, is very subtle, and for me personally, was something I realized was both a time-waster, as well as a sin-snare. I realize many good people and churches use FaceBook extensively to communicate with their Christian friends, church members, etc., for much good. I just personally found it to be too tempting to abuse, so I have stayed away from it."

"Some years later when Instagram came out, I made an account. It was private and I kept it restricted to people I personally knew, primarily. I would not have described myself as a heavy user or particularly influenced by Instagram. Yet a couple of years ago, in conversation with a godly friend who expressed his concern over social media and the ease at which the wickedness of this world is available to our young people, my heart was convicted. I knew this to be true. I'd been searching for an innocent picture on Instagram previously and was horrified to come across terrible images which I reported. As a youth group leader at church I knew that some families did not allow social media, and so rather than be a stumbling block to others I deleted my account. After a few days where it felt strange not to be checking my feed or thinking, 'I could take a photo and post this,' I felt absolute relief. I didn't realise the pressure my account had created. I didn't have to constantly think of photo ideas. I didn't have to check my feed daily to keep up with what everyone else was doing. I was suddenly freed from it all. And I realised it had a much greater hold on me than I had known."

"Facebook can be a very vain place to spend much time. There can be ungodly pictures, articles, songs, and opinions posted, false doctrine can be spread easily, and gossip and slander can be participated in very readily. The Facebook world does not like strong Christianity. Try to reprove somebody of an ungodly post or false doctrine, and you'll get all the 'don't judge' and 'you're a legalist' accusations thrown at you. It is amazing to me the lack of discernment so many professing Christians have. They will 'like' and 'share' Facebook posts that feature false doctrine, psycho-babble, half-truths and sayings, and off-color memes. Contemporary Christian, Country, and other types of music not fit for consumption by a child of God is often liked and shared."

"I thought I could use Facebook to post profitable things and stay away from the negative, but I found that I couldn't just do that. I had to scroll a few times and that turned into more. Back in high school the goal was to get as many 'friends' as possible, so I have friends that I didn't even know. The old acquaintances bring back old worldly memories that entice me and also I find myself wasting a lot of time."

"Facebook was a huge hindrance to my spiritual life. It didn't happen right away. Sin slowly slithered in until I was so far from the Lord. I don't even know it happened until too late. I deleted my FB account over three years ago and have not missed it."

"I had Facebook in my teenage years which I now see was detrimental to me. I got rid of it at age 18 for the reason that I have enough problems of my own, I don't need to know everyone else's. I quickly realized a difference in my attitude. I was joyful. I didn't have parental supervision while on Facebook and I found myself stalking other people, talking to people I hardly knew, and causing/feeding drama. Or getting involved in other people's drama. I praise the Lord for the decision I made at age 18 to get rid of it."

"I found that Facebook caused my heart to be on things other than spiritual things. My mind, when I woke up, was on what I missed throughout the night since I lived in a different time zone than many of my 'friends.' When I went to bed, I'd want to 'check in' one last time. I found that FB caused me to 'keep up' with all the heartbreaking trash that was going on with all the IFB churches that are involved with spreading the 'Hyles' mindset."

"As far as Facebook I have completely and happily quit going there for 2 years now. The family thinks I'm nuts, but they are mostly unsaved. ... Facebook entices to sin, gossip, seeing nakedness, filthy talking, fornication and

all manner of vices, and takes precious time away from reading Scripture, listening to sermons, or reading articles and commentaries. Facebook can take a person on mindless journeys for hours through photos and family secrets ... I love being on an email list so I can pay attention to the article at hand only and not other things to distract me. Facebook is a plague. Sorry for my boldness, but I really hate Facebook."

"I used Facebook for a short time many years ago to keep in contact with acquaintances. I quickly saw the artificiality of many of the 'friends' and the tendency toward self-centeredness, so it was no trial for me to give it up when I went to a Bible college that prohibited social networking. Years later, however, I started up a new account with no information about myself for the sole purpose of being able to access Facebook accounts of businesses that didn't have any other form of website. But one day my attention was grabbed by the list of suggested 'friends.' Somehow Facebook had figured out about some people I had known in my youth and recommended them to me. I started looking at it, seeing pictures of people who are now married and with babies. Then (thank the Lord) the thought came to me that resuming contact with all that would not be a help to my spiritual life. My desire to put the Lord first had led me on a different path than them, and they had rejected all my attempts to share with them the truth I was learning. When you mentioned that you were writing something about this subject, the thought came to my mind that it would be good to urge caution to anyone using Facebook just for 'business reasons' to make sure that they never compromised their original purpose. At the best, it is a way to quickly waste a lot of time, and at the worst it could take us back into former thought patterns, temptations, and even relationships that could greatly damage our walk with God."

Recently in our weekly men's discipleship meeting I asked the roughly 30 men to raise their hands if they have used social media. Most hands were raised. I then asked how many have given up social media, and again most hands were raised, for which we thank the Lord. I asked why they had given it up, and one after the other testified that it was because of the evil communications that had harmed their Christian lives: wrong friends, worldly music, vanity, gossip, deceit, pornography, distraction from the things of God, etc. They talked about being addicted, losing sleep, trying to create an attractive social media image of themselves, and other such things.

Social media owners and their worldview

As of 2020, a few corporations own the vast majority of the news and broadcast media in America, controlling 90% of what people read, watch, and listen to. They own the vast majority of internet social media. They own 70% of cable television. They own most of the influential newspapers and magazines. They are the purveyors of most of the news, music, and movies. This presents a massive consolidation in the 21st century.

- **AT&T** $181 billion annual revenue (TimeWarner, Cartoon Network, Cinemax, CNN, HBO, TBS, TCM, Time, TNT, Warner Brothers, Loony Toons, DirecTV, Warner Bros, Turner Broadcasting, DC Entertainment, WaterTower Music, NetherRealm and Rocksteady gaming companies)

- **Alphabet** $161 billion (Google, YouTube, AdSense, DoubleClock, Android, and Chrome)

- **Comcast** $108 billion (Brave, CNBC, Golf channel, DreamWorks, Hulu, MSNBC, NBC, Awesomeness TV, NHL Network, The Weather Channel, USA, Universal Pictures, Comcast Internet)

- **Sony** $77 billion (EMI, Epic, Providant, Sony Music, Sony Pictures, Sony Internet, Starz, True, TriStar, Triumph Films, dozens of television and movie companies)

- **Disney** $75 billion (A&E, ABC, Disney, Crime Investigation, ESPN, Miramax, Lucasfilm, History Channel, Lifetime, Marvel, GameStar)

- **Facebook** $70 billion (Facebook owns Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, Oculus, Masquerade)

- **National Amusements** $27 billion (Viacom with 250 TV channels, CBS, CBS games, MTV, 247 Sports, Nickelodeon, Nick, Paramount, Comedy Central, Showtime, Simon & Schuster, Pocket Books)

- **News Corp** $10 billion (Fox, Financial News, FX, Wireless Group, HarperCollins, National Geographic, Speed, MyTV, Zondervan, New York Post, Wall Street Journal, The Sun, The Australian; these are the top newspapers on three continents; hundreds of other newspapers)

- Total annual revenue $709 billion. If these media corporations were a country, they would be the 21st wealthiest country in the world by GDP.

The owners, leaders, and most of the influential employees of Facebook, Google, Twitter, and the other prominent social media companies have great power today, and they are anti-Bible in their worldview. These people are not friends of Bible-believing Christians.

The evidence has come out in recent years that they want to ban biblical viewpoints and they have done this numerous times already. This problem will only get worse.

It is in the fallen nature of man to be controlling of other viewpoints, to monopolize, to *not* give freedom to others. Every major communications company in history has practiced speech control. This is documented in *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires* by Tim Wu. Western Union and the Associated Press did this when they

were business partners. Western Union was the only nationwide telegraph network, and it carried AP reports exclusively. This communications/news monopoly was a major factor in the election of Rutherford Hayes in 1876. Contrary to its own rules, Western Union turned over private telegraph communications to the Hayes campaign. The AP ran an endless stream of positive reports about Hayes and an endless stream of negative reports about Samuel Tilden.

Facebook has a massive censorship program. It has 15,000 "content moderators" who search through Facebook pages and determine whether or not the content is acceptable. In December 2018, a Facebook employee "leaked more than 1,000 pages of documents detailing its content moderation policies and how it polices speech on a global scale" ("After Facebook apologizes for ban," *Fox News*, Dec. 31, 2018).

In December 2018, Facebook temporarily blocked Franklin Graham's Facebook account because in 2016 he supported North Carolina's state law HB2 that banned cities from requiring businesses to allow transexuals to use the bathroom of their choice ("After Facebook apologizes for ban," *Fox News*, Dec. 31, 2018). One of Facebook's 15,000 "content moderators" judged this as "dehumanizing language," which shows how much they have capitulated to the homosexual rights agenda. Simply to speak out in support of a state law is considered some kind of hate toward homosexuals. Graham said the social network is "trying to define truth. They're making the rules and changing the rules. Truth is truth. God made the rules and His Word is truth. Actually, Facebook is censoring free speech. The free exchange of ideas is part of our country's DNA. ... I think it was just really a personal attack towards me" (Ibid.).

In December 2018, Facebook censored pro-life advocate Obianuju Ekeocha. She had posted a link to an article about her pro-life work. Facebook said it "goes against our community standards" ("Big Problems with Big Tech," *The*

Stream, Dec. 20, 2018). Obviously Facebook's "community standards" support the murder of unborn children.

Pinterest Censoring Pro-Life, Conservative Organizations, Bible Verses. The following is excerpted from "Tech Insider Blows Whistle," ProjectVeritas.com, June 11, 2019: "Project Veritas has received and published documents from an insider at Pinterest. The documents, which include product code, Slack messages, and internal policies, reveal terms and websites that Pinterest apparently censors. In an interview, **the Pinterest insider who leaked the documents explains how the company censors pro-life and Christian content on the website**. Said Project Veritas founder James O'Keefe: 'The documents we obtained raise questions about whether or not these tech companies really operate like neutral platforms, as opposed to publishers with editorial agendas.' Pinterest is a publicly-traded social media company headquartered in San Francisco that has nearly 300 million active monthly users. In the past, Project Veritas released undercover footage of Twitter employees discussing 'shadow-banning,' and also published leaked documents from Facebook which revealed plans to target and demote conservative commentary. 'I was pretty surprised,' said the Pinterest insider in an interview, when s/he discovered that pro-life group LiveAction.org was added to a 'porn domain block list.' The insider explained that the 'block list' was intended to be a collection of pornographic websites that Pinterest uses in order ensure that pornography cannot be posted. LiveAction.org is not a pornographic website, instead it is the web domain of a prominent pro-life advocacy group. The insider explained that websites on a 'domain block list' cannot be linked in posts made by users. While investigating, Project Veritas tried to post the LiveAction.org link on Pinterest and failed to do so, receiving an error message that read, 'Sorry! Your request could not be completed.' ... Lila Rose, the founder and president of LiveAction claims that her

organization has been censored in the past, and believes that pro-life organizations are unfairly targeted by social media companies: 'Pinterest says that their mission is to help empower people to discover things that they love, but despite the fact that millions of people love babies and the pro-life cause, they are secretly censoring our life-affirming messages. Pinterest users deserve to know the truth and our messages deserve to be treated fairly.' ... Project Veritas reviewed the 'Sensitive Terms List' and discovered that Christianity-related terms like 'christian easter' and 'bible verses' were marked as 'brand unsafe.' ... The insider explained to Project Veritas that in addition to removing content it wants to censor, Pinterest also 'hides' materials from users on their home screens and search results. The insider added that there is also 'silent removing,' which means the content is removed but there is no notice to the account who posted the material that it was removed."

Google Censoring "abortion" Results for Youtube Videos. Google, which owns YouTube, censors the search results for "abortion" so that hard-hitting anti-abortion videos no longer appear in the top ten. "[A]n internal discussion thread leaked to *Breitbart News* reveals Google regularly intervenes in search results on its YouTube video platform--including a recent intervention that pushed pro-life videos out of the top ten search results for 'abortion.' The term 'abortion' was added to a 'blacklist' file for 'controversial YouTube queries,' which contains a list of search terms that the company considers sensitive" ("The Smoking Gun: Google manipulated search results," *Breitbart*, Jan. 16, 2019). The videos were not removed, but they were made to appear lower in the list of results so that they would be seen by fewer people. A Google spokesperson admitted to the *Daily Mail* that this was done, but claimed that the videos in question contained "misinformation" or "graphic content." "YouTube failed to explain how congressional testimony from Dr.

Antony Levatino, a gynecologist and former abortion doctor--also disappeared from the top ten results--could be 'misinformation.' But perhaps the most obvious contradiction to YouTube's comment is 'Abortion: My Experience,' a video that according to the *Slate* report, previously featured at around ninth in the search results. The video is a woman's personal story of being pressured into an abortion by an allegedly abusive partner, and subsequently regretting the decision. The video doesn't feature any graphic images. As it's a personal story, it can't be accused of 'misinformation' either. It seems that disappearing the stories of women who don't have the correct abortion experience is now YouTube's policy" ("YouTube admits it meddled with search results," *Breitbart*, Jan. 17, 2019).

Google Moving toward Censorship. The following is excerpted from "Google Admits They're Moving towards Censorship," Breitbart.com, Oct. 12, 2018: "In an interview with *One America News Network* host Jack Posobiec, Breitbart News Senior Tech reporter Allum Bokhari discussed the recent exclusive Breitbart leak of an 85-page internal Google document which states that the idea of free speech is a 'utopian dream' that is no longer possible, and outlines the growing crackdown of speech on social media. 'Google said the document is just research and it doesn't reflect company policy,' said Bokhari. 'That doesn't make sense to me as an explanation because the briefing is a description of company policy, it says this is where things are going, this is the direction of travel, this is where things are moving, this is where we need to move if we want to accomplish certain things.' ... 'The three top things that the briefing reveals, one: they admit they are shifting towards censorship and Silicon Valley as a whole is shifting towards censorship. Two: they admit that they, Twitter and Facebook now control the majority of online conversation and three: they make the business case for censorship. They say you

need to censor in order to protect advertisers from controversy and you need to censor in order to maintain global expansion.'"

Google's "creepy Line." The following is excerpted from "The Creepy Line" by John Stossel, Townhall.com, Dec. 5, 2018: "[A] new documentary, 'The Creepy Line,' argues that companies like Google and Facebook lean left and have power they shouldn't have. The title 'Creepy Line' refers to a comment by former Google chairman Eric Schmidt, who said when it comes to issues like privacy, Google policy 'is to get right up to the creepy line but not cross it.' But the documentary argues that Google crosses that creepy line every day. Google's power comes from its dominant search engine. We assume that whatever appears at the top of our searches is the 'best' or most popular result. But is it? 'It is a company that has an agenda,' the writer of 'The Creepy Line,' Peter Schweizer, says in my latest video. ... 'Their ability to manipulate the algorithm is something that they've demonstrated,' says Schweizer, and last election Google put positive stories about Hillary Clinton higher in Google searches. ... Human 'content monitors' do some of that censoring, and some of them despise conservatives. A former Facebook employee reported that the human censors sometimes ignored stories trending among Facebook users if the stories came from a conservative website. ... 'The Creepy Line' makes a compelling case that a small number of people at a few Silicon Valley companies have tremendous power to do creepy things."

Google Employees Protest Use of Word "Family" to Refer to Children. The extreme liberal, morally-perverted viewpoint of a large number of Google employees was evident in an event that occurred in March 2017 when the use of the term "family friendly" by a Google executive in a weekly company-wide presentation caused an uproar. The term "family" was used in the context of discussing a product

aimed at children. A Google employee stormed out of the meeting in protest and later ranted in an internal communication thread that linking "family" to children is "offensive, inappropriate, homophobic, and wrong." He said, "This is a diminishing and disrespectful way to speak. ... The use of 'family' as a synonym for 'with children' has a long-standing association with deeply homophobic organizations" ("Disrespectful: Google Employees Melt Down Over the Word 'Family,'" *The Daily Caller*, Jan. 16, 2019). About 100 other Google employees agreed with this anti-traditional family diatribe. One said, "As a straight person in a relationship, I find the term 'family' offensive because it excludes me and my boyfriend, having no children of our own." Another said, "My family consists of me and several other trans feminine folks, some of whom I'm dating. We're all supportive of each other and eventually aspire to live together. Just because we aren't a heterosexual couple with 2.5 kids, a white picket fence, and a dog doesn't mean we're not a family." Another said that "using 'family' to mean 'people with kids' is also annoying to me as a straight-cis-woman who doesn't have or want kids. My husband, my parents, and my pets are my family." Google vice president Pavni Diwanji apologized for using "family" in the traditional way and asked for help from employees on how the company could use language more inclusively and less offensively. He pleaded with his liberal-minded employees, "Please help us get to a better state. Teach us how to talk about it in inclusive way, if you feel like we are not doing it well." It is sad and frightful that the great power of the world's premier search engine is in the hands of such people.

Apple censors Christians who have a biblical viewpoint. The following is from "Apple Pulls," *The Christian Post*, Dec. 27, 2018: "Apple pulled a Christian ministry's app after LGBT advocates said it portrayed being gay as a 'sickness,' a charge the ministry says is false. *NBC News* reported that the tech

giant removed the app that was developed by Living Hope Ministries, a Texas-based organization, following a Change.org petition from gay rights group Truth Wins Out. The petition called the 'ex-gay' app 'dangerous,' 'bigoted' and 'hateful.' Living Hope Ministries is expressing disappointment over the move but says their work will continue. 'We are saddened by Apple's and Microsoft's removal of our app because of a single person's false accusations. Regardless of their decision we will continue to make the app and our services available to those who seek them,' Ricky Chalette, executive director of the group, said in an email to *The Christian Post* Thursday. 'We are a ministry that for nearly thirty years has helped individuals resolve their feelings they deem incongruent with their faith. We help people deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ through Bible study and accountability. We walk with them to align their lives with the teachings of Jesus Christ.' ... In 2014, Apple CEO Tim Cook became the first Fortune 500 company leader to announce he was homosexual, and told CNN in an interview earlier this year that being gay was 'God's greatest gift to me.'"

Google Engineer: "Our Tech Is Not Politically Neutral." The following is excerpted from "Google Engineer," *DailyWire*, July 24, 2019: "The engineer, Greg Coppola, a senior software engineer in the Google Assistant division, told Project Veritas that he was going public with his warning in an attempt to encourage increased transparency in Big Tech amid what he described as an increasingly politically biased atmosphere. 'I've been coding since I was ten [years old.] I have a PhD, I have five years' experience at Google and I just know how algorithms are,' said Coppola (partial transcript via Project Veritas). 'They don't write themselves. We write them to do what we want them to do.' 'I think we're just at a really important point in human history,' he said in explanation for why he is coming forward. 'I think for a while we had tech that was politically neutral. Now we have tech that really, first of all, is taking sides in a political contest, which I think, you know, anytime you have big corporate power merging with political parties can be

dangerous. And I think more generally we have to just decide now that we kind of are seeing tech use its power to manipulate people. It's a time to decide, you know, do we run the technology, does the technology run us?' Asked about Google CEO Sundar Pichai testifying in front of Congress last December that there's no bias in his company's searches, Coppola said that while he respects Pichai a great deal, the claim is 'ridiculous.' ... 'I think everyone who supports anything other than the Democrats, anyone who's pro-Trump or in any way deviates from what *CNN* and the *New York Times* are pushing, notices how bad it is.' The problem of political bias in Big Tech has gotten worse in recent years, he argued. After about a decade of relative neutrality, people began to trust companies like Google to provide them unbiased means of finding information. 'We haven't had time to absorb the fact that tech might have an agenda,' he said. The turning point in Big Tech from relatively neutral to increasingly partisan, he suggested, was Donald Trump's presidential run. 'I think as the election started to ramp up, the angle that the Democrats and the media took was that anyone who liked Donald Trump was a racist...' he said. 'And that got picked up everywhere. I mean, every tech company, everybody in New York, everybody in the field of computer science basically believed that.'

Youtube Censors Harvard Professor Alan Dershowitz and Dennis Prager's Video on the Ten Commandments. The following is excerpted from "Dennis Prager on Google restricting PragerU videos," *Fox News*, Aug. 7, 2019: "Radio host and PragerU President Dennis Prager said Wednesday on *Fox & Friends* that freedom of speech is being threatened by Google, pointing out content from his own platform that has repeatedly been restricted by YouTube. In a new *Wall Street Journal* column, Prager wrote that a video called *The Charlottesville Lie*, from CNN's Steve Cortes, was quickly moved to the 'restricted list' on Monday just hours after it was posted. 'This happened two weeks after a Senate hearing at which a Google representative swore under oath that the company doesn't censor based on political views,' he wrote. ... Prager added that the video was also removed from Twitter after complaints from the left. He explained that a video from Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz called *Israel's Legal Founding* was

also placed on the restricted list by Google-owned YouTube, along with Prager's own video about the Ten Commandments. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, asked a Google representative at a recent hearing how *The Ten Commandments: What You Should Know* made it onto a restricted list. The man said with a straight face, 'because it mentions murder.' ... Prager said Dershowitz told him in the upcoming film *No Safe Spaces* that he fears the left 'much more than the right.'"

Youtube Says Medical Facts about "transgenderism" Are "Hate Speech." The following is excerpted from *Pulpit & Pen*, Nov. 9, 2019: "After being on the platform for two years, YouTube banned a video of Dr. Michelle Cretella, a pediatrician and executive director at the American Academy of Pediatricians, who explained that dismembering body parts is a symptom of mental illness. The board-certified pediatrician gives medical facts in the video and demonstrates that 'transgenderism' doesn't really exist. Rather, the thought that one is the 'wrong gender' is body dysmorphia, a reason for mental health counseling rather than going under the knife. According to the media giant YouTube, giving medical facts is 'hate speech.' ... YouTube stated, 'Hate speech is not allowed on YouTube. We remove content promoting violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on any of the following attributes.' Katrina Kinko, Editor-in-Chief for *Daily Signal*, explained to the press that they had tried without avail to get YouTube to let them speak medical facts without punitive censorship."

Twitter Puts Warning on Trump Team's Pro-Life Video Featuring Smiling Babies. The following is excerpted from "Twitter Puts Warning," PJMedia.com, Jan. 24, 2020: "Twitter censored and attached a warning to a pro-life ad from the Trump campaign that featured beautiful babies growing in the womb, being hugged by the president, and playing on playgrounds. Twitter hid the video for a short time on Friday with this warning, 'This media may contain sensitive material.' In order to see it, a viewer would have to click through the warning. The video has nothing sensitive in it except to disagree with Democrats who think it's okay to kill babies. The pro-life message that life is worthwhile and babies deserve to live was loud and clear in the

message. There was nothing inappropriate about it. 'We know that life is the greatest miracle of all,' says the president over a beautiful image of a developing baby. 'We see it in the eyes of every new mother who cradles that wonderful, innocent, and glorious newborn child in her loving arms,' he continues over images of mothers getting ultrasounds and holding new babies. 'Under my administration, we will always defend the very first right in the Declaration of Independence and that is the right to life,' he says as our founding documents are shown. 'Virtually every top Democrat lawmaker also now supports taxpayer-funded abortion right up to the moment of birth,' says Trump as pictures of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren float by. 'These are living, feeling, beautiful babies who will never get the chance to share their love and their dreams with the world.' As these words are spoken, images and videos of beautiful smiling babies and children are shown. 'It is wrong. It has to change. But this movement can only succeed with the heart and the soul and the prayer of the people,' says Trump over crowd shots of various March For Life rallies. 'Let us work together to build a culture that cherishes innocent life,' he finishes. This ad should never have been censored and Twitter did take the warning off after complaints."

Youtube Censors Video about Evangelicals Helping Marxists As "hate Speech." The following is excerpted from "YouTube Says Video," *Pulpit and Pen*, Jan. 28, 2020: "Technocracies are increasingly controlling the conversation, censoring particularly impactful videos, posts, and articles that expose leftist schemes to takeover American institutions. This trend is seen most recently in YouTube taking down a video from Christian ministry organization *Worldview Weekend*, which focused on the link between Marxists and Muslims and their desire to take control of the United States. Entitled *Some Evangelicals Are Helping the Marxists and Muslims Sabotage America*, the video was produced and posted by Brannon Howse of Worldview Weekend (WVW). WVW now reports that the tech giant removed the video because of 'hate.' 'On January 25th, 2020 we received an email from YouTube that stated: Our team has reviewed your content, and, unfortunately, we think it violates our hate speech policy. We have removed the following content from YouTube: Video: *Some*

Evangelicals Are Helping the Marxists and Muslims Sabotage America.' WVW continues, 'Telling the truth with TONS of documented facts and video clips is now hate speech? These were older videos and so apparently YouTube is stepping up its crackdown on conservatives as the fall of 2020 elections approach. Yet, YouTube is FILLED with hateful rants by Islamists and Marxists about Christians, conservatives and Jews. Some of these videos feature individuals like Linda Sarsour, Yasir Qadhi, Dalia Mogahed, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Siraj Wahhaj who was on a list of co-conspirators in the trial of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. This is the second video in one week that YouTube has removed.'"

Vimeo Closes Christian Man's Account for Saying He Is a "former Homosexual." The following is excerpted from "Vimeo closes Christian man's account," *WorldNetDaily*, Jan. 26, 2020: "A man who describes himself as a former homosexual is suing the online video platform Vimeo for closing his account after he posted videos of his Christian testimony. Vimeo bans users from promoting 'gay-conversion therapy,' or efforts to change sexual orientation. On Monday, U.S. Magistrate Judge Stewart Aaron in Manhattan reserved a decision on a motion to dismiss the case brought by James Domen, who is now a pastor, and his California-based non-profit Church United, reported Courthouse News. Domen alleges Vimeo shut down his account in bad faith after finding several uploads that referenced him as a 'former homosexual' among a library of 89 videos. ... Videos promoting 'Sexual Orientation Change Efforts' are barred by Vimeo under the umbrella company's prohibition of 'hateful, harassing, defamatory, and discriminatory content.' ... Vimeo puts them in the category of efforts to 'harass, incite hatred, or include discriminatory or defamatory speech.'"

Social media is a forum for tracking

Social media companies such as Facebook and Instagram seek to exploit their knowledge of users for advertising purposes, and they do this by tracking the user's habits and

collecting information that will enable them to target the user with products.

> "Every time you click within a digital structure (like a social media app), you are adding to your own DIGITAL EXHAUST. Your digital exhaust is like a giant barrel filled with every click, every like, every share, ever clicked in your past, and space for every click you will ever click in your future. That barrel begins to form a complete image of the user as a person. Google will begin to tailor your search results based on your historical click and data exhaust. If you consistently read Fox News online, the next time you search on Google, Google will place the Fox News results at the top and probably won't bother showing you any MSNBC results. In addition, Facebook will see your Google search patterns and continue to offer up Fox Newsesque content items" (Jesse Weinberger, *The Boogeyman Exists, and He's in Your Child's Back Pocket*, p. 142).

Zeynep Tufekci, of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, observes, "What Facebook does is profile you. If you are on Facebook, it is collecting everything you do. If you are off Facebook, it is using tracking pixels to collect what you are browsing. And for its micro-targeting to work, **for its business model to work, it has to remain A SURVEILLANCE MACHINE"** ("The Facebook Dilemma," part one, *Frontline PBS*, Oct. 29, 2018).

After I opened a Facebook account for the purpose of doing some research for this book, I was immediately confronted with Facebook's attempt to draw me into its clutches. Suddenly, a faceless company was using the world's most powerful technology to study me, learn about me, track me, communicate with me. I was presented with a never-ending stream of "suggested friends," some of whom I knew from my high school years. I started getting text messages on my phone urging me to check out what was happening on my Facebook page. I responded by shutting down everything I

could shut down and removing all of my personal information, including my phone, and having nothing further to do with Facebook. I have plenty of other options for communicating with people, publishing photos, etc., without putting myself into the clutches of the world's largest social media company.

When someone signs up to TikTok, the app asks for permission to sync the user's contacts and then sends notifications to the contacts announcing the user's new videos. TikTok recommends videos to the user based on AI algorithms that study the user's behaviour, and by swiping down the user is tempted to watch whatever is offered.

"Online tracking technologies evolved to a point that would have made a Soviet-era spy blush. Arrival at NYPost.com would trigger up to twenty or more urgent 'tracking' messages to online ad agencies, or 'ad networks,' advising them of any available intelligence on the user, in addition to specifying what stories they were reading. Attention merchants had always been ravenous for attention, but now they were gobbling up personal data as well" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 322).

"While promising to be 'helpful' or 'thoughtful,' what was delivered was often experienced as 'intrusive' and worse. Some ads seemed more like stalkers than valets: if, say, you'd been looking at a pair of shoes on Amazon, an ad for just those shoes would begin following you around the web, prodding you to take another look at them. What was meant to be 'relevant' to your wishes and interests turned out to be more of a studied exploitation of one's weaknesses. The overweight were presented with diet aids; the gadget-obsessed plied with the latest doodads; gamblers encouraged to bet; and so on. One man, after receiving a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, found himself followed everywhere with ... ads for funeral services" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 323).

Social media is designed to be addictive

The goal of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, etc., is to keep users online within their forum as much as possible in order to make advertising money.

The first internet social media tool was **email**, which was invented by Ray Tomlinson in 1971. It was an immediate hit with the engineers and scientists and higher educators who had access to the early internet. Stephen Lukasik, a physicist and director of the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), was the first internet addict, lugging around a 30-pound device that he used to check for emails. By the 1990s, millions upon millions were addicted, logging into America Online, the most popular internet provider of the day, to hear the pleasant male voice say, "You've got mail" and to see the little graphic of a postbox stuffed with letters, promising "a virtual cornucopia of potential rewards in human connection."

The addictive nature of email is its random reward character. Most email is uninteresting, even a nuisance, but the user never knows when a desirable, interesting, or important email will arrive, and that keeps him checking. "It is enough to have had such an experience a few times to get you regularly fishing for it; constant checking is thus reinforced, even if most of the time checking your email turns out to have been pointless."

Returning to social media, every feature is designed to be enticing and addictive. The Like button, friends, comments, a constant stream of news, photos, videos, the music, the sounds, endless scrolling, notifications, suggestions, even the colors. For example, Facebook changed the color of its notifications from mild blue to attention-grabbing red.

There is the addictive nature merely of the "**DRAMA**" of being intimately and constantly involved in people's lives. What are they doing now? Where are they going now? What

are they talking about now? Who are they dating now? What's happening??? One man observed, "I do not have a Facebook page because of all the drama. I think drama is a very powerful, addictive ideal that young people are drawn to. It's dangerous for them because it's a way for them to express themselves in somewhat obscurity."

An early user of Facebook said, "I signed up on Tuesday morning and I was immediately addicted. Nothing validates your social existence like the knowledge that someone else has approved you or is asking for your permission to list them as a friend. It's bonding and flattering at the same time" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 294).

Social media addiction is called "**ENGINEERED ADDICTION**."

Facebook and other major social media sites study everything the user does with the objective of manipulating his life.

Chris Anderson, chief executive of a robotics and drone company, says smart phones are like crack cocaine.

Justin Rosenstein, who created Facebook's Like button, now warns about the addictive danger of Facebook.

Tristan Harris says the social media companies are "brain hacking" you.

Consider some excerpts from a 2018 BBC documentary entitled *Mind Control: The Dark Side of Your Phone*:

> "Insiders told us that **social media companies track vast amounts of data, every swipe and click, and analyze it in real time. Artificial intelligence then uses that to adapt what we see on our screens to keep us coming back**."

> Asa Raskin, who designed the endless scroll and other popular app features, says, '**We're in the largest behavioral experiment the world has ever seen. You're being tested on all the time**. Things like changing the

color of your like button. This shade of blue, should it be a little bit more red? And they will keep trying until they find the perfect shape and the perfect color that most maximizes your continued scrolling. **Behind every screen on your phone there are literally a thousand engineers to try to make it maximally addicting**. IT'S AS IF THEY'RE TAKING BEHAVIORAL COCAINE AND JUST SPRINKLING IT ALL OVER YOUR INTERFACE.'

Raskin says, '**I don't want my mind to be hijacked.**'

Endless scrolling is based on a soup experiment that demonstrated that if a bowl of soup is endlessly refilled without the knowledge of the eater, he will eat a lot more, because there is no cue that the meal is finished. **Before, you would scroll to the end of a page and have to click to go to a new page, but the endless scroll has no such cue. 'Now the page never ends, sucking us endlessly in**.' 'We found that if you don't give people stopping cues, they just keep scrolling. **We found that our design techniques became so powerful that IT JUST ADDICTS PEOPLE**.'

Facebook's founding president said this about THE COMPANY'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE: 'HOW CAN WE CONSUME AS MUCH OF YOUR TIME AS POSSIBLE**? And that means that we need to give you sort of a little dopamine hit every once in awhile, because someone commented on a photo or post or whatever.'**

The whole gambling industry is built on the unpredictability of rewards. Our smartphones could be like a slot machine or worse. The gambling industry calls all of the razzmatazz in casinos--the noise and lights and action and music--'**THE JUICE.**' Our smartphones have that, too. Flashing lights, pings, colors, and tunes.

Professor Catherine Winstanley, who has done leading research on the way dopamine fuels addictions, says, 'Unexpected rewards activate the dopamine experience. I think there are elements of design of apps on smartphones that seem similar to the electronic gaming. So **if your smartphone is recruiting and activating your dopamine system in the same way that we think happens when people are gambling it would imply that those two behaviors could be addicting in the same way as addictive drugs**' (*Mind Control: The Dark Side of Your Phone*, BBC documentary).

Chris Anderson, former editor of *Wired* and currently the chief executive of a robotics and drone company, says about mobile phones, **"On the scale between candy and crack cocaine, IT'S CLOSER TO CRACK COCAINE. We thought we could control it. And this is beyond our power to control. This is going straight to the pleasure centers of the developing brain**. This is beyond our capacity as regular parents to understand. I didn't know what we were doing to their brains until I started to observe the symptoms and the consequences" ("A Dark Consensus about Screens," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2018).

Major social media companies hire behavioral experts to help them exploit human nature for the companies' bottom line. Tristen Harris says product designers "play your psychological vulnerabilities (consciously and unconsciously) against you in the race to grab your attention."

TikTok recommends videos based on AI algorithms that study the user's behaviour, and by swiping down the user keeps watching whatever is offered. It is highly addictive. It is a massive devourer of precious time. "It gives them a sense of mystery and makes them excited ... it's easy to stay in the loop of watching more and more videos" ("Why Is TikTok Sweeping over the World?" UXDesign.cc, Mar. 13, 2019).

There is "the fear of missing out," which has its own acronym--**FOMO**.

There is **INSECURITY.** "Matt Mayberry, who works at a California startup called Dopamine Labs, says it's common knowledge in the industry that Instagram exploits this craving by strategically withholding 'likes' from certain users. If the photo-sharing app decides you need to use the service more often, it'll show only a fraction of the likes you've received on a given post at first, hoping you'll be disappointed with your haul and check back again in a minute or two. 'They're tying in to your greatest insecurities,' Mr. Mayberry said" ("Your smartphone is making you stupid, antisocial and unhealthy," *The Globe and Mail*, Apr. 10, 2018).

There is **NOVELTY BIAS**. "These companies have persuaded us to give over so much of our lives by exploiting a handful of human frailties. One of them is called novelty bias. It means our brains are suckers for the new. ... it makes us respond helplessly to Facebook notifications and the buzz of incoming e-mail. That's why social media apps nag you to turn notifications on. They know that once the icons start flashing onto your lock screen, you won't be able to ignore them" ("Your smartphone is making you stupid, antisocial and unhealthy," *The Globe and Mail*, Apr. 10, 2018).

There is the power of **RANDOMNESS and UNPREDICTABILITY**. Tests have shown that animals will spend more time at a project such as pecking at a button if the reward is random. Humans have a similar tendency, and this is manipulated by social media companies.

> "Some of the mental quirks smartphones exploit are obvious, others counterintuitive. The principle of '**VARIABLE REWARDS**' falls into the second camp. Discovered by the psychologist B.F. Skinner and his acolytes in a series of experiments on rats and pigeons, it predicts that creatures are likelier to seek out a reward if they aren't sure how often it will be doled out. Pigeons,

for example, were found to peck a button for food more frequently if the food was dispensed inconsistently rather than reliably each time, the Columbia University law professor Tim Wu recounts in his recent book *The Attention Merchants.* So it is with social media apps: Though four out of five Facebook posts may be inane, THE 'BOTTOMLESS,' AUTOMATICALLY REFRESHING FEED always promises a good quip or bit of telling gossip just below the threshold of the screen, accessible with the rhythmic flick of thumb on glass" ("Your smartphone is making you stupid, antisocial and unhealthy," *The Globe and Mail*, Apr. 10, 2018).

"If you want to maximize addictiveness, all tech designers need to do is link a user's action (like pulling a lever) with a *variable reward*. You pull a lever and immediately receive either an enticing reward (a match, a prize!) or nothing. Addictiveness is maximized when the rate of reward is most variable. Does this effect really work on people? Yes. Slot machines make more money in the United States than baseball, movies, and theme parks combined. Relative to other kinds of gambling, people get 'problematically involved' with slot machines 3–4x faster according to NYU professor Natasha Dow Schull, author of *Addiction by Design.* But here's the unfortunate truth--several billion people have a slot machine in their pocket: When we pull our phone out of our pocket, we're *playing a slot machine* to see what notifications we got. When we pull to refresh our email, we're *playing a slot machine* to see what new email we got. When we swipe down our finger to scroll the Instagram feed, we're *playing a slot machine* to see what photo comes next. When we swipe faces left/right on dating apps like Tinder, we're *playing a slot machine* to see if we got a match. When we tap the # of red notifications, we're *playing a slot machine* to what's underneath" *(Tristan Harris, "How Technology Is Hijacking Your Mind,"* May 19, 2016).

The danger of manipulation by social media is so real that early Facebook and Google employees have formed a coalition to fight what they built.

> "A group of Silicon Valley technologists who were early employees at Facebook and Google, alarmed over the ill effects of social networks and smartphones, are banding together to challenge the companies they helped build. The cohort is creating a union of concerned experts called the Center for Humane Technology. Along with the nonprofit media watchdog group Common Sense Media, it also plans an anti-tech addiction lobbying effort and an ad campaign at 55,000 public schools in the United States. The campaign, titled *The Truth About Tech*, will be funded with $7 million from Common Sense and capital raised by the Center for Humane Technology. Common Sense also has $50 million in donated media and airtime from partners including Comcast and DirecTV. It will be aimed at educating students, parents and teachers about the dangers of technology, including the depression that can come from heavy use of social media.

> "'We were on the inside,' said Tristan Harris, a former in-house ethicist at Google who is heading the new group. 'We know what the companies measure. We know how they talk, and we know how the engineering works.'

> "The effect of technology, especially on younger minds, has become hotly debated in recent months. ... Pediatric and mental health experts called on Facebook last week to abandon a messaging service the company had introduced for children as young as 6. Parenting groups have also sounded the alarm about YouTube Kids, a product aimed at children that sometimes features disturbing content. ...

> "The new Center for Humane Technology includes an unprecedented alliance of former employees of some of

today's biggest tech companies. Apart from Mr. Harris, the center includes Sandy Parakilas, a former Facebook operations manager; Lynn Fox, a former Apple and Google communications executive; Dave Morin, a former Facebook executive; Justin Rosenstein, who created Facebook's Like button ... Apple's chief executive, Timothy D. Cook, told *The Guardian* last month that he would not let his nephew on social media" ("Early Facebook and Google," *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 2018).

Social media is a world magnet

Facebook is filled with worldly people and worldly things. You aren't forced to participate with worldly things and you can control your own Facebook page and who you "friend," but staying in control is no small task. Facebook doesn't want to make it easy for its users to shut themselves off from notifications, and suggested "friends" and "Likes," and such.

Facebook and Instagram and Snapchat are the devil's nose-rings to lead young people around by the nose and take them wherever he wills.

Following are some testimonies:

> "If you use FB like my wayward daughter used it, you'll get drawn into teenage love triangles (with other church kids of course), ultimately leading to a destructive rebellious lifestyle, other contributing factors notwithstanding."

> "Many years ago, I left Facebook for the simple fact that I found too many so called Christians that I had grown up with or went to Bible college with had left their first love and it became very depressing and troublesome."

> "We don't believe that young people should be on Facebook. The young people in our church who are growing spiritually are those who have given up social media, and we have many of these. One pastor says, 'I have taught our young people not to be on Facebook,

and the ones who have stayed in the church are those who followed that advice.'"

"I thought I could use Facebook to post profitable things and stay away from the negative, but I found that I couldn't just do that. I had to scroll a few times and that turned into more. Back in high school the goal was to get as many 'friends' as possible, so I have friends that I didn't even know. The old acquaintances bring back old worldly memories that entice me and also I find myself wasting a lot of time."

"Facebook was a huge hindrance to my spiritual life. It didn't happen right away. Sin slowly slithered in until I was so far from the Lord. I don't even know it happened until too late. I deleted my FB account over three years ago and have not missed it."

Social media is a forum for self-promotion

The Bible warns that the last days will be characterized by self-love.

"This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves..." (2 Ti. 3:1-2).

From its inception, the rock & roll culture has been all about pleasing yourself, living for yourself. "It's my life, and I'll do what I want."

Even the world recognizes that this is the age of *me*; the age of narcissism. Narcissus is the god of Greek mythology who saw his image in a pond and fell in love with himself.

Nothing in the history of man has facilitated self-love more than social media. It is the perfect medium for self-promotion, documenting my life online for all the world to see, lying about my achievements, exaggerating my experiences.

"In truth, however, what Facebook was offering users was not a fuller and more ordered 'social' life but something even more alluring: **an augmented representation of themselves. Not as they were, exactly, but at their contrived best**, with hundreds of friends (before success became equated with thousands) and others still in queue awaiting 'approval'" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 294).

Mark Zuckerberg understands this very well. He said, "Think about what people are doing on Facebook today. They're keeping up with their friends and family, but they're also BUILDING AN IMAGE AND IDENTITY FOR THEMSELVES, which in a sense is THEIR BRAND" (Fred Vogelstein, "The Wired Interview: Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg," *Wired*, June 29, 2009).

"Facebook had supposedly replaced cyberspace with something more 'real,' but what it created in fact was just another realm of unreality, one that, on account of looking real, was more misleading. Here was a place where friends always congratulated and celebrated; where couples did little but eat at nice restaurants, go on vacation, or announce engagements or newborns; and where children never cried or needed diaper changes or hit each other. On Facebook, all happy families were alike; the others may be each been unhappy in their own way, but they were not on Facebook" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 301).

A web developer testifies, "No one really cares what you did last night, but social media encourages foolish sharing of our personal time. This contributes to voyeurism, it contributes to gossip, and a lot of pride. Paul warns the widowed women, though it should pertain to any woman (or man!) not to be busy bodies or roam from house to house, but social media allows us to stay in the comfort of our own homes while being a busy body or sticking our nose in everyone else's business. ... I know of no other arena where

pride, vanity and vainglory are on display more than on social media platforms."

It is the age of the selfie. This word was invented by the Australians, who love catchy little words, such as barbie (barbecue), biccy (biscuit), brekky (breakfast), brolly (umbrella), cupper (cup of tea), maccas (McDonalds), mozzie (mosquito), rellie (relatives), runners (running shoes), sanger (sandwich), sickie (a sick leave), and sunnies (sunglasses). Not surprisingly, Aussies call laptops *lappy* and Facebook *Facey*.

"Selfie" became Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Year in 2013.

By 2016, 24 billion selfies were uploaded.

The Philippines is known as "the selfie capital of the world."

Kim Kardashian, known as "the Selfie Queen," published a book entitled *Selfish* that featured selfies.

Celebrity selfies can get millions of likes. Kylie Jenner's 2017 selfie at the Met Gala had 3.7 million likes on Instagram. Ellen Degeneres's selfie with other celebrities at the 2014 Oscar ceremony was retweeted 3.3 million times.

The smartphone is the electronic "mirror in my hand." In the original version of *Snow White*, the queen says to her mirror, "Magic mirror in my hand, who is the fairest in the land."

Social media is the nearest thing to a real magic mirror that has ever been invented.

"But far and away Instagram's best known feature--its killer app--was the self-portrait [selfie]. ... Early on, Instagram reported that it had 53 million photos so designated (with #selfie). The selfie was so important that the form and the platform rose in tandem ... Instagrammers 'created an Instagram life,' telling their own stories, or at least a stylized and idealized version of it" (*The Attention Merchants*, p. 311, 312).

The Meitu app is used by 1 billion users in China and elsewhere in Asia. "Meitu" means "beautiful picture" and the app harnesses the power of today's pocket super computers to "magically" enhance ones attractiveness: whitening teeth, lightening skin color, removing blemishes, enlarging and changing the shape of the eyes, changing the shape of the face, changing hair styles, applying makeup.

A self-promotion social media lifestyle isn't real and it doesn't satisfy. Consider the testimony of Essena O'Neill, an Australian teenager who became an Instagram celebrity and quit in despair:

> "I had the dream life. I had half a million people interested in me on Instagram. I had over a hundred thousand views on most of my videos on YouTube. To a lot of people, I made it. ... Everything I was doing was edited and contrived and to get more views. ... Everything I did was for views, for likes, for followers ... Social media, especially how I used it, isn't real. Its contrived images and edited clips ranked against each other. It's a system based on social approval, likes, validation in views, success in followers. It's perfectly orchestrated self-absorbed judgment. ... I met people that are far more successful online than I am, and they are just as miserable and lonely and scared and lost. We all are" (Laura Donovan, "Instagram Star," Nov. 2, 2015, attn.com).

Social media is a forum for stalking

Social media is a predator's dream world.

Twenty Facebook stalking crimes are reported to the Kathmandu Metropolitan Police's Cyber Crime Unit every day (Himalayan Times for Dec. 10, 2018). Consider the case of a young nursing student. A man created five fake Facebook accounts in her name and posted obscene photos with morphed images of her face. He offered to take down the accounts if she would meet with him. Another young woman

accepted a 'friend' request from someone posing as a woman, but it turned out that it was a male stalker who wanted to receive photos of her. When she refused, he created a fake Facebook account and photoshopped her face on obscene photos and posted them. Nepal police inspector Lila Raj Dangi said that Facebook's office in Hong Kong had turned down multiple requests for help in protecting these women and identifying the offenders.

The global pop culture, with its fundamental principle of "live young and free," has made young women exceedingly vulnerable to the malicious, duplicitous advances of wicked men. It has "liberated" young women from the protective oversight of fathers, brothers, and husbands. Social media companies don't care for these women. They are just dollar signs.

Many women, children, and some men have been murdered by people who stalked them on social media, usually posing as someone other than who they really are. Women pose as men; men pose as women; older people pose as younger; homosexuals and transsexuals pose as "straights."

A missionary friend in Central America wrote the following: "I have seen several young girls here with Facebook 'friends' who are men from other countries. I have counseled several and warned about this. They all replied that they get bombarded with 'friend' requests. I decided to do an experiment, and the results were very disturbing. I opened a fake Facebook account as a 17-year-old girl from this country. No photos, no likes, no friends, no links to anyone or anything. I used an unregistered new phone chip number (available here from cell phone companies for two dollars). Basically, it was a blank Facebook profile, so there was nothing that could 'entice' a stalker. I then waited with no activity on my part. After a month or so the account was bombarded by 'friend' requests. All were from Muslim men from Muslim countries. I found this highly disturbing

because it shows that the algorithms of Facebook are programed to make a link between foreign Muslim men with young foolish girls in this country. And of course it is not difficult to see where that leads."

Jesse Weinberger, who teaches internet safety to thousands of parents and teachers each year, says, "If I told you that your child's favorite playground, library, or coffee shop is frequented by sexual predators actively seeking children as prey, would you take them there or allow them to hangout in those places without you? Probably not. Would you say, 'Oh, well, he has to learn how to navigate the world sometime'? Probably not. But by providing your child with a device, a signal, and little-to-no supervision you have effectively invited the entire 'creeper playground' into your child's bedroom, bathroom, and wherever else he uses his digital devices. There are approximately 740,000 registered sex offenders in the United States. These are the people (mostly men) who have been caught and successfully prosecuted. [These] are merely the ones who have been caught and have been added to the registry as part of their sentence" (*The Boogeyman Exists*, 2014, p. 111).

Social media is a forum for slander

There has never been such a powerful forum for slander and gossip and other evil speaking. Facebook and social media in general are a forum for character assassination.

Social media is used continually to slander good churches and ministries and pastors by disgruntled people, and there is really nothing they can to do protect themselves.

"A married youth pastor has been accused by a female teenager of sending suggestive chats to her but since they disappear he can't prove his innocence."

Social media is a forum for immoral relationships

Social media is the most powerful, most private communications tool that has ever existed, so it is no surprise that in a fallen world it is an instrument for countless unwholesome relationships and has broken up countless marriages.

The prominent law firm McKinley Irvin says that one in three divorces now start as online affairs. "With smartphones and social media apps, it's never been easier for dissatisfied spouses to look for a new relationship, get in contact with an ex, or seek out a fling. A whopping 30% of Tinder users are married" ("The Effects of Social Media Use on Marriage," McKinleyirvin.com).

Family Lawyer Magazine reported in 2013 that 81% of divorce lawyers have used social media as evidence in cases. According to one survey, for 25% of couples, Facebook is the cause of a fight at least once a week ("Why Social Media Causes Divorces," Jul. 30, 2015, Bustle.com).

An extensive study by Boston University and other research organizations found that "across all states, and in every analytical model used ... as social media use increased, marriage quality decreased" ("Approaching Social Media Before, During and After Divorce," itsovereasy.com).

Many people who have communicated with us on the subject of social media have described this aspect of it. Following are some examples:

> "I have experienced my lost husband looking up ex-girlfriends on Facebook and flirting with other women. It was devastating to me. I do realize that if this is in his heart, he doesn't need Facebook and other social media to accomplish these things, but social media surely does make it a lot easier for people to cheat on their spouses and look at things they ought not look at."

> "Facebook enabled our daughter to become engaged to someone she never met and move half a country away to be with him. That was three years ago. She may be married to him by now."
>
> "I was preaching at a family camp when a distraught woman told us her son was a pastor. Her daughter-in-law made contact with an old high school friend through Facebook and ran off with him. Tragic. Facebook wasn't the only cause for that marriage breakdown but it was a definite factor."
>
> "I think Facebook is causing many divorces. It almost cost me my marriage. An old male friend of my wife's contacted her through FB. She said they were close friends in high school and nothing was wrong with their renewed friendship. He had other plans, he was going to leave his wife after stealing mine away. Through lots of prayers that didn't happen. We are still married and things are slowly getting better."

A young person in Nepal told us that in her village *many* young people have run away after meeting someone on Facebook. She is from a village in the world's 16th poorest country, yet Facebook is having a powerful and negative influence on young people there.

Homosexuals use social media to proselytize their lifestyle. "A father once told us he was 100% sure his daughter was gender-fluid because of the internet. The internet is filled with affinity groups made up of groups of like-minded people. ... on the darker side you can have ... LGBT+ groups that will give your teen a community to get advice about how to determine if they are same-sex attracted" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

There is a Dark Web that lies beyond the realm of the public web, as if the filth on the public web isn't dangerous enough! "The dark dark web is the World Wide Web content that exists on darknets, overlay networks that use the internet

but require specific software, configurations, or authorization to access. The dark web forms a small part of the deep web, the part of the web not indexed by web search engines. It is usually a very dark and unsafe place. ... This is the place where child porn is trafficked" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

The danger is not only for youth; it is for all ages. Over 130 million people monthly visit the Ashley Madison website, which caters to married people looking for affairs. It is called "the cheating" web site. A few years ago, Ashley Madison was hacked and 32 million names were exposed. One was Josh Duggar, oldest of the 19 children of the Duggar family whose television program on The Learning Channel made them famous representatives of the Christian faith. After R.C. Sproul, Jr., son of the famous Reformed theologian and author, admitted that he visited Ashley Madison, he was placed under a one-year suspension from the ministry. He is a father and grandfather. Southern Baptist leader Ed Stetzer said as many as 400 pastors and church workers could resign because of the exposure ("400 Church Leaders," *Relevant*, Aug. 27, 2015).

The elderly father of a pastor friend committed adultery with a younger member of his pastor son's church. The two met when the father attended the church on a family visit, and they subsequently developed the relationship on Facebook. The father was caught when the son borrowed his cell phone and found the illicit communication.

Social media is a forum for heresy and nuttiness

As we saw in the chapter "Spiritual Safety Requires Understanding the Times," we live at the end of the church age in the depths of apostasy. The little leaven that began in the days of the apostles has leavened "Christendom" for two millennia, until the whole is almost leavened.

And never has it been so easy for people to come into contact with every type of heresy and goofy principle, from

emerging church to flat earth, from Christian rock to New Age dieting, from theistic evolution to yoga.

When I was a new Christian, I didn't have spiritual guidance in a sound church for the first few weeks and was tossed to and fro in the sea of apostasy. I was confronted with Pentecostalism, Seventh-day Adventism, and Herbert W. Armstrongism. And in that day, to encounter heresies one had to attend a church or Bible study or visit a bookstore or library or listen to a "Christian" radio program.

Now all one has to do is surf the web with one's ever-present smartphone and endlessly scroll through a fathomless selection of error.

Consider the following testimonies about this danger:

> "It is my observation one of the greatest dangers of the internet technology is that it brings (literally) thousands of teachers into your home. Any church member now, in the absence of serious biblical study, can hold forth on any topic by putting the verses in question in Google and then quoting his favorite teacher. The speaker has no knowledge of the subject, no knowledge of the teacher. I had a man in our congregation who got involved with many different online 'Baptist' teachers. He adopted all kinds of silly doctrines (amillennialism, no eternal security, etc). He was at best, a baby Christian, with no time in the Word of God, but because he read all these people, he considered himself an expert. He was shocked when I told him to stop reading all those teachers. It is shocking to Americans to tell them that. Right away they say you are trying to hide something from them. Everything is a conspiracy. 'We have the right to read and learn from anything we want.' It used to be you had to put effort into finding other teachers, and a pastor who had been saved for decades and approved by a sending church had standing. But now, thanks to the internet, you can find all kinds of experts to tickle all your fancies. With the man in our

assembly, it got to a point where he was bringing his smart phone and computer to church and looking up the texts we were using in real time. Then he would raise his hand and contradict me by quoting the internet teacher. Even though I could answer the childish and shallow arguments, he gave more credence to the online teachers. We threw him out. You want booze, we have a teacher for that. You want to be a pastor without meeting the qualifications, we have a teacher for that. You want to have women leaders, we have a teacher for that. You want to stop separating, we have a teacher for that. You think your pastor is a bad guy, we have a teacher for that. Anything you want, we have a teacher for that. This is one of the worst parts of new technology. It puts every heretic right at your fingertips."

"In my experience and opinion, very few Christians are mature enough in the Lord to be on social media. Social media is (along with many other things) a one-world church tool that promotes unbiblical doctrines and heresies through the use of peer pressure and exposure to philosophy of the world. It is a place where one can trust in the world's understanding and reason. It is a place where the individual can gather agreement for anything he or she wants to believe or promote from the smorgasbord of views. Do 'born again believers' not know the wiles of the devil?"

"I firmly believe that the internet along with social media is the chief aid in the fulfillment of 2 Timothy 3:7, 'Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.' The foundational issue is that the average professing Christian is Biblically ignorant. They know just enough to be a danger to themselves and everyone around them. They are too lazy to read their Bibles and study hard after the truth which in turn means they won't be testing everything by it."

This danger makes it more imperative than ever that churches educate their people well in doctrinal dangers.

The most important way of victory is to make all of the Lord's people serious and effectual Bible students. The equivalent of a Bible Institute education is the very beginning of being the Bible student that can protect himself from error.

Social media is the devil's mixing bowl

Social media is the devil's mixing bowl to weaken Christians in their spiritual stand.

Facebook and other social media tend to, even attempt to, mix everything together, the holy and the unholy, the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the worldly, truth and heresy, righteousness and unrighteousness.

In this manner, social media provides a direct and powerful and continual assault on biblical holiness, separation, and purity.

Consider the following warnings we have received from Christian friends:

> "When someone leaves a good church and starts living according to the world, many people continue to remain friends with them and 'Like' everything they do. They will encounter things on Facebook that their church is against, such as immodest clothing, rock music, drinking, smoking, dancing, dating, wrong marriages. They hear these things preached against at church, but they approve of them on Facebook. They will not separate from people who are going in the wrong direction. From that standpoint, I believe that Facebook has done great damage to churches. I have friends in Independent Baptist churches around the world and I have observed that this takes place everywhere."

> "I have seen friends and family members who used to have [biblical] standards and convictions who no longer hold them. But they are quick to call others judgmental and legalistic. I have one family member who praises

Jesus on one post and curses and drinks on the other. You can't correct them without them getting angry."

"It is amazing to me the lack of discernment so many professing Christians have. They will 'like' and 'share' Facebook posts that feature false doctrine, psycho-babble, half-truths and sayings, and off-color memes. Contemporary Christian, Country, and other types of music not fit for consumption by a child of God is often liked and shared."

"I found that I 'reconnected' with people that the Lord had separated me from. The Lord geographically moved me away from an area that I did not need to live in. When I got saved He removed me from things that were not spiritually or physically healthy for me. The Lord saved me from a very wicked life! As a Christian I had no business reconnecting with them. Satan had me believe that I could be a witness to them. It did not happen! There were zero salvations as a result of me 'reconnecting' with anyone on Facebook."

Social media promotes envy

Social media can promote envy because of the way that people commonly use it to promote themselves and the most exciting parts of their lives.

"Social media platforms are used to glorify self. Look at me. Look at what I accomplished. Look at how much money I make. Look at how wonderful my life is."

"I think Elon Musk said it best (if not first) that the problem with social media in general is that we have all become our own press agents and never share the negative or mundane, which is 95% of our life. We portray every moment as successful, glamorous, victorious, exciting, enviable, whatever, while the truth is that life is often the opposite. It keeps us from being genuine, even with ourselves."

"You may find yourself struggling with coveting new pick-up trucks, trips to the mountains, and new jobs. A virtual keeping up with the Jones's, indeed."

"My mother is not saved. She is retired and has had a stroke. She daily sees what others are doing. Where they are going, from co-workers from 40 years ago to acquaintances she barely knows. It creates deep depression in her and envy; she wants to 'keep up.' She wants to go places and do things not for the experience itself but to show others. Years ago people would occasionally send a post card of a beautiful setting on a trip. The continual posting of pictures today has created the works of the flesh."

Social media promotes ecumenical thinking

Social media promotes ecumenical thinking by bringing Christians of all persuasions into contact in a "no judging" environment. This promotes tolerance of error, and tolerance of error is spiritually corrupting.

God's Word commands, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" *(*Eph. 5:11).

So it is impossible to obey God and be "non-judgmental."

God's Word commands, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Co. 6:14-17).

So it is impossible to obey God and associate with error.

God's Word commands, "... earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3).

So it is impossible to obey God and keep one's mouth shut when the truth of Scripture is being twisted and abused and disobeyed.

Obedience to God will keep the believer from being ecumenical, and being ecumenical will keep the believer from obeying God.

Social media is a time waster

Many who have written to us about Facebook and other social media forums mention this problem.

Social media is designed to grab your attention and keep it.

> "I find the biggest hindrance of Facebook is that it can be a very big time waster.   There are so many connections that can be had with Facebook that if a person is not careful they will spend more time on Facebook than they do in their Bibles and on their knees."

> "I have struggled with letting Facebook control too much of my time, and I do regret a lot of time lost to Facebook. I'm not even tempted to use Facebook anymore because I remember how depressing it could be to sit and scroll looking at the same stuff over and over knowing that there were other things I could and should be doing with my time."

> "Facebook is very addicting. Next thing you know you have wasted time going throughout posts reading comments. I have had to limit myself to checking mine only a couple of times a week if that."

> "Facebook is like a black hole sucking productivity away."

> "YouTube is a trap. Instagram is a trap. Facebook is a trap. If you're still here, that's because they have been designed to hook you. I went for a 10-day retreat and realised how much time I had been wasting on these

platforms. They distort the perception of reality and above all eat up the precious time that you have."

Consider "35 Things You Do that Waste Your Time": "Popping by YouTube and getting sucked into something totally irrelevant. Watching random videos that scroll across your feed about someone's child or cat or checking Facebook or Twitter 'real quick'" ("35 Things," ProlificLiving.com).

"There is no better late-night activity than trawling through the dregs of Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest to see what your followers have been up to. You'll find things you never knew or wanted to discover: arty photographs of colleagues' Christmas dinners overlaid by ridiculous filters, endless irritating videos of cute animals, and catty exchanges between TOWIE celebs accused of stealing each others' boyfriends. Problem is, IT'S A BOTTOMLESS PIT. There is, quite literally, no end to the meaningless waffle of the web-- and, once you start..." ("The 7 best ways to waste time on the internet," *The Telegraph*, Dec. 30, 2014).

We have considered 14 dangers of social media:

Social media is a vehicle for evil communications
Social media owners and their anti-biblical worldview
Social media is a forum for tracking
Social media is designed to be addictive
Social media is a magnet to draw people into the world
Social media is a forum for self-promotion
Social media is a form for stalking
Social media is a forum for slander
Social media is a forum for immoral relationships
Social media is a forum for heresy and nuttiness
Social media is the devil's mixing bowl to weaken Christians in
    their spiritual stand
Social media promotes envy
Social media promotes ecumenical thinking
Social media has the potential to be a great time waster

Spiritual Safety Requires a Heart Seeking God's Will

As in every age, spiritual victory in the Facebook age is a heart matter. It is a matter of salvation and serious Christian living. It requires a heart that is regenerated, that loves Christ, that desires to do His will.

It is not enough to set up rules for the use of technology, to have filters and covenants and social media bans and accountability software and family plans. These are important and necessary, but the unregenerated, unsurrendered heart will find a way to do what it wants to do.

If an individual is not saved and surrendered to God's will, he will not understand and appreciate godly rules and will find a way to break them.

In my observation, most teenagers in Bible-believing churches do not have the heart required for spiritual protection in the Facebook age.

In response to a teacher who expressed concern about her smartphone use and was suggesting stricter rules, a teenager curtly replied, "The stricter the parent, the sneakier the child."

This teenager was saying that strictness only inevitably produces rebellion. Many parents have accepted this philosophy and subsequently have been crippled in their ability to enforce godly rules. I have heard parents say, "But if I try to control my children, I will lose them." The reality is that if you don't try to control them in a wise, compassionate, godly manner, you have *already* lost them!

This teenager's philosophy is based on two wrong assumptions.

First, this philosophy assumes that strictness (and we are talking about strict in a godly, wise, biblical sense, not a cultic, abusive, legalistic sense) is wrong and harmful, that it

is a restriction of innocent liberty and should therefore be resisted. But biblical strictness is not for the purpose of harming anyone or taking away legitimate liberties. It is for the purpose of godly discipline and spiritual and moral protection.

Second, this philosophy assumes that sneakiness is something wise. But in reality sneakiness is the outworking of a heart that does not understand the fundamental truths of life. The problem with the young person who purposes to be sneaky and disobedient is that he doesn't see things clearly. He doesn't have a wise worldview. Either he has not experienced a heart-level conversion, or he is backslidden and walking after the flesh rather than the Spirit, which a true child of God *can* do (Gal. 5:16-25). But we must understand that a backslider is one who has been born again truly, and such a person will have given clear evidence of spiritual regeneration. Without such evidence, the individual is not backslidden, he is lost.

Consider just a few examples of the wisdom that the Bible gives to youth who heed its precepts:

"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11).

We see that God withholds no good things from His children.

God is the Author of "every good gift and every perfect gift" (Jas. 1:17). There is absolutely nothing good that you have ever enjoyed that did not come from God's hand. God's law not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not for the purpose of harming our first parents. It was the devil who spoke that lie, implying that God wanted to keep good things from them. "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Ge. 3:4-5). Jesus

said the devil "is a liar and the father of it" (Joh. 8:44). Absolutely no good has ever come from disobedience to God's laws. Only harm, sorrow, pain, death. We have 6,000 years of evidence of this.

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:11-14).

Here we see that God doesn't save sinners so that they can continue to live as they please. He saves them to "purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." He saves them to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." He saves them to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts." This is a very strict way of Christian living. This is the true grace of God. Any other definition of grace is false grace, heretical grace, licentious grace. Christianity is filled today with heretical grace that promises a "liberty" that God nowhere promises.

"Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Co. 5:17).

Here we see true Christianity. It is to be born again, to become a new creation in Christ by the supernatural power of God. Note that for the saved, *all* things have become new. All things! To be born again is to have new life, new thinking, new perspective, new direction, new hope, new dreams, new intentions. When you have experienced this, you no longer hold such worldly philosophies as "the stricter the parent, the sneakier the child."

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Note the emphasis of this passage. The focus is not on the restrictions; the focus is on the blessing. God says that obedience to Him and obedience to the authority that He has ordained is about living long and "well." God is promising blessing. He is talking about a life filled with peace, joy, righteous pleasure, satisfaction, true friendships, capped with eternal rewards. This is a life that escapes the corruption that accompanies moral rebellion, the alcohol and drug and pornography addictions, the divorces, the rage, the violence, the relationships broken by sin, the suicides, the untimely deaths. These are the opposite of living long and well.

How opposite this is to the pop culture philosophy, that obedience to parents is burdensome, undesirable, harmful to my true liberty, something to be avoided as much as possible! That is the foolish philosophy that rock & roll taught me as soon it entered my life at the dawn of my teenage years. Oh, that I had been wise enough to listen to God's Word then! Oh, that I had been in a good church that taught such wisdom in a practical way and modeled it!

"[Ephesians 6:1-3] is all about LIFE. Enjoying long life. It's not about the rules. The rules serve something bigger. They serve LIFE. And ultimately abundant life. Life to the full" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 Jo. 2:15-17).

We see that there is nothing good in the world (meaning the world's ways of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life). There is nothing wise, nothing beneficial, nothing of lasting value, nothing of God. We see that those who love the Father will not love the world. The world is at enmity with God, and God's children will not love it. We see that the world passeth away. The verb "passeth" is present indicative middle. The present is a continuous tense. So the word is passing away. The present indicative "asserts something which is occurring while the speaker is making the statement." So the world system is passing away at this time. The middle voice tells us that the world is passing away by an action acting upon itself or concerning itself. So the world is being passed away. We know that the world is not passing itself away, and the god of this world is not passing it away. Rather, it is God who is passing the world away. He holds the reigns. He is using this present world system for His eternal plans and glory, and it will be finished exactly when God decides, to be replaced by Christ's kingdom.

The wise understand these things, and it dramatically changes their worldview.

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 Jo. 5:1-3).

Here we see that the true child of God keeps God's commandments. Again, we see that there is evidence of salvation. Before we are saved, we don't love God's commandments. But salvation is the writing of His commandments into the heart (Heb. 8:10, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts"). We see that the love of God is not to live as one pleases, it is to keep God's

commandments. And we see that to the true child of God, God's commandments are not grievous. Again, all of this is the product of and the evidence of born again salvation.

"What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:15-18).

The main lesson here is that submitting to sin is not liberty, it is slavery. It is not "real life"; it is death. This is the opposite of the world's thinking, but God's Word is truth. The young person must ask himself, do I want to be a slave? Do I want to choose the way of death? Are the things of the world *that* important to me? Am I that foolish?

True liberty is the liberty to live one's life to the fullest *within the boundaries* of God's will. And those boundaries are very, very wide, since He is the author of every good thing!

"So what if freedom is NOT doing whatever, whenever, however? What if instead, it is having the ability to set wise boundaries for yourself that allowed you to flourish and not be enslaved? This is freedom from evil and the freedom to grow and mature. The freedom to do good. Surely the dangers that smartphones bring are frightening. Similarly, it would be terrifying to play soccer by a cliff without a fence. But if the appropriate boundary is in place, it almost disappears as you focus on enjoying the moment you are in, safe within the limits you placed" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Re. 3:19).

Here we see that Christlike chastening is an act of true love. Christ is love incarnate. He has no ill will toward any of

His creatures. He is not a severe taskmaster. He is the Saviour, the Good Shepherd. He doesn't invite sinners to come to him so that He can burden them down with unreasonable and harsh rules. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30). Christ's chastening is for the purpose of bringing His people to repentance and obedience. The lukewarm church at Laodicea was on the path of destruction. For Christ to ignore such a thing would not be an expression of true love.

We could look at many other passages of Scripture to a description of the right heart and the development of the right heart that is required for spiritual victory in the Facebook age.

But perhaps the most succinct passage is Romans 12. Here we find God's pattern for knowing His perfect will.

Until professing Christians are walking the path outlined in Romans 12, they will not have spiritual victory in the Facebook age, whether young or old. Until a church's parents are walking this path, they will not disciple and protect their children. Until a church's young people are walking this path, no program, no rules, no internet filters, no covenant eyes, nothing will protect them. All of these things are helpful, but none of them will keep an individual from finding a way to do what he wants to do.

We suggest that before doing anything in a practical way about internet/smartphone safety, that a church spend some weeks immersed in Romans 12 and in prayer.

Following are some suggestions:

Set up some special meetings to pray for revival.

Devote one evening per week to teaching on Romans 12, verse by verse. Don't have any other activities on that evening that would distract the people from giving their full attention

to God's Word. At the end of each session, have an invitation for salvation, confession, and rededication.

Memorize Romans 12 as a church, and use the verses as the basis for meditation. See the *Memory Version Journal* for suggestions. It is available for free viewing and download at www.wayoflife.org.

Following is a suggested outline of Romans 12. A fuller study is available in the free eBook *Knowing God's Will*, www.wayoflife.org.

Romans 12

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, *let us wait* on *our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. *Be* kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring

one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

This fundamental passage is the summary of knowing God's will.

This is what we preach to our young people. A great many churches are backing off of and toning down all of the elements of knowing God's will in Romans 12: on full surrender, on separation, on renewing the mind, on transformation, and on ministry. Most churches are either entertaining the youth or doing nothing with the youth. We intend to go in a different direction.

My daily prayer for our children and grandchildren is that they will walk in the steps of Romans 12.

Making wise decisions in God's will is necessary to avoid spiritual shipwreck. Multitudes of professing Christians have ruined their lives by not making important decisions, such as education, occupation, and marriage, in God's perfect will.

In Romans 12, we see the mercies of God. It is only by God's mercy that we can do the will of God. In ourselves, we deserve nothing but wrath. Mercy was made possible by the atonement that Christ made on Calvary.

We see that there is a perfect will of God. God does have a specific plan for every believer's life, a plan that He formed before the world was made. This is a great and wonderful thing. If God has a specific plan for my life, how important, how urgent it is that I find that will!

We see that the will of God must be proven. It must be lived; it must be sought.

We see that the will of God is for every child of God ("you," "ye" Ro. 12:1-2). The will of God is not just for preachers or missionaries. The will of God is not just for young people; God has a perfect will for the father, the mother, the grandfather, the grandmother.

We also see that surrender to God's will is an individual matter ("every man," Ro. 12:3). Ruth didn't follow her sister-in-law Orpah. Daniel and his three friends didn't follow the crowd.

Salvation

> "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God" (Romans 12:1).

The passage on knowing God's will is addressed to "brethren." These are born again children of God.

Salvation is the fundamental of fundamentals in knowing God's will. You cannot please God or serve Him acceptably or be discipled or know the will of God until you are born again.

We must pursue a regenerate church membership. We must be very careful about baptism, looking for scriptural evidence of salvation. There is not one example in the New Testament of someone who was saved and did not show a changed life. We must be careful about church membership. The biblical standard is found in Acts 2:41-42.

Salvation Is Believing the Gospel

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Ro. 1:16).

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1Co. 15:1-8).

You don't have to be a theologian to be saved, but you must know the gospel. There is a certain doctrine that must be believed from the heart (Ro. 6:17), and that is the doctrine of the gospel.

A great many Christians we meet don't know the gospel. A church-going taxi driver in South Africa is typical. He told me that the gospel is "obeying Jesus."

The gospel is what we need to teach children all through their childhood. This is how the Scriptures make the child wise unto salvation (2 Ti. 3:15).

Consider some lessons about the gospel from 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

Believing the gospel means that I know who "Christ" is ("*Christ died...*").

I can't believe that Christ died for my sins in a saving way until I know who He is.

Christ means "the Anointed One." Christ is a Greek word that means the same thing as the Hebrew word *Messiah*. It refers to the man that God has chosen to be the Saviour of the world and to establish God's eternal kingdom.

Christ refers to Old Testament prophecies about the coming of God's anointed or chosen one. After the first man and woman sinned in the Garden of Eden, they were condemned to die and suffer eternal punishment. God planned to send Christ into the world to take the punishment that sinful man deserves so that he can be saved. The prophets said that Christ would come to earth the first time to be cut off or to die for man's sins (Da. 9:25-26; Isa. 53:4-7). And He would come again to rule on the throne of David and to establish the kingdom of God on earth (Isa. 9:6-7). These prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ.

The Bible warns about false christs. Believing in the true Christ means that I must reject every false christ, such as the Mormon christ who is the spirit brother of Satan, the Roman Catholic host-christ, the Jehovah's Witness christ who is Michael the Archangel, the rock & roll party christ, the theological liberal christ who is not the virgin born Son of God, and the non-judgmental universalistic christ who will not condemn anyone to hell.

Believing the gospel means that I acknowledge that I am the sinner that the Bible says I am ("*Christ died for our sins*").

To be saved, the individual must see himself as a wicked sinner before God, a sinner who is deserving of eternal condemnation. I must understand and acknowledge that I am not good (Ro. 3:12). I have no righteousness that is acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6). In contrast, we think of a Roman Catholic man in California who prayed a sinner's prayer on door-to-door visitation, but he still believed his

good works would get him to heaven. It is obvious that he was not saved even though he was counted in the church's salvation statistics.

It is the Holy Spirit who shows the sinner his sin and impresses this to his heart so that he is convicted and found guilty before God (Joh. 16:8). The soul winner must look to the Holy Spirit to do this supernatural work, and must look for evidence of this work in the sinner's life. He must be patient. The true work of salvation cannot be forced or rushed or manipulated by any salesmanship methodology.

Believing the gospel means that I believe that Jesus died for my sins ("*Christ died for our sins*").

I deserve eternal judgment, and that judgment fell upon Christ. Salvation is an exchange (2 Co. 5:21).

The Bible emphasizes that Christ's atonement was sacrificial, vicarious. This is repeated 12 times in Isaiah 53 (Isa. 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12). See also Ro. 4:25; 5:6; 1 Co. 5:7; 15:3; 2 Co. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 5:2; Col. 1:14; 1 Ti. 2:6; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 9:12, 26; 10:12; 1 Pe. 2:24-25; 3:18; 1 Jo. 2:2; 4:10; Re. 5:9.

Believing the gospel means that I will not trust in anything other than Christ's atonement for salvation. If I am still trusting in baptism or sacraments or a church or my good works or my sincere heart, I am not believing the gospel and am not saved. We think of John and Charles Wesley, who were so zealous for Christianity that they formed a "holy club" at Oxford University, were mockingly called "Methodists" for their methodical habits of prayer and fasting and Bible reading, were ordained as Anglican priests, and hazarded the dangerous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean to America in order to preach to the natives. But the Wesleys were trusting in their good works rather than the grace found in the gospel of Christ. They knew *about* Christ, but they didn't know Him personally in salvation. When a Moravian preacher asked John if he had a hope to be saved, he replied,

"I do"; but when the preacher asked him the reason of his hope, he said, "Because I have used my best endeavours to serve God." John Wesley was trusting in something in addition to the blood of Christ, and that something was his own works.

The testimony of a truly saved person is expressed in the hymn "Nothing but the Blood" by Robert Lowry:

> What can wash away my sin?
>   Nothing but the blood of Jesus; ...
> This is all my hope and peace,
>   Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
> This is all my righteousness,
>   Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
> Now by this I'll overcome,
>   Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
> Now by this I'll reach my home
>   Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Believing the gospel means that I believe that "Christ died for my sins according to the Scripture."

I must know what the Scriptures are. Multitudes of people in the world do not know what the Bible is. They have never even seen a Bible. They might have heard the word "Christian Bible," but they don't know anything about it. A taxi driver in South Asia once asked me if I wrote the Bible. But there is widespread and gross ignorance of the Bible even in America today. We can't assume that people know what the Scripture is.

That Christ died for my sins according to the Scripture refers to the amazing prophecies that described His death in great detail. Consider Psalm 22, which was written about 1,000 years before Jesus was born: *Christ would die by crucifixion* (Psa. 22:14-16; Jo. 19:16-18); *the soldiers would gamble for His robe* (Psalm 22:18); *the very words that He spoke from the cross* are recorded (Psa. 22:1; Mt. 27:46); *Christ would thirst* (Psa. 22:15; Jo. 19:28); *the people would mock*

Him (Psa. 22:6-8; Mt. 27:39, 41-43); *the people would sit and stare at Him* (Psa. 22:17; Mt. 27:36).

Believing the gospel means that I believe that Christ was buried ("and that he was buried").

Christ's burial proved that He really died. He did not merely faint or merely appear to die as some have claimed. The reason the soldiers did not break Jesus' legs is because He was already dead, and they were experts in the matter of death (Joh. 19:31-34).

Jesus' burial fulfilled prophecy. It was "*according to the Scriptures.*" The Bible prophesied that Jesus would be buried in the tomb of a rich man (Isa. 53:9). This prophecy, written about 710 years before Jesus was born, was fulfilled when Jesus was taken down off the cross by a wealthy disciple and buried in that disciple's own tomb (Mt. 27:57-60).

Believing the gospel means that I believe that Jesus "rose from the dead the third day according to the Scripture."

To be saved, I must believe that Jesus Christ is alive and that He is ready to receive me when I call upon Him.

The evidence of the resurrection is the eyewitnesses and the changed lives, such as Saul, a hater of Christians who was converted after meeting the risen Christ.

Jesus' resurrection was "according to the Scripture" in that it was prophesied in Psalm 16:10. This was written about 1,000 years before Jesus came. His resurrection proved that He is the Son of God (Ro. 1:4). Jesus prophesied that He would rise again the third day (Mt. 16:21), and if he had not done so it would have proven that He was a deluded man or a false prophet and not the Son of God that He claimed to be.

Salvation Has Evidence

Consider 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 -- "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true

God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

When Paul speaks of "what manner of entering in we had unto you," he is referring to their changed lives. Salvation is something that was "shown." It is demonstrated. It can be seen. It is a heart matter, but it has external evidence.

There was turning. This is repentance; it is surrender to God's authority; it is a turning from my way to God's way, from the world to Christ.

There was rejection of false religion. When a person is born again, he will no longer hold to any false religion. He will renounce it, whether it be Hinduism, Buddhism, Darwinian Evolution, Islam, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Atheism, Agnosticism. He will renounce every works religion and every demonic religion. There will be a willingness to stand against one's relatives, friends, and society for Christ's sake.

There was a life-changing conversion. The believers at Thessalonica not only turned from idols, they were busy serving God. The whole direction and purpose of their lives was changed. This is the fruit of the supernatural experience of being "converted" (Mt. 18:3) and being "born again" (Joh. 3:3). There is no exception to this in Scripture. We think of the woman at the well; Zacchaeus; the 3,000 saved on the day of Pentecost; Paul; the Ethiopian Eunuch; Lydia; the Philippian jailer.

There was the expectation of Christ's return. The author of Hebrews mentions this as an evidence of salvation. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

Knowing God's will requires that the individual be saved. If there is no spiritual life, there can be no discipleship, and spiritual life comes by the new birth.

Surrender

> "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

When exhorting the believer to prove the perfect will of God, the first thing that Paul mentions is surrender.

It is a ***free-will surrender*** ("I beseech you"). The word "beseech" does not mean command; it means entreat. It is a word that is used when an individual has a choice. God has given man a free-will, both for salvation and for surrender. God says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and it is man's choice to say, "Here am I, send me" (Isa. 6:8).

It is a surrender **by the mercies of God**. Only by God's mercy in Christ, because of His blood, can a sinner present himself to God. We are saved "unto good works," but the good works of the Christian life are by God's mercies. From beginning to end, we deserve nothing but judgment, and every blessing of salvation is by God's great mercies in Christ.

It is a surrender **to the merciful God**. Romans 12:1-3 mentions God four times. It is not a surrender to a philosophy or a religion; it is a surrender to God Himself. And it is not to any "god"; it is not to a severe taskmaster; it is to the merciful God. Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mt. 11:29-30). He does the heavy lifting. One woman told my wife that she was tired of trying to live the Christian life, because "it is too hard." She said this because she isn't saved and she is trying to live the Christian life in her own strength and without having experienced a converted heart. There are plenty of hardships in the Christian life, but the Christian life itself is not hard, because the essence of the Christian life is to know the merciful God personally and intimately, by the Spirit to call Him "Abba, Father" (Ro. 8:15).

The better I know Him, the easier it is to surrender to Him. His will is not to be feared. Hudson Taylor said, "He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to him."

It is a surrender of the ***body*** ("present your bodies"). Here the body represents the whole person. To present my body is to say to the Lord, "Here is my body and everything that I am." What an amazing gift the body is! God made man in His image and gave him an amazing body by which he can fulfill the divine purpose. For example, the human brain is "the most complex arrangement of matter in the universe." The human brain has about 1 quintillion (1,000 trillion) synapses and each synapse functions like a microprocessor ("What Is a Neuron"? faculty-washington.edu). That is about how many stars are in 10,000 Milky Way galaxies (each one containing 100 billion stars)! New research shows that the synapses don't operate like a computer transistor, with a simple on or off function. Rather, they communicate by at least 26 levels of electrical signal strength so that they are vastly more complex than previously thought. "They store and transmit information not with the simplistic 0s and 1s of computer code, but with degrees of synapse strength. In other words, THEY DON'T TRANSFER INFORMATION WITH A SINGLE INPUT SPIKE, BUT RECOGNIZE 26 DISTINGUISHABLY DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SYNAPTIC STRENGTH" ("Your Brain Has More Memory" by Brian Thomas, Ph.D., icr.org, Feb. 4, 2016). Latest research also shows that THE BRAIN'S MEMORY CAPACITY IS AT LEAST A PETABYTE, IN THE SAME BALLPARK IS THE ENTIRE WORLD WIDE WEB ("Memory Capacity of Brian," *Salk News*, Jan. 20, 2016). A petabyte is 8,000,000,000,000,000 bits of information. "The mind-boggling levels of organization and necessary regulatory protocols in synapses refute all notions that brains evolved from single cells through merely natural processes. The strategies, algorithms, and design principles brains employ could only have come

from an otherworldly Architect whose genius mankind can only dream of copying" (Thomas).

It is a ***full*** surrender ("sacrifice"). This harkens back to the Levitical sacrifices that were offered in the Tabernacle. The sacrifice was offered as a whole. All was consumed (Le. 6:23). That is what God requires. I cannot know the perfect will of God apart from *full* surrender. Most professing Christians haven't done this. They profess faith in Christ and then continue with the plans they had before they were saved. They cut out large parts of their lives for their own will rather than God's will. They aren't willing to surrender to God's will in everything: education, occupation, friends, dress, music, entertainment, marriage, location. In 1974, I gave my life to the Lord in the fullest way I knew how in an apartment in Chattanooga, Tennessee, when I was in Bible School. I had no plan except God's will. I died to my will. Though I didn't want to come to South Asia, I came the first time at age 30 and I returned at age 50 and I have stayed by that calling. I do not envy any man on earth. Surrender to God is to have one Master. ("No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other," Mt. 6:24). Either you live for yourself or you live for God. When a young person makes a choice, a major life decision, that choice is either his own will or it is God's will.

It is a ***continual*** surrender ("a living sacrifice"). It is a surrender as a way of life, not a one-time thing.

It is a ***holy*** surrender. It is a surrender unto holiness and purity, not unto uncleanness. Holy means set apart for God, pleasing to God. It refers to righteousness and obedience to God's Word. It is a surrender to a pilgrim lifestyle.

It is an ***acceptable*** surrender. God can accept the believer's surrender because it is in Christ. By His blood, Christ has redeemed the sinner so that he is accepted by God, and in

Christ, the believer's works are accepted. This is a most amazing and marvelous thing.

It is a *reasonable* surrender. The Greek is *logikos*, from which the English word "logical" derives. It is reasonable because this is man's very purpose for existing. As the Westminster Confession says, "Man's purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

It is a surrender *to service in the context of the church and Christ's Great Commission*. All of the pronouns are plural-- *you, brethren, ye, your*. The passage speaks of the body. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Ro. 12:5). The church is God's house, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15). It is in the church where God's people are prepared to know God's perfect will. The church is the headquarters for world evangelism (Acts 13-14). God has a business on this earth to which He calls His people to join. It is the work of Christ's Great Commission, which He emphasized so emphatically after His resurrection (Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lu. 24; Joh. 21; Ac. 1). It is the greatest business on earth. It is far more important than government or commerce. *My surrender to God is to surrender to my part in God's great harvest.* It is to surrender my plans to His plan. Romans 8:28 is a promise to those who "love God, *to them who are the called according to his purpose*," not those who pursue their own purposes. The Great Commission is the business that is of chief importance in this present time in God's great plan of the ages. Christ said the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few and instructed us to pray for laborers (Lu. 10:2). Bill Sullivan said, "The evangelization of the world waits not on the readiness of God but on the obedience of Christians." A.T. Pierson said, "If missions languish, it is because the whole life of godliness is feeble. The command to go everywhere and preach to everybody is not obeyed until the will is lost by self-surrender in the will of God." Isobel Kuhn said, "It is not God who does

not call. It is man who will not respond!" Hudson Taylor said, "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed." This is the purpose of our annual missionary conference, and it is why we make a very big thing of this conference. We want all of our young people to say, "Here I am, send me." We want each of them to find his or her part in this, the greatest business on God's earth, and we have seen much success in this. When a church takes God's business seriously and makes a very big thing of it, God is always ready to "do His part."

Kuperto Kangleon surrendered himself to General Douglas MacArthur during World War II for service in the Philippines. After the Japanese captured the Philippines, Charles ("Chick") Parsons was assigned by MacArthur to organize the guerrilla movement on the islands. Kangleon was a former colonel of the Philippine Army who lived on Leyte. He had been imprisoned by the Japanese and was in poor health when Parsons visited him to try to convince him to lead the guerrillas on Leyte. At first, Kangleon said, "I am very tired. My health is not of the best. I wish only to rest here with my wife and children. I am weary of war. I am not young." Parsons continued to reason with him. Finally, Kangleon replied, "Apparently it is not the time for a soldier to rest. You have made my duty clear, Commander Parsons. I have no choice. You may tell General MacArthur that I am at his disposition" (Travis Ingham, *Rendezvous by Submarine: The Story of Charles Parsons and the Guerrilla-Soldiers in the Philippines*).

A far greater war is raging, and a far greater General is calling for volunteers!

Separation

"And be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2).

When I was saved in 1973, separation was one of the major things that distinguished fundamental Baptists from Southern Baptists, but today separation is being given up by a great many fundamental Baptists. It is not being renounced so much as neglected and redefined (e.g., "Gospel-centric"). No position can be maintained without a campaign.

The biblical teaching on separation and a pilgrim lifestyle is something that impacted my life powerfully as a new Christian. I am a separatist because of the Bible's clear teaching. I could have gone down the Christian rock path and kept my worldly music, my long hair, my raunchy movies, my friendship with the world, but God's Word forbids this.

The Necessity of Separation

Separation is necessary to please God and to know His will. It is emphasized at the very heart of this fundamental passage about knowing God's will.

The Method of Separation

To be conformed means to be pressed into a mold, to be fashioned according to a likeness. "Conformed" is the Greek *suschematizo*, which is a blueprint, a pattern. It is the basis of the English term "schematic," referring to a drawing or representation of an object. The god of this world designed the schematic for this evil world system (Eph. 2:1-3). It is translated "fashion" in 1 Pe. 1:14, "not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts." "Stop being molded by the external and fleeting fashions of this age" (*Complete World Study Dictionary*).

The world is aggressive and evangelistic and enticing. It wants to shape our lives. When a young person loves the world, you can see the stamp of the world on him (in his aspirations, beliefs, attitude, fashion, music, friends, entertainment).

Biblical separation is also aggressive. It requires going against the tide. It is the opposite of relaxing and being comfortable in the midst of this world's wickedness.

Biblical separation is very strict. There is to be no conformity to the world. Consider the following Scriptures:

> "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and **TOUCH NOT** the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you" (2 Co. 6:17).

> "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from **ALL** filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Co. 7:1).

> "And have **NO** fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11).

> "Abstain from **ALL** appearance of evil" (1 Th. 5:22).

> "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself **UNSPOTTED** from the world" (Jas. 1:27).

> "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For **ALL** that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 Jo. 2:15-17).

Biblical separation is to bring *everything* into conformity to God's will.

This requires a surrendered heart; because you must reject things that your flesh likes (the world's music, the world's fashions, the world's entertainment, the world's proud ways). Choices must be made.

The Role of the Mind in Separation

"the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

We will deal with the role of the mind in transformation or spiritual growth, but here we want to emphasize the role of the mind in separation from the world.

Worldliness is a mindset; it is not just certain actions, such as tight blue jeans or R-rated movies. Worldliness is a mind focused on the vain things of the world instead of the wisdom and holiness of God.

The renewing of the mind is the process of replacing the natural mind with Christ's mind through the Word of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul describes the Scriptures as "the mind of Christ." The Scripture is quick and powerful (Heb. 4:12), and the mind is renewed by reading, studying, memorizing, meditating upon it. The renewing mind is a testing mindset that measures everything by the standard of God's Word to reject anything that is not God's will--"be sober, be vigilant" (1 Pe. 5:8); "prove all things" (1 Th. 5:21); "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Co. 10:5). The renewing mind is alert and aware of what is happening and resists the world's influence, whether by literature, music, fashion, commercials, social media, fake news, or anything else. If the believer is not testing the culture, he is being conformed to it.

I don't want the world influencing my mind. I intend to be alert and aware of what is happening and to resist being conformed to the world.

Separation and the Global Pop Culture

In modern times, the "world" of the "lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 Jo. 2:16) is the world of the global pop culture.

The pop culture has a philosophy. It has an attitude. It is driven by music. And it is global in nature. There are local flavors, but the major aspects are the same in every nation.

Following are some of the chief aspects of the pop culture that captivate the minds of people today and that are particularly enticing to youth:

Pop Music

There is a sound track to end-time apostasy, and it is the electronic pop music that blasted onto the scene in the 1950s and took over Western culture in the 1960s. Pop music is all about sex. "That's what rock is all about--sex with a 100 megaton bomb, THE BEAT!" (Gene Simmons of the rock group KISS). Pop music is all about rebellion and narcissism. "I'm free to do what I want any old time" (Rolling Stones, 1965). "It's my life and I'll do what I want/ It's my mind, and I'll think what I want" (The Animals, 1965).

Pop music videos are the most popular YouTube videos. The total views of the top 29 music videos in 2015 was 26 billion, and they are filthy.

Contemporary Christian musicians love secular rock and fill their minds with it. We have documented this in *Baptist Music Wars.* For example, in a 2017 interview, Joseph Rojas of Seventh Day Slumber said his favorite song was "August and Everything After" by Counting Crows. The filthy lyrics include cursing and talking about visiting prostitutes.

Fashion

Clothing is a language. It is a social message, a fashion statement, "a prevailing mode of expression." American fashion designer Rachel Zoe said, "Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak" (goodreads.com).

Modern fashion designers don't merely sell clothes; they sell a philosophy of life. Vivienne Westwood, who created the rock punk look, said, "I think fashion is the strongest form of communication there is. … It's only interesting to me if it's subversive'" (Jon Savage, *Time Travel: Pop, Media and Sexuality 1976-96*, p. 119).

Pants on women in Western society in modern times broke three fundamental Biblical principles: *First, pants on women broke down the distinction of the sexes*. It was created as a unisex fashion. The pantsuit was created by homosexual fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent in 1966 as part of the rebellious rock & roll culture ("How Yves Saint Laurent Revolutionized Women's Fashion," *Business Insider*, Aug. 8, 2011). Laurent has been called "the man who put women in trousers" ("Celebrating Yves Saint Laurent," *Daily Mail*, June 2, 2008). The style was called "defiant," "irreverent," "daring," and "androgynous" (*Business Insider, Ibid.*). Models popularized the fashion by appearing with "slicked back hair and masculine posture." Feminist Linda Grant observed that the pantsuit "put women on an equal sartorial footing with men" and "is what fashion gave to feminism" ("Feminism Was Built on the Trouser Suit," *The Guardian*, June 3, 2008). *Second, pants on women are immodest, highlighting the woman's figure in a sensual way, and the tighter the pants the greater the sensuality or "hot" factor*. Loose pants on women were invented by feminist designer Coco Chanel during World War II when women were leaving the homes to work in factories. Tight pants were created by Calvin Klein, a bisexual fashion designer. When his pants appeared in 1974, they sold 200,000 pairs *in the first week* ("Calvin Klein: A Stylish Obsession," *Entrepreneur*, Oct. 10, 2008). Tights worn as pants (leggings) were created by Gianni Versace, a homosexual fashion designer who was murdered by a homosexual in 1997. *Third, pants on women destroyed shamefacedness* (1 Ti. 2:9). This is translated from the Greek word *aidos*, which "has the idea of downcast eyes" and means "bashfulness, i.e. (towards men), modesty or (towards God) awe" (Strong). It implies "a shrinking from trespassing the boundaries of propriety" (William Hendrickson). Shamefacedness is the opposite of the cheeky, saucy, impertinent, flippant, insubordinate attitude that the world seeks to develop in women today. The very concept of

shamefacedness is mocked. Imagine reading this verse publicly anywhere in modern society (e.g., a mall, football game, rock concert, public school, even in the vast majority of churches).

In 2019, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London had a major exhibit on Mary Quant, the revolutionary fashion designer of the Beatles era. She invented the mini skirt and hot pants. She was all about revolution, liberation from biblical sexual mores, breaking down the barriers between the sexes (unisex, androgyny). Following are some of the quotes from the exhibit: "using fashion to question hierarchies and gender rules"; "rebellious approach to established gender norms"; "mocking religion"; "subverting menswear"; "trousers were considered inappropriate for women [but] Quant wears them anywhere she wants"; "androgynous style"; "an independent style"; "self-expression"; "freedom." "The miniskirt became an international symbol of women's liberation." The exhibit acknowledges that unisex clothing was a major facet of homosexual rights. "[Quant's] provocative styles reflected increasing relaxed attitudes in society towards sexuality in all its forms, reinforced legally by the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967." Why were Quant's fashions so popular? It is all about ME! It is the "lovers of their own selves" generation prophesied in 2 Timothy 3:2.

Pornography

It is easily accessed by the internet. It is addicting and destructive. It destroys marriages; it destroys ministries. I recall a student at Tennessee Temple in the 1970s who was accepted as a missionary with BIMI, but his pornography addiction was brought to light and it harmed his marriage and disqualified him from being a missionary. Pornography use is a downward spiral which can lead to the depths of wickedness. The explosion of homosexuality, child

molestation, and sexual serial killing can doubtless be traced to the prevalence of pornography.

Multi-Player Online Video Games.

These are so addictive that they are likened to drugs. *EverQuest* is called "never rest" and "ever crack," *World of Warcraft* is called World of War Crack, *Halo 3* is called Halodiction.

Fantasy Romance Novels

These exploded in popularity in the 1970s. In 1976, sales reached 40 million copies. By 2008, sales were 74 million. Many romance novels have a strong sexual content. A recent example is *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which even delves into sadomasochism. "These novels were written to be titillating, and I really don't think there's a huge difference between this and porn. It's 'soft porn,' and indeed many women find themselves far more aroused by reading something like this than they would be watching porn on a computer. So women who devour novel after novel like that aren't that much different from men who watch porn all night" ("Romance Novels: Dangerous, Harmless, or Just Fun?" Jan. 16, 2012, tolovehonorandvacuum.com). Even G-rated romance novels take the reader into an unrealistic world typically populated by strong, beautiful heroines and handsome, caring men who "fall in love." They can create addiction to a fantasy world and dissatisfaction with real life. In 2011, the *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health* in Britain reported that romance novels "are a cause of marital breakdown, adulterous affairs and unwanted pregnancies." As with anything, there is the danger of progression. "I've known so many Christian teens who just devoured all the romances in the church library, and then headed to the public library for more, and ended up almost addicted to really steamy stuff" ("Romance Novels: Dangerous, Harmless, or Just Fun?" Jan. 16, 2012, tolovehonorandvacuum.com).

Mythology and Witchcraft

There has been an explosion of popularity in things such as Harry Potter, Pokemon, and super heroes. For a youth promotion, the staff members of Coastline Baptist Church in Oceanside, California, dressed as Wolverine, Batman, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, Star Wars, and the Force. This is an incredibly foolish capitulation to the pop culture and a horrible example for the young people.

Facebook and Social Media

It is used to create false lives. Young people pretend to be something they aren't. It is a massive forum for the seduction of women. It is a forum for vanity: selfies, sharing every moment of your life with others. One's social media reflects the true state of mind and heart. It is the devil's mixing bowl. It is a forum for mixing the good together with the bad, the godly together with the ungodly. It is breaking down the barriers of separation between God's people and the world. It is weakening the spiritual conviction of many. It is a major element in the destruction of the holy pilgrim character of churches.

Professional Sports

Professional sports is one of the world's chief gods. Major characteristics of professional sports include pride, covetousness, drinking, blatant neglect of God's house, and pure fantasy. John's description of the world in 1 John 2:16 ("lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life") is a perfect description of professional sports.

Conclusion

God calls His people to a separated, pilgrim life. to be not conformed to the world is not an optional part of God's will.

We urge each individual to surrender to God's will in the matter of separation.

We urge each family to surrender to God's will in this and to take this more seriously than you ever have

We urge grandparents to set the highest standard for the younger generations.

We urge each church to *emphasize* separation as a high priority. It has been said that no position can be maintained without a campaign.

We are thankful that some churches are getting stronger instead of weaker, which is the more typical direction.

Transformation

> "... but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"
> (Romans 12:2).

"Transformed" is the Greek *metamorpho*. It is used for the life cycle of a butterfly. It begins as an egg which hatches a caterpillar. It increases its weight 3,000 times in 20 days, which would be like a human baby increasing from 8 pounds to 24,000 in less than 2 weeks. It spins a silk pad and attaches itself to the pad by a cremaster. It then forms into a soft wet pupa with no head, jaws, legs. The pupa skin hardens, and inside the pupa the creature becomes a biological soup which reorganizes into a butterfly. The caterpillar has 16 short legs, a chewing mouth, six simple eyes that see only in black and white, eats leaves, crawls, and has no sex organs. The butterfly has six long articulated legs, a sucking mouth, antennae, a proboscis, four wings, reproductive organs, two complicated compound eyes that see in color, drinks nectar, and can fly!

At the resurrection, the believer's transformation will be complete, but in this present life it is gradual and never complete.

Spiritual transformation is the victory over the world. The word of God in the believer must be so strong that the world cannot mold the individual into its own image.

Transformation Comes by the Renewing of the Mind

Transformation comes by the renewing of the mind ("be ye transformed by the renewing of the mind..."). The mind is the chief battleground.

The new birth brings a spiritual mind that must be fed and strengthened (Ro. 8:5-7).

The renewing of the mind comes through the Bible.

It is the Scripture that has mind-renewing, transformational power.

> "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

> "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Ac. 20:32).

> "But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:2-3).

> "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Jos. 1:8).

> "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Joh. 8:31-32).

> "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from

glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Co. 3:18).

Scripture is the mind of Christ (1 Co. 2:16). The context of 1 Corinthians 2:16 is Scripture (see verses 6-15, particularly verses 12-13). By Scripture, we see Christ and are changed into His image. **"**But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Co. 3:18). The word "changed" here is the Greek *metamorph,* the same word used in Romans 12:2 for "transformed."

The renewing of the mind requires a proving mindset. "That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." The proving is the product of everything mentioned in this passage: surrender, non-conformity to the world, renewal of the mind, and transformation. All of these things result in proving the will of God. But the proving also is part of the renewing process itself. It is not enough to learn Bible facts and to memorize it by rote. It must be understood and applied to every area of life. It must be used as the basis for testing whether things are right or wrong. Everything that is not the perfect will of God is rejected. We see this in Hebrews 5:14, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

The ministry of Scripture in the believer's mind and life is like a flowing stream. There is pollution in every stream in this present world, but it is kept cleansed when the water flows. As soon as the water stops flowing, the pollution congregates and the stream becomes stagnant. Likewise, there is pollution in the believer's life because of the world and the flesh, but while the water of God's Word flows through the mind and life, it has a cleansing, purifying action. But as soon as the Word of God stops flowing, the pollution congregates and there is backsliding.

The Bible works!

The major thing the individual child of God can do to experience spiritual growth and victory is to become a serious Bible student. Many things are necessary, but this is number one.

The major thing we can do to strengthen the churches is to seriously strengthen the biblical depth of the congregation.

> "Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:13-14).

The vast majority of church members are like those to whom Hebrews 5 was addressed. They are not serious Bible students, are not skillful in God's Word, and do not have their senses exercised in spiritual discernment in an effectual manner. If God's people will become skillful in God's Word, they will be more spiritually minded, more serious in prayer, more faithful to the house of God, more separated from the things of the world, wiser in the use of time, more surrendered to God's perfect will, more diligent in building godly homes and training their children, more zealous for the salvation of souls.

We are doing everything possible in our church to renew the minds of the members with God's Word. We use the *Effectual Bible Student* video course. We have a one-on-one discipleship program using the *One Year Discipleship Course*. We have a Bible memorization and meditation program. We have a church-wide program to read the Bible through each year. We have a weekly men's discipleship meeting and women's discipleship meetings. We have serious youth meetings that focus on helping the young people become real Bible students. We have a Bible college to train preachers and teachers. We teach the preachers to do the type of expository Bible preaching that builds up the saints in God's Word.

We teach the people to see the breathtaking beauty of the Bible.

The Bible is a whole **university.** There is more wisdom in the Bible than all the universities of the world. It contains the best theology (this is its first purpose), the best history (the key), the best philosophy (Ecclesiastes, Job), the best anthropology, the best natural philosophy (study of nature), the best social science, the best apologetics, the best prophecy.

The Bible is a **paradise.** Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania is 1077 acres or 1.6 sq. miles. It has indoor and outdoor flowers, ponds, a five acre fountain garden with 1700 fountain jets, an Italian water garden. It has colors, smells, and wildlife. It is delightful, but the Bible is a *much more* delightful paradise.

The Bible is a **treasure mine** filled with silver and gold and jewels. Yea, it is "better than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. 119:72).

The Bible is a **feast** for the mind and soul. Shady Maple in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, has 200 feet of buffet tables, with cheese bar, soups, all sorts of meats (beef, pork, chicken, salmon), flavored breads, southern style vegetables, cooked to order breakfast, Amish style cakes and pies. But the Bible is a much greater feast! It is spiritual milk and honey, bread and meat.

God Himself is the greatest treasure, and He is the theme of Scripture. To know Him is the greatest delight; to feed on Him is the greatest feast; the knowledge of Him is the greatest wisdom.

The treasures of the Bible will open to those who love it more than gold and silver, to whom it is sweeter than honey (Psa. 119:72, 103). After I came to Christ, I didn't care about pursuing general education (whereas before that I had aspired to get a degree in psychology) or money. I just wanted to study the Bible. The ultra-orthodox Jews have a ceremony

called Upsherin. At age three, the Jewish boy gets his first haircut and starts learning the Hebrew alphabet. Honey is put on the letters to make the Word of God sweet to him. This is a vain religious tradition, but it points to the reality of what the Bible should be to every child of God.

Learning the Bible takes work. We must be diligent in study and learn to rightly divide Scripture (2 Ti. 2:15). We must seek wisdom as men seek for silver and treasures (Pr. 2:4).

Learning the Bible requires training in such things as how to have an effectual daily Bible study, how to employ principles of interpretation, and how to use Bible study tools. A good start can be obtained with the 12-hour video course *The Effectual Bible Student*.

Being an effectual Bible student requires gaining the equivalent of a Bible Institute education. It is impossible to be "skillful in the word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13) without a Bible survey, Bible geography, Bible customs, the life of Christ, Bible theology, Bible prophecy, the history of Bible times, Acts, the Pauline Epistles, the General Epistles, etc.

The Bible must get into the believer's heart and life. He must meditate therein day and night (Ps. 1:2). He must look at life through Scripture. He must obtain a biblical worldview. For example, he must look at life through the lens of Genesis 1 (a six-day creation by an Almighty, all-wise Creator), and through the lens of Romans 3:10-18 (man's fallen character), and through the lens of John 14:6 (Christ as only Saviour), and through the lens of Psalm 100:5 ("the Lord is good"), and through the lens of Psalm 119:64 ("the earth is full of thy mercy"), and through the lens of 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (end-time apostasy), and through the lens of 1 Pe. 4:7 ("the end of all things is at hand"). Developing a biblical worldview is the path to renewing of the mind.

The student must take the time to study the Bible thoughtfully, purposefully. He must ask questions such as

these: What is the context? Who wrote it and to whom is it written? What is the main lesson of the passage? What are other lessons? What does the passage teach about God? What are lessons for my daily life? What sin does it reprove? He must use a good dictionary and concordance, *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge,* and other Bible tools. He must write down questions and find answers.

This process will not produce sinless perfection, but it will produce spiritual growth and ever increasing blessing and fruitfulness.

Ministry

We find God's will by getting busy serving the Lord, not by waiting and watching. The will of God is done *today*.

We give young people many opportunities for service: taking offerings, reading the Bible and leading in public prayer, music, evangelism, teaching and helping with Sunday School, discipling, overseeing the bookstore, serving refreshments after services, operating the sound system.

But they must meet the standards. We require the following: a good testimony of Christian living (including separation from the world and a good attitude toward parental authority), love for Bible study and prayer, spiritual growth, submission to authority, faithfulness to all the services, modest dress, and the gifting and ability to do the assigned ministry.

The Specific Calling

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members

one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, *let us wait* on *our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:3-8).

There is a danger of wrong thinking about oneself (Ro. 12:3). An example is a man thinking that he is called to be a pastor. There are many evidences of calling: gifting and ability, moral qualification (e.g., 1 Ti. 3), training ("as he hath been taught," Tit. 1:9), recognition (e.g., Ac. 13:1-3), and fruit. To think that I am called to a certain ministry when I am not qualified and recognized is self-deception.

The church is the place of training and service ("one body," Ro. 12:4-5; "pillar and ground of the truth," 1 Ti. 3:15). We must have good churches.

We minister according to God's grace (Ro. 12:6). We don't serve in our own strength. No one's shoulders are broad enough for the ministry--only Christ's. There is rest in God's service (Mt. 11:28-30).

We minister according to faith (Ro. 12:6). Faith is personal decision, and faith is also a gift.

There are many gifts, callings, and ministries (Ro. 12:6-8). There are temporary gifts (1 Co. 12:8-10). These were revelatory gifts that pertained to the era before the canon of Scripture was completed (prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues). These were associated with the apostolic era, when "the signs of an apostle" were operating (2 Co. 12:12). We believe in healing by prayer according to James 5, but not healing as a sign gift (1 Co. 12:9). We believe in miracles and we witness miracles, but we don't have the working of miracles as a gift (1 Co. 12:10).

There is a gift of **prophecy** for today (Ro. 12:6). This is the preaching of God's Word. See 1 Co. 14:3.

There is a gift of **ministry** (Ro. 12:7). This is a broad and general term. The Greek *diakonia* is also translated "serving" (Lu. 10:40) and "relief" (Ac. 11:29). It is used to describe the trip that Paul and Barnabas made to Jerusalem to carry the offerings for the needy saints (Ac. 12:25; compare Ac. 11:28-30).

There is a gift of **teaching** (Ro. 12:7). This is the gift of expounding the Scriptures, of training the saints in the will of God. All elders and pastors must be able to teach, but not all teachers have the office of ruling. A woman, for example, can teach women (Tit. 2:3-4) and children (2 Ti. 1:5), but she cannot be a ruler (1 Ti. 2:12). Many men are capable of teaching in various capacities such as Sunday School or jails and nursing homes who are not gifted or qualified to be rulers.

There is a gift of **exhorting** (Ro. 12:8). This is translated the Greek *parakaleo*, which means "to call alongside of" and refers to encouraging, consoling, imploring, and urging people to fulfill their duties. We have exhorters who minister after the main service. The Greek word is also translated "intreat" (Lu. 15:28), "desire" (Ac. 8:31), "comfort" (Ac. 16:40), "call for" (Ac. 28:20). An example of an exhorter is Barnabas (Ac. 11:22-24). "Exhortation" also encompasses reproving. The epistle of Hebrews is called "the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22), and it contains a great deal of warning and reproving (e.g., Heb. 2:1-3; 3:7-8; 4:1; 5:12-14; 10:26-27; 12:5-13).

There is a gift of **giving** (Ro. 12:8). Every believer is to be a giver, but there is a gift of giving. The giving is to be done "with simplicity." This is the Greek *haplotes*, which refers to "singleness, sincerity (without dissimulation or self-seeking),

generosity" (Strong). It is also translated "bountifulness" (2 Co. 9:11), "liberal" (2 Co. 9:13), and "singleness" (Eph. 6:5).

There is a gift of **ruling** (Ro. 12:8). This refers to the office of the pastors and elders who rule over the church (Heb. 13:7, 17). It is a *very important job*. It has been said that everything rises and falls on leadership. Ruling is to be done "with diligence." The pastor must be single-minded about his calling and give himself to it zealously. This is in contrast to the pastor who is half-hearted and lazy. This is a *very difficult job*. It requires great wisdom. It requires much training. It requires continual training. It requires spiritual courage. The preacher must be able to stand alone with God like Jeremiah.

There is a gift of **showing mercy** (Ro. 12:8). The simplest ministry in God's will is important. One danger for someone who has the gift of showing mercy is to be too soft and not understand the importance of discipline and rebuke.

The proper exercise of spiritual gifts requires diligence (Ro. 12:8). Christ despises lukewarm, half-hearted, sluggardism.

The proper exercise of spiritual gifts requires cheerfulness in (Ro. 12:8). This is the opposite of grudging or serving as a mere duty. It is a "ready mind."

The General Calling

"*Let* love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. *Be* kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for

evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:9-21).

The Christian's *specific* calling is found when he dedicates himself zealously to the *general* calling of God.

The general calling of God is to an obedient, godly lifestyle. As the believer gets busy doing those things that God wants every believer to do, he is led by the Holy Spirit step by step into his more particular and personal calling.

Consider the example of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, who went to get a wife for Isaac: "I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren" (Ge. 24:27). By obeying God you put yourself "in the way" to be led in God's will.

I think of my early Christian life. I set out to obey the Lord right away. I started looking for the right church in God's will, and as soon as I found it, I was faithful to everything. I set about to separate from evil things of the world as the Lord showed me (e.g., movies, "abhor that which is evil," Ro 12:9). I set about to be honest and to give restitution for things I had stolen ("without dissimulation," Ro. 12:9; "provide things honest in the sight of all men," Ro. 12:17). I set about to honor my dad, to love people ("let love be without dissimulation," Ro. 12:9). I set about to be diligent and wise in the use of my time, to learn how to order my days, to redeem the time, to set priorities ("not slothful in business," Ro. 12:11).

As I walked with the Lord and studied the Bible and sought to obey God, He led me to start writing booklets. He put Way

of Life on my heart. (Pr. 6:23 - "The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.") Later he led me to a missionary work.

Romans 12 describes the type of churches we need in a nutshell. They are churches that train God's people to pursue that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Seeking God's will is the biblical Christian life.

Seeking God's will is the way of blessing. Don't be afraid of God's will. There are difficulties in God's will, but in God's will there are unspeakable blessings. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4). "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3). Sometimes I'm almost embarrassed to describe God's great blessings in my life!

Seeking God's will is the way of fruitfulness. Church members who are fruitful are the church members who are earnestly seeking God's will.

Seeking God's will is the way of spiritual protection. If you are not going forward, you are going backward and are therefore in danger.

Seeking God's will is the path of spiritual revival. Revival is not something we should experience in a special meeting from time to time. It should be a daily experience, and it can be for the child of God who walks in God's will as described in Romans 12.

Seeking God's will is a measure of spiritual health. This is true for the individual and for the church.

Spiritual Safety Requires Building the Right Kind of Churches and Homes

The issue of spiritual safety exists within the environment of a certain kind of church and home. Without the right kind of homes and the right kind of churches, there will be very little victory at the individual level.

We see two houses in 1 Timothy, and they must work together. First, we see **the "house of God"** (1 Ti. 3:15). This is the New Testament church. The context is a church with pastors and deacons. Its purpose is to nurture, protect, train, equip, prepare, and discipline God's people. Second, we see **one's "own house"** (1 Ti. 3:4, 12; 5:8). This is the Christian home. Its purpose is to raise up a godly seed for God's glory. Malachi 2:15 says that God seeks "a godly seed." Children do not belong to parents; they belong to God. "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine..." (Eze. 18:4).

The church is not the home, and the home is not the church. Both are divine institutions, and they are to work together in harmony. It is the church's job to build up the homes and fulfill the Great Commission in all of its manifold aspects (Mt. 28:18-20), generation after generation until Jesus comes, and it is the home's job to raise a godly seed and to build up the church for its God-given work of the Great Commission.

The Right Kind of Church

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard

> *this,* they were pricked in their heart, and said unto
> Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren,
> what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent,
> and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus
> Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the
> gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and
> to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as
> many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many
> other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save
> yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they
> that gladly received his word were baptized: and the
> same day there were added *unto them* about three
> thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the
> apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of
> bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:36-42).

Only a true New Testament church will provide an environment for spiritual safety and growth and fruitfulness. A spiritually weak church produces weak homes and weak members who are lukewarm and have at least one foot in the world. It is nearly a complete waste of time to teach about spiritual victory in the Facebook age in such a church.

Acts 2 describes the first church, and though there were temporary characteristics of that church that are not patterns for today (e.g., apostles, apostolic signs, communalism), the fundamental characteristics described in verses 41-42 should mark every New Testament church throughout the age:

Salvation (Acts 42:41)

- The fundamental mark of a New Testament church is a regenerate church membership.

- A regenerate church membership requires the preaching of the gospel (Christ crucified and risen, Acts 2:22-36; "many other words" Acts 2:40). It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Ro. 1:16). Salvation requires coming unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Ti. 2:4). It involves obeying from the heart "that form of doctrine which was

delivered you" (Ro. 6:17). Christ taught that the gospel is to be preached to every creature, and those who believe the gospel are those who are saved (Mr. 16:15-16). The gospel is beautifully summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

- A regenerate church membership requires conviction (Acts 2:37). This is the supernatural work of the Spirit, drawing, enlightening, convicting. There is no salvation apart from this work.

- A regenerate church membership requires repentance (Acts 2:38). Repentance is commanded by Christ ("except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish," Lu. 13:3, 5) and by Paul ("God now commandeth all men every where to repent," Ac. 17:30). Paul preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac. 20:21). Repentance is to turn to God in submission. It is a change of mind that results in a change of life. Repentance is not works salvation; it is a change of mind, not a change of life. But it produces a changed life. Paul preached "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Ac. 26:20).

- A regenerate church membership requires glad faith (Acts 2:41). Their faith was not manipulated or pressured. When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip if he could be baptized, Philip replied, "if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (Ac. 8:37).

- A regenerate church membership requires conversion (Acts 2:42). True salvation is regeneration. It is being made a new creature in Christ (2 Co. 5:17). It is to be translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

- Supernatural salvation is the fundamental of fundamentals for a sound New Testament church. We have gotten ever more careful about this.

Baptism (Acts 2:41)

- This is believer's baptism by immersion. It depicts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is the gospel,

and the believer's identification with Christ (Ro. 6:4-5). It is commanded by Christ (Mt. 28:19). It is a fundamental doctrine and practice.

- Salvation and baptism are the requirements for church membership -- "and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

Discipleship (Acts 2:42)

- They continued stedfastly. This is a strong emphasis on their obedience, zeal, and faithfulness.

- The most common name for a New Testament believer is "disciple" (*methetes* in Greek). The term "believer" appears two times (Acts 5:14; 1 Ti. 4:12); "Christian" appears three times (Acts 11:16; 26:28; 1 Pe. 4:16); "saint" appears 62 times; "brethren" appears about 135 times; but "disciple" (referring to a disciple of Christ) appears about 268 times. Jesus defined a true disciple as follows: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh. 8:31).

Apostles Doctrine (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved doctrine. They loved Bible study. No one had to order them to be present in Bible teaching meetings. I can relate to this. As soon as I was saved at age 23, for the first time in my life, I loved to read and study the Bible and was eager for good Bible preaching/ teaching, and by God's grace, that has not waned in 46 years.

- This is evidence of true discipleship. "He that is of God heareth God's Words" (Joh. 8:47). "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh. 8:31-32). "My sheep hear my voice" (Joh. 10:27).

- They loved *sound* doctrine. They continued in the apostles' doctrine, not in the doctrine of heretics. A church that continues in apostolic doctrine has a testing mindset. See 1 Th. 5:21-22. A New Testament church exercises a ministry

of proving, evaluating, analyzing, judging. This is not a critical attitude. It is a godly, truth-loving, protective attitude. The objective is a positive one to avoid error and to "hold fast that which is good."

- A church that continues in doctrine is a serious Bible study church. We aim to make every member a serious Bible student. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). "... for every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14). We are convinced that the equivalent of a Bible Institute education is the *beginning* of the level of Bible knowledge that is required for a fruitful Christian life in God's will.

- A church that continues in doctrine involves the right kind of preaching/teaching that feeds the sheep and builds them up in the faith and teaches them how to study and understand the Bible for themselves.

Fellowship (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved the brethren. This was their family, their crowd. They loved zealous brethren.

- True fellowship is spiritual. It is not just eating and playing together. The world does that. The spiritual character of a church will be seen in what the members love to talk about. What do the young people talk about? The men? The women?

Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved the Lord's Supper. Compare Acts 20:7.

- It is an important and essential practice. It is the time of remembering Christ, of learning of Christ, of expecting Christ's return.

- It is a very serious practice. It is a time of heart searching (1 Co. 11:27-32) and an element of church discipline ("with such an one no not to eat," 1 Co. 5:11).

Prayers (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved prayers (plural). It was a praying church.

- Prayer is mentioned at least 415 times in Scripture; 129 times in the NT; 35 times in Acts; 25 times in Paul's epistles. It was a major emphasis of Christ's teaching.

- The true disciple is a praying Christian. His life is a life of prayer. He loves prayer. He has a daily prayer closet. He has seasons of prayer. He intercedes in prayer. He prays without ceasing. He is in communion with his God all through the day. He prays with his wife and family. He loves corporate prayer. He loves praying with the brethren. He has prayer partners.

- This is in great contrast to the typical church today. How can a church claim to be a New Testament church if its people don't "continue in prayers"?

This is the *image* of a New Testament church; this is the *test* of a New Testament church.

An Acts 2:41-42 church is not a church without sin and without problems. Compare Acts 5 and 6. But it is a *far* more spiritually serious church than the typical church today.

We need to stop following tradition, including fundamental Baptist tradition. Tradition has weakened churches, not strengthened them.

I think of the Southern Baptist church in Florida that I grew up in. All the kids made professions of faith, but there was no caution, no wisdom, no looking for evidence, and the professions were never questioned later on, regardless of how

empty they proved to be. My former best friend died at age 62, having lived a Christ-rejecting, filthy life, and being steeped in Native American spirituality, which is demonism, but his Southern Baptist mother, a former Sunday School teacher, thought he was in heaven because of his empty childhood profession.

I think of **Highland Park Baptist Church** in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in its heyday**.** The governing principle seemed to be "get as many as you can as fast as you can." When Lee Roberson became pastor in 1942, the membership was 1,000, the Sunday morning attendance was 400, and the mid-week service attendance was about 10 (James Wigton, *Lee Roberson: Always about His Father's Business*, 2010, p. 22). So 60% of the members were nowhere to be found and only 1% had enough Christianity to attend a mid-week service. That was and is typical, both for Southern Baptists and for fundamental Baptists. That pattern never changed at Highland Park even as the numbers exploded. When Dr. Roberson retired in 1982, Highland Park's membership was 63,000, but Wednesday night attendance was about 3,000. That is the best measure of active membership, and that would leave 60,000 unaccounted for! The huge membership numbers got Highland Park listed as the world's largest church, but since the vast majority of those "members" were not active, what did it mean?

Acts 2:41-42 Christianity is not "negative" or "boring" to saved people. Our young people enjoy their Christian lives. There is *zero* pressure from them that the church provide entertainment. They love separation from the world because they want God's will and they don't want to be devoured by the devil. They have turned from drugs, given up beautiful but worldly girlfriends, given up worldly social media, given up addictions to video gaming, given up immodest dress, given up secular education that was hindering their spiritual lives. They love serious prayer meetings. They love studying

the Bible. They love playing and singing sacred music. They love Christian ministry.

The Right Kind of Home

Spiritual victory in the Facebook age is won or lost, second of all, in the home.

A friend recently replied as follows to my question as to how many young people in his church are on fire for the Lord:

> "A few of the young people are pretty serious. Most not. Pastor preaches hard. The parents are failing their kids by not following through on what they are hearing. The key is the home. They are getting the right stuff from the pulpit. Those who put into practice what they hear being preached have been pretty successful. Those who don't have failed miserably."

The church should build godly homes that raise a godly seed for Christ. The church and the home are both divine institutions that should work together.

The home is not the church. In Colossians 4:15, both are mentioned ("the church which is in his house"). Here is a church that met in a house. This is in contrast to "house churches" in which the home is preeminent. Some years ago, I preached a Bible conference in Australia, and a family with many children attended the Sunday morning service and even participated in the music ministry, but they didn't return for the rest of the services. When I inquired about this, the pastor said, "They only attend Sunday mornings; the rest of the time they attend to family business." This is a family that is confused about God's will in this present age.

It is the church that is called the pillar and ground of the truth, not the home (1 Ti. 3:15).

The church is not the home, but the church is to build up the home. The church should not weaken the home (by

worldliness, by lack of seriousness, by lack of spiritual and biblical depth, by lack of true discipleship, by avoiding discipline). And the home should not weaken the church by unfaithfulness, worldliness, and halfhearted discipleship.

The instruction about the home is given in the context of the church. The instruction is incorporated into the church epistles (Eph. 5:22 - 6:4; Col. 3:18-21; Tit. 2:4-5). It is the church that is to teach husbands how to be good husbands and how to be the spiritual leaders of their homes, wives how to be good wives, parents how to discipline their children, mothers how to be keepers of the home, children how to obey and honor their parents, plus all the other things that make a godly, fruitful home. It is the church that is commissioned by Christ to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have taught you" (Mt. 28:20).

An important measure of the spiritual character of a church is the condition of the homes. Not every home will respond properly to the church's ministry, but the church cannot escape responsibility. Only if a church is doing everything it can to build godly homes is its responsibility finished.

Recently a pastor's wife asked, "What about children that go wrong in good homes?" My answer is that God has given powerful promises about the children. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pr. 22:6). "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Pr. 23:13-14). But training children as disciples of Christ is a large job that entails many things, and most families aren't fully engaged in this business and aren't doing the things that are necessary.

Keeping the Kids: How to Keep the Kids from Falling Prey to the World is a training course that is the product of

experience, Bible study, reading, feedback from questionnaires, interviews.

Following are some fundamental elements of the home that is the right environment for spiritual victory in the Facebook age:

1. Husband and wife having good Christian character; consistency in Christian living; hypocrisy is one of the most destructive things

2. Good husband/wife relationship

3. Commitment to and faithfulness to and serving in a sound New Testament church.

4. The father the spiritual head of the home.

5. Dad and Mom 100% committed to raising the children for Christ; a major priority. One man said, "Turning our daughter out right for the Lord is the highest priority we have. It's EXTREMELY important to us. It's like life and death to us. So, it gets a lot of our thought, prayers, and attention." A missionary to Japan said, "Both sides of our families were broken. My parents got divorced after 25 years of marriage. My wife's parents divorced after 25 years of marriage. Both sides have illegitimate children. Both of us have grandparents that were divorced or a mess. And we just covenanted when we first got married that we would break the cycle from our generation forward. We had no background at all in godly parenting." A missionary to Brazil said, "Right from the start my wife and I started having devotions together and it was a deep desire in our hearts to have a godly family and to raise godly children." These types of parents make this priority the major factor in all decisions (church, job, lifestyle, possessions, entertainment, education, relationships with family, etc.)

6. Mom and Dad being prayer warriors

7. Biblical child discipline; this needs to be a serious matter of study and application.

8. The mom a keeper at home (Titus 2:5). This requires parents who are putting God absolutely first, parents who are living by faith and know how to trust God for their needs. I'm glad that all of my daughters and daughters-in-law are keepers at home for their young families. A young mother wrote to me recently, "------ turned 1 on the 11th of last month and ----- will be 3 on the 21st of this month. It is going by fast. We have such a short time with our children to teach them truth. I'm so glad I'm able to stay home with the boys and be fully present. Brian always wanted it that way." Note that her husband, Brian, is fully on board with her being a keeper at home. This young couple has learned how to live wisely and frugally on a single salary, and yet with God's blessing they have everything they need and far more. When Christ said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you," He meant it! Another mother wrote as follows: "We have 7 children. We followed your advice years ago about not giving them unlimited, unsupervised access to the internet and are very thankful for your wise counsel. We have found that if the mothers would obey God's commandment to be keepers at home the need for children to have a smart phone would be diminished. Also if a family takes Deuteronomy 6 seriously, this also protects against needing a smart phone by homeschooling children. God's Word is a shield, a high tower, it protects us and allows us to see dangers a far off. We have warned our children that the Lord sees everything, hears everything and knows our motives, our heart. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Don't post anything you don't want read aloud in front of the church. Use social media to exhort, bring people to Christ, proclaim the gospel and teach the word. For God says for every idle word man shall give account. Surely a serpent will bite without enchantment and a babbler is no different. A fool is known by the multitude of his words, even a fool when he holdeth his peace is esteemed wise. The cure for social media

problems is knowing the Word of God and teaching it to our children."

9. Serious Bible education (training the children to be Bible students). 2 Ti. 3:15, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The children need to be taught to have a daily Bible reading habit. As they mature, they gradually learn how to be serious Bible students.

10. Wisdom and extreme caution about education in general. God's Word warns repeatedly about evil associations, which has a direct and clear application to education (Ps. 1; 1 Co. 15:33; 2 Co. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11). In a great many places, Christian parents follow the culture in exalting secular education too highly and not being wise enough about this matter. The only way that a young person can attend a secular school with any degree of safety is that he be a saved, serving, growing Christian who is faithfully serving (not merely attending) in a good church.

11. Separation from all evil things (1 Jo. 2:15-16; Eph. 5:11); constantly examining, evaluating; toys, books, entertainment, recreation, clothing, friends, relatives, everything

12. Wisdom and extreme caution about the internet, smart phones, computers, social media (pastor's son who became atheist; pastor's daughter whose heart was stolen by the world)

13. Wisdom and extreme caution about bringing the children to salvation. One of the main things that weakens churches is lack of wisdom in dealing with children. Lack of patience and prayer; lack of looking for evidence. See "Careful Child Evangelism," www.wayoflife.org.

God's people must focus like a laser on building true New Testament churches and godly Christian homes.

For the most part, it is here that the battle for spiritual victory in the Facebook age will be won or lost.

Spiritual Safety Requires the Right Mindset

A Mindset of Taking Control

The fundamental protection is to take control. It is the determination that I will have *one* Master, and that Master is Jesus Christ! I'm not going to allow anyone or anything to take the place of Christ as my Master. I will not be a slave to a smartphone or a video game or YouTube or Facebook or Twitter or FoxNews or Snapchat or a constant stream of "notifications." I will not be the puppet of some faceless, money-grubbing corporation. I will not be controlled by social engineers. I will not allow my time to be wasted on vanity.

> "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24).

This requires stepping back and analyzing one's life and every aspect of how communication technology is affecting me, not just one time, but repeatedly, continuously.

A Testing, Pilgrim Mindset

Another fundamental protection is a testing, pilgrim mindset.

> Pr. 4:26 Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

> Pr. 14:8 The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.

> Pr. 14:15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

Pr. 22:3 A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. (repeated in Pr. 27:12)

2 Co. 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

1 Th. 5:21-22 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

1 Pe. 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

The child of God must go against the grain of the age. He is a pilgrim in a foreign world. He has been redeemed and delivered from bondage to "the god of this world." He has a different Master. He marches to a different drummer. He doesn't flow along with the culture like a mindless zombie, accepting every fashion and trend that comes along. He wants to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. He wants to be wise about the use of his time and not waste hours upon hours caught up in vanity. Pleasing God and having eternal fruit is more important to him than fleeting pleasures.

Since I was saved, I have had a different mindset and worldview. This world is not my home! I am a pilgrim in a foreign country. I am a soldier living in the enemy's territory. I am going to be on guard. I'm not going to relax and move along with the crowd. I'm not going to put down my weapons. I'm not a friend of this world; I'm the friend of

God, and therefore I'm an enemy of this world. I don't want the world or the devil messing with my mind, controlling me, manipulating me, deceiving me, using me for their covetous purposes. It has been said that "if a company doesn't sell a product, you are the product." That is true for Facebook, Google, YouTube, Twitter, etc. But I refuse to go along with this like a lemming. I will not blindly follow the pop culture. I will not submit to what Apple, Microsoft, Google, Facebook, etc., want to do in my life. I will do all to the glory of God. I will avoid dangers. I will avoid addictions. I will avoid even the appearance of evil. I will not be a crowd follower. I will not do something simply because it is popular. I won't sit around and do what others are doing (e.g., young people at the park or cafe or wherever).

Be ever examining what you are doing and what effect things are having on you. Be monitoring your life and your use of technology. Be constantly asking questions before the Lord: does this thing please the Lord? Does it help me please the Lord? Does it help me to be holy? Am I using my time wisely? Am I a good example? Am I being a good witness to the lost?

Be ready to make whatever changes are necessary to protect yourself and to live wisely and fruitfully. Be ready to modify your social media use dramatically, ready to cut it off entirely, for the sake of an unhindered walk with God. Be ready to give up any web site, any news feed, any internet forum.

Pastors must take the lead in this and inform and warn and exhort the people about how to protect the children and youth from the great spiritual danger of modern communications technology.

A Guard the Eye-gate Mindset

A commitment before God to guard the eye gate is a fundamental protection. Ultimately, no parental oversight, no

filtering app, no accountability program, can keep you from looking at those things that you determine to look at. God doesn't teach His people to dwell in caves like monks. We are to be in the world but not polluted by the world. There must be a spiritual mindset that is committed to protection and purity.

> "And when the woman **SAW** that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Ge. 3:6).

> "That the sons of God **SAW** the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Ge. 6:2).

> "When I **SAW** among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it" (Achan, Jos. 7:21).

> "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I **THINK UPON** a maid" (Job 31:1).

> "And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he **SAW** a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon" (2 Sa. 11:2).

> "I will set no wicked thing before **MINE EYES**" (Ps. 101:3).

> "Turn away mine eyes from **BEHOLDING** vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way" (Ps. 119:37).

> "Let **THINE EYES** look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee" (Pr. 4:25).

"Lust not after **HER BEAUTY** in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids" (Pr. 6:25).

"And behold, there met him a woman with **THE ATTIRE** of a harlot..." (Pr. 7:10).

"whosoever **LOOKETH** on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mt. 5:28).

"... the lust of **THE EYES** ... is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jo. 2:16).

The Word of God teaches the child of God to avoid looking at wicked things. It is a choice of the heart. I can't always control what my eyes see, but I can control how I look at it and for how long. I can control what I *stare* at and what I *meditate* upon.

This refers to not looking at that which is wicked by the standards of God's Word, not by the standards of this fallen world and this degenerate age.

This is great protection in the age of visual entertainment. It means that I will not look at wicked things on YouTube. I will not look at wicked things in video games. I will not look at pornography, whether "hard" or "soft." I will not look at dancing girls and beach party girls. I will not look at the indecently clad women of Hollywood and Bollywood and the fashion industry, the rock & rollers and beauty queens.

This is a very far-reaching standard. It applies to every part of my life.

This is something the believer must deal with every day. Victory does not come once and for all. Every day the battle is new, to put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24).

It is something the believer must work at zealously and persistently, because wicked things come into our lives, and they come *back* into our lives, *incrementally*.

A Mindset of Hating False Ways

The Psalmist teaches God's people to hate every false way. "Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way (Ps. 119:128).

This is righteous "hatred," and it is the path of spiritual protection.

I will hate every false way in religion, in philosophy, in music, in fashion, in entertainment, in education.

I will hate the way of the pop culture, with its narcissistic self-love and relativistic morality and "live as you please" philosophy, its foolish devotion to a-musement, its rebellion to God's laws, its addiction to sin.

While I must live in the selfie age, I don't have to love its ways. The selfie age is the way of spiritual blindness and foolishness, but by God's grace I am not blind or foolish.

I will hate the way the pop culture uses social media. Following are some testimonies of Christian young people who hate social media in a godly and wise way for its evils and dangers:

> "I used to be an avid Facebook user. I would spend time on there every single day. Lots and lots of time. I loved to see what everyone was doing as well as share my own life through the site. As the years went on, though, I noticed a change in myself. I would check my Facebook multiple times a day, all day. I would scroll senselessly. I would see things I shouldn't as I had a diverse group of 'friends.' I began to be grieved by my use of Facebook. I began to be grieved with my own response to how people would respond to my posts and comments, etc. I started to hate Facebook. I began taking periodical 'breaks' and just unplugging. Every single time I did I felt amazing. My prayer life increased, my walk with the Lord became stronger, I was happier. But I always went back. Don't ask me why. Finally I had enough! Last year, January 1st, 2018, I unplugged for good! By God's grace

I will never go back to Facebook. My life is so much richer! There is revival in my heart! I read many books! I study God's word more, spend more time connecting with my children, and am just happier. I wouldn't say that no one should use Facebook, but it was definitely damaging to me and my spiritual walk. Facebook gobbled up precious time that could have been used in so many many better ways! I literally hate Facebook now. The very thought of it causes me stress."

"I think everyone should evaluate themselves in this area and determine if their usage of it is expedient. For me personally, this took the form of only using the FB messenger without a FB page. Even the messenger I would get rid of except for a few friends in the States who prefer to stay in touch via messenger. I use Skype and of course email and I use What'sApp for a few friends who prefer that over using their texting minutes. But for the social media that is nothing to me anymore but mindless scrolling and looking at everyone's opinions and watching Christians argue and debate, I have found that there were better uses for my time. I'm not even tempted to use Facebook anymore because I remember how depressing it could be to sit and scroll looking at the same stuff over and over knowing that there were other things I could and should be doing with my time. But if someone else thinks they can and should use Facebook for the glory of God in some way, I will not criticise or try to discern their heart. I just know this is what the Lord has showed me in my own life. I'm better off with less social media in my life."

"Some years later when Instagram came out I made an account. It was private and I kept it restricted to people I personally knew primarily. I would not have described myself as a heavy user or particularly influenced by Instagram. Yet a couple of years ago, in conversation with a godly friend who expressed his concern over social media and the ease at which the wickedness of

this world is available to our young people, my heart was convicted. I knew this to be true. I'd been searching for an innocent picture on Instagram previously and was horrified to come across terrible images which I reported. As a youth group leader at church I knew that some families did not allow social media, and so rather than be a stumbling block to others I deleted my account. After a few days where it felt strange not to be checking my feed or thinking, 'I could take a photo and post this,' I felt absolute relief. I didn't realise the pressure my account had created. I didn't have to constantly think of photo ideas. I didn't have to check my feed daily to keep up with what everyone else was doing. I was suddenly freed from it all. And I realised it had a much greater hold on me than I had known."

"I thought I could use Facebook to post profitable things and stay away from the negative, but I found that I couldn't just do that. I had to scroll a few times and that turned into more. Back in high school the goal was to get as many 'friends' as possible, so I have friends that I didn't even know. The old acquaintances bring back old worldly memories that entice me and also I find myself wasting a lot of time."

"Facebook was a huge hindrance to my spiritual life. It didn't happen right away. Sin slowly slithered in until I was so far from the Lord. I don't even know it happened until too late. I deleted my FB account over three years ago and have not missed it."

"I had Facebook in my teenage years which I now see was detrimental to me. I got rid of it at age 18 for the reason that I have enough problems of my own, I don't need to know everyone else's. I quickly realized a difference in my attitude. I was joyful. I didn't have parental supervision while on Facebook and I found myself stalking other people, talking to people I hardly knew, and causing/feeding drama. Or getting involved

in other people's drama. I praise the Lord for the decision I made at age 18 to get rid of it."

"I used Facebook for a short time many years ago to keep in contact with acquaintances. I quickly saw the artificiality of many of the 'friends' and the tendency toward self-centeredness, so it was no trial for me to give it up when I went to a Bible college that prohibited social networking. Years later, however, I started up a new account with no information about myself for the sole purpose of being able to access Facebook accounts of businesses that didn't have any other form of website (for example, the carpenter who made cabinets for my house). But one day my attention was grabbed by the list of suggested 'friends.' Somehow Facebook had figured out about some people I had known in my youth and recommended them to me. I started looking at it, seeing pictures of people who are now married and with babies. Then (thank the Lord) the thought came to me that resuming contact with all that would not be a help to my spiritual life. My desire to put the Lord first had led me on a different path than them, and they had rejected all my attempts to share with them the truth I was learning. When you mentioned that you were writing something about this subject, the thought came to my mind that it would be good to urge caution to anyone using Facebook just for 'business reasons' to make sure that they never compromised their original purpose. At the best it is a way to waste a lot of time, and at the worst it could take us back into former thought patterns, temptations, and even relationships that could greatly damage our walk with God."

Spiritual Safety Requires Practical Steps of Protection

Even the unsaved are wising up about the danger of the internet, social media, and mobile phones and are taking control of it.

Chris Anderson, former editor of *Wired*, has five children and 12 tech rules. They include no phones until the summer before high school, no screens in bedrooms, network-level content blocking, no iPads at all, and screen time schedules enforced by Google Wifi that he controls from his phone. Bad behavior? The child goes offline for 24 hours ("A Dark Consensus about Screens," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2018). He says, "Rule No. 1 is there are no screens in the bedroom. Period. Ever. My kids accuse me and my wife of being fascists and overly concerned about tech, and they say that none of their friends have the same rules. We have rules because we have seen the dangers of technology firsthand. I've seen it in myself; I don't want to see that happen to my kids."

Kristin Stecher is a former social computing researcher married to a Facebook engineer, Rushabh Doshi. After researching the matter, they decided they want almost none of it in their home. "Doing no screen time is almost easier than doing a little. **If my kids do get it at all, they just want it more**" ("A Dark Consensus about Screens," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2018).

Athena Chavarria, who worked as an executive assistant at Facebook, says, "I am convinced the devil lives in our phones and is wreaking havoc on our children." She did not let her children have cellphones until high school, and even now bans phone use in the car and severely limits it at home. She said she lives by the mantra that **the last child in the class to**

get a phone wins" ("A Dark Consensus about Screens," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2018).

Jesse Weinbeger is the author of *The Boogeyman Exists: and He's in Your Child's Back Pocket*. In a survey of 70,000 children, she found that, on average, pornography consumption began when children turned 8, and sexting and pornography addiction began around age 11. Weinbeger says, "The longer you keep Pandora's box shut, the better off you are. There's no connection to the dark side without the device."

Before his death, Steve Jobs, founder of Apple was asked if his kids loved the iPad. He replied, "They haven't used it. We limit how much technology our kids use at home" (*New York Times* interview).

Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, said, "You're always looking at home technology can be used in a great way-- homework and staying in touch with friends--and also where it has gotten to excess. We don't have smartphones at the table when we are having a meal. ... We often set a time after which there is no screen time" (cited from *Smartphone Sanity*).

These people are exercising more wisdom in this matter than the average parent in a Bible-believing church. Their rules aren't strong enough, because they aren't based on biblical principles, but they are probably stronger than those of the average Christian parent.

Suggestions for Young Adults

Consider Not Having a Smartphone

Have a simple phone, instead.

Even with a simple phone, you must be very careful about to whom you talk and what you talk about and how long you talk. You can have evil communications through a simple phone. Many girls have been seduced by men via a simple

phone and have gotten into trouble. Many young men have developed evil friendships by a simple phone and even by conversations without any phone, of course.

If You Do Have a Smartphone, Control It Ruthlessly

We do not believe that a child or youth under about age 20 should have a smartphone. There are great benefits, but there are also great dangers.

If a man of God like David fell because his eyes landed on the wrong sight one day, how dangerous is the internet which is filled to the brim with wrong sights!

If you do have a smartphone for Bible study and other wholesome things, you must be spiritually mature enough to have a mindset that you are going to control it for the glory of God and it is not going to control you.

We suggest the following things:

Remove everything that is contrary to God's will.

Go through every feature and every app and remove anything that will put you in contact with evil, anything that will rob you of time that could be spent on profitable things.

This is the mindset of taking control. It is the mindset that I am not going to allow this device to hinder my walk with Christ or to pull me out of God's will.

Nest unnecessary apps into folders.

In this way, they are not readily seen at first glance. The apps are not able, therefore, to draw one's attention. Since it takes extra effort to access them, you will access them only on purpose when you actually need them. You will be more likely to control the apps rather than the apps controlling you.

Don't be addicted to a constant stream of information.

Limit the flow of notifications and information you receive: email lists, messages, chats, Twitter accounts, news feeds, etc.

This is an effectual way to have more control over your mobile phone and over your life.

On the iPhone, Notifications are accessed under Settings. By scrolling down through the list of apps under Notifications, it becomes clear that most app designers want to have access to your life and interrupt your day.

In my case, I have turned off notifications (both sound and vibrate) for all apps except the phone, WhatsApp, and texts. The last two are usually set to notify only in vibrate mode. I don't want to be at the beck and call of every app that wants to signal me. I don't get notifications for emails. I check it only when I want to or when I am expecting an important email. I want control.

Understand that the modern news media is not really news; it's commercialism; it's entertainment; it is confusing and depressing. Secular news, even the most conservative, is delivered entirely outside of the context of God and God's sovereignty and God's will and the imminent return of Christ and coming judgment and any other spiritual truth and reality. Psalm 37 teaches a right perspective of "the news."

Take every precaution in accessing the internet.

Many have found help from **a web browser filter** like CleanInternet, which is operated by fundamental Baptists.

Some use **Covenant Eyes** for accountability. It monitors the individual's internet usage and emails reports to selected people for accountability. The accountability report lists web sites visited, internet searches, and the times of day when the internet is used. It also features a score that ranks the individual's level of objectionable internet usage. Covenant Eyes also has a filtering service that can be used in combination with the accountability service. Another service of this type is **X3 Watch**. It provides accountability on computers, cell phones, and tablets. While I have not used this personally, it has been recommended by friends.

Others use a church leader or mature Christian friend as an accountability partner. One single young man wrote:

> "I have a friend in Bible college who has the restriction codes to my phone. I cannot access the App Store, I cannot access the browser. I personally deleted every game I had off the phone, deleted Facebook and anything else that I felt 'drawing' my mind away in ways that I thought were a hindrance to my walk with God. A great example of this is FoxNews. The App shows a lot of news, to be sure. The space directly below it has a lot of entertainment news, which was basically nothing but soft porn. I got sick and tired of seeing this and deleted that app as well. If SnapChat or other items are a hindrance, the partner can block those as well by restricting it. Remember that browsers can be downloaded through the App Store, so even if Safari or the base browser is blocked, there are ways around it."

What the accountability partner should be looking for are clear patterns of behavior. Covenant Eyes and X3 Watch are programmed robots, and robots cannot be trusted as moral supervisors. It knows what site a user is accessing, but it does not know why the user accessed that site or what he or she is looking at on that site, if anything.

For more on this see the chapter "Church Smartphone Accountability Program."

Have regular times when you unplug.

Schedule your days; be in control; don't just drift along through life. Don't allow your smartphone to control your time. Don't allow social media to control your life. Don't allow your friends to control your time. Have one Master! Tristan Harris says, "Every app and website ... is trying to get you to come back and spend more time. Companies literally have teams of people called Growth Hackers, whose job is to *invent new reasons (notifications)* and new persuasive

tactics to bring you back. I know this because I studied with the lab at Stanford that invented many of these principles."

One way to control one's life in the age of electronic devices is to habitually unplug at various times, such as (1) personal Bible study and devotion time, (2) prayer time, (3) family meals, (4) other family times, (5) husband-wife dates; you must spend time with your spouse, (6) reading time, (7) church services. During these times, totally unplug. Turn the phone off or put it in airplane mode. No calls, no texts, no social media, no notifications.

One suggestion is to buy a regular alarm clock and turn your smartphone off at night instead of setting it to wake you up. This way, you will be less likely to start attending to notifications first thing upon waking.

Don't play around with the world's music.

Show me a spiritually weak young person in a church, and I will show you a young person who is messing around with the world's music. It was the first thing that stole my heart as a youth in a Baptist church. It was one of the first things the Lord dealt with me about when I was a young Christian.

The internet is filled with the world's music. YouTube is filled with it. Video games use rock music as background noise. One young man says: "Before I got saved, I listened to rock music, copying it to my memory cards. After I was saved, for some time I couldn't [make myself] delete the songs. I used to say that I would be able not to listen to them, but I was easily tempted to listen to the things that were already in my phone. I was making provision for the flesh while promising not to fulfil the lusts thereof (Ro. 13:14). So one day I decided to delete them totally from my memory card and from my computer too. I thank the Lord, I have never regretted that decision."

Contemporary Christian music is the devil's chum. Chum is a fishing technique. It is something like oatmeal or blood

(in the case of sharks) that is used to attract fish to your boat so that you can catch them. Many Christian parents have let their kids get involved with CCM, thinking it is a safe alternative to secular rock and that letting them have CCM will keep them from the world, but CCM is of the world and it leads to the world. (For more on this see the *The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music*, a free book and video series available at www.wayoflife.org.)

Avoid video games.

We cannot say enough about the spiritual and moral danger of video games, and they are becoming more dangerous every year.

See the chapter "Beware of Video Games," which deals with video games and addiction, video games and moral relativism, video games and violence, video games and the occult, video games and wasting time, video games and taking God's name in vain, and video games and spiritual wounds and scars.

The most up-to-date edition of this report will be at the Way of Life web site.

Be extremely wary of social media.

All of the young people in our church who are growing spiritually in a serious way have given up social media.

If you have Facebook or other social media for godly purposes, guard it like a dangerous animal.

A missionary who uses Facebook told us,

> "I totally agree with the many dangers of Facebook you have previously warned about. Much danger, time wasted, walking with fools, etc. A positive point. Not having the expertise or help to build and maintain a website or blog, it has been a tremendous blessing to allow me to update our supporting churches and friends instantly with pictures and reports from the field, using only my phone. As it reduces the size of these, it will

eventually upload. I don't have to use any software to do that manually. That is a blessing. This allows those who are most invested and interested in our ministry to keep closer tabs and pray more specifically and regularly for us."

While forums such as Facebook *can* be used for good, they are *filled with* spiritual and moral danger. They are *engineered* to be addictive and controlling. A wise and experienced Christian adult might be able to control it, but no teenager can.

We have dealt at length with the dangers of social media in the chapter "Spiritual Safety Requires Understanding Social Media Dangers."

Churches are using Facebook and social media because they are popular and readily accessible and practical and hard to resist, not because they are godly and safe. And typically without having prayerfully and carefully considered the pros and cons from a biblical perspective. For the most part, using Facebook is glibly going down the broad, easy path, rather than choosing the straight and narrow.

Consider using Facebook alternatives.

There are plenty of alternatives to social media. I mainly use email and text messaging.

And I use WhatsApp. It is owned by Facebook, but it is a completely different type of communications tool. It is easy to control. The user is not deluged with "friends" and "likes." We have family WhatsApp chats and ministry WhatsApp chats.

If you do use Facebook, be extremely careful.

Following are some suggestions:

- Remember that others are following your example, and what you do with biblical wisdom and much caution, they will probably do with far less.

- Be on guard in a hyper way. Be in control. If you have social media, keep it caged. Keep it chained! Watch it! Don't let down your guard. At the very least, believers need to be exceedingly careful in the use of Facebook and other social media. Facebook is filled with worldly things, with fornication, covetousness, lying, and self-promotion. You aren't forced to participate and you can control your own Facebook page, but staying in control is no small task. Facebook doesn't want to make it easy for its users to shut themselves off from notifications and suggested "friends" and "likes," and such, because keeping you online as much as possible is Facebook's bread and butter.

- Be *always* prayerfully re-examining the situation and how Facebook or other social media are affecting your life. Beware of being the "frog in the pot," meaning the individual who gradually becomes desensitized to sin because of not separating from it.

- Be extremely careful about whom you "friend" and "follow." One man said, "I personally 'unfollow' most of our 'friends,' so I'm not wasting time, energy, attention, and effort on the inconsequential junk that many post. I only 'follow' those who post things that challenge me spiritually."

- Speak out for truth and righteousness. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, BUT RATHER REPROVE THEM" (Eph. 5:11). "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mr. 8:38). "For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you:* Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead" (1 Pe. 4:3-5). Let your

flag fly for Christ and for truth and righteousness! Don't flow along with the crowd. Don't try to blend in. Don't be afraid to shake the boat. The Lord doesn't save people so they live comfortably in this present world and be a friend of this wicked age. God's redeemed are pilgrims and ambassadors in a foreign world.

   - Always aim to have as little social media as necessary and use as few of the social media tools as possible. Two wise young men wrote about this issue as follows: "I'm better off with less social media in my life," and, "I think everyone should evaluate themselves in this area and determine if their usage of it is expedient. For me personally, this took the form of only using the Facebook messenger without a FB page."

   - Restrict who views the content of your postings. Another brother said, "Most people do not realize that in Facebook, people can restrict who sees what content is posted. For example, I have a group of 'friends' who are somewhat vetted out Christians, with which I share prayer requests and other Christian-related content. I can post conservative content in that group without fear of it going outside the group, since posts posted in that way, I have restricted to not being share-able. I also have another group made up entirely of those who can read and understand Chinese, another language I am literate in; I'm very, VERY careful about what political content I put within that group. I have another group for one side of the family, another for the other side of the family. ... All of those groups are subsets of all 'friends' I have within Facebook. Churches can have their own Facebook pages, where there are various levels of restrictions as to who can put in content. People who do not make use of groups tend to put everything into 'public,' which is very UNSAFE. Identity theft is the least potential worry of that. Default sharing level for EVERYBODY should be FRIENDS ONLY. I have not set up a new account for years, so I don't know what the defaults are."

The bottom line for the child of God who wants to be spiritually wise and safe in the Facebook age is that he is going to have the mindset of being in control of all devices and all media at all times. He is going to be aware of what is happening in his mind and life and how he (and his family) is being affected by things. He is going to be educated about the dangers and constantly alert. He is going to be ready to shut down anything that is displeasing to his Lord and harmful to his walk with Christ and his pursuit of God's will. He is not going to be a gullible lemming, meekly and pathetically following the crowd.

Redeem the time.

> "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16).

Life is too short to waste time. Every hour is God's gift and should be used fully for God's glory.

Analyze your days. We think of a young woman who sat down and evaluated her schedule and realized that she was spending 40 hours a week playing video games. Schedule your days with intention and wisdom; don't just drift along. Fill your time with godly, profitable things. Prepare yourself for God's will, for ministry, for marriage.

Be a serious Bible student.

Becoming a serious Bible student is the most effectual *one thing* you can do to have spiritual safety in the Facebook age. It has a myriad of godly, healthy consequences. It is profitable for every aspect of one's life. It is both edifying and fascinating. The more you learn the Bible, the more edifying and fascinating it becomes.

Anyone with a basic education can become an effectual Bible student, if he or she is willing to obtain the necessary instruction and to devote the time and labor.

Teenagers can become effectual Bible students, if they are saved and surrendered to Christ and willing to pursue this endeavor with the necessary enthusiasm.

Being a serious Bible student requires a lot of time and attention, which is time and attention that won't be given to social media, video games, etc.

Being a serious Bible student requires learning how to read the Bible, how to study the Bible, how to use Bible study tools, how to interpret the Bible, how to meditate on the Bible. There is no shortcut. To be a serious Bible student requires pursuing at least the equivalent of a Bible Institute education. It requires a good survey of the Bible, Bible geography, Bible customs, Bible doctrine, Bible background, Bible prophecy. It requires studying major books such as Romans. Ideally, it requires studying Hebrew and Greek, at least at a basic level.

We recommend that young people, especially, study the Bible with books instead of with a smartphone or tablet or computer. We believe it is beneficial to use books in Bible study before moving to electronic tools. There are great advantages to electronic Bible study, but there are also advantages to using books and paper and pen. I love ebooks and eBibles, but I am glad that I spent 10 years using books for Bible study before I obtained my first computer (Osborne, about 1981) and 15 years before obtaining my first electronic Bible software (Online Bible, about 1990). (1) With an actual Bible, the student can better learn to envision the whole Book and the individual parts. When the student is studying a certain chapter or book, he can see exactly where it is located in the larger picture. (2) Books (e.g., *Strong's Concordance*, *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, *Bible Believer's Commentary*) require the student to work harder in study, which is a necessary part of learning the Bible. See Proverbs 2:4, which says wisdom is found by those who seek it as silver and hid treasures, and 2 Timothy 2:15, which says "study" is

necessary, which is the Greek *spoudazo*, translated "endeavor" (1 Th. 2:17), "diligence" (2 Ti. 4:9, 21; Tit; 3:12), and "labor" (Heb. 4:11). (3) Books avoid the distractions inherent in electronic devices. There is the constant temptation to write an email, respond to notifications, get sidetracked by the web or social media, etc. (4) Studies have shown that writing by hand has multiple benefits. Many successful businessmen find benefit in keeping handwritten notes and journals even in this computer age. The founders of Habit Nest was selected as Amazon's Best Small Business Owners Under 30 for 2019 for their writing journals, and four of Amazon's Small Business of the Year finalists "said they rely on pen and paper as they run e-commerce brands" ("Entrepreneurs swear by Bullet Journals and other paper notebooks to organize their lives," *Business Insider*, Dec. 8, 2019). They use paper and pen to develop their creative and strategic ideas. "Psychology researchers have found in various studies that handwritten notes lead to better conceptual understanding than typed ones, that task-switching causes performance to suffer..."

Way of Life Literature publishes many materials for the serious Bible student. The starting place is the course (new for 2020) *UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE FOR YOURSELF.* It deals with choosing the right Bible, how to establish a habit of daily Bible study, rules of Bible interpretation, methods of study (a practical seven-fold plan for studying any Bible passage), using Bible study tools, using Bible commentaries, using Bible study software, and having a plan of lifelong study. There is an extensive list of suggested Bible study projects. The course is extremely practical and hands on. We explain exactly how to get started in Bible study and how to move forward step by step. It is a course for new Bible students as well as for old.

Be faithful to and serving in a sound New Testament church.

The church is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15), and faithful commitment to and service in a sound New Testament church is an essential part of right Christian living. The first Christians "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Ac. 2:42). That is the example of true Christianity until Jesus comes. Phebe was "a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Ro. 16:1). On Paul's missionary journeys, he didn't just preach the gospel and form Bible studies and prayer meetings, he organized churches. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Ac. 14:23). We see this in his instructions to the preacher Titus, to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Tit. 1:5).

In Ephesians 4:11-16, we see the church described as a spiritual body which is focused intently on "the work of the ministry." The leaders have their part, and every member has his part. The goal is to grow every saint into the perfection of Christ and to preach the gospel to every unsaved person on earth, which is a massive endeavor that requires the full attention of every child of God.

To get busy in Christ's service in and through the church, to be busy pursuing God's perfect will, keeps God's people from wasting their time and just drifting along through life, and it protects them from getting involved in unwholesome and wicked endeavors.

Get involved; be active in ministries; make friends in Christ; be a friend to others, not just with the popular people and those easy to like. Be very active in evangelism.

Find a serious, biblical church. Relocate if necessary. The right church is worth relocating to the other side of the country or even to another country! It is that important.

Avoid a church that is focused on entertainment, sports, fun and games, a church that is a Christianized version of the world.

Fill your time with other good things.

Paul instructed the young man, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Ti. 6:11). Note that he was to flee that which is evil and to follow after that which is good. Either one without the other isn't a biblical Christian life that pleases God.

There are countless wholesome and profitable and enjoyable things that meet God's standards of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness and which individuals and families can do without plugging into television, social media, video games, etc. There is reading (theology, commentaries, Bible study books, practical Christian living, biographies, history, creation science, archaeology, exploring). There is music (learning music and playing and singing music). There is photography, fishing, hunting, shooting, boating, camping, electronics, mechanics, astronomy, cooking, sewing, canning, making models, learning how things are made, investigating God's amazing creation all around us, watching birds, collecting insects, flying kites, flying model airplanes, raising animals (if you can't have a horse or even a dog, you can usually have an ant farm or a guinea pig or a goldfish tank), growing gardens, studying the weather. The list is endless, and there are online courses for such things.

The goal should not be mere entertainment. That's the way of the world. The goal should be edification and godly

education. Time is too valuable to fritter away, even on wholesome things.

The main thing in life, indeed, life itself, is to know God in Jesus Christ and to love Him "with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (De. 6:5).

We deal with how to fill one's life with good things in *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church*, chapter "The Youth" in the section on "Pursue Christian Growth." We deal with Bible study, good music, good sermons, good videos, Christian service, reading and learning, photography, and other things. [www.wayoflife.org/mobile/]

Have godly friends and spend your free time with them.

Paul instructed Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, WITH THEM that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Ti. 2:22).

Fleeing youthful lusts is to be done in the context of pursuing godliness with godly people. This is a true New Testament church. If a church is not filled with people who call on the Lord out of a pure heart, it is not a New Testament church. It is not a spiritual house made of living stones (1 Pe. 2:5).

Desire help and seek help.

> "Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war" (Pr. 20:18).

This is great wisdom, and it is the opposite of the way most young (and old) people live.

Wise counsel should be sought in every major decision, such as education, employment, relocation, choice of church, and especially marriage.

Seek "good" counsel, first from saved parents, next from biblically-thinking church leaders, finally from other mature, wise, biblically-thinking Christians.

Beware of getting counsel from other young people. And if you are a young person, beware of acting like you are wise enough to give counsel.

Don't live a secret life.

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil" (Ec. 12:14).

"... be sure your sin will find you out" (Nu. 32:23).

"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jo. 1:6-7).

Walk in the light with God and man. Young people who keep secret lives are young people who get into serious trouble.

I think of two teenage girls in our church who ran away with young men and lost their moral purity and their testimonies. That is the fruit of a secret life.

Use your youth wisely.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ec. 12:1).

This verse should be a major part of every young person's worldview.

"*Remember*" -- Be wise in the use of your mind; be wise in your thinking; have a sober mind. This is the opposite of a mind filled with foolishness and pleasure. Think before acting; don't be impulsive as young people naturally tend to be. This is the opposite of mental laziness.

"*Remember now*" -- Don't put this off; don't think you have plenty of time to do business with God; you are not promised tomorrow. The longer you wait, the more difficult it gets. The heart grows hard; the conscience becomes seared; habits become set.

"*thy Creator*" -- There is an Almighty Creator; nothing evolved.

"*THY Creator*" -- He is the Creator of you personally. He made you in your mother's womb.

"*in the days of thy youth*" -- Life is divided into days and man is responsible for those days. Man must think wisely about his days and use them for the will of God. There are days of youth. Youth is a special time that God made; it is a time of optimum strength, optimum ability, optimum beauty, optimum expectation.

"*while the evil days come not*" -- Old age is called evil because of its special difficulties, challenges, sicknesses, weakness, loss of faculties as described in Ecclesiastes 12:2-7.

Suggestions for Parents

Protection begins with the biblical truth that the parents are God's designated governors of the home, so parents have a God-given responsibility to be in charge of whether, when, and how children use technology. God will hold the parents accountable. As a parent, if you aren't in control and don't set rules and don't do all of those things that are necessary for the spiritual protection of your children, you are disobeying God and have already lost the battle.

Even the world recognizes that the internet age has brought new dangers and challenges that require close parental supervision. Jesse Weinberger, who teaches internet safety to thousands of parents and teachers each year, says,

> "As parents raising 21st century digital citizens, it is critical that we become educated in order to understand

the reality of where our children live, who they interact with, and who they become once they enter the digital sphere. ... The entire landscape of parenting has changed; some for the better, much for the worse. AD era (After Digital) parenting holds all of the same issues from the BD (Before Digital) era, plus a full slate of new ones. ... The constantly changing landscape of digital risks demands constant parental engagement" (*The Boogeyman Exists, And He's in Your Child's Back Pocket*).

One wise parent says, "Let the youth know that as a parent you have a responsibility to know what and who they communicate with. The cell phone is not a private diary, and as a parent, don't treat it as such."

Parents must know that God's goal for the home is to raise up a godly seed.

The home is a tremendously important institution. It is the first institution that God made when He brought Eve to Adam and performed the first marriage, as recorded in Genesis 2.

The home is for the purpose of raising up a godly seed for God's glory. The prophet Malachi described this. "And did not he make one? ... And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed..." (Mal. 2:15). The context is marriage. The husband and wife are made one by God, and when He gives them children, he is seeking a godly seed.

Children do not belong to parents. Both parents and children belong to God. He says, "Behold, all souls are mine..." (Eze. 18:4). And the parents are tasked with raising the children to know God and to walk in His will.

Knowing that God's goal for the home is to raise up a godly seed must motivate the parents to create the proper environment in which this can happen. It is an environment of Christian love, holiness, biblical education, soul winning (leading the children to Christ), spiritual peace and harmony, and discipline.

In the following lessons we cover the essential aspects of this atmosphere.

Parents must know that the home and church are to work together to fulfill God's goal.

The right environment for raising up a godly seed is created by godly homes and New Testament churches working together as a team.

We dealt with this in the chapter "Spiritual Safety Requires Building the Right Kind of Churches and Homes."

The home and the church are divinely-ordained institutions with different programs, and they should work together in discipling the youth. Discipling youth requires three parties working together: the church, the parents, and the youth themselves.

The church should support the home's program of raising children for the Lord, and the home should support the church's program of the Great Commission.

This requires a true New Testament church that is effectually building godly homes.

A good church can rarely overcome the influence of willfully worldly homes (meaning homes that refuse to respond to God's Word), and a good home can rarely overcome the influence of a worldly church.

A good test of whether a church is sound enough to disciple youth is to look at the church's fruit. Look at the young people. What are their goals in life? What are they putting first? What is their passion? There are many churches that have never produced a pastor, preacher, or missionary. There are many churches that do not have even one young person truly on fire for Christ, surrendered to God's perfect will, separating from the world from the heart, and otherwise passionately pursuing the path of Romans 12.

It is better to relocate than to lose your children to the world or to new evangelical compromise. My wife and I have

seen many parents stay in churches when they should have left, and the fruit has *invariably* been discouraging.

Many parents have testified to me that being in the right church was a major reason why their grown children are serving the Lord today. I met a grandfather in Chesterton, Indiana, who told me that his children, and now his grandchildren, are serving the Lord. He said that he moved to that area many years ago when his children were young and he had purchased a house. Afterwards he found Fairhaven Baptist Church, when Roger Voegtlin was the pastor, and knew this was where the Lord wanted him to raise his family, but it was more than an hour's drive from his house. He put the house on the market and commuted to church every service. He thought his house would sell quickly, but it took more than two years, if I remember correctly, yet he continued to commute to a good church rather than settle for a mediocre one. The sweet fruit of this wise decision has already continued to the second generation.

We must warn that Bible-believing churches are changing quickly.

We have warned about this in *Why Most Independent Baptist Churches Will Be Emerging within 20 Years.*

They are adopting a positive, non-judgmental philosophy; there is little "negative" preaching, little hell fire and brimstone, little warning, no plain identification of false teachers and compromisers.

They are lowering the standard of separation from the world in dress, entertainment, etc. Forthright preaching against the world has been toned down. The worldly things that the churches preach plainly against are fewer and fewer. I think of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Fairfax, Virginia. At one time, it was an "old-fashioned" Baptist church that believed in biblical separation and was committed to the King James Bible, but for many years it has moved ever more gradually in a contemporary direction. By 2002, when the

Baptist Bible Fellowship International conference was held there, the fruit of the new direction was plain for all to see. Pastor David Stokes said, "With regard to dress and modesty issues, we enforce NO RULE on our folks. … apparel issues are really of NO CONCERN to us" (emphasis added). A newspaper described the church's Skate Night as an occasion when "Christian rock throbs inside the gymnasium." The church's new youth director for 2002 wore an earring and a P.O.D. T-shirt for his photo for the church's paper. P.O.D. is a hard rock band, whose members smoke, are covered with tattoos, curse in interviews, and criticize church kids "who want to segregate themselves from the world."

A great many churches are lowering the standard of music to please people, including visitors and young people.

The youth emphasis is on fun and games rather than serious discipleship. Typically it is 80% fun and 20% spirituality, if that. It is a Christianized version of the world. It is Christianity lite.

And it isn't working, even from a pragmatic standpoint. For the most part, these churches are losing the youth at a phenomenal rate. The children grow up and leave, either abandoning church entirely or joining an out-and-out rocking contemporary one that has no pretense of biblical separatism, old-time holiness, and a pilgrim lifestyle.

Typically, the churches that are trying to keep the youth by entertaining them instead of seriously discipling them, by lightening up on biblical standards of holiness, are declining in membership every decade and the median age of the membership is rising. They are dying.

Dying fundamental Baptist churches are everywhere, and a dying Bible-believing church is a shocking and frightful thing.

The church can't compete with the world in fun and games and coolness. The world will win that contest.

It is the churches that are obeying God's Word and pursuing true biblical discipleship that are keeping the youth and growing.

In *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church* we deal with the following lessons about the kind of church that can disciple youth in an effectual way. This 220-page book is available as a free eBook for viewing and downloading at: www.wayoflife.org/mobile/

1. A church with qualified leaders and officers

2. A church that appoints the right teachers and workers

3. A church that is careful about salvation

4. A church that is uncompromising about separation

5. A church that trains the parents to build godly homes

6. A church that is more "integrated" than "segregated"

7. A compassionate church

8. A church that exercises discipline

9. A praying church

10. A church that is not boring

11. A church that is not weird and cultic

12. A church that pursues serious training of youth

13. A church that gives young people ministries while maintaining high standards

14. A missionary church

We can have churches like this. This is God's will. He is ready to bless those who do things His way and renounce tradition and pragmatism.

Parents must train up their children in the way they should go.

This is the parents' part in God's plan.

> "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Training up children in the way they should go is a far-reaching, full-time job.

A pastor's wife with teenage children asked me last year whether I believe that it is possible for parents to raise children for Christ. I replied, "Yes, but it is a big job and parents can fail in many ways."

In the book *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church*, we deal with the following 15 lessons about training children for Christ. The 2020 edition is enlarged.

(See: www.wayoflife.org/mobile/)

1. Training teens is a full-time job and requires total commitment by the father and mother. The father must be the spiritual head of the home, and the mother must be the keeper of the home.

2. Training teens begins in infancy.

3. Training teens requires gaining and keeping their hearts.

4. Training teens requires being a disciplinarian.

5. Training teens focuses on a biblical conversion experience.

6. Training teens requires the parents to spend a lot of time with them.

7. Training teens requires filling the home with God's Word.

8. Training teens means the parents must know what their children are doing.

9. Training teens requires consistent Christian living.

10. Training teens requires candor and "transparency."

11. Training teens requires much patience.

12. Training teens requires an effectual prayer life.

13. Training teens requires teaching them principles of spiritual protection.

14. Training teens requires a good church.

15. Training teens requires building a hedge of protection.

Each one of these things is important.

We cannot emphasize too strongly the necessity of focusing on a biblical conversion experience. Until the children are genuinely born again, they will not serve God from the heart. They will not be self-motivated to walk in holiness and wisdom.

Parents must understand the child's character.

Parents must remember what the Bible says about children. Foolishness is bound in the heart (Pr. 22:15). In man's flesh or old nature there is no good thing (Ro. 7:18).

Children do not have native wisdom. It comes only through a process of growth and experience. It comes through regeneration and sanctification.

A teenager is simply not mature enough to be given his own cell phone and to be expected to use it in a right and safe manner without close and wise oversight, at the very least.

The child will say, "Don't you trust me?" The biblical answer is, "Of course not; you have strong enemies within and without, and you don't have anything like the maturity to protect yourself."

Parents must oversee their children.

We deal with this in *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church*, but we want to repeat it here, because it is such a fundamental, practical thing.

> "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15).

The parents must know what their children are doing at all times.

We can list case after case of young people in Christian homes who have shipwrecked morally and spiritually because their parents did not provide good oversight.

We think of a teenage girl who ran away with an unsaved boy. The mother and father were working and weren't in tune with what the daughter was doing. They "trusted her."

Today, parents must know what is on the young person's phone, tablet, laptop, etc., at all times and have all the passwords.

One parent wisely observed, "They must know that this device is not their personal diary."

Parents must set the example.

We deal with this in *The Mobile Phone*, but it must be emphasized.

Hypocrisy is the #1 destructive thing in parenting. The parents must set the example in loving God, in walking with God, in prayer, in Bible study, in faithful church attendance, in putting God first, in holiness, in separation from the world, in setting spiritual priorities, in the wise use of time, in the use of the internet and social media. One mother wrote,

> "I am a mother trying to teach my daughter purity, modesty, servant-hood, thoughtfulness, and other Christian virtues. I want her to be selfless rather than selfish. I cannot change others, but I can show by my example to my daughter what Christ is like by how I choose to live. I am thankful I live out in the country away from the influences of town life. To make a difference, we must be Christ-like in all we say and do."

Parents who are serious about raising godly children for Christ need to spend time individually and together examining their lives and their home before God and being willing to make whatever changes are necessary. Nothing less than this will "work."

Reading together and praying over and discussing the books *Keeping the Kids* and *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church* can help educate and unite their hearts before God in this task.

See: www.wayoflife.org/keeping/
See: www.wayoflife.org/mobile/

Parents must disciple their children in a serious, biblical way.

The most fundamental part of discipling is to fill the home with God's Word.

We deal with this in a very practical way in *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church* in the chapter on "The Parents."

Parents must teach and disciple in an atmosphere of open communication and affection.

Spiritual safety in the Facebook age requires that parents teach the children God's Word, the principles of spiritual protection, and practical wisdom for every area of living. There must be teaching, teaching, teaching.

But the education must be given in an atmosphere of open communication and affection. The children must be encouraged to share what is on their hearts. They must know for sure that their parents love them and want the best for them.

One missionary who has visited many churches and has observed how that a great many of the young people turn out to be rebels observed,

> "I think the most important thing would be to keep close relationships with the children. Lots of parents are too busy with other things instead of being spiritually close to the family. Children grow up in their own world with the video games, movies, music, headphones, internet, etc., which causes great rebellion. Once they are old enough to choose for themselves, they will go their own way and not listen to their parents."

One man told me that through talking with his 12-year-old son about what goes on at church, he learned that most of his

son's peers aren't serious about the things of God. He has used this as an opportunity to stay close to his son by showing that he is interested and sympathetic and by teaching him spiritual lessons, such as the importance of not following the crowd but making his own decisions before the Lord and choosing the way of wisdom rather than folly.

Another man wrote of the benefit of discussing the preaching with the children.

> "Children should have opportunity to worship alongside of their parents. The questions that followed the preaching gave us the opportunity to discuss and at times be amazed at the things that mattered to our children and even the things they misunderstood."

The issue of the internet and social media and smartphones and other internet-accessible devices should be out in the open and thoroughly discussed by the entire family. The parents need to have open communication with their children. They need to teach, but they also need to listen.

This is wise parenting. The wise father is not a Marine drill sergeant. He is not taskmaster or a prison superintendent. He is a father who aims to provoke not his children to wrath but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

The Lord rules and chastens His children, but He also communes with them, inviting them to walk with Him, talk with Him, reason with Him, cast their care upon Him, seek help from Him, seek wisdom from Him. We read of God's ways with His children in James 3:17, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

This is godly parenting, and this is the parent who can help his children be safe in the Facebook age.

Open communication and effectual teaching requires that the parents be focused like a laser on keeping the hearts of the children.

Pastor Terry Coomer observes,

> "Let me ask you a most serious and sobering question. Do you have your child's heart? You as a parent have to get the child's heart. Not only must you get the heart of the child, you must keep the heart of the child. ... I can hear someone say, 'Pastor, I knew a Christian family where there were three children and two of the kids grew up to serve the Lord and one was a horrible rebel.' The answer is here; the parent did not have the heart of the rebel or he did not keep the heart of the rebel. ... You have to get the child's heart! The problem in every spiritual problem is the heart! Parents, rebellion begins in the heart. Children's lives wander because their heart wanders. ... The one who has the child's heart will eventually have his life and his loyalty" (*Rearing Spiritual Children*, pp. 70, 72).

The children must be encouraged to ask questions, to express their own thoughts, their own desires, and their plans. Wise parents will use this openness to guide the children and to help them to see life through Scripture, to teach them a testing mindset.

Parents should teach courses such as the *One Year Discipleship Course* and *Spiritual Safety in the Facebook Age*, but they must do it in the context of open communication, not just one-way teaching. Encourage open and frank discussions. This is a major part of effectual education.

If the children cannot express themselves freely with their parents and get answers to their questions from the parents, they will look elsewhere.

Some fathers might have to work harder at this than some mothers, but work at it they must if they are going to keep the hearts of their children.

We deal with this more extensively in the book *Keeping the Kids.* In the chapter "Child Discipline," we describe the ways that a child's heart can be both kept and lost.

Parents must understand modern communications technology.

There is no safety in ignorance. Parents must be educated about all of the dangers that face their children.

To provide such education is the major purpose of this report *Spiritual Safety in the Facebook Age*, but it does no good to parents who aren't pursuing serious education. Sadly, in our experience, this is the typical parent in a fundamental Baptist church, and this is one reason why the homes and churches aren't winning the battle for the next generations.

Parents must own all devices.

A fundamental protecting concept is that children and youth do not own their own phones, tablets, or laptops, etc. Any such devices are owned by the parents and are only used by the children under parental rules and supervision.

"When you make it clear that you own the phone, then their claims to 'privacy' fall flat. The phone is yours, and should be used as you see fit. They simply are allowed to use it under your supervision. This is the number one most important thing to emphasize when you give your kid a phone, or give it back to them. Be super clear about this. So, big picture-wise, we suggest giving your kid access to a phone you own with very limited functionality, and then over time (and through many discussions helping them develop wisdom), helping them learn to use it well before they leave your home" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Parents should have a family plan

The family can make a written plan that includes the rules of using the internet and computing devices, penalties, etc.

The book *Smartphone Sanity* describes a family plan. We would warn that this book is written from a new evangelical perspective and is thus lacking some fundamental things, such as an emphasis on salvation, repentance, biblical separation from the world (moral protection is mentioned but not in terms of biblical separation as such, e.g., Ephesians 5:1; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17), end-time apostasy, and ecclesiastical separation. The book is based on the philosophy of evangelical "cultural liberalism," which gives liberty to "wisely" and "cautiously" engage in such things as the world's music, movies, video games, and social media such as Snapchat and TikTok. It is based on the Chuck Swindoll definition of grace rather than God's definition in Titus 2:11-15. It is based on the pop psychology approach whereby everything must be fun, light, positive, non-judgmental. But *Smartphone Sanity* does have some helpful tips for facilitating family communication and developing an oversight plan that includes rules and penalties. The book might be helpful particularly to families in which the parents might not have as much control over the children as they wish. I think of divorced and remarried couples who share custody of children with unsaved people or worldly Christians. And it might be helpful to parents who have lost control of their children to the world and are trying to regain control.

Parents must allow young people no private internet connection.

There should be no access to the internet and online stores and social media without permission and close supervision.

Kristin Stecher is married to a Facebook engineer. After researching social media, they decided they want almost none of it in their home ("A Dark Consensus about Screens," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 2018).

Athena Chavarria, who worked at Facebook, says, "I am convinced the devil lives in our phones and is wreaking havoc on our children" (Ibid.).

Many young people have gotten into trouble by having unsupervised use of these devices, and this is not a new thing. Pastor Dave Sorenson testified of how that his heart was pulled into the world when his father (a pastor) let him have a portable radio and keep it in his room at night when he was a teenager. The internet has increased this problem phenomenally.

I have a pastor friend whose teenage son had an MP3 player that he used to access the internet in his room at night, and he began reading the writings of atheists and is now confused and uncertain about his own faith in God.

I have another pastor friend whose daughter developed relationships with unsaved youth through the internet access she had for home schooling (unbeknown to the parents), and it nearly shipwrecked her faith.

Robert and Michael Bever, ages 18 and 16, grew up in a Christian home in Oklahoma and developed a fascination with serial killers via access to the internet. The parents allowed this access and trusted them to do right. In July 2015, Robert and Michael killed five members of their family, including their trusting mother and father. The boys were tracked down and captured that night by a canine unit, but their goal was to kill hundreds of people, and they had purchased thousands of rounds of ammunition for that purpose. They planned to steal the family vehicle and go on a nationwide killing spree, murdering five people at a time at stores and restaurants and gas stations, until they were caught. They wanted to make a video of their crimes to gain social media notoriety.

They become perverted and inflamed by evil communications. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Co. 15:33).

Parents must understand that young people are very clever about getting around restrictions.

Parents must understand internet-capable devices. When connected via cable, wi-fi, or cell phone technology, the internet can be accessed by a personal computer, a tablet (iPad, Samsung), e-Readers (Kindle), video game consoles, and smartphones.

"Game consoles (like Xbox and PlayStation) allow your children to connect to the 'internet' on the gaming side (players connecting with each other in LIVE play) as well as on the browser side. Your child will have access to the web, YouTube, and other web apps via the gaming interface. ... There are many completely benign games which feature in-game chat, bringing serious risks to children. For example: Clash of Clans ... Once you've downloaded the app you 'create a clan' Very quickly you will find that the most 'powerful clans' are open to strangers. Once the clan is open, so is the opportunity to chat within clan members" (Weinberger, *The Boogeyman Exists*).

A 15-year-old girl named Dorothy was forbidden by her mother to use her Twitter account (which she had set up as an Ariana Grande fan page) and took away her phone. Dorothy then used Nintendo game players. When those were shut down by the mom, she found a way to tweet via their LG smart refrigerator! The LG Electronics company confirmed that "it is possible to access Twitter via the web browser on select LG smart refrigerator models" ("Teen claims to tweet from her smart fridge," *The Guardian*, Aug. 13, 2019).

Parents should have a basic phone that teens can use when necessary.

A young person shouldn't "own" his own phone, but he can be allowed the use of one under parental control if the parent believes he needs to use one and is able to do so without spiritual harm.

One pastor said, "We have a Tracphone that we give them if they are walking down to the store or going to do a mowing job. They cannot access the internet on it and we can easily check the minutes used."

If a young person is allowed to use a smartphone, the parent must control it.

Apple's parental controls for iPhone and iPads are found in THE SCREEN TIME APP. "It offers a full analysis on your phone about your kid's phone. This includes information about apps used, the number of notifications received, the number of times the phone was picked up, and other features. It will also allow you to control the amount of time they spend on their phone and their phone bedtime curfew." It can be used to restrict screen time, block apps, restrict iTunes and App Store purchases and downloads, prevent web content.

> "Once you have the newest iOS downloaded and installed, you will need to set-up Screen Time on your kid's phone. There are two ways to do this.
>
> "The first way is with their phone in hand. On their phone, go to Settings > > Screen Time. It will prompt you with a set-up screen, so choose 'Continue,' and select, 'This is my child's phone.' (If it does not prompt you with a set-up screen, scroll down and find 'Turn Off Screen Time' in red ink. Select it, confirm, and return to Settings. Then, open Screen Time again and it should give you a set-up screen.) If you are setting up a brand-new iPhone for your kid, go through the start-up process and create an Apple ID for them. Then choose 'Continue' when prompted to set up Screen Time. After the set-up process, go to Settings and follow the instructions above to turn on Screen Time.
>
> "The other way to set up Screen Time is through Family Sharing. Go to Settings > > Family Sharing on your phone and add your kid as a family member with their Apple ID and password. Then select Screen Time, your

kid's account, and 'Turn Screen Time On.' One important thing: If you ever take them out of Family Sharing, your restrictions will be lifted. (Side note: Apple allows parental controls though Family Sharing until your kid is 18. Be sure their Apple ID birthdate is correct, because if they say they are older than they are, parental controls will be nulled.)

"After either way of setting up Screen Time, you can now choose all sorts of restrictions, starting with 'Downtime' and 'App Limits,' which both enforce screen time awareness and control. Create a passcode that your kid will not be able to guess, one they cannot easily find out when you enter it for them. This passcode will lock all changes in the Screen Time app, and also will lock the phone from a 'factory reset,' which would erase all restrictions you set. Beware, if you choose to turn off Screen Time, you will erase all your restrictions. If you want to give your kid more time on their phone or a particular app, do not turn off Screen Time. Instead, enter your passcode on their phone for the app for which you are granting more time.

"Lastly, in Screen Time, choose which apps you want to always allow—regardless of screen time limits—in case of emergencies. For example, the phone function cannot be disabled, along with any others you add to the list. This is not just for emergencies. If you want your kid to have limited time on Instagram, but to always be able to access their Kindle app, you can put that app here" (*Smartphone Sanity*, chapter 20, "Non-negotiables, Money, Location, and Time").

Similar controls for Android can be found in the GOOGLE FAMILY LINK APP. "If your kid has an Android phone, the Family Link app allows you to be aware of their total screen time, track their individual app time, and control their phone from your Android or iPhone."

"The Android screen time awareness and control feature is the Google Family Link app. If your kid has an Android phone, the Family Link app allows you to be aware of their total screen time, track their individual app time, and control their phone from your Android or iPhone.

"It costs NOTHING. It is also creepy how simple it is to set up. You will need to have access to your kid's phone to set it up.

"First, download the Google Family Link app from the App Store or the Family Link Manager App from the Google Play Store on your phone. When you open the app, it will run you through an orientation to ensure you have everything you need to set up the account.

"Then, it will prompt you to create a Google account for your kid. One weird Google rule: Family Link only works with Google accounts for children under 13 (or the relevant age as determined by applicable law in your jurisdiction). Once a child turns 13, they can continue to use Family Link if they choose to do so. You might have to adjust the age that you report to Google about your child, wink wink.

"To create an account, first create an email for them, and then a password, both of which they will know. Google ensures you are actually a parent by requiring a credit card number. They do not charge anything through Family Link, and your kid will not have access to your payment information. After making sure you have the correct set-up and then creating your kid's Google account, it is finally time to connect to your kid's phone.

"If you are setting up a new Android phone for your kid, follow the set-up instructions. When prompted for a Google account, set up a new one for your kid (under age 13). If you just made one for them in Family Link, use that account. Finish the rest of the set-up, in which you will download Family Link from the Google Play

Store on your kid's phone. You will then choose which apps to limit, along with other restrictions as prompted by the set-up program.

"If you are trying to set up Family Link on an existing Android phone, chances are your kid already has a Google account. If they are under 13 and have an account that is not under your parent account, they likely lied about their age to set up their account (since Google forces parent supervision to create an account for ages under 13). If they are older than 13, then Family Link won't do you much good, unfortunately. You can invite them to your family (and they will have to accept through an email they receive), but you won't be able to manage anything on their phone once they join unless you report a younger age for them to Google.

"Once you have set up a Family Link connection on your kid's phone, go back to your phone and open Family Link. Go to the tab in the app for your kid's phone and start setting the restrictions you see fit. The sections on 'Screen Time' and 'Daily Limits' are particularly relevant, as well as setting a 'Bedtime' when the phone will lock automatically" (*Smartphone Sanity*, chapter 20, "Non-negotiables, Money, Location, and Time").

There are many programs available that allow parents to control any devices that their children are allowed to use.

MMGuardian is one option. Pastor Chris Starr says,

"I personally use MMGuardian with my children and highly recommend it. It gives the parent total control of a phone. I have taken the route of allowing my children toward the end of their senior year to have one and teaching them how to use it with strong accountability, and good communication and management of it. Through MMguardian, you see all the websites they visit, you see all their text conversations, you can allow or not allow pictures to be sent via text.   You control

> what apps they can use, you can shut down the app store
> all together, you see who they called, how long they were
> on the phone. You can set time parameters of when they
> use the phone. If they see an inappropriate picture, it
> sends you as the parent an alert. You can track where
> they are at with the phone. It is the most thorough
> parental control app out there and it is user friendly."

Pastor Starr uses MMGuardian on Android phones. We have read that some of the features don't work on the iPhone, so anyone who is considering MMGuardian should look into that carefully.

Other examples of parental control packages are Qustodio, Norton Family Premier, Net Nanny, Famisafe, Family Shield OpenDNS, and Family Pro Shield. We cannot offer personal recommendations for these, but they are options that parents can explore.

Parents must beware of stealth apps and hidden apps.

There are apps, such as Private Photo and Secret Calculator, that allow users to hide photos under seemingly innocent apps. "They look and function like calculators; however, if you know the secret numerical code, the app opens up a hidden database for your kid to put photos and videos in. It also has a secret browser that is available" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

"You can also put apps deep inside folders where a parent's eyes might not look. We heard one story of some parents who grounded their son from Instagram and made him delete it. A few weeks later, at a dinner party, they were sharing how good he has been since deleting Instagram. The other parents at the party were confused, because they had been seeing the son's posts for weeks. He was still on Instagram; he had just hidden the app a few folders deep. Similarly, it is possible to create a transparent folder inside another transparent folder. This makes it look like there is no folder on your phone's

screen so you can hide apps in there. However, a list of all apps will be in the phone's settings" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

On an iPhone, app usage can be checked under Settings, Battery, Last 10 Days Usage.

Parents must beware of non-browser apps that allow access to the internet.

"Other apps have access to the internet and can therefore get access to an internet browser. For example, Google Maps. You can search for the Google headquarters inside Google Maps. It will take you to a landing page for Googleplex in Mountain View, CA. From there you can access Google's homepage, google.com. And now you are on the internet unfettered. From other apps you can click the Twitter social media icon. This will take you to Twitter. From Twitter you can search for Google. From the Google page on Twitter you can click google.com and thus gain unfettered access. Not all apps will give you access but many will" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Parents must beware of screen recording passwords.

Some apps allow you to record what happens on a phone's screen. Think of it like a video version of a screenshot. Therefore kids will turn on a screen recorder then hand their parents their phone so that the parent can unlock the phone with a password. They now have a video of the passcode, and they will use it--unbeknownst to their parent--to unlock and re-lock the phone when needed" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Parents must beware of burner phones.

"Finally, if they have limits on their phone, they may buy or be given their friend's old phone when that friend gets an upgrade. They will then hide this phone from you so that they can do whatever they want on their secret phone. Even without cell service this phone can do a lot on your WIFI. Most schools have a black market for these phones" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Parents must be very careful about their children's relationships with members of the opposite sex.

The pop culture is not wise and not safe.

> "There be three *things which* are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid" (Pr. 30:18-19).

> "And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her" (Ge. 34:1-2).

"Cell phones, emailing, and Facebook enabled our daughter to become engaged to someone she never met and move half a country away to be with him. That was three years ago. She may be married to him by now."

We think of a teenage girl in our church some years ago who showed a lot of promise for the Lord, but she began to be pursued by a young man, a fellow church member. No one had peace about it or thought it was a good match. Her parents were upset, and we met with all of them and supported the parents in warning the young man to stop contacting her. At first she said she wanted nothing to do with him, but he continued to call her and she continued to accept his calls. They started meeting in secret and eventually ran away together and had a child out of wedlock.

A Nepali girl recently told my wife her story. A man started calling her and wooing her. He told her that he had graduated from high school, had a good job, and didn't drink. Finally she ran away with him and quickly learned that he was lying about everything. He eventually left her for another woman. With a broken heart she said to my wife, "I shamed my parents; they don't want me back; I ruined my life."

A pastor friend told me about a girl who borrowed a SIM card from another person. An unknown male called that number and started talking to her. She unwisely continued conversing with him on the phone. When she tried to stop the conversations, the guy threatened to commit suicide if she didn't marry him, and eventually she eloped with him.

Parents must monitor the young person's attitude and character and be ready to do whatever is necessary to correct the problem.

This comes back to the importance of parents spending enough time with the young people so they know them and can discern what is happening in their lives.

Following are testimonies from parents that show how this works in regard to the use of cell phones and internet:

Testimony # 1

> "Our two oldest children are both saved now, and are usually very thoughtful of others. They will engage in conversation with old and young alike; and they are keen to serve and help people. However, when they started to play innocent games on the iPad, they would quickly become selfish and would become so glued into the iPad that they stopped noticing the needs of others around them. We eventually forbade them to play on it at all."

Testimony # 2

> "I have two teenagers--ages 15 and almost 16. We held out on them having a cell phone for their own personal use, but something always seems to happen to weaken that resolve. 'I got a new iPhone so why not pass our old ones down; after all, they need one when they start driving.' Or, 'We can get rid of our home phone and they can share the iPhone.' So many justifications. Our son had the first problem with Google. There are no protections or filters available that I know of. He wanted

to see pictures of pretty girls. Then my daughter went to camp and came home to reveal to me she was having a problem with music because she could Google any song. That was the start.

"Now, our son has no phone and no iPod. He is more content and can focus on what is important. He secretly became involved in Instagram and SnapChat, neither of which were pure and innocent. Social Media is so very dangerous to young people. Some might have the maturity to handle it, but we choose to make sure they have a right relationship with God before we allow any phones or iPods back into our son's hands.

"I was amazed at how deceitful our children could be, no matter how much we taught or how watchful we were. The lure is just too much for some. My daughter does have her phone back. She has a real desire to do right, but we hold her accountable and she puts it in our room every night before bedtime. She has no social media and isn't allowed to take it in her room. So far so good, but I really believe it has to do with her desire to do right and her relationship with God. If our young people want to please God, they will guard their hearts and minds, but it is our job as parents to guide them in this matter."

Testimony # 3

"We have a teen daughter whom we briefly allowed to have a smartphone and iPad. We took every precaution to shield and prevent her from accessing things that would be an ungodly influence in her life. We placed parental controls on both devices, performed regular and unannounced checks on each device to ensure nothing was going on behind our backs that should not have been. Most of the time, she would play games and watch YouTube tutorials and shows we approved. ...

"In the year we allowed her access to these devices, we had no 'real' problems except for the occasional

disobedience of getting on the device when she was not allowed to be on it (e.g. during school hours, because we homeschool). *Nevertheless, the one main, consistent, and overriding problem we encountered time and time again was the spirit these devices seemed to place over her. She went from having a sweet spirit in all her ways and relationships, to being lazy, selfish, sneaky, delayed in obedience (disobedience), disrespectful, and having a bad attitude.* NOW TO ANYONE ELSE, THEY WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SEE THE CHANGE AS IT WAS VERY SUBTLE. Someone would really have to know her to even recognize there was a change occurring. Thankfully, because we have homeschooled her throughout her life, I have the unique advantage of REALLY KNOWING WHO MY CHILDREN ARE and therefore can recognize the change quickly.

"For about a year, we went back and forth with her privilege to be on the phone and iPad. When finally I started to see a pattern emerge. When she was on the devices, she had an ugly spirit and character problems. When she was grounded from it, her sweet spirit returned and the character problems disappeared. So we decided that she was not ready for such devices because it was doing more harm than good. It's hard enough to raise godly children, and we don't need to add things that will make it that much more harder; it's foolishness! So we kept her off all these devices, and put a password on every electronic in the house for a year. If she needed Internet access, we logged into the computer for her and she did what needed to be done and logged off.

"After a year off electronics, we recently decided we would allow her access to her iPad (again) especially since it is now summertime. However, that did not last very long. After only a few weeks, we were starting to have very familiar character problems once again! I warned her; she'd shape up for a few days, and then back to warning, shaping up, and so forth. Last week, I

had my last straw and said we were back to no electronics. Boy, did this unleash a rebellious spirit in her that lasted for days! I faced her rebellion head on and refused to overlook any of it. If it meant losing my sanity to fix the problem, then so be it. She is worth it! Finally, she got over her rebellion of losing the iPad, and now we're back to seeing a sweet spirit once again. I just informed her that we would not be introducing anymore personal electronics if that's the spirit we encounter when it gets taken away. Obviously, she is not mature enough to handle such a privilege. If personal electronics become a god in your life, then it's foolishness for us to allow you to have it. Sometimes there are things in life that, on the surface, seem to add quality and convenience to our lives, but in reality it only brings a multitude of heartache! I'm sure she did not like to hear this, but that's of no concern. We will be her parents first and foremost, even if it makes us unpopular!"

Parents should help fill up the children's lives with good things.

Christian homes that raise happy, healthy, dedicated Christian youth are homes that are filled with God's Word and also filled with every blessing of life.

Consider R.A. Torrey, who was an evangelist who conducted worldwide crusades and also pastored Moody Church and was the head of Moody Bible Institute and later the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola). He married Clara Smith in 1878, when he was 23, and they had four girls (Edith Clare, Blanche, Elizabeth, Margaret) and one boy (Reuben). All of the children served the Lord, and Reuben and his wife Janet were missionaries in China and Korea for 46 years.

The Word of God had first place in the Torrey home. Torrey loved to teach the Bible, and he continually taught it to his own family. So did Clara. She taught Sunday School and ladie's' classes, but her first and foremost pupils were her

own children. There was an emphasis on church life. The children were taught to be faithful to the house of God and to be active in service. There was strict separation from evil things.

But the family also had a lot of all-around wholesome fun. (An emphasis on separation and rules without wholesome enjoyment tends to produce hypocrisy and rebellion. And an emphasis on fun apart from a priority on the Word of God and separation simply produces a "clean," Christianized version of the world that results in lifestyles centered on having fun rather than on pilgrim lifestyles that are characterized by surrender, self-sacrifice, and a passion for fulfilling the Great Commission.)

Following is a description of the Torrey home:

> "Torrey's relationship with each member of his family was one of warmth, love, and enjoyment. They were a very closely knit household and were as happy as any family could be. Each member of the family, although widely differing in personality, was very devoted to both his or her father and mother. ...

> "Torrey ruled his household with a firm but tender hand. He took heed to the injunction that 'a bishop must then be blameless ... one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity' (1 Ti. 3:2, 4). ... Family devotions were always held immediately after breakfast. ... He endeavored to instill within them a true love for the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God. He also kept a careful watch over the friendships the children formed realizing the tremendous influence of bad companions. ... He laid down a few principles of action but not a lot of laws as to what they should or should not do. He did not always explain the 'why' of these, as he wanted them to learn the principle of authority. ...

> "The devoted attitude of the children toward their parents is reflected in an incident involving Blanche. ...

Blanche was offered two tickets [to a Sunday gathering featuring President William McKinley and famous U.S. Navy Commodore Dewey], but she refused them. Her astonished teacher asked, 'Did your father forbid you to go?' 'No,' she replied, 'but I don't think it would please him if I did, so I am not going.' The children gladly accepted the principles which their parents laid down for them.

"As Reuben in later years recalled, 'We did not resent the fact that theaters, dancing, and the like were denied us, for two reasons. First, the reasons why these were not countenanced were fully explained. ... Second, we realized how continually our parents were endeavoring to meet the youthful craving for pleasurable activity and excitement by making possible good times that were wholesome and normal. What dance could compare with the thrill of meeting Father in Lincoln Park for an afternoon's skate and the jolly tramp home as the old gas lamps began to twinkle? Who cared to sit in stuffy theaters when there were art galleries and museums to visit with one who appreciated them so keenly and knew so much of history and science.'

"Torrey scheduled certain times to be with his children on their time. On Saturday afternoon it was either hunting, fishing, swimming, hiking, canoeing, golfing, horseback riding ... picnicking, or tennis in the summer. Ice skating was the favorite in the winter. ... The family also enjoyed frequent visits to zoos, museums, art galleries, and other places of interest. Whatever his schedule, he scrupulously observed Monday night as a family time. How delighted the children were to hear their father tell them stories and play such then-popular games as Upjenks, Rook, Crockenole, and Pillow Dex. ...

"Torrey's devotedness to his children was great, but it did not compare to the deep attachment which he had for his wife Clara. ... Whenever possible, she always went with him in his journeys. When he was away from

her, the daily letter was a must no matter how pressing the duties. A birthday or wedding anniversary was never forgotten" (Roger Martin, *R.A. Torrey, Apostle of Certainty*).

We deal with how to fill one's life and home with good things in *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church*, chapter "The Youth" in the section on "Pursue Christian Growth" We deal with Bible study, good music, good sermons, good videos, Christian service, reading and learning, photography, and other things.

See: www.wayoflife.org/mobile/

Parents must have a long-range vision.

Parents must understand that standards and rules are not an end in themselves. They are simply tools for spiritual protection. They are a necessary part of creating an environment for salvation and spiritual growth.

The biblical goal of child training is to introduce the child to Christ for salvation and to get him started in proving that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. It is to provide him or her with a good biblical foundation on which to build a Christian life that pleases God. It is to give him or her the tools for pursuing the will of God as a lifelong project.

"What you must understand is that this is not EITHER your kid has a phone with full freedom OR has no phone at all. Instead this is a journey of growth with a destination of independence" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

The parenting goal in the Facebook age is both to protect the children in their immaturity and inexperience and also teach them how to use technology in a wise and safe way as they move into adulthood and are on their own.

"I personally use MMGuardian with my children and highly recommend it. It gives the parent total control of a phone. **I have taken the route of allowing my children toward the end of their senior year to have**

one and teaching them how to use it with strong accountability, and good communication and management of it. Through MMguardian, you see all the websites they visit, you see all their text conversations, you can allow or not allow pictures to be sent via text. You control what apps they can use, you can shut down the app store all together, you see who they called, how long they were on the phone. You can set time parameters of when they use the phone. If they see an inappropriate picture, it sends you as the parent an alert. You can track where they are at with the phone. It is the most thorough parental control app out there and it is user friendly" (Pastor Randy Starr).

Suggestions for Churches

Churches that want to help protect their members from spiritual and moral danger in these times must be deeply involved with this issue.

1. Building biblical families.

- Spiritual safety in the Facebook age begins with strong New Testament churches that build biblical families. The home is the chief battle ground. If the fathers aren't the spiritual heads, and the mothers aren't the keepers of the home, and if the children are not being disciplined and discipled effectually, and if the home is not separated from the world, the church will have a very uphill battle in discipling the youth and protecting them in the Facebook Age.

- So building biblical families must be the focus of every church.

2. Serious youth discipleship.

- The church's commission is to build up every member to perfection in Christ (Col. 1:28). This includes the youth, obviously. This is a full-time job. There is no commission for a fun and games program. In the vast majority of cases, youth

people today have no dearth of fun and games. Why should the churches provide even more!

- Serious discipleship focuses on making sure that every youth is truly saved. We are extremely focused on this and careful about this. We constantly emphasize it. We teach the gospel in great detail and from every angle. We look for clear biblical evidence.

- Serious discipleship focuses on making the youth real Bible students. We are teaching *Understanding the Bible for Yourself* to our youth (beginning in the January 2020 youth conference). This is a seminary level course, but we have found that young people can gain a lot from it. We emphasize a daily Bible reading program. We use the weekly memory verse meditation journal (www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/memory_verse_journal.php).

- Serious discipleship requires a thorough-going Bible education. The equivalent of a Bible institute education is the beginning of the type of education that is essential for a fruitful Christian life in God's will. We do everything we can to provide this education and to motivate the youth to pursue it all their lives. We have a full-time Bible college. We operate a bookstore that is stocked with sound biblical education. We offer supervised courses that the church members can take.

- Serious discipleship requires a strong ministry of God's Word. In our Bible college, we emphasize expository Bible preaching.

- Serious discipleship focuses on practical Bible training. We have a one-on-one program and use the *One Year Discipleship Course.*

- Serious discipleship focuses on pursuing God's perfect will (Romans 12). This chapter gives a summary of and the outline for proving that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The fundamentals are surrender and self-sacrifice, separation from the world, transformation of life by the renewing of the mind through God's Word, passionate

service. This is not something that can be taught once in awhile. These are things that must be woven into every aspect of the church's ministry to young people. It must be the focus. It must be the theme song. And it must be the standard. Only young people who are walking the path of Romans 12 should be allowed to serve in any ministry. This way the serious youth become the example and the standard, and the other youth can be drawn up toward that standard.

- Serious discipleship requires spending a lot of time with the youth. We have weekly men's meetings, monthly youth meetings, and four-day Bible conferences about three times a year.

- Serious discipleship requires a focus on Christ's Great Commission. This is God's chief business on earth. It is the most important business. God's will requires finding your place in this great business. Our annual missions conferences are our most important conferences, and God has used them to bring many young people to full surrender of their lives to His great business.

3. Practical protection measures

- We have dealt with these under "Suggestions for Young Adults."

- Consider not having a smartphone

- If you do have a smartphone, control it ruthlessly; have a wise mindset that you are going to control technology, it is not going to control you.

- Remove everything that is contrary to God's will

- Nest unnecessary apps into folders

- Don't be addicted to a constant stream of information

- Take every precaution in accessing the internet

- Have regular times when you unplug

- Don't play around with the world's music

- Avoid video games

- Be extremely wary of social media

- Redeem the time

- Don't live a secret life

- Have an accountability partner.

- Consider setting up a church-wide accountability program. See "Church Smartphone Accountability Program," www.wayoflife.org.

Scriptures Pertaining to Spiritual Protection

The following are some of the Scriptures that teach the way of spiritual victory. These are good choices for memory verses for young people.

The student can do a profitable personal study of these by answering the following questions:

- What is the context of this verse? (Who wrote it? To whom was it written? What is the historical situation?) The Bible student can get a good start in learning how to do this through *Understanding the Bible for Yourself*, available from www.wayoflife.org.

- What is the meaning of any difficult words? (use the *Bible Believer's Dictionary*)

- What is the main meaning of this verse or passage in my own words?

- What are some lessons from this verse or passage for my daily life?

- What are some other verses that help me understand this verse or passage? (use the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*)

- What helpful things did I find in Bible commentaries about this verse or passage?

Abide in Christ

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that

abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (Joh. 15:4-5).

Meditate on Christ

" Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is,* there *is* liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Co. 3:17-18).

Put Off the Old Man

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof* " (Ro. 13:14).

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

Walk in the Spirit

"*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Ro. 8:1).

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Ro. 8:12-14).

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Ga. 5:16-18).

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Ga. 5:25).

Keep a Sober Mind (vigilant, cautious, a testing mindset, guarding one's mind, setting one's affection on things above, a pilgrim mind)

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil" (Pr. 4:23-27).

"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going" (Pr. 14:15).

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Ac. 17:11).

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Co. 10:5).

"Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:10).

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15).

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

"Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Th. 5:6).

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Th. 5:21).

"... that women adorn themselves ... with shamefacedness and sobriety" (1 Ti. 2:9).

"That they may teach the young women to be sober..." (Tit. 2:4).

"Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded" (Tit. 2:6).

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them,* and embraced *them,* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

"Whose adorning ... *let it be ... the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pe. 3:3-4).

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Pe. 4:7).

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pe. 5:8).

Separate From Evil

"Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: *but* thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it *is* a cursed thing" (De. 7:26).

"Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (Ps. 1:1).

"I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers" (Ps. 26:4).

"I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; *it* shall not cleave to me" (Ps. 101:3).

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil *men.* Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Pr. 4:14-15).

"To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman *a man is brought* to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take

fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Pr. 6:24-27).

"Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen ..." (Jer. 10:2).

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Ro. 12:2).

"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying" (Ro. 13:13).

"Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Co. 5:6-7).

"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Co. 10:21).

"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Co. 15:33).

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them;* and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing;* and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Co.. 6:14-18).

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Co. 7:1).

"Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27).

"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:6-8).

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11).

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them" (Col. 3:5-7).

"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:3-5).

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Ti. 2:22).

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:12).

"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27).

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4).

"As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance" (1 Pe. 1:14).

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1 Pe. 2:1).

"Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pe. 2:11).

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pe. 4:1-3).

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 Jo. 2:15-17).

Church Smartphone Accountability Program

For the most up-to-date edition of this report see "Church Smartphone Accountability Program," www.wayoflife.org.

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The church should help oversee young people who want to do right. It can't help rebels in this way, except for preaching and prayer, but for those young people who love the Lord and are wise and want help to stay safe, the church should be intimately involved in their lives. God's Word commands this.

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).

Our church is starting a phone accountability program for those who want this help.

Many people are waking up to the moral danger of the smartphone age and are taking steps to protect themselves and their families. Jesse Weinberger, who teaches internet safety to thousands of parents and teachers each year, says,

> "As parents raising 21st century digital citizens, it is critical that we become educated in order to understand the reality of where our children live, who they interact with, and who they become once they enter the digital sphere. ... The entire landscape of parenting has changed; some for the better, much for the worse. AD era (After Digital) parenting holds all of the same issues from the BD (Before Digital) era, plus a full slate of new ones. ... The constantly changing landscape of digital risks demands constant parental engagement" (*The Boogeyman Exists, And He's in Your Child's Back Pocket*).

Many families are making "Family Phone Agreements." A sample is as follows (from *Smartphone Sanity*):

   - Parents have full access to any phone at any time.

   - No sneaky apps designed to hide or keep secrets.

   - Calls from parents are answered or responded to in a certain time period we decide.

   - GPS location services are on for our family.

   - No pornography and no sexting.

   - No dating or 'hook-up" apps.

   - We will not use our phones to bully or gossip.

   - No abusing or inappropriate language communicated through this device.

   - Handle phones legally (not while driving, etc.).

   - Respect the parameters of the family data plan.

   - Be wise.

If unbelievers and evangelical and denominational Christians are taking such steps, how much more should Bible-believing fundamentalists and Baptists!

Spiritually mature men who understand the technology are assigned to oversee the phones of other men who want to sign up for the program. Each participant is assigned to one of the overseers. The overseer has all passwords and has complete access to the phones, laptops, etc. He can ask to see the devices any time.

Church members sign up on a freewill basis. Without a personal and strong desire to live a holy life in God's will, no accountability program will work.

One of the benefits of this program is that it keeps the issue of internet danger before the church, and keeps the church informed and communicating about this.

An accountability ministry is a "one another" ministry

The Christian life is not a solitary life lived for self. It is a family life lived with others and for others. I *am* my brother's keeper!

"admonish one another" (Ro. 15:14)

"by love serve one another" (Ga. 5:13)

"bear ye one another's burdens" (Ga. 6:2)

"forbearing one another, and forgiving one another" (Col. 3:13)

"teaching and admonishing one another" (Col. 3:16)

"edify one another" (1 Th. 5:11)

"consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24)

"exhort one another" (Heb. 3:13; 10:25)

Preparation

We spent many weeks preparing for this by teaching in the weekly men's meeting on surrender, holy living, seeking God's will, being transformed by the renewing of the mind by God's Word, controlling the emotions, and the importance of separation from evil, all with a strong application to internet dangers. Some of the studies we taught are in the course *Spiritual Safety in the Facebook Age*, www.wayoflife.org.

Another thing we emphasized is the blessing of God's will. See, for example, Ps. 16:11; 37:4, 10; Joh. 10:10; 1 Ti. 6:17; Jas. 1:17. A holy life as a pilgrim believer is a blessing-filled life. Within the protective boundaries of God's will are massive blessings. There is liberty to do anything that is good, and that is a very long list.

The program must be explained carefully to the church and discussed and fine-tuned according to the feedback. Emphasize that the purpose is for protection, not control. The adult participants must not be treated like children or like they are in a prison. The overseers of the accountability program are not prison guards, they are friends in Christ.

Overseers

Overseers are selected on the basis of how many members sign up for oversight. Ideally, an overseer should not be responsible for more than three or four people so that he can give proper attention to this.

The overseers should be chosen and assigned with wisdom. They must be spiritually mature and wise enough to shepherd the individuals under their care, and they must know enough about technology to be an effectual overseer. They must know how to check for new apps, browser histories, etc.

They must have knowledge of protection tools such as AppLock (an Android app that can be used to control select apps), web browser filters (e.g. CleanInternet), Covenant Eyes, and parental control software (e.g., Qustodio, Norton Online Family, Family Shield OpenDNS, Family Pro Shield).

The major spiritual qualifications of an overseer in this program are found in Romans 15:14. Here we see two things that are necessary for the effectual function of admonishing others. First, there must be goodness, which refers to a good Christian character and testimony. Second, there must be knowledge, which refers to knowledge of God's Word and God's will. If an individual lacks goodness, lacks a good testimony, he can't effectively admonish others because they won't take him seriously. If he lacks Bible knowledge he will not have the wisdom to admonish in a right way.

Participants

The individual who joins the program promises not to hide anything and to avoid visiting wrong sites or looking at wrong things. He agrees to obey God's command to set no wicked thing before his eyes (Ps. 101:3), to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), and to avoid evil communications (1 Co. 15:33).

He agrees that the overseer will have access to all areas of his phone, tablet, laptop, etc.

He agrees not to delete the history of internet use, such as browsing history. He agrees not to use browsers such as Tor or Epic or SRWare Iron that do not leave a history and agrees not to use private modes in browsers (such as Chrome's incognito mode) that do not leave a history.   (These are unofficially called "porn modes.") He agrees not to use secret IDs to log in to YouTube, etc., that are kept from his overseer. There should be no deleting of photos and videos and music except when they were received as unwelcome intrusions, such as sent by someone via text or WhatsApp. In other words, the deletions should not be for the purpose of hiding sin. When using the YouTube app, he/she will log in so that a history is maintained.

The participants should be categorized by age and situation and treated accordingly. For example, married people cannot be treated the same as single ones. Married people should have more privacy. For example, married people's communication with their spouses should be strictly private, but single people should not have intimate communication with members of the opposite sex other than close relatives. In fact, every person in the program must be treated as an individual.

The program

The overseer starts by meeting with each individual under his care to develop a plan for how he is going to supervise that individual. The overseer must be firm and protecting but not overly forceful. If he forces the individual to do something against his will, it won't work, because there are endless ways to get around supervision. From beginning to end, the program must be free will. In general, the overseer talks with the individual to find out how he is currently using his phone and other devices, in what legitimate and good ways, and tries to work out a plan so that the individual can use his devices for good but not for sin. Following are some of the things that should be done in the first meeting:

- At the very beginning, the individual must agree to keep everything open, to have no secrets on his devices, to not delete things in order to hide wrongdoing, to allow the overseer to check his phone at any time, and to communicate with the overseer to seek help if he is experiencing problems.

- Find out all of the ways the individual currently uses his phone and/or other devices.

- Ask if the individual has experienced any special temptations pertaining to the use of his devices.

- Thoroughly examine the individual's phone and other devices. First check overall usage for last ten days. (On an iPhone, screen time can be checked easily by going to Settings >> Battery >> "Last 10 Days.") Then look at every app and find out its function and how the individual uses it.

- Decide on a plan: What apps will be kept? How will they be used? Will something like Covenant Eyes be installed? Will a browser filter be installed? Some individuals should have no use of a web browser, for example, while others should have access to it. The overseer can recommend using the aforementioned protection tools for controlling and filtering.

- Pray together about the program and ask God's help.

The main thing is to treat each participant as an individual and have good communication and rapport with that individual. The individual's age, spiritual maturity, and background must be taken into consideration. If an individual has had problems with pornography in the past, for example, he should desire and should be given closer supervision.

The overseer commits to be mindful of the men under his care, to pray for them, and to be observant of them. He will meet each individual under his care at various times (irregular and unexpected, ideally) and do the following things: inquire about the individual's situation and how he is doing with the Lord; look to see what apps are installed;

check overall smartphone use (Settings >> Battery >> "Last 10 Days); check histories (browsers, YouTube, photos, calls, etc.); perhaps look at photos and videos (this depends on each individual's situation, as we have discussed); and pray with the individual. The overseer doesn't read the individual's private communication (e.g., email, SMS, WhatsApp), but he does try to get an idea with whom the individual is communicating. The overseer must allow the individual to explain any particular aspect of his devices and internet use that might be questionable and not be hasty to condemn.

The overseers give reports to the church leaders so they can be informed about what is happening.

The Attitude

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of the right attitude on the part of the church leaders and the overseers of this program. If the participants feel that they are being treated with true Christian love, kindness, patience, mercy, and wisdom, if they feel that the overseers are truly wanting to help and protect them and not to dominate them, they will benefit from the program and will want to continue to participate in it. Otherwise, it will be a short-lived thing.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2).

The author of the previously cited Family Phone Agreement observes, "This agreement is a WIP, a work in progress. It will need to be adjusted as time goes on."

Feedback and Adjustment

For this type of program to work, there must be good feedback and adjustment. It can't be set up and forgotten.

Each church in each place and time is different, and a program like this must be well adapted to the church's particular situation.

What devices are being used? What are the most popular apps, internet sites, social media, etc., in that place? What are the main ways that young people in that place are using technology? Are the men happy with the program? Do they want to continue? Do they have suggestions for improvement?

Plus the technology is constantly changing and God's people must be aware of what is happening and be in control of the technology rather than allowing the technology to control them.

Beware of Video Games

The most up-to-date edition of this report will be at the Way of Life web site. See: https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/beware_of_video_games.php

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> "Some studies suggest that gaming is absolutely taking over the minds of children all together."

> "Virtual life becomes more appealing than real life."

A father approached me at a Bible conference recently and said that his teenage daughter begs him every day to allow her to use his smartphone to play a video game, because "she needs to relax." I told him that there are far better and safer options for "relaxing" than video games. The dangers are multitudinous as we document in this report: addiction, the slippery slope of being drawn into less innocent games, using smartphone time to access any number of dangerous platforms, such as Snapchat or TikTok, and being drawn into the toxic world of teenage social media.

The first commercially successful video game was *Space Invaders*, which appeared in 1978. By 1982, *Space Invaders* was the biggest money making entertainment product in the U.S. It was only available in gaming arcades and was sold in little chunks of time that cost 25 cents, but it earned more than $2 billion! Soon, video games were earning $5 billion a year. In the early 1980s, the first personal video gaming consoles appeared. By 1982, Atari was the fastest growing company in America.

The most popular video games for 2020 are *Minecraft* (users can create their own virtual reality worlds; it has sold 180 million copies since 2011 and has 112 million monthly active players), *Fortnite* (online shooter game, 125 million

players per year), GTA *Grand Theft Auto V* (hyper-violent game that includes auto theft, reckless driving, gang wars, and murder), *Rainbow Six Siege* (shooter game), *Super Smash Bros* (fighting game), *Red Dead Redemption II* (western-style violent game), *Overwatch* (multiplayer shooter game), *Rocket League* (vehicular soccer game), *League of Legends* (multiplayer online battle game "inspired by *World of Warcraft*"), *PayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (violent war game in which 100 players battle to the death), *Counter-Strike Global Offensive* (terrorist, counter-terrorist), *Call of Duty* (special forces missions), *Legend of Zelda* (occultic action-adventure), *Spider-Man* (super powers), *Elder Scrolls* (violent occultic action-adventure, dragons, super powers).

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) has made billions of dollars. *Grand Theft Auto V* has made more than any movie in history.

Many of the most popular YouTube channels are video game oriented. The top YouTube celebrity is Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie), a gamer with 102 million subscribers. The most popular YouTube channels also include gamers JuegaGerman (37 million), El Rubius (36 million), Fernanfloo (34 million), Evan Fong (23 million), Markiplier (20 million), Jacksepticeye (19 million), DanTDM (19 million), PopularMMOs (14 million), Captain Sparklez (10 million), The Game Theorists (10 million), H20Delirious (10 million), I Am Wildcat (6 million), Game Grumps (4.5 million).

Some have become millionaires via their YouTube channels. The number of social media followers is called social currency, but it can be converted to real currency if it is large enough. Businesses will pay social media stars to advertise and review their products. Since 2012, PewDiePie has made about $90 million through the social currency of his YouTube gaming channel. All he does is video record himself playing games with a running commentary.

In 2019, some of the top YouTube earners other than PewDiePie were Dan Middelton ($18.5 million per year), Mark Fischbach ($17.5 million), Evan Fong ($17 million), Luis Alvarado ($16 million), Sean McLaughlin ($23 million), Alastair Aiken ($7 million), JuegaGerman ($6 million), Guillermo Diaz ($5 million), Samuel de Luque ($4 million).

Just like the video games themselves, most gaming channels are filled with filthy language, blasphemy, immodesty, the occult, and violence.

"YouTube stars/influencers can normalize wrong beliefs or behaviors all to make a little cash" (*Smartphone Sanity*).

Video Games and Addiction

While there are video games that are relatively innocent and might be used in wise and godly moderation, these are not the most popular ones, and even with these there is always the danger that video gaming will become an addictive waste of life's fleeting hours.

"Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Pr. 27:20).

There is also the ever-present danger of getting drawn into truly wicked games. A former gamer says, "Visiting families, I've seen 'innocent' children's games having advertisements for violent games that showed texts like 'kill' or 'headshot,' including the bloody graphics. Other advertisements contained gambling, women with very few clothes on, and so on. I've yet to see the first video game on a smartphone/tablet that doesn't have such advertising."

The following note is from a reader who saw a warning about addiction to video games in our weekly publication, Friday Church News Notes:

> "I am writing with a heavy heart. Your Church Notes on the video and computer games is true. I see video games and movies have taken over the children's lives in my church. Our preacher preaches against it all and sets the

best example. As a matter of fact, when we travel, we haven't found a better church than ours. I just have seen so much TV and video games creep into homes and then it gets uncontrollable. The moms say they allow this because they don't want to let their children out into the world and they don't want them to be bored. [Note from Brother Cloud: How unreasonable it is to bring the world into the home in the name of keeping kids out of the world!] The sad thing is that it overtakes their lives and I am observing that when the children are getting into their teens and even 18, 19, 20, 21, etc., they are even deeper into the video games. Yes, 21-year-olds spending every free second playing X Box, Play Station, Nintendo, etc. These same young people, when it comes to the church services, don't sing the hymns, sit on the back pew, and don't seem to care much about the things of God. They get up several times during the preaching service to get a drink of water. It's so sad."

A young person sent the following testimony:

"I am writing to tell you how much I appreciate your ministry. I am a homeschooled student and I have used your articles numerous times for researching various subjects and issues. I am especially glad, however, that you warn people about video games and their destructive influence and overall effect on the players. Unfortunately, many people I know have been sucked into the video game world and are consequently wasting their lives. Even if a video game has nothing obviously unbiblical it still has that destructive influence. I know of several people at my church who play video games. What I can't understand is why they can't spend their time in a more profitable way. If they need excitement or entertainment they could just read some good books, but then video game playing and reading don't really go hand in hand. Video games are too unrealistically violent and exciting and draw them away [from reality]. Earlier this month a friend told me how her two

brothers spent the whole day with lots of other boys playing video games together. She said they all sat completely mesmerized while staring at their computer screens. Communication was achieved by instant messaging rather than actual speaking. It is very sad. Countless people are wasting their lives pursuing this vain employment. I pray with all my heart they will realize their error and seek the Lord. I am truly grateful for comments on this topic."

These testimonies were written in the 1990s, and the situation has gotten a great deal worse since then.

Video games are so addictive that thousands of husbands and wives have been virtually abandoned for make-believe games played in cyberspace. In other words, they have been abandoned for nothing, for a figment of the imagination, for pixels on a screen, for less than soap bubbles.

An article on MSNBC.com was titled "Game Widows Grieve Lost Spouses." Consider an excerpt:

"Though their spouses and partners haven't gone to the great beyond, these particular widows and widowers say their loved ones have gone someplace that's almost as distant and unreachable. Some have left this world for the 'World of Warcraft,' others have forsaken this life for 'Second Life' and still others have been taken away by 'EverQuest,' 'Final Fantasy XI' and 'Dark Age of Camelot.' ... As the ranks of those playing video games in general--and massively multiplayer online games in particular--continue to grow, so grow the ranks of those who refer to themselves as 'game widows.' They are the husbands, wives, girlfriends and boyfriends of gamers whose playing habits have consumed their lives. The bereaved say their mates have suffered a kind of digital death that has left only the shell of the person they loved behind. And like a real death, it has left the people who remain heartbroken, scared and angry."

Video games were addictive from their inception. A *Washington Post* reporter assigned to try *Space Invaders* in 1980 said, "I dropped in a quarter and saw 55 rectangles waving little arms and dropping laser bombs on earth, which is at the bottom of the screen. I fired back with my three laser bases, which got bombed out in about 30 seconds. ... I was still pounding on the FIRE button at the end of the game. End of quarter. Start of addiction." That report stated, "It's like drugs. They'll tell you: 'I got a $4-a-day habit.'" In 1981, Dr. Robert Millman told *The New York Times* that video games were like "sniffing glue" and were "a seductive world."

Video games are designed to be addictive. The developers and markets are in the business for money. They are not innocent promoters of entertainment. They will steal your time, your heart, your holiness.

The multi-player online video games are so addictive that they are likened to drugs. *EverQuest* is called "never rest" and "ever crack," *World of Warcraft* is called World of War Crack, *Halo 3* is called Halodiction.

The most addictive games in 2015 were the following: *Madden*, *Dota 2*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Tetris*, *Candy Crush Saga* (the company is valued at $7.5 billion), *Minecraft*, *EverQuest*, *The Sims* (player has omnipotent control over people), *World of Warcraft*, *Call of Duty* (the last two are played by more than 100 million players), *Halo 3*, *Total War*, *Pong*, *Civilization*, *Diablo 3*, *Super Meat Boy*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Dark Souls 2*, *Counter Strike*, *Starcraft 2*, *Persona 4 Golden*, *Monster Hunter 3*, *Elder Scrolls*, *Angry Birds*, *Faster Than Light*, *Peggle*, *League of Legends*, *Civilization V*, *Pokemon*.

The most addictive and dangerous are the MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing) games. Nothing takes over young people's hearts and minds more than these.

Even in remote places like Nepal, gaming competition is becoming popular. A report on Nepali gamers in the *Kathmandu Post* (Aug. 29, 2015) was entitled "By Their

Bootstraps." Gaming started in Nepal in internet cafes in 2010. The 2015 Colors E-sports Carnival at the Civil Mall had 500 participants competing at *Defense of the Ancients* (DOTA), a multi-online battle game.

A young man in our church didn't start growing spiritually until he gave up online multi-player video gaming. He attended church faithfully for about a year and seemed to love the Bible teaching, but he wasn't making any real progress in his spiritual life. We didn't know about his video gaming addiction. Since giving it up, he has made great strides. He left his secular education to join our Bible college.

A former gamer in the Netherlands describes the way that the gaming companies create addictions:

> "First off, you need to know that at the fundamental background of all MMO's, video games (whether PC or console), and smartphone games are the statistics. They keep track of what level peoples' characters are, what items they collected, what items they buy, how long it takes them to get said items, and the list goes on and on. They use the statistics for targeted advertising, bringing out more items that sell well, and above all they use it to know when to release new content.

> "If you release content too early, people can't play it. If you release it too late, people quit and play another game. Unfortunately, video game makers are masters at this and know exactly when to release new content. Usually the timing is just before the majority of players finish the old content.

> "For the 'hardcore' players like me, they use 'grinding' which is just another word for 'running the treadmill.' They need special content to keep players like me hooked because we finish game content too fast. The game makers give you group based content called instances or raids in which you have to take down powerful bosses. This requires a lot of coordination and tactics and isn't easy. Defeating a boss means you can get

your character special armour such as chest, legs, boots, gloves, helmet and cloak or swords, axes, bows, ingame currency, and the list goes on. To get all the items you have to play for months and then of course new content comes and the whole 'grinding' starts all over again and again and again and again.

"Nowadays almost all games whether on PC, console, or smartphone have the aforementioned addictive components and then some. Their goal, of course, is to make as much money as possible.

There are differences between each game but here's how they do it:

1. Early in the game they don't bother you much. You get free coins, rubies, diamonds or whatever ingame currency they use to give you a head start. It's just enough to keep you playing for a while but not too much. The goal is to get you 'hooked.'

2. Once they have you 'hooked' they start throwing up 'roadblocks.' There generally are three ways to get past those 'roadblocks.' One, you have to 'grind' or start "running the treadmill" and you get it for 'free.' They hope it gets too tedious for you to do, cave in and buy some ingame currency. Two, you buy ingame currency to buy yourself past the 'roadblock.' Three, you have to watch an advertisement which of course makes the game maker money. The goal of course is to keep you 'hooked.'

3. They sell you treasure chests which if you open have items in it. Sometimes you get them for free but most times you don't and you have to open them with ingame currency. Most times you get basic items but occasionally you get rare items and you have an infinitesimal small chance on getting extremely rare items. The last category is basically the 'jackpot' and are the most coveted items. The goal is to make you keep buying treasure chests to get the aforementioned jackpot.

"Playing video games will cause you to waste more and more time playing your game and spend less and less time on Bible reading, Bible study, prayer, going to church, or you'll just end up pretending and secretly play during the sermon. No Christian man, woman or child is above sin and thereby is not above becoming addicted to video games. You need to know that game makers STUDY YOU! They study human psychology! They know what makes humans tick and they know how to get you addicted. I've been addicted to games and I know this to be true" ("Testimony of a Video Gamer," www.wayoflife.org).

Video Games and Moral Relativism

Another warning that we would give about video games is that many of them are programmed with relativistic moral choices.

These choices include such things as decisions as whether to kill a person or to save him, to help terrorists or to resist them, to break the law or to obey it. Many games allow the player to take on both good and bad personas.

We are told that "unstructured, open-ended play gives gamers a great deal of choice about how to behave in video games" ("Real moral choices in virtual game worlds," *The Guardian*, Aug. 16, 2007).

The games promote moral relativism or situational ethics, the idea that morality changes according to the circumstances. Examples of these games are *System Shock* and *BioShock* produced by Irrational Games. Ken Levine, president of the company, says cutting-edge gaming programmers are constructing "moral playgrounds," which are places in which people "can explore different philosophies, principles and personalities."

The situation ethics is also seen in such games as *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. The characters in this game are "all entirely lacking in principle." You can "murder someone's

family and steal from their shop and then give them a load of cash and they would treat you as a long-lost friend."

From a biblical perspective, this is dangerous for at least two reasons.

First, man's fallen heart, which is naturally attracted to sin and rebellion, can be fed and enflamed.

> "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Ro. 6:16).

> "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15).

When a young person is allowed to live in a make-believe video world in which he can choose to commit evil without any real-life consequences, he is feeding and enflaming his old nature and is becoming a slave in the process.

Second, there is the danger of demonic deception and control. He is "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Re. 12:9). He is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). He is the ruler "of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12). He walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pe. 5:8). He blinds the minds of them which believe not (2 Co. 4:4). He must be actively fought with "the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11-19).

The human imagination is a major spiritual and moral battleground. If used in a wise and godly way, the imagination can produce spiritual growth. The believer finds the will of God by "renewing the mind" (Ro. 12:2) and by "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that

exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Co. 10:5).

If abused, though, the imagination can descend into increasingly dark territory. Romans 1:21 associates vain imaginations with a darkening of the heart, and vain imaginings is an accurate description of most video games. The Bible warns that those who do not "retain God in their knowledge" are given over to a reprobate mind (Ro. 1:28), because anything that takes the place of God in man's heart and life is an idol, and God hates idols (Ex. 20:3). I would strongly suspect that most young people who become immersed in video games are not retaining God in their knowledge during that endeavor, to say the least.

In light of the Bible's warnings about the possibility of enslavement to the old nature and demonic deception in the imagination, the moral relativism in video games is a recipe for spiritual disaster.

Video Games and Violence

Many video games are very violent.

One of the most popular is *Grand Theft Auto*. Players assume the role of lawless, destructive criminals who kill innocent bystanders, policemen, and military personnel, "while dealing with only temporary consequences." It has been called a cop-killing training machine. Some of the versions require the player to torture people in brutal ways to advance to new levels. Sexual elements include hiring and killing prostitutes (by means of the player's choice of fist, machete, bat, or gun). "Grand Theft Auto is a world governed by the laws of depravity. See a car you like? Steal it. Someone you don't like? Stomp her. A cop in your way? Blow him away. There are police at every turn, and endless opportunities to take them down. It is 360 degrees of murder

and mayhem" ("Can a Video Game Lead to Murder?" 60 Minutes, June 17, 2005).

Real life murders have been committed by people who were obsessive players of *Grand Theft Auto* and have even admitted to being inspired by the game.

Video Games and the Occult

Many of the video games are occultic.

The following is excerpted from "Escaping Reality: The Danger of Role-playing Games," Vince Londini, March 22, 2005.

> Growing up in an independent Baptist church, we were occasionally warned about the dangers of the occult. Every three to five years, someone whose interest had been piqued would offer a Sunday School lesson or sermon about witchcraft, sorcery, magic, Satanism, and the occult. These lessons would focus on the fantastic, nearly unbelievable activities performed by devotees of these black arts. After being rightly warned to stay far away from anything even remotely occultic, we might hear a few brief thoughts about *Dungeon's and Dragons* (D&D). Those warnings focused on the pagan/Satanic material that game authors such as Gary Gygax (of D&D fame) used as source material for creating their pretend magic systems and fictional fantasy worlds. That seemed to be the extent of the warnings I received about role-playing games (RPGs).

> As a Jr. High student, my inquisitive mind discovered board-games, strategy war-games, and simulations. My mind was captivated by the prospect of sophisticated make-believe with quasi-realistic representations of the choices a General, WWII squad leader, or stock investor might make. These games, especially the war simulations, began consuming an increasing amount of my time as they often required 40-80 page 8.5x11 inch rule-books and hundreds of small cardboard counters to represent everything from flamethrowers to tanks to individual officers on a battlefield. However, like any lazy North-American child, I quickly tired of misplaying these games because I'd forgotten rule 3.4.2.3 (no kidding) about the correct way to game, for example, the bullet penetration of

a .30cal German light machine gun. I think I forgot to count the correct distance for the bullets to penetrate and roll on a chart to see if the units behind the target were injured. That might have changed the entire course of the battle, but it happened five turns ago, and I only just discovered it while looking up rule 7.5.10 about flamethrower operations.

No doubt, you're already worn-out just reading my recollection! You might be wondering what that has to do with role-playing. The summer before I entered High School, I discovered RPGs. While similar to war-games and simulations in having large rulebooks, the role-playing rules taught the players how to tell an interactive story. The story focused on a character controlled by the player. Each player makes every decision his respective character faces as the story unfolds. The rulebooks provided fictional background material and a combat system to game man-to-man (or beast, as the case may be) combat using a variety of weapons. In general, the rules were far less complex than war-games and the immersive escapist aspects of the story far more intense, precisely because it wasn't being interrupted by obscure rules.

I discovered the 'Middle Earth Role-Playing' Game (MERP) by Iron Crown Enterprises (I.C.E.). In Jr. High I found and read Tolkien's famous *Lord of the Rings* saga set in his imaginary world of Middle Earth. While some aspects of the story were beyond my adolescent attention-span, my imagination enjoyed the idea of elves, dwarves, humans and hobbits using good magic to fight orcs, trolls, and their evil allies. Over the next 10 years I would read the complete trilogy three times, the introductory volume called *The Hobbit* some five or six times, and in attempts to re-read the trilogy I re-read *The Fellowship of the Ring* over 10 times. I also read some of Tolkien's other works that laid more background material for his mythology, such as the *Silmarillion*. We bought piles of rules manuals and source books for the games that expanded the story from the original premises and read all of these many times.

Notice three reasons I was attracted to role-playing. One, the game I found allowed me to pretend to be a character in a fictional story I had already come to enjoy. Two, the game I found was set in a fictional world already declared 'safe' by my

Dad and Mom and peers. Sure, I'd seen D&D on the shelves before, but I wasn't the slightest bit interested. I knew THAT was wrong. But, Tolkien's stories were just harmless fantasy, right? Besides, it's just a game, isn't it? Three, the game I found was better than just reading a story or watching TV, because it involved telling your own story and making choices to discover how the story was going to turn out.

O CHRISTIAN, BEWARE! It took 10 years to pull that sinful hook out of my flesh. My deceitful, self-pleasing, worldly-affectionate heart led me to help the world, flesh and devil hook me good. I'm still a weaker man today for having given my heart to role-playing games. Please let me warn you about the three key dangers role-playing games pose to the born-again Christian.

Violence

Whether fantasy (meaning quasi-medieval with sorcery thrown in), science-fiction, horror, or historical, role-playing games most often promote and glorify violence. Regardless of what simulation-like elements the game play may contain, at their core these games are about killing or defeating one's opponents in order to gain wealth, possessions, and 'experience.' The player then uses these gains to better equip and train his character to provide better capabilities for killing or defeating more powerful opponents.

Witchcraft

While this aspect of role-playing games was addressed during my formative years, I foolishly believed there could be 'good' magic instead of 'bad' magic. Nearly every RPG involves 'magic' whereby the rules attempt to game the imagined effects of magical incantations and abilities. Science-fiction or 'horror' RPGs will imagine the existence of ESP, telepathy, and other 'psionic (psi) powers' with basically the same effect.

The player's character uses spells and magic items in fantasy gaming (psi-powers and non-existent technology devices in Sci-Fi gaming) as a shortcut to defeat opponents beyond the character's ability. From here on, I'll usually refer to fantasy

role-playing, but you can fill in the terms for the other genres as I did for Sci-Fi in the previous sentence.

Magic in these games is considered a good thing, much sought after to gain advantage such as: Spells, potions, amulets, wands, staves, rods, scrolls, runes (cryptic magical writing), bracelets, rings, necklaces, magic weapons, magic armor, and magic clothing. As a young Christian, I knew magic was bad, but we so enjoyed the game effects of the magical spells and items, that our games invariably involved a lot of them. We wouldn't game actual spiritual realities like demons or Hell, but we reveled in magic swords and spells, and we thought we could do "good" with them. What a curse!

Anti-God Worldview

While the witchcraft aspects of most fantasy RPGs occasionally gets attention from our Biblicist pulpits, this last aspect is often ignored. An entire sermon could be preached here against using fiction, TV, movies, lust, as well as games to escape from thinking about reality and Spiritual truths.

It is just as anti-God to ignore Him, as to curse or attack Him.

With regard to role-playing games, God, Christ, salvation from sin, the gospel, heaven, and hell are either mocked by these games or twisted and warped beyond Scriptural recognition. The players are fed ideas, attitudes, and philosophies about religious and Spiritual truths from a very pagan perspective.

Most born-again souls that get caught up in role-playing games probably have never thought this point through. But, what you're really telling God when you play any game that glorifies what God opposes or ignores His existence is – 'Thanks for creating the World, dying for my Sins, saving my soul, sealing me with your Spirit, and preserving your Word for my instruction; but, I'd rather spend my time pretending to explore an imaginary world whose authors rebel against Your

existence by not including You. I know You understand that I need to have my fun.'

What true believer would ever want to say this to God's face, verbally? But, how many are telling God this by their actions?

According to Psalm 10:4, one of the behaviors of the wicked is his refusal to constantly consider God. 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.'

The most dangerous aspect of role-playing games is not their sinful content (though that is dangerous), but the temptation the player faces to meditate on the game, imagine future scenarios for the game, and calculate how to game various real-world situations. **In other words, these games have great ability to keep one's mind continually distracted from spiritual truths and reality even when one isn't wasting time playing them.**

I don't want to share the humbling details of the games I've gone back to for a short season, or the unwise, sinful purchases I've made. For me, giving up the pencil and paper role-playing game was far easier than abandoning ungodly, worldly computer games which are just as sinful as the games I've described, because they contain many of the same elements. Over the course of my adolescence, I foolishly spent months and years forming these sinful habits and affections. They didn't just disappear when I decided I wanted them to go away. Beware the dangerous hooks of sin! ('Escaping Reality: The Danger of Role-Playing Games,' March 22, 2005).

(I am sad to report that some time after writing this, Londini left the ministry and went back to his video gaming addiction, but this adds an even louder warning about the dangers he exposed and the "hooks" that such gaming set into the users.)

Even many of the more innocent-appearing video games are deeply associated with the occult.

Consider the current craze, **Pokémon Go.** Pokémon promotes the search for occultic power. The cards are called "energy cards." Players engage in "pretend" occultic warfare. There is nothing innocent about Pokémon. It is a clever attempt at demonic mind-control. Almost overnight it became the most popular mobile game in American history, increasing the stock market value of part owner Nintendo more than 50%. "Pokémon Go, the newest iteration of the nearly 20-year-old Pokémon franchise, engages players in an 'augmented reality' where they try to find and capture Pokémons hidden throughout the real world. The *Australian Business Review* has suggested that it may be a 'watershed moment' in the development of virtual reality" ("Pokémon Go craze drawing gamers to church," *Baptist Press News*, July 15, 2016). The game "uses the mobile phone's camera to create the perception that the Pokémon characters are actually in front of the players." It is so engaging and addictive that people have crashed their automobiles and walked into dangerous situations. Two men recently fell off a cliff near San Diego while engaged in the game.

Pastor David Brown, First Baptist Church of Oak Creek, Wisconsin, who made the effort to investigate *Pokémon* and apply the test of God's Word to it in 1999, says, "The name *Pokémon* is derived from POCKEt MONster. ... One of the first things I did was to find out who produced the Trading Card Game. Here is an exact quote right from the Web page of the producer - 'The *Pokémon* Trading Card Game is a new collectable Card Game that is made and distributed by *Wizards of the Coast*. The same company that made the best-selling game ... *Magic: The Gathering*.' *Wizards of the Coast* also owns TSR, the producers of *Dungeons & Dragons*. When I discovered who owned the American *Pokémon* Trading Card Game rights, I knew it was not just an innocent

card game for elementary school children. [The Pokémon rap mantra says]: 'I will travel across the land/ Searching far and wide/ Each Pokémon to understand/ The power that's inside/ Gotta catch them all.' ... To be sure it is a game, but a game that does not glorify God! When God says something is wrong, it is wrong regardless of what form it is in. Not only that, but many of the kids who play this game *are* seduced into believing the principles that the game subtly teaches" (Dave Brown, "The Problem with Pokémon," http://logosresourcepages.org/Occult/more.htm).

In the official literature, the main characters of the game are described as headstrong, stubborn, quibbling, hormonal, having a fascination with and trying to "score" with the opposite sex, self-centered, vindictive, obnoxious, and prone to cross-dressing!

Pokémon promotes the search for occultic power. The cards are called "energy cards." Players engage in "pretend" occultic warfare. Currently there are 729 species of Pokémon monsters, and 151 of them are sought by Pokémon Go players. Two of them are named *Abra* and *Kadabra*, long associated with magic. The *Abra* card promotes the ability to read minds. The *Kadabra* character has a pentagram on his forehead. What an incredibly dangerous, wicked influence for children! *Nintendolife* says there are poison types, psychic types, dark types, fairy types, dragon types, and ghost types.

There is nothing innocent about Pokémon. It is a clever attempt at demonic mind-control. For more about the dangers of Pokémon see "The Problem with Pokémon" by David Brown, http://logosresourcepages.org/Occult/more.htm

Video Games and Wasting Time

"How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? *Yet* a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty

come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man" (Pr. 6:9-11).

The average gamer spends eight hours per week playing video games. This equates to 416 hours per year.

Last year, a teen told me he wanted to learn to study the Bible on his phone, but when I asked to look at his phone, I found that it was filled with games. I challenged him to get rid of them and to spend that time on Bible study and other profitable things. I told him that until he was willing to put aside wasteful things, he wouldn't make much progress in his spiritual life.

A Christian young lady that we know got convicted about how much time she was wasting on video games, and she sat down and analyzed her life. She discovered that she was spending three months a year on video games! She deleted the games from her iPad and is spending that time memorizing Scripture and other profitable things.

Young people who want to find God's will must learn to be careful about time. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). We deal with this in *The Mobile Phone, the Christian Home and Church*, in the section on "The Youth." See: www.wayoflife.org/mobile/

Even the more innocent games use rock music as a background, thus addicting young people to the world's music with all of its inherent dangers. (See *What Every Christian Should Know about Rock Music*, available as a free eBook from www.wayoflife.org.)

Video Games and Taking God's Name in Vain and Violent Thoughts

"I've played games which contain extreme violence and taking the name of the Lord in vain. GTA [Grand Theft Auto] is such a game. It uses the name of the Lord in vain almost continually and allows you to engage in adulterous acts and murder by picking up a whore,

going somewhere quiet, picking an item from the price list (I won't mention it here because it's to wicked). After you finish, you kill her and get the money back. Yes the game rewards you for doing that. The end result was that I started using the name of the Lord in vain, using foul language I won't mention here, and entertaining thoughts about violence. Video games that use the name of the Lord in vain, use violence, sorcery and such aren't innocent and are a great spiritual danger" ("Testimony of a Video Gamer," www.wayoflife.org).

Video Games and Spiritual Wounds and Scars

A young person might think that he can mess around with video games for a while and then leave them behind later when he gets more serious about life.

But messing around with sin always leaves scars. One father illustrated this to his sons by having them hammer some nails into a wooden door. Then he said, "Take them out." While the nails could be removed, the holes remained. That is what happens to those who mess around with the world. It leaves wounds and scars even when repented of.

> "It was a long time ago that I foolishly toyed around with these games and the damage in my life remains to this day" ("Testimony of a Video Gamer," www.wayoflife.org).

> "Over the course of my adolescence, I foolishly spent months and years forming these sinful habits and affections. They didn't just disappear when I decided I wanted them to go away. Beware the dangerous hooks of sin! (Vince Londini, "Escaping Reality: The Danger of Role-Playing Games," March 22, 2005).

Recommended Materials for Youth Discipleship

The following are available from Way of Life Literature, www.wayoflife.org -

- *Acts*
- *Believer's Bible Dictionary*
- *The Bible's Proof*
- *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms: Treasures from Archaeology (PowerPoints)*
- *The Four Gospels*
- *The Future According to the Bible*
- *Introduction to Bible Geography (PowerPoints)*
- *The Judge Not Heresy*
- *Keeping the Kids: How to Keep the Children from Falling Prey to the World (video and book)*
- *Knowing God's Will*
- *The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church*
- *Old Testament History and Geography*
- *One Year Discipleship Course*
- *Pastors, Deacons, and Church Members*
- *The Pentecostal Charismatic Movements (PowerPoints)*
- *Questions Answered on the Bible and Christianity*
- *The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music (video and book)*
- *Scientists Who Believe the Bible*
- *Sowing and Reaping: A Course in Evangelism (video/book)*
- *Understanding the Bible for Yourself*
- *An Unshakeable Faith: A Christian Apologetics Course (PowerPoints)*
- *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*
- *What Every Christian Should Know about Rock Music*
- *Woman and Her Service to God*