

Introduction

I begin with two observations. First, people complain about a lot of things. And second, one of the things they complain about most is technology, especially my generation, the baby-boomers. Not long ago, I heard a grandfather complaining about his grandchildren having their noses stuck in their I-phones. **"Those phones,"** he said, **"make it impossible to talk to them."**

Let's think about that statement for a moment. Those phones make it impossible to talk to them. Is that true? No, it isn't. His statement betrays what he thinks – that it's Technology with a capital "T." But it isn't. It's technology with a small "t" and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Humans Can Handle their Environment

This is a fascinating text that reveals the beginnings of civilization. It records the first human society, formed by the descendents of Cain. And as verses 16-24 make clear, it was a godless one. What we have here then is the beginning of the self-sufficient secular society that the New Testament calls the **"world."**

Now, if the Bible was a biased account, it would have ascribed nothing good to this godless society. But it isn't a biased account. So, it reveals three of its accomplishments: the semi-nomadic discipline in verse 20, the cultural arts in verse 21, and the use of bronze and iron tools in verse 22, which is our focus today. Verse 22 attributes their invention to Cain's grandson, Tubal-cain, who was the first blacksmith.

Verse 22, in other words, is about technology. Technology refers to devices and methods that enlarge our capacity to act upon and interact with the world around us. Tubal-cain's inventions enlarged people's capacity to cut down trees and skin animals for instance. It was easier and faster to do both with bronze or iron tools than with stone ones.

Technological developments are an integral part of human history.

Already in the earliest stages of civilization in verse 22, people are inventing things. They continued to do so of course and always will. I read an article titled *The Top Ten Inventions that Changed the World*. They are as follows: the wheel, nails, the compass, the printing press, the internal combustion engine, the telephone, the light bulb, penicillin, contraceptives, and the internet. Those are just a sampling of countless inventions that have dramatically impacted individual and cultural life. We can only imagine the astonishing ones to come.

The technology in verse 22 and in history teaches us a basic truth about humans. We can handle our environment.

Humans Can't Handle Themselves

But we can't handle ourselves.

We see that in verses 23-24, which are about an evil man named Lamech. Genesis 2 clearly reflects that God intended marriage to be monogamous. But Lamech, driven sexually, became the first recorded polygamist, with at least two wives. He was also a brawler according to verse 23. He apparently became involved in a petty squabble of some kind with a younger and probably smaller man who either verbally or physically assaulted him. The offense against him was slight. His response was severe. Lamech killed him.

It was a tragic and, as verse 24 reveals, calculated overreaction. Lamech declared his intention. He would retaliate against anyone who harmed him in any way "**seventy-seven times**" as much.

Verses 23-24 record what they do in order to teach a second basic truth about humans. We can't handle ourselves. 10,000 years of human history are overwhelming empirical proof of that. In our natural state apart from Jesus, we're inherently and primarily self-centered. Because we are, we're at the ready to act foolishly or sinfully when it suits us. As a result, anger, malice, contempt, resentment, addiction, sloth, greed, gluttony, impatience, and a host of other vices permeate our actions and interactions at every level and to every degree.

Examples abound. On one end of the spectrum, just this past week, a young woman was so angry about the hair cut a barber gave her that she went home, got her gun, came back to his shop, and pulled the trigger three times. Fortunately, the gun jammed and she was subdued before she killed him. Except for the gun jamming, Lamech would have been proud. On the other end of the spectrum, a worker running the road marking machine did this (power point slide). Instead of stopping and removing the branch, he just marked around it. It's sloth.

The young woman and the road marker convey the human situation. Yes, we can handle our environment through technology. But we can't handle ourselves, our nature.

Technology with a Capital "T"

Those are critical insights and together, they correct a false assumption many people have about technology.

Let me make an observation. People have always complained about technology. Gutenberg's printing press is an example of what I mean. Many criticized it because it allowed the dissemination of information. One Benedictine priest, for instance, warned about **"the shameless print material which may, alas, inflame impressionable youths."** Or take Alexander Graham Bell's telephone. Many lamented that people would converse by phone and lose the ability to communicate face-to-face. The biggest complaint though was its intrusiveness. Mark Twain was so taken back by it that he wrote a Christmas card wishing everyone rest and peace – except the inventor of the telephone. Bell himself refused to have one in his workroom. My point is that people have always complained about technology. Some in Genesis 4 I'm sure complained about those new fangled bronze axes and knives.

With the astounding technological advancements of the past 30 years though, we now complain as none ever have. It's constant – especially the electronic devices. We hear and read it all the time. Screens are stealing us; video games are making us inactive and obese; iPhones are

making us detached and rude; texting is depersonalizing us; the internet is corrupting us, and on it goes.

Notice something grammatically. A technology is the subject of each of those statements. It shows us what people think. Technology is something that independently acts upon or against us. It's technology with a capital "T" in other words, which means it's to blame. So, it's Technology's fault that we're addicted to screens, that we're lazy and obese, that we're detached and rude, and so on. There's no doubting it. In many if not most people's minds, it's Technology with a capital "T."

Technology with a Small "t"

But it isn't. It's technology with a small "t" instead. Our text teaches us that. We can handle our environment. The problem isn't the technology. We can't handle ourselves. The problem is us – the self-centered nature that we allow to direct us.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not denying the effects of technologies on us. As a result of the rapidly moving and changing images of television and video games, for instance, many have a diminished ability to concentrate and learn.

But whose fault is that? I've mentioned Neil Postman's classic book about television, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. That title is instructive. Notice it isn't television amusing us to death, because it can't do that. It can't independently act upon us or against us. It's us amusing us to death through television. My point is technologies have only those effects upon us that we allow them to have. We, not they, are responsible for their effects upon us.

A young pastor, John, tells about a friend of his in seminary, Paul. Paul told him one day that he shut down his Facebook account. "**I deleted it!**" he said. "**I'm done!**" When John asked why, he replied, "**It's a complete distraction from studying. From life!**" Yet, several weeks later, when John issued a dinner invitation via Facebook, Paul RSVPed. He admitted that he switched it back on and explained why, "**It**

turned out that I just watched TV instead. And I was missing social invitations." It's clear. The problem wasn't Facebook or TV. The problem was Paul's and his lack of discipline.

Let's get it straight. It's isn't Technology with a capital "T." It's technology with a small "t."

Control Technology

That's the truth and it implies what we need to do. Control technology. Don't allow ourselves to be controlled by it. We control it by doing two things.

First, stand back and see.

Tony Campolo arranged for an Amish bishop to speak to a sociology class at Eastern University. Listen to what the bishop told Campolo's students. Referring to technologies like cars, telephones, and electricity, he said: **"We didn't outright reject these things. We just stood back to see what happened to the families that had them. And when we saw what it did to the likes of your kind, we decided that we would just as soon not have those things happen to us."**

We need to do what the Amish did. Stand back and see. Take the time to observe and objectively analyze the effects of particular technologies on us. We do that carefully and prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit for insight and wisdom as we do.

Take social networking, websites that enable people to communicate with each other like Facebook, Twitter, and many more. Psychological fact – normal human interactions lock us into patterns of feeling, thought, and action that hinder living strongly in the kingdom of the heavens. Technological fact – overusing social networking dramatically increases normal human interactions. Overusing social networking, therefore, hinders living strongly in the kingdom of the heavens. The more we use it, for instance, the more we tend to gossip.

That illustrates what it means to stand back and see. We observe and objectively analyze the effects of particular technologies on us.

We control technology by doing a second thing. We address its detrimental effects. Standing back and seeing enables us to identify those effects. We then strongly address them.

That's what the Amish do. They don't believe cars, telephones, electricity, and other technologies are wrong. They just limit or eliminate their detrimental effects. Take telephones. They don't want them intruding into their homes. So they address that detrimental effect by placing them outside their homes, in telephone booths at the end of their driveways. That way they can make calls but don't have to receive or even hear them.

We should be not **"just like"** but **"more like"** the Amish. Once we identify the detrimental effects of particular technologies, we address them. We act to limit or eliminate those effects. So, a runner takes his cell phone with him but turns it off. He can make a call, if he's having a heart attack (he's an old guy), but doesn't receive calls. Or a man never looks at texts when conversing with others. Or a Christian doesn't play video games unless he's already read the Bible and prayed. Or a Facebook user limits scrolling to ten minutes a day.

I'm not saying we should do particularly what they do. I am saying we should do generally what they do. Strongly address the detrimental effects of technology. Do our best to limit or eliminate them.

Conclusion

Our spiritual lives depend on it. It's a fact that our ordinary life is the context of our friendship with Jesus. It's in that ordinary life that we live with Him and for Him. Consequently, anything that diminishes our ordinary life diminishes our life with and for Him as well. We must not, therefore, allow technology to diminish our ordinary life. I know it from my experience and the experiences of others. If we want a transforming friendship with Jesus, we must control technology not be controlled by it. We must do that, and the good news is that we can because it's technology with a small **"t"**. So let's leave here and do it!