

The University Heights Messenger

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Technology And The Church

By Jeff Smith

When I first became a full-time preacher, I had the privilege of getting to know an older preacher who was coming our way to hold a gospel meeting. I called him to talk over his plans, settle on accommodations and find out if there was anything specific that he would need.

“Will you be using the overhead projector,” I innocently asked?

“No,” he retorted. “I won’t be putting on any picture show to entertain the brethren!”

He pontificated for another twenty minutes about the dubious benefits of putting anything in front of the audience that couldn’t be erased in a cloud of chalk. The overhead projector – a dying technology twenty years later – was just too similar to a movie projector and everybody knows they have no place in the worship of the saints.

This older preacher has gone on to his reward now, but I sometimes wonder what he would think of our modern digital projectors and fancy websites. What would he think about churches sending out podcasts and uploading videos to YouTube?

The twentieth century saw preachers migrate from charts printed on white bed sheets to overhead projectors to digital projectors. Churches lived in the Yellow Pages, but then discovered a wider audience on the Internet. Sermons leapt from reel-to-reel recorders to cassettes to compact discs to MP3s. Even hymnals are falling prey to paperless versions that are projected upon the silver screen. If time permits, one wonders where the technology will take us next.

Those advances are not confined to sermon presentation and sharing, either. Every saint now has easy access to volumes which once dwelt only in the libraries of preachers who had the hunger and the budget to collect them. Commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, lexicons – all are just a click away. A generation ago, the Franklin handheld Bible invaded the pews, permitting worshipers to

search for passages and terms on a little screen, but with impressive celerity. When cell phones got smart, Bibles popped up on them as well, and now netbooks and iPads offer more screen real estate for reading verses in multiple versions and doing quick searches and studies, as well as note taking.

Can you imagine a time in the future when the church has nothing paper in the rack of the pew in front of you? The Bibles may all be digital and the hymns will be projected on the screen.

There are dangers, of course. Some folks might assume that you’re playing games or checking football scores on your smart phone, rather than reading the preacher’s references. Actually, some might even be doing those very things, the way schoolchildren used to hide comics in their textbooks and chuckle through boring lectures. The potential for noisy interruptions and entertaining distractions is great, but in pious hands, these technological marvels can surely make worship a more intellectually rewarding experience. We just have to resist the urge to tune out a boring sermon in favor of playing a quick game of Pac-Man on mute.

It was not so long ago that if an emergency occurred while one was in church, he learned of it when he got home and found a message waiting. When doctors began sharing their pager technology with the rest of us, that changed a bit. Suddenly, you were alerted to call home and some would walk out of the worship to find a phone. It wasn’t very long before cell phones became affordable and small enough to carry, and then the sound of ringing phones became common during worship. The recipient would sheepishly silence the phone and try to act like nothing happened. Now, there are probably countless text messages flowing in silently to the cell phones in nearly every purse or pocket in the building.

Technological advancements are wonderful. Never before have we been so capable of taking the gospel into the whole world at such little expense (Matthew 28:18-20). A single congregation can do

today what seemingly required church-splitting unscriptural arrangements a short time ago. Yet, the potential for abuse is also so apparent.

Gossip and false doctrine can now spread faster than a regional wildfire – at the speed of light all the way around the globe (James 3:1-12). There is something clean and sweet about the simplicity of the gospel that is disturbed by the presence of so much pulsating technology (2 Corinthians 11:3). So much noise and imagery can detract from the message and the spiritual task (see Luke 10:40).

So, we’re seeking to balance the availability of new technologies with the solemnity and dignity of worship and evangelism (1 Corinthians 14:40). We are tasked with presenting the gospel to a generation raised with game consoles and flashy television programs. Without sacrificing the essential gravity of the gospel, we face the challenge of being heard over the din of the Wii and the iPod.

Where Paul was concerned with sympathy for the Jew, the lawful, the lawless and the weak, we must apply ourselves to reaching Generation Y and Generation Next by presenting the gospel as relevant, urgent and useful, “as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). Paul wrote, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:21-23).

While we cannot afford to be left behind technologically, neither can we afford to go beyond the will of Christ or cheapen the Bible’s truths. This is one technological challenge the scientists won’t be able to solve for us.

IN NEED OF PRAYERS:

Jeff Howerton will return to work in April!

Edith Tirey continues to struggle with her health.

Linda Hill (wife of Gylon Hill who had been on the list but is now doing well), is suffering from lung cancer. It has metastasized to her brain. They have begun radiation treatment.

Our members: **Jim Edwards, Glenn Davis, Glenn Kimberlin.**

Others: **Robin Miller, Vina Krassow, Tom Curtis, Shelly Stewart, Courtney and Aubree Reeves, Tabetha Lynn, Tom Curtis, John Bennett, Dennis Brennan, Robert and Sarah Brundige, Donald Dawson, Jean Gartland, Wes Kidd, Gail Stein, Shannon Gilbert**

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Streaming Bible study every Tuesday at 7.

Our spring meeting with Mark McCrary is April 17-22

The men’s meeting is today at 3:30

Special study March 26 at 10 AM.

BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

- Sun:** Ex 26-27, Ps 37:23-40, Luke 1
- Mon:** Ex 28, Ps 38, Luke 2
- Tue:** Ex 29-30, Ps 39, Luke 3
- Wed:** Ex 31-32, Ps 40, Luke 4
- Thu:** Ex 33-34, Ps 41, Luke 5
- Fri:** Ex 35-36, Ps 42, Luke 6
- Sat:** Ex 37-38, Ps 43, Luke 7

SERMON TOPICS:

Sunday AM. Competing with horses
(Jeremiah 12:5)

Sunday PM. Do your best to come before
winter
(2 Timothy 4:9, 21)