INTRODUCTION

The subject for this lecture is *technology and church ministry*. I'd like to introduce our topic with a text that not only refers to technology but also suggests, by way of inference, its usefulness for ministry. That text is Ecclesiastes 10:10. The English Standard Version reads as follows:

> If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed (Eccl 10:10).[1]

The Hebrew term translated "iron" (בַּרְזֶל; *barzel*) refers not only to the metal itself but also to various kinds of instruments made of iron. In this context, the Scripture writer most likely has an axe in mind. Not surprisingly, most modern English translations make that specific usage more transparent (NASB; NIV; NKJV; NLT; NET; CSB). I don't use the New Living Translation too often, but it does a great job of making the meaning of this text more obvious:

> Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed (Eccl 10:10, NLT).

An axe is a product of human technology, designed to assist man in subduing the earth. The implication of this text is that people should not only employ the right technology in carrying out their particular cultural task. But people should also keep such technology "honed" or "up-to-date" in order to increase their productivity and likelihood of success.[2] "Wisdom" (חָכְמָה; *ḥokmah*) instructs a person to ensure that his technology be (in this case *literally*) "cutting edge" technology.

Using this text as our "spring board," I'd like to suggest as the fuller title of our message: **"The Cutting Edge: Technology and Church Ministry."** My outline will be as follows:

1) The Idea of Technology Defined

2) A Biblical Theology of Technology and Culture

3) The Benefits, Tradeoffs, and Dangers of Technology

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[1] Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version (Crossway Bibles, 2011) unless otherwise noted.

[2] Commenting on this text, Tremper Longman III writes, "The meaning of the verse is that success is the fruit of wisdom, and the inference must be that a wise person would have sharpened the axe in the first place, saving himself a lot of wear and tear." *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 245. With a touch of humor, Douglas Wilson remarks, "We see in this proverb a little Solomonic understatement. That boy is trying to chop down a tree with a baseball bat. If a man stopped to sharpen the ax, he would get through the cord of wood a little faster. If he undertook a little maintenance, the car would run longer." *Joy at the End of the Tether: the Inscrutable Wisdom of Ecclesiastes* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 107.

4) Some Useful Modern Technologies for Church Ministry

5) Some Concluding Thoughts on Technology and Church Ministry

My primary objective or goal will be (1) to demonstrate that technology is lawful and useful for church ministry, (2) to encourage you to use the best and must suitable forms of technology for your church ministry, and (3) to offer some examples of technology used for ministry in our day.

Before we delve into our study, I want to file an important disclaimer. I am not, nor do I claim to be a technology "guru" or "geek." I like technology. I use technology. But I'm not an expert in technology. Despite the fact that I own an Apple MacBook Pro, an iPad, and an iPhone, I'm still in the "minor leagues" when it comes to technology. Nevertheless, I hope I can at least point you to some resources in these lectures that will deepen your knowledge of the topic far beyond what I'm able to accomplish in these lectures.

A DEFINITION OF "TECHNOLOGY"

If one consults a modern English dictionary, he'll find that the term "technology" has several different but related uses. In his book *From the Garden to the City*, John Dyer does a fine job of distilling these different uses of the term into four concise definitions: (1) technology is "the *skill* of making things"; (2) technology is "*the study* of the skill of making things"; (3) technology refers to "*the tools* used to make things"; and (4) technology is "*the things* made with these tools."[3]

Let's apply these four senses of the term to the specific technology addressed in our opening text. In the first place, Solomon is alluding to the technology or "skill" of woodcutting. In modern terms, think of the lumber industry or the housing industry.

Secondly, one might conceive of a branch of science and education that studies the skill of woodcutting. Today, students who attend the "Massachusetts Institute of Technology" (MIT) study various kinds of technologies, particular those related to science and engineering. For the sake of illustration, we might imagine in Solomon's day something like "LIT" or the "Lebanon Institute of Technology," which specialized in the study of woodcutting.

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[3] *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), Kindle edition, loc. 946 of 3483. In the larger section in which his distillation of the basic uses of the term is found, Dyer provides a helpful analysis and the term's etymology and historical development. See also Quentin Shultz's definition in *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), Kindle edition, loc. 584-1849.

Third, our text most obviously refers to "tool," specifically, an iron axe. Today, axe heads are usually made of steel. In fact, we actually have other tools for dropping trees, such as handsaws and motorized chainsaws.

Finally, while our text doesn't explicitly identify exactly what the woodcutter was seeking to make from the dropped tree, we can assume that it was some other form of human technology, whether building structure, a battle siege ramp, or perhaps some wood handles for iron axe heads! In this case, technology is both the tool and the product made by the tool. Today, the graphic designer, by way of example, uses the technology of a computer and Adobe software in order to create the technology of an Internet website.

With this multifaceted definition of technology before us, it should become apparent that human technology is very closely related to human culture. The first entry in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th edition (2009) defines "culture" as "the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought." Culture is everything human societies think, feel, and make. Therefore, culture includes technology. Technology is *an activity* of culture, *a tool* of culture, and *a product* of culture. So when we speak of technology, we're unavoidably addressing an essential aspect of human culture.

We're now ready for the next stage in our study.

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE

I believe it would be helpful provide a brief biblical theology of technology and culture. Since technology and culture describe what humans made in God's image do and make, it shouldn't surprise us that the Bible has something to say about them. And I believe it would be useful for us to develop a biblical and theological framework for technology and culture *before we attempt to relate them to church ministry*.

As we look at the biblical data, what we discover is that the Bible portrays human culture and its corollary human technology as good, as bad, and as both good and bad.

1. Human culture and technology as "good"

We're first introduced to human culture and, by way of implication, to technology in the creation account of Genesis one. Here we learn not only *the origin* but also *the nature* of human culture and technology.

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And *let them have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it* and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:26-28).

Not surprisingly, this passage has been called "the cultural mandate." God not only creates humans; *he assigns them a task*. They're not to live in isolation from one another. Men are to marry women and produce children. Those families are to become clans; those clans are to become cities and nations and societies; those societies are to work together to "subdue the earth." In other words, humans are assigned the task of taking earth's natural resources and developing or cultivating those resources for the good of man and the glory of God.

It is not the will of God that man leave the world in its natural state, as some radical environmentalists would call us to do. We're not to go out into the wheat fields and graze like cattle or walk up to a pine tree and chew on its bark, like Euell Gibbons might encourage us to do. On the contrary, we're to grow the wheat, harvest the wheat with the sickle, separate the grain from the chaff, grind the grain into flour, put it into the oven, and consume it in the form of bread.

Likewise, man is to domesticate animals so that the animals serve the needs of society. Man is to mine in the earth order to extract various metals to make tools and machinery and coinage. Man is to fell trees and cut stones in order to make homes and buildings and cities.

Moreover, the cultural mandate includes learning about the world. God commands man to learn about the animals and name them according to their characteristics. We can assume God also wants man to classify details about the soil, and the water, and the air, and the trees, and the mountains, and the oceans, and the stars. And God intends one generation to pass on this knowledge to the next, from one society to another.

Furthermore, God endowed man with *aesthetic capacity* so that he could not only enjoy God's creation but that man might imitate his Creator's creativity. So men would not merely extract metal and stone from the earth, but they would distinguish some as precious metal and stone. And men would not only build places to live but he would design and adorn the buildings so that they looked attractive. And some would refine the art of communication and others painting and others music.

Hence, technology is a necessary fruit of God's cultural mandate to humanity. As Mark Ward Jr observes,

> Technology is what happens when humans, whether intentionally or no, fulfill God's original Mandate. As soon as you get to work filling and subduing, you run into problems that require tools: grains that need scything, wheat that needs transporting to distant markets which will pay higher prices, bridges to make those markets less distant, etc., etc., *ad ineluctum* [from inescapable exigencies]. Technology is not an accidental add-on in Gods world, something Adam and Eve weren't meant to discover or develop. It is a God-given good.[4]

What Dr. Ward concludes about the primeval "goodness" of human technology can be inferred from that the fact that it's a fruit of God's blessing (Gen 1:28) and also from God's sweeping assessment at the end of creation account: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, *it was very good*" (Gen 1:31; emphasis added). Of course, God is primarily assessing *his work* not *man's work* in this verse. Nevertheless, God's assessment in this verse includes the mandate he gave to humanity. In other words, as Ward asserts, *God views human culture and technology as a good thing.*

But we all know the story doesn't end at Genesis 1:31.

2. Human culture and technology as "bad"

When we come to Genesis 3, we read of man's rebellion against God and his fall into sin. When we come to Genesis 4, we see human sin spread from the first generation to the second when Cain murders his brother Abel. Perhaps Cain took the very sickle he originally made to harvest the field and now employed it as a weapon of violence.

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[4] From his "Technology Giveth and Technology Taketh Away" (Unpublished manuscript, 2012). Dr. Ward gave two lectures on the benefits and dangers of technology for the pastoral ministry as part of Reformed Baptist Seminary's pastoral theology curriculum. The PDF of his lecture notes are available through RBS. The HD videos of these lectures are posted on my blog "It Is Written": http://drbobgonzales.com/2012/technology-giveth-technology-taketh-away-by-dr-mark-ward-jr/. One Day Publications has accepted Ward's manuscript for publication and the book should be available in 2013 under the title *Digital Ministry*. Tim Challies also provides a helpful theological definition of technology that highlights the God-given gift of human creativity: "God's basic instruction to mankind is to develop the resources of the natural world and use God-given abilities to bring glory to him. To put it in more practical terms, God is glorified in our creativity, whether that leads us to craft a painting that moves our hearts to praise or to design a plow that will better allow us to plant and harvest a crop. To do these things—building cities and schools and families, planting crops and composing music—we must rely on the practical fruit of our creative abilities: technology. Technology is *the creative ability of using tools to shape God's creation for practical purposes*" (emphasis his). *The Next Story: Life and Faith After the Digital Explosion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 23. Challies credits Stephen Monsma and John Dyer for helping him with his definition (199).

By the time we reach Genesis 6, the whole earth is corrupt and filled with violence. We read that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Men are no longer satisfied with God's norm of monogamous marriage, but they give in to sexual lust and begin building harems. They can't work together in harmony, so they hate and fight and war against each other. And it's very likely that many of the technologies that humans developed and refined over the centuries of antediluvian history were being employed to oppose the kingdom of God and to advance the kingdom of man.

Things get so bad that God has to send a worldwide flood to destroy the whole human race with the exception of one family. But the flood didn't wash away sin. Not long after Noah's new beginning, we read of humans employing the tool of human language to unite together to build a city with a tower that would reach to heaven.

Was their goal to bring glory to God? No, they say in Genesis 11:4, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves." This is human rebellion on an international scale! As Henri Blocher observes,

> The difference between Eden and Babel is that which distinguishes the individual deed and the collective act.... Having become a collective enterprise, the sinful project [Babel] takes on the face of totalitarianism, with *technology* and *ideology* as its means of realization. If Genesis 3 reveals the religious root of human evil, Genesis 11 shows it in its most logical and perhaps most terrible political expression" (emphasis added).[5]

George Orwell predicted it would happen in 1984. But the Bible traces the origins of human rebellion and the resultant abuse of technology to a much earlier date.

And things haven't improved much since Babel. Now, in light of mankind's fall into sin and his subsequent history, how should we evaluate human culture and technology? At this point, the "counter-cultural" Christians begin to smile and say, "See, we told you. Culture and technology are bad. We must not accommodate to culture or use modern technology; we must avoid them. We must keep them out of the church. It's "Christ against culture," plain and simple.

There definitely are aspects and dimensions of human culture that we must reject because they've been corrupted by human sin. Moreover, we must because of the temptation to idolize and misuse technology in ways that facilitate our rebellion

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[5] *In the Beginning: the Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1984)*, 203-04.

against God. Thus, there are ways in which we must be "counter cultural" and wary of human technology.

3. Human culture and technology are "good and bad"

However, I don't believe the "counter-cultural only" position is a good position. In the first place, it's not possible. There's no way for us to completely escape human culture and contemporary technologies. Certain sects like the Amish have attempted to do this. But in reality, they're only exchanging one form of human culture and technology for another. They simply reject the American culture and technologies of 2012 and attempt to revert back to the American culture of the late 1800s.

While not as radical in their counter-culturalism, some branches of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism make a similar mistake of confusing "cultural conservativism" with theological fidelity and of pining nostalgically for the "good ol' days."[6] But the only "good ol' days" the Bible knows of are those in the Garden before the Fall![7]

More importantly, if we're only "counter-cultural," then we're only partly biblical. And to be only "partly" biblical is often, in fact, to be "unbiblical." Certainly, none of us wants to be unbiblical. *Therefore, we need to consider more biblical data in order to have a more accurate view of human culture and technology.*

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[6] Donald Carson makes this observation when he writes, "Churches that are faithful to the apostolic gospel are sometimes also the ones that are loyal to a culture becoming increasingly *passé*. In such a situation *cultural* conservatism can easily be mistaken for *theological* conservatism, for theological orthodoxy. In an age of confusing empirical pluralism and frankly frightening philosophical pluralism, in an age that seems to be stealing from us the Judeo-Christian worldview that prevailed for so long, it is easy to suppose that retrenchment and conservative responses on every conceivable axis are the only responsible courses for those who want to remain faithful to the gospel." Carson rightly cautions against this confusion: "Such a course is neither wise nor prophetic. Sometimes it is not even faithful. The church may slip back into a defensive, conservatism that is fundamentally ill-equipped to address postmodernism…. The challenges of biblical illiteracy demand, among other things, that we begin "farther back" in our articulation of the gospel—i.e., it is becoming more and more necessary to expound the Bible's story-line, the main lines of a Christian theistic worldview. Cultural conservatives may think of this as succumbing to the demand for relevance; I think it is prophetic wisdom, demanded by the Scriptures themselves." *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 470-71.

[7] See John Frame's chapter on "Christ and Our Culture" in his *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008), 876-87. Frame surveys a number of Christian critiques of modern culture, which often contrast contemporary culture as "bad" with some earlier era of civilization that was supposedly much better. But as Frame demonstrates, these critiques are often biased and marked by faulty reasoning. He prefers, instead, the perspective advanced by Cornelius Van Till who "knew only one turning point [in human history]: the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. History since that time, in [Van Til's] view, has been replay after replay. Eve was a rationalist and irrationalist, modernist and postmodernist, oppressive establishment and countercultural rebel, an idolater of value and a destroyer of it, all at the same time" (886).

What biblical reality do we need to add to creation and the fall in order to cultivate a more balanced view of human culture? What part of the biblical picture do the "counter-cultural" only Christians often miss?

The simple answer is "grace." According to the Bible, God does not completely abandon mankind in his sinful state, but he shows kindness or grace. To be more specific, God bestows two kinds of grace: *common grace* and *saving grace*.

I think we're all pretty familiar with God's saving grace, which enables us to turn from our sin and trust in Jesus—the grace by which God endows us with every spiritual blessing in Christ and secures for us an eternal inheritance. But sometimes we lose sight of God's common grace. What is "common grace" from a biblical point of view? Like the word "culture," the phrase "common grace" doesn't appear in the Bible. But the concept of common grace does. Common grace refers to *God's blessings on the human race that fall short of salvation from sin.* Theologians usually classify them as follows:[8]

(1) God restrains human sin.

When God confused human speech at Babel (Gen 11:6-9), he was restraining the extent to which that societal sin would develop. Similarly, God doesn't allow every human being to develop into an Adoph Hitler or a Charles Manson or a Jeffrey Dahmer. Every human has the moral capacity to develop into cruel dictators or serial killers. But God doesn't allow every human being to become as evil as he potentially could become.

Jesus recognizes this when he says to Pilate, "He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11). Pilate was guilty. But Pilate's sin was not as grave as the Jewish leaders who delivered Jesus to Pilate.

Thanks to God's common grace, we don't have to live in the wilderness of Montana for fear that our next-door neighbors might kill us and eat us. We don't have to ban our child from Little League baseball team because we're afraid he'll be kidnapped and sent to a concentration camp.

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[8] Helpful formulations of "common grace" can be found in Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 2:654-75; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 432-46; Cornelius Van Till, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974); John Murray, "Common Grace," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:93-119; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 657-68; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 364-68; Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 860-62.

In fact, here in America there's been such a high degree of common grace that very few Christians have had to endure serious hostility or persecution from unbelievers. And because of God's common grace, we have many opportunities to develop cordial relationships with unbelievers in the hopes of winning them to Jesus Christ.

(2) God bestows some temporal blessings on humans indiscriminately.

Jesus alludes to this when he instructs his disciples to love their enemies on the basis of God's indiscriminate love to mankind. "For," says Jesus, "[God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45).

God doesn't just do nice things for Christians and bad things for unbelievers. In this life, God is often kind to both. *And Jesus wants us to imitate our heavenly Father.* He doesn't want us to form little Christian colonies that are separate from unbelievers. On the contrary, he says to us,

> You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden…. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:14, 16).

And the people before whom we're to shine are not just fellow Christians. Jesus wants us to be engaged with unbelievers. "Father," he prays in John 17, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (17:15).[9]

Jesus wants us to remain separate from sin. But Jesus wants us to engage sinners. He wants us be proactive in our gospel outreach. Remember the words of Paul, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them" (1 Cor 9:19).

(3) God endows unbelievers with knowledge and skills that benefit society as a whole.

Cain was a murderer, and his descendants turned out to be an ungodly lot. But as we read the Genesis account we discover that God was pleased to endow some of Cain's descendants with a great deal of knowledge and skill. In Genesis 4:20-22 we read that Cain's descendant Jabal,

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[9] See Arturo G. Azurdia III's excellent exposition of this text in which he calls on Christians not to isolate themselves from the world but to engage the world. *Connected Christianity: Engaging Culture without Compromise* (Ross-Shire, U.K.: Christian Focus, 2009).

was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. [And] Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

Here we have the first mention of such technologies as animal husbandry, musical instruments, and metallurgy. We could broaden the categories and classify them as the technologies of agriculture, the arts, and the sciences. Commenting on this text, John Calvin remarks,

> [Moses] expressly celebrates the remaining benediction on that race, which otherwise would have been deemed void and barren of all good. Let us then know, that the sons of Cain, though deprived of the Spirit of regeneration, were yet endued with gifts of no despicable kind; just as the experience of all ages teaches us how widely the rays of divine light have shone on unbelieving nations, for the benefit of the present life.[10]

Christians are not the only ones who can selectively breed livestock, or make good music, or develop metallurgy. God has endowed many unbelievers with knowledge and skill to provide services, create art, and invent technologies that benefit everyone.

Indeed, God's people can employ the skills and technologies of unbelievers to advance the kingdom of God! For example, in 1 Kings 5:6, we read that Solomon employed *the Sidonians* to provide him with the timber because they were among the most skilled in the ancient Near Eastern world in cutting and transporting timber.

If the men of Sidon were the best lumberjacks, the men of Tyre were the best craftsmen and builders.[11] So when Solomon begins work on the Temple, he sends word to King Hiram of Tyre and asks Hiram to send him a skilled craftsman to oversee the project. So Hiram responds,

> Now I have sent a skilled man, who has understanding, Huram-abi…. He is trained to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and in purple, blue, and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and to do all sorts of engraving and execute any design that may be assigned *him, with your craftsmen, the craftsmen of my lord,* David your father (2 Chron 2:13-14; emphasis added).

So Solomon does not place a fellow Israelite over the building project. He chooses a pagan from Tyre! And Solomon doesn't limit the use of their products and services

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[10] *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. John King (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 1:218.

[11] Actually, there may be no real distinction here. The peoples of Sidon and those of Tyre were both Phoenicians known for their involvement in international trade.

to secular buildings. He employs their technology in the Temple of God *even though the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon were some of the most notorious sinners in the Bible*!

Lest we're tempted to fault Solomon, we should remember that as modern Christians we employ the technologies of the unregenerate in our church ministry. For instance, we're all greatly indebted to the inventions of Thomas Edison. He developed the carbon microphone that would later be used in telephones. He invented the light bulb and then patented a system for electricity distribution in 1880. Later he invented the phonograph and an early motion picture camera ("the Kinétograph").

Think of what life would be like without electricity, light bulbs, audio and video recording. If you were Amish, you'd probably say, "Better." But if you're like the rest of us, you're grateful for all the technology that came out of Thomas Edison's inventions. And we employ much of it to facilitate our church worship and ministry. Yet it's highly unlikely Edison was a genuine believer![12]

What's my point? Not everything produced by an unbelieving world is intrinsically evil or bad in-and-of-itself. True, unbelievers cannot fill and subdue the earth for the glory of God. So in terms of their motives, unbelievers are unable to do good. Moreover, unbelievers often transgress God's laws. They take another man's life or another man's wife. They steal and lie in order to make money. And they create technologies that either serve as their idols or facilitate their idolatry.

Nevertheless, thanks to God's common grace unbelievers are able to write good books. They're able to create beautiful music. They're able to invent surgical techniques and medication that save lives. *And for our purposes, they're able to create technologies that the church may employ in order to advance the cause of the gospel and the kingdom of God*.

It might be helpful at this point to highlight the relationship between culture and religion. Religion is actually an aspect of human culture. This is why one can speak use the terms "religion" and "worldview" somewhat synonymously. Of course, false religions and worldviews are distortions of human culture. But Christianity, which is animated by special grace and guided by Scripture, is the true *cultus* of human

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[12] When asked whether he believed in God, Edison responded, "What you call God I call Nature, the Supreme intelligence that rules matter." And he goes on to assert, "It is doubtful in my opinion if our intelligence or soul or whatever one may call it lives hereafter as an entity or disperses back again from whence it came, scattered amongst the cells of which we are made." From Paul Israel's *Edison: A Life of Invention* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2000), as cited on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Edison#cite_ref-Israel_34-6.

culture.[13] Not surprisingly, there's a striking analogy between the cultural mandate of Genesis 1 and the Great Commission of the Gospels. I note this connection in my paper on the creation covenant:

> God had commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth, and to subdue it for God's glory. Jesus has taken up that task. And just as the First Adam had a bride to serve as his helper (Gen. 2:18-24), so too the Second Adam has chosen a bride to serve as his helper, namely, the church (Eph. 5:31-32). And together with His bride Jesus is fulfilling the original mandate God had given to Adam by filling earth with regenerated images of God who are in turn are submitted to God's rule and are subduing the earth for His glory. To state it differently, the primary objectives of the creation mandate God gave to the First Adam and his bride have now become the primary objectives of the Great Commission, which God has given to Christ (Isa. 42:1-12; 49:1-26) and through Christ to the church (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8; 13:47-47; Rom. 15:18).[14]

Viewing religion as a vital part of human culture reminds us that it's impossible for the church to function outside of culture. While it may be appropriate to distinguish *religious* or *Christian* culture from *secular* culture, it's impossible to make an absolute dichotomy. Both are elements of the larger category of human culture and both will employ some of the same technologies to advance their respective agendas.[15]

THE BENEFITS, TRADEOFFS, AND DANGERS OF TECHNOLOGY

So human culture and technology are a necessary part of the creation mandate and as such should not be viewed as necessary or intrinsic evils. Moreover, we've argued that religion is part of human culture, and it will, therefore, employ some of the tools of culture. Nevertheless, before we suggest some ways in which we can use modern technologies to advance the Great Commission, I want to briefly highlight the tension that exists between the benefits, tradeoffs, and dangers of technology.

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[13] Interestingly, the terms "culture" and "cult," which refers to a system of religion, derive from the same Latin term *colere*, which means to cultivate or to adorn.

[14] This is actually an expanded section from an original article I wrote entitled, "The Covenantal Context of the Fall: Did God Make a Primeval Covenant with Adam?" *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 4:2 (2007): 5-32. I express a similar idea in my article "Man: God's Visible Replica and Vice-Regent," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 5:2 (2008): 63-87. John Fesko develops the connection more fully in his *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1—3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Ross-shire, U.K.: Mentor Press, 2007), 167-68. For the most comprehensive study on the connection between the creation mandate and the Great Commission, see Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, in New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, 2004).

[15] For a more comprehensive and helpful study of human culture, the Christian, and the church, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 851-908.

I've already suggested that human technology brings with it certain benefits or, to use a biblical term, "blessings." Nevertheless, over and against those benefits and blessings, we need to be aware of the resultant tradeoffs as well as the potential dangers that new technologies introduce.

For example, the industrial revolution brought with it many benefits. Various kinds of manufactured goods become more available and affordable. Many of the things produced by factories facilitated the services of other vocations and even occasioned the need for new vocations. As a result, many new jobs were created and people employed.

But there was a downside to the industrial revolution. With the benefits came tradeoffs or losses. For example, before the industrial revolution skilled craftsmen created most manufactured goods. If you wanted a quality-made shoe, you didn't go to your local Footlocker store and choose from among several name brands like Nike, Addidas, Asics, etc. Instead, you went to the local shoemaker, and he'd measure your foot and design a shoe to your liking. This was true with respect to other types of clothing, kitchenware, farming equipment and so on.

But the industrial revolution took work from many of these people. The industries didn't need highly skilled labor to run the machines. And they could mass-produce products at a much lower cost to the consumer. Of course, that often meant lower pay and poor working conditions for the employees. But, as you can guess, the industrial owners especially infuriated the craftsmen, whose work was being taken from them. In some places, the craftsmen banded together, wrote threatening letters, and even set some of the factories on fire.[16]

So there was both an upside and also a downside to the industrial revolution. With the benefits came certain drawbacks and losses.

What was true of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries has also been true of the advances in modern technology that have characterized the 20th and early 21st centuries. Think, for instance, of the benefits of modernized forms of travel technologies. Cars, trains, and planes have made our world smaller. Now we can travel greater distances in shorter periods of time. It's easier to visit faraway places and to relocate to new places. But with the upside of modern travel there are downsides and even dangers. Think of all the auto accident related deaths. On a

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[16] Tim Challies gives a brief history of the Luddite movement in England. *The Next Story*, 33-35.

more subtle level, think of how people are less rooted to their "places of origin" or hometowns and how, as a result, family and community bonds are weaker.[17]

Moving forward a few decades, think of the technological revolution of the Internet and the cell phone. These technologies have served to make information and people much more accessible. Ten years ago, only some people owned a cell phone. Today, nearly everyone, even the youngest and poorest are getting cell phones. And the great benefit is that we can contact nearly anyone via phone call or text virtually any time and any place.

The "worldwide web" provides dump truck loads of information from all over the world, and Google makes that information available within seconds. No longer do we rely on newspapers or even the six o'clock news on our local TV news station. We can get it all over the Internet. Moreover, Facebook and Twitter keep us up-to-date with minute-by-minute reports of what all our family, friends, and "friends" are doing and even thinking. And best of all, our computers, smart-phones, and tablets come with automatic notification features to ensure that we don't miss anything.

But despite the great benefit of increasing the breadth and speed of our access to people and information, many of us have also come to realize that there are downsides or drawbacks to this kind of technology. The Internet, for example, not only provides us quick access to lots of helpful information, but it also makes lots of harmful content available at the click of a mouse. What's more, greater accessibility to people and information also means that people and information have greater accessibility to you and me. Think of all the "junk email" we receive. And think of the many times the ringtone of our cell phone or the flashing light of our iPad notification center has interrupted our train of thought or family time! Such interruptions not only affect our productivity and compete with other priorities, but they can be downright annoying. At times I've been tempted to set up my phone or email account with an automated reply from Proverbs 25:17-

> Don't set foot too frequently in your neighbor's house,
> Lest he become weary of you and hate you (NET).[18]

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[17] David Wells notes these changes and their sociological effects in chapter one ("A Delicious Paradise Lost") of his book *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Became of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 17-52. I do think Wells' book is somewhat guilty of the unwarranted nostalgia of cultural conservatism I allude to above on pages 8-9. For a critique of Wells' analysis, see John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 881-82.

[18] This verse forms a couplet with verse 16: "When you find honey, eat only what is sufficient for you, lest you become stuffed with it and vomit it up." Together they enjoin moderation. As Bruce Waltke remarks, "Even things as delightful and desirable as honey and as neighborliness can become loathsome through excess." *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, in The New International Commentary of the Old Testament, ed. Robert L. Hubbard Jr.

My point is simply to highlight the fact that new technologies not only bring benefits and blessings, but they also come with downsides and dangers. They have the potential to impact our lives and vocations both positively and also negatively.

This reality of the positive and negative effects modern technology has upon people and societies has occasioned a new field of study called "Media Ecology." Just as the biological ecologist studies the impact a new species has upon a biological ecosystem when introduced, so the media ecologist studies the impact new technologies have upon the personal and social environments into which they're introduced. And some of them like John Culkin have concluded, "We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us."[19] Or, as Christian media ecologist John Dyer explains,

> Technology, then, is the means by which we transform the world as it is into the world we desire. What we often fail to notice is that it is not only the world that gets transformed by technology. We, too, are transformed.[20]

Of course, we need to be careful not to demonize technology itself. To use a current topic of national debate, it's not guns that kill people; it's people who kill people with guns or sometimes with other technologies like knives or baseball bats. In other words, the tools themselves are not morally evil. And they don't necessarily force people to sin.[21]

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 326. Charles Bridges also does a fine job of capturing the meaning of the axiom: "This maxim was … never intended to give a chill to the flow of neighbourly love, or to restrain its practical exercise. It only suggests, that kindly intercourse cannot be maintained without a considerate feeling. An ordinary acquaintance would give just umbrage in claiming the free and unrestrained intercourse of intimate friendship." *Proverbs* (1846; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 472.

[19] "A Schoolman's Guide to Marshall McLuhan," *Saturday Review*, March 18, 1967, 51; cited by John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, Kindle edition, loc. 558.

[20] *From the Garden to the City*, Kindle edition, loc. 547. For a fuller analysis of the upside and downside of technology than that which I've summarized above, I recommend the following resources: Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion* (Zondervan, 2011); Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2008), 50-64; John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).

[21] Remember that Jesus lived in the first century culture of the ancient Near East, and he no doubt used the technologies of his day. If we view technology in a "deterministic" way that sees its negative effects as irresistible and unavoidable, then we'd have reason to wonder how Jesus managed to live a sinless life. Yet the fact is that Jesus used technology but never abused it or allowed it push him into moral failure. But some media ecologists seem to portray technology—especially modern technology—as if it inevitable leads every user to stumble. Thus, they speak of modern popular culture and technology as threats to healthy civilization, and come close, at times, to demonizing them. See, for instance, Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985); idem., *Technopoly: the Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993). Jeff Meyers, a Christian thinker, basically follows Postman's trajectory and applies it to modern pop culture and technologies. See his *All God's Children & Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture*, Kindle edition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012). For a cogent critique of analyses like Postman's and Meyers', see Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2012), 107-164. John Frame also offers a brief critique of Meyers in *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 882-83.

More precisely, human technologies may tempt us to sin or provide the occasion through which we express our sinfulness. Tim Challies is spot on when he notes that humans can treat technologies as idols or use them to facilitate their sinful idolatries.[22] In a similar vein, John Dyer remarks, "We use our idols fundamentally as a way of meeting our needs apart from God, and this is our greatest temptation with technology—to use it as a substitute for God."[23]

Whether ancient or modern, technology can affect us and our vocation in good ways and in bad ways. This fact is important to remember as we transition to consider practical ways in which we can employ technology for the service of church ministry.

SOME USEFUL MODERN TECHNOLOGIES FOR CHURCH MINISTRY

I opened our lecture by referencing the "sharp axe" proverb in Ecclesiastes 10:10. The principle highlighted is the importance of keeping our technology "honed" or "up-to-date." Not only is an iron or steel axe head preferable to a stone axe head, but the edge of the axe must also be sharp if we want to increase our productivity and success.

Just as the woodsman should keep his axe sharp in order to increase his productivity, so we who are engaged in church ministry should keep our technology in good working order and, as much as possible, current and up-to-date. Of course, we shouldn't assume that the latest technology is always the best technology. We may need to wait until a new technology is "tested" before making the investment. Moreover, having "cutting edge" technology may not be absolutely necessary or feasible for every church.

But I fear that some of us are trying to do church ministry with a "stone axe," metaphorically speaking. Our technology is either dated or we're not keeping it sharp. As a result, our church's ministry is not as efficient and productive as it could be. Of course, we can still do church ministry with older and less efficient technologies just like a woodman can bring down a tree with a sledge hammer if he hits it long enough. But why should we pray God overrule our lack of applied

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[22] Challies rightly traces the sinful idolatry not to the idol itself but to the fallen human heart, which John Calvin describes as an "idol factory." But the sinful heart is more than ready to make human technologies into idols or to use these technologies as "an enabler of idols." See *The Next Story*, 27-32.

[23] *From the Garden to the City*, Kindle edition, loc. 1304-3483.

wisdom? Why not make use of the best and most efficient technologies that are consistent with our ministry objectives and within our budgetary grasp?

With these thoughts in view, I'd like to suggest some modern technologies that may serve and facilitate our church ministry. My suggestions will focus primarily on *mediums of gospel communication* since that's what church ministry is primarily about. Some of you may already use these technologies. My encouragement to you will focus primarily on keeping the "tool" sharpened and up-to-date.

My plan is to look at various modern technologies under four categories of the church ministry. As we'll see, there will be overlap as some technologies can be used in each of these areas. The examples I give are by no means exhaustive.[24] Some of you younger men may be aware of technologies I don't address below. Moreover, I offer these examples as *suggested* technologies you *may* want to consider using. My purpose is *not* to imply that you must employ *all* these technologies for church ministry.

1. Technologies for Outreach

Here I'm thinking about reaching out to your community and beyond with two objectives: a more *immediate* objective and a more *ultimate* objective. The immediate objective is to introduce yourself—who are you, what do you believe, and what do you do. More specifically, I'm speaking of advertising your church's identity, beliefs, values, and mission. The more ultimate objective is to introduce people to Jesus Christ and the gospel. What are some technologies to help your church accomplish those objectives?

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[24] I won't discuss technologies for the pastor and his study such as Bible software, productivity software, e-books and e-readers, etc. Dr. Mark Ward Jr. discusses these in his lecture "Technology Giveth," which he gave in January 2012 for our pastoral theology course (PT 621). The video lecture may be accessed here: http://drbobgonzales.com/2012/technology-giveth-technology-taketh-away-by-dr-mark-ward-jr/. Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears devote an entire chapter to the topic of technology and church ministry in *Vintage Church: Timeless Truth and Timely Methods* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 267-85. The reader should keep in mind that they're suggesting technologies that they've found helpful *in their context* but that may not be helpful (or wise) in every ministry context. In addition to the resources above, the reader may find some helpful, though in some cases dated, advice in Quentin Schultz's *High Tech Worship?* (2004) and John P. Jewell's *Wired Ministry* (2004). Len Wilson's *The Wired Church 2.0* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) addresses many practical issues related to using technologies for church ministry. Finally, one may find useful articles on technologies for church ministry on the Internet. For example, see the following resources (as of January 2013): Church Tech Today: Technology for Today's Church; Technologies for Worship Magazine (online); ChurchMediaDesign.tv; ChurchMarketingSucks.com; Churchm.ag; Church Production Magazine (online); 4 Myths Abound Using Technology in Church; The Evolution of Technology in the Church.

(1) A Good Website

In past decades churches made the community aware of their presence primary through the Yellow Pages of a phone book and by means of a church sign that was visible. The ad in the Yellow pages usually conveys basic information like the church's name, contact information, and service times. The church sign could be simple or more elaborate in design. In addition to the church's name and other basic information, it might also include the church's branding (i.e., logo and/or motto) and sometimes a concise, catchy, and/or corny (!) message. The phone book and church signs are still technologies used by churches today. But with the advent of the Internet, the former is quickly become passé and the latter is becoming less significant.

The Internet is increasingly becoming the place where people will often first encounter your church ministry. Indeed, as Mike Atkinson remarks, "If you're not on the Web, you don't exist."[25] And unless people already know something about your church, they're usually looking for more information that what the Yellow Pages or a church sign can provide. What they're looking for is a church website.

Pastor Kevin DeYoung underscores this point:

> I have never been one to encourage churches to chase the latest trends…. But increasingly, if your church does not have a decent website you're uninviting a lot of people who might otherwise have plodded, persevered, and sat under good preaching with you. I am out of town on sabbatical for most of this summer. That means I'll be a church visitor again. And like most people under the age of 40 (or is it under 70?) when I check out churches I do most of my checking online. More often than not, when I meet a visitor at our church, they've already been to our website. Having a decent website is not about being hip or pursuing relevance. It's about being welcoming and hospitable. Your website is the front door of your church for many, many people.[26]

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[25] Atkinson goes on to write, "With such a wealth of accessible information on the Web, it's easy for people to limit their research to just an Internet search. Add to that the fact that younger families are much less likely to use yellow pages or newspaper ads, and pretty quickly you understand that not having a website makes you invisible to most people under age 40. When trying to communicate with young families, not having a website is similar to not having a sign on your building - how will they know you exist?" "Reach Young Adults on the Web"; accessed January 12, 2013 on the Internet: http://www.uneeknet.com/services/tips/articles/youngAdults.php. Atkinson's article primarily assesses the usefulness of a website in attracting younger generations. However, even people in their 50s and 60s are becoming more accustomed to using the Internet to find out basic information.

[26] "Be Welcoming, Get a Good Website"; accessed January 10, 2013 on the Internet: http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/06/10/be-welcoming-get-a-good-website/. In the same vein, Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears write, "Your church must have a good Web site where people who hear about you through the media or word of mouth or are directed through a search engine can find out who you are and what you believe and get a taste of your teaching and music. They will feel encouraged to visit in

It's important to note that DeYoung isn't just urging churches to get a website. The title of his article is "Be Welcoming, Get a *Good* Website" (emphasis added). Most churches understand the value of a website, but what many fail to appreciate is the importance of a good website.

What constitutes a good website? From what I've gleaned in researching that question, the marks of a good website can be classified under *content*, *functionality*, and *appearance*.

With respect to "content," the website should obviously include the church's name, location, service times, and contact info. But just as important, if not more so, are the church's core beliefs, values, and mission. Moreover, the church should include information pertinent to first time visitors: childcare and/or youth ministries, leadership and staff, sample audio sermons, the church's style of worship, and so on.

Also, remember that a "picture is worth a thousand words." So include quality photos that depict different aspect of church ministry and life. You need important written content, as noted above. However, keep the written content concise. Furthermore, make sure that pictures and the written content communicate *authentic* information. In other words, avoid using "stock photos" except for special graphics or for conveying generic concepts.[27] Most of the photos on your website should communicate *who you are*, not *who you used to be* or *what you hope to be*.

"Functionality" largely pertains to the website's architecture and structure. A website with good functionality is one that's easy to navigate. As one website designer observes, "Good church websites make it easy to find that information quickly in a way that makes sense."[28] This usually entails a menu bar at the top (or left side) of the website with drop down windows and simple labels such as "About Us," "Church Life," "Events," "Media," "Directions," "Contact Us," etc. It may be especially useful for visitors to include some obvious button or link entitled "New Here?" And make sure your links, buttons, and fonts are sufficiently large and

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person after walking through the digital front door." *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 277.

[27] Many stock photos of church buildings, worship services, believers fellowshipping, etc., have been replicated and reused dozens of times on the Web. People who use the Internet frequently will often be able to tell whether or not the people in picture are professional models or whether they're "real people."

[28] "What Makes a Good Church Website?" (June 22, 2012); accessed November 2012 on the Internet: http://fatrabbitcreative.com/expert_advice/what_makes_a_good_church_website.

obvious. In the words of another website designer, "They should be staring people in the face everywhere they navigate on the site."[29]

Finally, the website must have an aesthetically pleasing appearance. Quoting again from a reputable church website designer,

> The church bears a responsibility to create beautiful things all for the glory of God. If the website is the first interaction someone has with your church, make sure it's a positive interaction. At the same time, the design of a church's website won't be engaging if it doesn't communicate effectively. Users want information, not flash. Good and engaging design doesn't distract from the user's goal.[30]

Here are a few things to keep in mind with respect to aesthetics. First, make sure your design is up-to-date and current. If your website was created more than five years ago, it's probably time to update the design. Most people below the age of 40 can date sites and if your site's dated, they'll take note.[31] Second, choosing the right color combinations for the basic theme of your site is important.[32] Third, remember your home page is usually the first and most important page people will see. In addition to the menu bar, you'll want to include your church's branding (i.e., logo and motto). Moreover, a "featured slider" with rotating banners can serve not only as a helpful navigation tool but also as an attractive eye-catching feature of your home page—provided that the graphics of the banners are well done![33] Moreover, avoid too much clutter. More graphics and less words are preferable for the home page. Yet too many graphics aren't good either. On the one hand, you don't want your site to appear overly bland and barren.[34] On the other hand, you want to avoid a look that's too gaudy or flashy.[35]

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[29] "What Are the Key Elements Found in the Best Church Websites" (May 9, 2011); accessed November 2012 on the Internet: http://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2011/05/key-elements-church-websites/.

[30] "What Makes a Good Church Website?" See the link above.

[31] For some examples of dated church websites, see the following (as of January 10, 2013): http://fbcmvky.org; http://cvcpc.org; http://church-of-christ.net; http://churchforchrist.com.

[32] Colors convey "moods." See the brief articles on fatrabbit CREATIVE (website design company) that address the "psychology" of each base color. For example, read about "black and white": http://fatrabbitcreative.com/expert_advice/how_colors_speak_black_and_white_are_colors. You can also follow the links or search to learn about the other base colors like red, blue, green, etc.

[33] Banners are like website "billboards" that advertise current sermon series, special events, or something important about the church (like a vision or mission statement). For some examples, see the following sites (as of January 10, 2013): http://www.covlife.org; http://www.hopeingod.org; http://www.trinitymd.org; http://www.hbcowensboro.org; http://gbctaylors.org.

[34] I'm not necessarily referring to "minimalist" designs which aim to reduce the features of a website to the most essential functions. Many minimalistic websites are very eye-catching and attractive. For the features of minimalistic design and some samples, see "Principles of Minimalist Web Design, With Examples" (May 13, 2010); accessed January 10, 2013 on the Internet: http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/05/13/principles-

Your best course of action is to look for a skilled website and graphics designer. Sometimes, a person may be good at both. If not, you may need more than one person to bring the skill sets together. Professionally designed church websites will cost a few thousand dollars.[36] Personally, I think a good website is worth the investment. Most churches hire professionals to build their church sign. Today your website is as important if not more.

But if you don't have lots of money to spend, you can utilize a church website template like those designed for Wordpress.[37] You'll still need a good graphics designer and someone with a little IT ("Information Technology") experience who can upload content and manage the site. I recommend that you try to stay within the skill sets God's given to your church or that you can afford to procure from outside the church. A simple and unsophisticated website that's simple and attractive is better than a more complex and overly "sophisticated" website that's poorly designed. In some cases, it may be better to hold off on a website until God provides the human and financial resources. No website is better than a really bad website that may reflect negatively on your ministry.

(2) Audio and Video Media

Nowadays, a good church website will have more than good graphics and helpful written information. Since the advent of digital media, many churches have begun to make their sermons available in audio format. If the church has its own server or pays for a hosting service, it can archive its audio messages and make them available on its own website.[38] For churches that can't host their own audio archives, there are ministries like Sermonaudio.com, which can provide both the hosting and also a

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of-minimalist-web-design-with-examples/. Of course, not all the samples on this site would serve well as church websites.

[35] For an example of a church website that goes overboard with its visual and audio experience, click here: http://www.evangelcathedral.net.

[36] Last I checked the average cost for a quality church website was around $3,000. That doesn't include the cost of site hosting or maintenance.

[37] Our church currently uses a "church theme" designed for Wordpress: http://gbctaylors.org. Some themes are free, but the better themes will cost between $50 and $100. This usually includes free updates and technical support. For other examples, see the Wordpress church themes designed by ThemeForest here: http://themeforest.net/category/site-templates/nonprofit, or by Church Themes here: http://churchthemes.net/themes/. For somewhat more sophisticated predesigned website templates, see Squarespace.com. Also, check out Thrive.am, which not only provides church website templates that are compatible with different Internet devices and platforms but also enables you to convert your website design and information into printed literature.

[38] Your church can also open an iTunes account and make your sermons available as downloadable podcasts.

worldwide venue of listenership for a reasonable price.[39] Such services often provide monthly reports not only of how many people are listening to or downloading your sermons but also of where these people are in the world. You can also acquire these kinds of statistics by using Google Analytics to monitor your website traffic.[40]

In addition to posting audio media on your website, you may want to consider using video as a medium for outreach. Many churches (especially larger ones) will have something like a "welcome" video where the pastor or someone else on staff provides the visitor to your website with a concise (2 to 5 minutes) introduction and invitation to your church. If the video is well done, it provides the visitor with a more warm and personal welcome than he would get if he simply read a text on your website or on a church promotional brochure.[41]

In addition to the basic welcome video, you may want to include somewhere on your website other video media that address and expound other topics that are important to your church and that really define your church's core beliefs, values, and/or mission. Moreover, if you have the personnel to help in this area, you can have your sermons recorded in video format and made available through live streaming and/or uploaded to a dedicated server (with sufficient bandwidth) or host services like Livestream, Vimeo or Viddler.[42] Higher Internet speeds and lower hosting costs have made the option of podcasting your sermons in video format more feasible. Furthermore, some churches create well-edited excerpts from sermons, give them a catchy title, and feature them as "teasers." Videos featuring the personal testimonies of certain members may also be an attractive way of introducing potential visitors to the kind of people who make up your church and, more importantly, to the power of the gospel in the life of individuals.

In addition to posting these kinds of videos on your church website, you may want to consider creating a church Facebook page where you can feature these videos. Your members can post these videos on their own Facebook pages and use them not

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[39] Sermon Audio offers an app for the iPhone and iPad and Android devices.

[40] Last I checked it was around $300 per year for at least two uploads per week.

[41] Many churches have and continue to use "Welcome" packets. These usually consist of a nicely designed folio with the church's name and the word "Welcome" on the outside, as well as pockets on the inside filled with small pamphlets that tell people more about the church. These are still useful. But the "Welcome" video on your website will enable you to reach out to potential visitors without requiring them to visit your church first.

[42] Viddler also provides a built in iTunes podcast feature. YouTube offers free video hosting. The downside is that you'll have unwanted ads prefacing your videos. Moreover, you can't control what videos it presents at the end, some of which may have offensive content. Also the EULA states that they have rights to your video to use how they deem.

only to introduce their family and friends to your church ministry but also as an evangelistic tool. Using social media networks to post your church audios and videos can be a useful and effective means of communicating the gospel to outsiders. And if you have the money to invest, a nicely designed smartphone or tablet app can be yet another attractive venue to make your audio and video media available to the public.[43]

Of course, audio and video media require the equipment and the personnel to capture, edit, and upload it. You'll need quality microphones, mixer boards, computers, editing software, HD cameras, good lighting (for video) and so forth. You'll need someone with some basic experience with audio and/or video equipment to record the audio or video. You'll need someone with more experience to do the editing. And you probably should have a professional or at least a semi-professional help you select the right equipment, set it up, and oversee the capture and (especially) the editing process. This is more the case with video media than with audio.

If you already possess or want to invest in video equipment in order to create something like a welcome video or other ministry related videos, I recommend you look into procuring a video teleprompter. With the advent of portable tablets like the iPad, you can now purchase affordable teleprompter kits[44] that enable you to look right at the camera as you're reading the scrolling text of your presentation reflected off of a "beam splitter" glass (which works like a one-way mirror). If done well, this can give your presentation more precision and polish.

Certainly, acquiring and employing audio and video technologies for church ministry requires financial investment. Moreover, most pastors, including myself, do not have the expertise in audio/video technology to discern what equipment to buy or what level of competence is needed to operate that equipment. At this point, I'll lean on the wisdom of a personal friend. Ryan Hobson is a video producer and consultant. He also serves as the Technical Director at Heritage Baptist Church, Owensboro, Kentucky. Here's what Ryan has to say about selecting the right

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[43] Some companies that specialize in creating iPhone and/or Android apps for churches and ministries include The Church App (designed by Subsplash), Church App Solutions, and Mobilesalt.

[44] The Prompter People offer three models of iPad teleprompters ranging from their basic $600 model to their $1,400 Proline series. This does not include the cost of the iPad itself. One can find various teleprompter apps for the iPad. "Teleprompter+" is among the apps with the best ratings. If you can't afford to purchase a teleprompter, you can rent one.

equipment that won't go out-of-date too soon ("future proofing") and training the right personnel for your audio and (especially) video media:

> A qualified consultant, especially one who specializes in helping churches, can often be more cost effective in the long run than the "do-it-yourself" approach. A church should not only consider its present needs. It needs to look five to ten years ahead. A well-defined "upgrade path" can save $1,000s or $10,000s down the road. Better to wait and purchase the quality equipment than to get cheap or "adequate" equipment, which may require more effort and money to upgrade it later on.

> Proper training is important for A/V volunteers. Being left on their own to "make it work" is the fastest way to lose them. This is because the only time they're usually noticed is when something goes wrong and they get blamed. Since the A/V personnel at most churches are volunteers, providing them with quality training and support is essential for the success and effectiveness of their ministry.[45]

So if you don't have members in your church with the knowledge and proficiency to set up and operate the equipment, you may need to invest some money to hire a professional to help you choose the right equipment, set it up, and provide those in your church with a basic knowledge of audio and video technology, some coaching and technical support.[46]

Personally, I believe an investment in quality audio and video media is worthwhile in light of the fact that such digital media is widely used by people in our culture as well as people in other cultures around the world. I don't think audio and video media will replace good written media. But as a means to introduce your church to outsiders and to communicate to them your basic identity, as well as your core beliefs, values, and mission, I believe audio and video technologies are a lawful and effective medium of gospel communication.[47]

One need not feel constrained to endorse Mark Driscoll's ministry model in every detail in order to appreciate a valid observation he makes concerning the use of technology for outreach:

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[45] Ryan provided me with this input at my request. His company is EF Media Solutions. Ryan not only provides quality video production, but he also offers professional consultation concerning audio/video technologies for church ministry. For more information on developing and training a media personnel team, see also the helpful chapters on "Building a Champion Crew" in *The Wired Church 2.0*, 85-118.

[46] In my experience, you'll need personnel with more experience than someone who may know how to use an iPod or play video games on an Xbox 360. And while voluntary help is appropriate and often necessary, the quality of the media you produce will usually not rise any higher than the skill and proficiency of the personnel who capture and edit the media. Not surprisingly, many churches today are including on their staff at least one person proficient in audio and video technologies. If you can't afford to bring an IT expert on staff, pray that God bring to your church people with the skill sets, the heart, and time to minister in this way.

[47] For a list of helpful principles for quality video production, see Len Wilson, *The Wired Church 2.0*, 67-69.

Technology is a tool for the church to connect with people and provide them with gospel content about Jesus. Now more than ever, churches that want to reach out effectively to lost people, particularly young people, don't necessarily need to love technology but must learn to use it to connect with people they love. Any church that is willing to use technology well is demonstrating love by approaching lost people in a way they are accustomed to. This technological hospitality is the practical outpouring of Jesus' love for our neighbor.[48]

2. Technologies for Discipleship

Churches are not merely called to evangelize the lost, but their mission also includes educating and equipping the saints (Eph 4:12-14). While the church's pastoral teaching ministry (public and private) is and should remain its *central* means for accomplishing this task (Acts 2:42; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 3:17-4:2), the church may employ other *secondary* means.

Historically, solid biblical literature has been one of the primary mediums for this complementary mode of cultivating disciples. Now, with the advent of the Internet, pastors can self-publish helpful teaching by means of a pastor's blog that's structured into or linked to their church's website. And as more of your people acquire e-book reading devices like Kindles or iPads, you can provide them with self-published materials in electronic format.[49]

Twitter is an Internet-based social network platform you can use to send brief messages called "tweets" (a maximum of 140 characters) to subscribers on a daily, weekly, or periodic basis.[50] True, many people use Twitter in silly ways, as a means to publicize trivial information-bites.[51] On the other hand, I've followed the tweets of some Christian leaders who craft well-worded messages that prompt the readers to set their "minds on things above" (Col 3:2) and that "stir up [others] to love and good works" (Heb 10:24).[52]

In addition to your audio sermons, written literature, and well-crafted tweets, there's a plethora of discipleship resources available on the Internet in written,

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[48] *Vintage Church*, 281.

[49] The cheapest and easiest way to do this is to save your document as a PDF, which can be uploaded to Kindle or iBooks.

[50] You can link your Twitter account to a Facebook account so that your tweets will appear on your Facebook page when you post them.

[51] For an animated illustration and good laugh, see the YouTube video "Twouble with Twitters": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN2HAroA12w.

[52] I've subscribed to the tweets of Pastor John Piper and usually find them spiritual stimulating. My friend, Jonathan Christman, is also gifted at framing brief statements that prompt his readers to think about the realities of the gospel.

audio, or video format. For example, there are a number of Christian bloggers who provide helpful articles on various biblical and/or practical topics. Moreover, many gifted teachers and/or ministries provide free audio and/or video media of sermons and lectures. A few resources I've personally found helpful include media from <u>Ligonier Ministries</u>, <u>The Gospel Coalition</u>, <u>Desiring God Ministries</u>, <u>Third Millennium Ministries</u>, <u>Reformed Theological Seminary</u>, and <u>Covenant Seminary Worldwide</u>.[53] Another helpful online resource is the <u>New City Catechism</u>.[54]

There are potential dangers and drawbacks to using the Internet as a tool for discipleship. To begin with, there are many really *bad* resources on the Web as, for example, websites featuring pornographic media. Pastors should warn their people about these dangerous sites and encourage them to consider Internet filtering and accountability measures.[55] Additionally, sub-biblical or even heretical teaching can be found on the Internet, just as it can be found in Christian bookstores. Once again, pastors should caution their people. It may be helpful to provide a list of sites you consider orthodox and basically in line with the doctrinal position of your church. Of course, even the best teaching available on the Internet isn't infallible. The key is to teach your people to be discerning.

Yet even the best Internet resources present potential temptations for Christians. Not surprisingly, good audio and video resources often feature some of the most gifted preachers and teachers in the nation (or world). If your members expose themselves to the best communicators, they may be tempted to compare these preachers and teachers critically with that of their local church pastors. Worse, believers can be tempted to treat listening to and/or watching a sermon on the Internet as a substitute for corporate worship.

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[53] Ligonier Ministries, The Gospel Coalition, Desiring God Ministries, and Third Millennium Ministries are also available as "apps" for the iPad.

[54] This is a modern catechism that provides theological questions and answers for memorization and meditation. It draws from both the Heidelberg Catechism and also the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The answers include a shorter version for children as well as a longer version for adults. Moreover, it includes a written commentary and prayer for each question and answer, as well as a two to five minute video exposition by a pastor and/or biblical scholar. I believe this is a useful tool for personal or family devotions. The 52 questions and answers fit nicely into an annual "one-per-week" schedule. It's also available as an iPad app.

[55] There are great Internet filtering platforms such as <u>Safeeyes</u>, <u>CovenantEyes</u>, and <u>NetNanny</u>. I would also recommend David Murray's article "7 Steps to Using Technology for God's Glory," which is available here: http://www.christianity.com/christian-life/discipleship/7-steps-to-using-technology-for-god-s-glory.html (accessed Jan 17, 2013), as well as his DVD series, "God's Technology: Training Our Children to Use Technology to God's Glory," which can be purchased here: http://headhearthand.org/films/gods-technology/.

I don't think the best approach in seeking to protect your people is to ban their use of good resources. Nor should you criticize these teachers or resources unfairly in an attempt to dissuade your people from using them. For one, it's not loving or righteous to misrepresent your neighbor. Moreover, imbalanced criticism of another preacher or author can actually backfire. The more mature members in your church can tell if you're criticizing another ministry unfairly and may begin to distrust your discernment and motives. Furthermore, you may post blogs and upload your sermons not only for the sake of your members, but also for the edification of Christians in other places. If so, your objection to your people accessing the sound teaching of other pastors online will come across as an inconsistency.

A more balanced approach, in my view, is to commend good preachers and authors to your people, making qualifications or offering caveats when necessary.[56] Remember that God has given some pastor-teachers to serve the universal church (Eph 4:11-14). "All things are yours," writes Paul, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas" (1 Cor 3:21-22). And we might add, "Whether Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, C. H. Spurgeon, as well as R. C. Sproul, John MacArthur, or John Piper."

At the same time don't feel ashamed to remind your people that God has provided local churches with *resident* pastor-teachers (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Titus 1:5). What's more, God commands church members "to respect those who labor among [them] and are over [them] in the Lord and admonish [them] and to esteem [their pastors] very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess 5:12-13; cf. Heb 13:7, 17). Consequently, Christians should view their local church pastors as their *primary* shepherds and the ones God has ordained for their growth and maturation.[57]

Finally, I should mention software and Internet platforms like Community Church Builder and Ministry Grid. These technologies enable churches to keep track of their various discipleship ministries as well as to organize and network various kinds of training for ministry leaders, Sunday School teachers, child-care workers, and so on.[58]

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[56] Just remember to be fair and humble in your criticisms of other gospel laborers.

[57] I acknowledge that some believers are in less than ideal church situations with pastors who aren't doing a good job of faithfully expounding God's word or shepherding the flock. Even in such situations, the church member shouldn't act disrespectfully or unlovingly toward his leadership. He should avoid gossip and communicate his concerns directly to his pastors with a humble and gracious spirit. He should prayerfully and patiently wait on Christ to bring change. He may have to look for another church home eventually. But he shouldn't act in haste or divisively.

[58] See http://www.churchcommunitybuilder.com and http://www.ministrygrid.com.

3. Technologies for Community

We've already discussed the usefulness of a good website. Many church website designs offer an "events" page or calendar in order to facilitate fellowship and ministry among the members. Some websites feature a private page for members only, which requires a password for access. Prayer requests and more "in-family" news can be posted here.[59]

Facebook is currently a popular and widely used social network platform. It allows users to share information, photos, and links with others whom they designate as "friends." Churches can create their own Facebook page. It can be configured so that every member of the page can post. Or, if you prefer, you can set up the page so that only designated administrators can post. In this case, members can still "like" or comment. A church Facebook page can be useful to share prayer requests, important news, upcoming events, or links to helpful media on the Internet. You can set up the page to be visible only to members or visible to the public.[60] In addition, community groups within a church can create their own pages.

When used wisely, Facebook, like Twitter, can be used to encourage one another in the faith. Moreover, church and community group Facebook pages can facilitate fellowship and mobilize members for ministry. Furthermore, it's a great way to keep your high school and college age young people connected with the church's ministry.[61]

4. Technologies for Worship

Introducing new technologies into worship can be a challenge—especially into churches within the Reformed tradition.[62] Some Christians within this tradition believe the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) applies only to the corporate

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[59] Churches can integrate the Community Church Builder software with their website to facilitate these objectives. Additionally, Yahoo! Groups or Gmail Groups can be used to send an email to a single "group" email address that includes the emails of a designated group of people (i.e., your church or community group members). The single message will go out to everyone on the list, as well as any replies.

[60] If you make it visible to the public, you may want to designate who can post updates or links, and you'll need to have someone monitor the page so that inappropriate comments can be deleted.

[61] According to Driscoll and Breshears, "Facebook is a site that many church planters have successfully used to gather and mobilize entire core groups. College ministries also thrive on Facebook since virtually every college student has a profile there." *Vintage Church*, 277.

[62] According to one survey of over 800 churches, at least 42% rejected the use of a computer projector on the basis of ecclesiastical "tradition." See Schultz, *High Tech Worship?* Kindle edition, loc. 1612-1849.

gatherings of the church and interpret it as precluding the introduction of anything into the worship service that's not explicitly commanded in the New Testament.[63]

Personally, I question whether the RPW should be limited to corporate worship. I don't think we live by one regulative principle when we pass through the "sanctuary doors" and a different principle when we're outside corporate worship.[64] Rather, as I see it, we live by one principle, which is *sola Scriptura*. This principle applies to all of life *in a more general way* and to church worship, community, and mission *with greater specificity*. Thus, there's *one principle*, but *different applications* based on varying contextual situations, i.e., worship in a broader sense and worship in a narrow sense.[65]

But even if we granted that the RPW only applied to corporate worship, it would not preclude the use of technology. This is because technology is a *circumstance*, not an *element* of worship. Just as technology is a tool that helps us accomplish our "cultural mandate," so technology is a tool that assists us in our "cultic mandate." Accordingly, we don't need to comb through the NT looking for *explicit* references to modern technologies. That would be an exercise in futility (and folly)! Instead, we must recognize that

> there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church,
> common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and

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[63] I agree with Derek Thomas who argues, "The case needs, then, to be established and maintained that the regulative principle is an argument on what is warranted by God in Scripture *as a whole*, and not merely in the New Testament church" (emphasis added). "The Regulative Principle: Responding to Recent Criticism," in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 92.

[64] A common proof text used in defense of the RPW is Deuteronomy 12:32: "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it" (ESV). The preceding context has to do with God's prescriptions for a centralized place of worship, i.e., the Temple (see 12:1-31). However, Moses doesn't just apply the "don't add, don't subtract" clause to formal or corporate worship. He's already employed the same formula and applied it to the totality of life in covenant with Yahweh (see Deut 4:1-2). Interestingly, many scholars have noted that the structure of Deuteronomy resembles the structure of 2nd millennium suzerain-vassal treaties and that Deuteronomy's case laws resemble those found in other ancient Near East legal codes. It turns out that these ancient treaties and law codes sometimes employed a similar literary device (i.e., a "don't add or subtract" clause) that served *as a warning not to tamper with, disregard, or distort the covenantal or legal stipulations*. In such texts, the warning applies to *the entire body of stipulations* and not just to certain stipulations that address cultic behavior or some other specific area of life. See Eugene Merrill, Deuteronomy, vol. 4 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 115, notes 150, 151; 228-29.

[65] According to Terry Johnson, "No Puritans, or for that matter any other mainstream spokesman for the regulative principle, would have argued that it applies only to public worship and has no application in private worship. Rather their point and ours would be that it applies differently…. All worship, then, is regulated by God's Word, *but the application is different in different contexts*, whether formal or informal, public or private" (emphasis his). *Reformed Worship: Worship That Is According to Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 4, n. 3.

Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (2LBC 1.6).

In reality, most Reformed Christians follow the Confession's teaching in practice if not in theory. For example, wooden pulpits, printed hymnals, and cushioned pews are all technologies (i.e., circumstances) that help us carry out the "elements" of worship, such as preaching, singing, and listening to the Word of God. None of these technologies are commanded in the NT. Yet few question their appropriateness in worship services.

But why do older technologies get a pass while newer technologies are dismissed out of hand? I'm not suggesting *every* new technology is appropriate for worship. We still have to discern whether a given technology is *a help* or *a hindrance* in praising God and edifying one another. What I am suggesting is that the use of modern technologies in corporate worship cannot be forbidden *simply because they're new*.

One relatively newer technology that has received admittance into most Reformed churches is "voice amplification."[66] Before this technology, the projection range of the preacher's voice limited the amount of people he could address in a sermon. A few preachers, like George Whitefield, possessed the vocal range to reach hundreds and even thousands.[67] But with the advent of the microphone and amplification, pastors can address much larger audiences than before. Not surprisingly, many modern churches—including most Reformed churches—employ this technology in their corporate worship.

Bigger churches have moved from amplifying the preacher's voice in order to reach *distant ears* to amplifying the preacher's image in order to reach *distant eyes*. Large auditoriums or overflow rooms are now equipped with projectors or flat screen technology in which a video image of the preacher is projected on a large screen. This enables the hearers to catch the speaker's bodily language and facial expressions.[68] Pastors can also use projectors and large screens along with software

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[66] Late 19th and early 20th century.

[67] But preaching to hundreds and thousands without voice amplification took its toll on Whitefield. He often strained his voice, sometimes to the point of rupturing blood vessels. See Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 267.

[68] Many homileticians acknowledge the importance of bodily gestures and eye contact in preaching. See C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 272-304; Gwyn Walters, "The Body in the Pulpit," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 445-63; John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th edition, ed. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 290-98; Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 198-202; Wayne McDill, "Preaching is More Than Words"; accessed January 2013 on the Internet: http://www.preaching.com/sermons/11565640/page-7/. Even the Bible

like PowerPoint or Keynote to project the outline of their sermon, quotations, graphics, photos, and even video clips to illustrate a point in their message.[69]

Many churches combine this technology with high-speed Internet and "live stream" their worship service for members who are providentially hindered from attending the service or for non-members who happen to tune in. Some large or "mega" churches have taken a further step and now broadcast a pastor-teacher's sermon to other "sites" or "campuses" within a large city or region in digital audio and video format.

In addition to modern technologies that enhance and expand the preaching of God's word in corporate worship, newer technologies are being used to facilitate congregational singing. In the place of or in addition to hymnbooks, the lyrics of songs are projected on a wall or screen for the entire congregation to see. What's more, software is now available that enables the personnel in the A/V room to transmit the lyrics wirelessly to flats screens or tablet devices like iPads for the music leader and musicians.[70] They can even project messages, prompts, or a timer on the preacher's iPad as well!

We don't have time to cover other modern technologies used in corporate worship.[71] But we need to pause for a moment and assess those we've surveyed. Are such technologies as flat screens, live streaming, and worship software helpful for the proclamation of God's Word and corporate praise?

I've found that it depends on whom you ask. Some Christians are very positive about the incorporation of these modern technologies into corporate worship. Others are decidedly opposed to them. Many, like myself, are "open but cautious." We acknowledge the appropriateness and even usefulness of technology for the cult (i.e., religion) as well as the culture. Moreover, we don't view modern technology as bad simply because *it's modern*. Nevertheless, we recognize that most technologies

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acknowledges body language (Ps 47:1; Lam 2:15; Ezek 4:4-7; Acts 13:16; 19:33) and the ability of the eyes to communicate (Ps 32:8; Prov 10:10; 16:30; 30:17).

[69] Some, like Leith Anderson, think PowerPoint is passé. According to him, "PowerPoint has been largely a Baby Boomer phenomenon. Younger adults wonder about the validity and credibility of anything perceived to be canned…. So PowerPoint is less used with younger adults and becoming more a characteristic of an older generation." "Visualcy: Is PowerPoint Fading?" Interview with Leith Anderson, *Leadership* (Summer 2007), 37, as cited in Driscoll and Breshears, 272. While I think it's an overstatement to say that projected words or images is no longer in vogue, I have observed that those who still use projected media tend to use less words and "special effects." The minimalism that has influenced web design seems to be influencing PowerPoint presentations too.

[70] See, for example, ProPresenter worship software.

[71] For example, updates in the technology of musical instrumentation.

not only offer benefits but also bring some downsides, drawbacks, or potential dangers.

For example, it's one thing to project a video of your pastor preaching on a large screen if you're meeting in a large auditorium or if a portion of your congregation is forced to meet in an "overflow" room because there's not enough space in the main sanctuary. But using the same technology to create "multi-site" churches is another matter.[72] Some are concerned that such a strategy and methodology creates challenges for the government of the church and the care of the sheep. Such a model could also tend to promote a "celebrity culture" where the most gifted speaker virtually eclipses other less gifted teachers in the church. I'm not prepared to condemn all multi-site churches. But I think it's a church ministry philosophy that warrants some careful and cautionary reflection.[73]

What about projectors, flat screens, and special software for lyrics, as well as modern technologies for the musical accompaniment of congregational praise and singing? Once again, some are enthusiastic about these technologies and believe they enhance the worship experiences. Others fear that they can tend subtly to transform worship into entertainment that disengages our minds rather than engaging our minds.[74] Overall, my experiences in worship venues where these technologies were

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[72] Geoff Surrat, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird define the multi-site church as follows: "A multi-site church is one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board." *The Multi-site Church Revolution: Being One Church ... in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 18. As this definition demonstrates, there are different versions or types of multi-site churches.

[73] Those who support the multisite church philosophy point out that early churches congregated together when possible but also divided into smaller groups and met for worship in different houses (Acts 2:46). They also note that the apostles sometimes taught the churches from a distance through written letters (a technology) rather than in person (2 Thess 2:2, 15). On the other hand, one might view the house gatherings and teaching *in absentia* as occasioned by certain exigencies rather than preferences. We do know that the apostles expressed a preference to minister to the saints face-to-face rather than from a distance (2 Cor 1:16; 12:14; 1 Thess 2:17; 3:10; 2 John 12; 3 John 13-14). Books and articles defending the multisite model include the following: Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears, *Vintage Church*, 241-56; J. D. Greear, "A Pastor Defends His Multi-site Church," *9Marks eJournal* 6 (2009): 21-26; Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Defense of Multi-site," *9Marks eJournal 6* (May/June 2009): 8-20; idem., *Sojourner and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), iBook, loc. 539-546. Arguments against the multi-site model are found in Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 87-88; Grant Gaines, "Exegetical Critique of Multi-site: Disassembling the Church?" *9Marks eJournal* 6 (May/June 2009): 45-59; Jonathan Leeman, "Theological Critique of Multi-site: Leadership Is the Church," *9Marks eJournal 6* (2009): 50-62; Thomas White and John M. Yeats, *Franchising McChurch: Feeding Our Obsession with Easy Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009).

[74] Some media ecologists and critics of modern culture seem unduly biased against modern technologies that employ images or visual effects. They believe the visual medium not only affects the message but also irresistibly overrides any textual content and becomes itself the message. Ted Turnau refers to this as "imagophobia" and offers a more balanced approach to visual media and imagery in his book *Popologetics: Popular Culture in*

used *well* have been generally positive. But I've also been in church services where they were employed in a way that was distracting. Since I agree with John Piper that one of the goals for corporate worship is "undistracting excellence,"[75] I think these technologies should be used with care and discernment. If they can aid worship without getting in the way of worship, they may be useful and legitimate tools.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON TECHNOLOGY AND CHURCH MINISTRY

I don't believe all modern technologies for worship are helpful in every situation. In some contexts, they're clearly not edifying. Moreover, along with the benefits come drawbacks and potential dangers. So we must proceed with caution. To borrow an analogy from Arthur Boers,

> It would be exceedingly convenient if we could simply label every technology as either "good" (use it as much as you want) or "bad" (never, ever use it). But ... technology is more like a yellow like the yellow light on a traffic signal. Unlike green, which always means "go," or red, which always means "stop," the yellow light is a call for a discerning look at the entire situation.[76]

So while we shouldn't be dismissive of modern technologies for church ministry, we should be discerning. They can be useful tools if they help us accomplish our ministry objectives in ways that are lawful and edifying.

I'd like to close with the following thoughts:

1. Count the cost

Technology is a useful tool, but it's also a costly tool. It demands time, money, and personnel. Therefore, make sure you know what you're trying to accomplish or produce before you invest money on the technologies to produce it. As Len Wilson remarks,

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Christian Perspective (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2012), 135-64. See also Brian Godawa's *Word Pictures: Knowing God through Story and Imagination* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2009).

[75] See point 8 of Piper's "What Unites Us In Worship at Bethlehem" (Oct 1, 2003); accessed January 2013 on the Internet: http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/what-unites-us-in-worship-at-bethlehem.

[76] Cited by John Dyer in *From the Garden to the City*, Kindle, loc. 454 of 3483. Similarly, Quentin Schultz advocates a cautious approach to technology: "A wise approach to new technologies, then, is a "yes, but" attitude: yes, we will consider using it to serve our neighbors as ourselves, but we will not be duped by inflated rhetoric about its inherent goodness or badness. Yes, new technologies are part of the unfolding of God's original creation, but we fallen human beings will never be able to use them to usher in heaven on earth. The "yes" is our faith in God to bless our imperfect use of technology; the "but" is our admission of foolishness and hubris—all sin." *High Tech Worship?* Kindle edition, loc. 597-1849. Consider also some of the pitfalls summarized by John P. Jewell in *Wired for Ministry: How the Internet, Digital Media, and Other New Technologies Can Serve Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 29-73.

There's no point in having highly specialized computers, plus video hardware and software, unless you have a clear idea of its intended use. Just like you never know what tools you'll need until you begin the project and read the manual, the types of equipment needed to begin a media ministry depend thoroughly on what it is that you want to accomplish.[77]

Once you know you're ministry objectives and what technologies you'll need to accomplish them, you'll have to do the math and determine whether you have sufficient resources.

Better to wait till you have the funds and the staff to do it right than to rush ahead and have it backfire. Using a little technology well is better than trying to use lots of technology poorly. It's definitely a case in which "less is more."

2. Minister within your means

Don't feel pressured to compete with the bigger churches. On the other hand, I'm not suggesting you should sinfully envy or despise the bigger churches. Indeed, we can aspire to grow and to have the personnel and financial resources some day to afford better technologies for church ministry. Until then, let's be content with the resources and technologies God has given us. Perhaps the best approach may be one in which the church implements some of these modern technologies in phases.[78]

3. Keep your priorities right.

Churches should focus on developing, employing, and refining their core beliefs and values as well as their ministry vision and mission before spending lots of time and money on publicizing them through modern technologies. Who you *really* are in Christ and what you're *really* doing to advance the kingdom is more important than the attractive website or videos you employ to convey this information to the public. Indeed, you know you have the cart before the horse when visitors who were attracted by your nice website and well-edited videos are disappointed when they realize that the real "state of affairs" is no where close to what was advertised on the Internet.

Moreover, remember that technology is a *circumstance* of church worship and ministry, not an *element*. It's not itself a means of grace but a medium through which you communicate the means of grace. "When we fail to see technology within the context of the power, majesty, and glory of God," cautions Quentin Schultz, "we can

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[77] *The Wired Church 2.0*, 129.

[78] For some helpful advice along these lines see "The Phasing Plan" in *The Wired Church 2.0*, 147-62.

become more enchanted with our technological ability than we are humbled by God's grace."[79]

Therefore, the gospel, not technology, is our priority. We need to focus on preaching the gospel, living the gospel, and sharing the gospel. Technology may be a tool to help us accomplish these objectives. But technology is not an end in itself. Let's keep it that way![80]

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[79] *High Tech Worship?* Kindle edition, loc. 305 of 1849.

[80] This applies to the younger church members who restlessly yearn for cutting edge technologies. But it also applies to older church members who may be unduly attached to their favorite older technologies. All parties need to subordinate their personal preferences to the gospel.