

Let No Corrupt Communication come from Your Computer or Your Cellphone

By Al Felder

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29)

We live in an ever changing world in regards to technology. Today’s youth are used to the constant use of smart devices. Within the past fifty years we have gone from wired dial-up telephones, black and white televisions with rabbit ear antennas, and computers that would fill a room; to a device that fits in your hand, and can do more than all of those other devices combined!

The use of these devices brings new challenges to living a life that is pleasing to God. The moral issues themselves are not new. They are the same moral issues that have been with man since the creation. We just have to learn to apply the scriptures to our use of this new technology. We must do as the scriptures teach, and let no corrupt communication come from our computer or our cellphone.

Before we get too much further into our discussion, I do want to say something about the positive use of modern technology and personal responsibility. The amount of information that exists on the internet today is unbelievable. In the past it would have cost a small fortune to build a library of religious books. Today, however, many valuable resources can be found online for free.

Also, the spreading of the Gospel is limitless due to modern technology. There are Churches in parts of the world today that started because someone built a website, shared an article, or an audio sermon. Many Christians have been built up in the faith, and encouraged through the use of modern technology.

I say all of that to say this, our smartphones don’t make us sin. We sin because we make a choice to sin. The technology can either be used for good or evil. We are accountable for how we choose to use it. If we are unable to make good decisions, and the temptation for evil seems too great; Jesus gave the ultimatum for such instances. *“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”* (Matthew 5:30) Nothing is worth our soul! If the temptation is too great to use such devices for sinful behavior, we need to get rid of them.

Let’s look at some statistics so we can grasp exactly what the current generation is facing. The Kaiser Family Foundation did an extensive study on media use by kids, and came up with the following statistics. Kids spend an average of six and a half hours per day with media. Twenty-six percent of the time they are using more than one device. This means that eight and

a half hours' worth of media exposure is packed into six and a half hours. This is equivalent to a full time job. For children who have televisions and computers in their rooms, these numbers can be even higher.¹

The use of social media websites is the most common activity of teens. Recent polls indicate that 22% of teenagers log on to social media more than ten times a day, and over half of all teens log on at least once a day. "Seventy-five percent of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, 54% use them for texting, and 24% use them for instant messaging."² This is the first generation to have its social and emotional development occur through the influence of the internet.

With the new technology we have new vocabulary. Today our children are familiar with such terms as cyberbullying, sexting, and Facebook depression. The internet has given rise to new challenges in the protection of children's privacy, and sleep deprivation caused by online addiction. Let's expound upon some of these issues.

Cyberbullying is defined as, "deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person."³ The victims of this sin often suffer depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and suicide. The sin itself is not new, it is just being carried out in a new way today.

Biblical sins that fit this activity are lying, gossip, bearing false witness, evil speaking, bitterness, anger, hatred, malice and railing. That last one is a sin worthy of disfellowship according to 1 Corinthians 5:11. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." (Ephesians 4:31) Such sins should not be named among Christians.

It is amazing how people will talk to and about one another while online. The language used is often abusive, pornographic, and debasing. Even on sports sites fans often say the most awful things about rival fan bases. Because of the relative or complete anonymity of the writers, the electronic exchanges are filled with sock value and insults. People are less guarded in the things that they say. They often say things that they would not if the person was standing in front of them.

Young people, such activities are not funny or cool; they are sin. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen,

¹**Meg Meeker, M.D. 2007.** *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters.* New York : Ballantine Books, 2007. p. 22.

² **Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe, MD, & Kathleen Clarke-Pearson, MD. 2011.** Clinical Report - The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. *American Academy of Pediatrics.* March 28, 2011, pp. 800-804.

³ **Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe, MD, & Kathleen Clarke-Pearson, MD. 2011.** Clinical Report - The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. *American Academy of Pediatrics.* March 28, 2011, pp. 800-804.

how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20) We are all created in the image of God, and the way that we treat one another is a true reflection of our attitude towards God.

Sexting is defined as, "the sending, receiving, or forwarding of sexually explicit messages, photographs, or images via cell phone, computer, or other digital devices."⁴ Twenty percent of teens say that they have posted nude or seminude photographs or videos of themselves online. In some instances teens have been charged with felony child pornography and sentenced to jail. Other incidents have led to school suspension or the loss of jobs.

Exposure to pornography is a major danger when it comes to the use of modern technology. The average age of a boy's first exposure to pornography is eleven. Nearly half of boys between the third and eighth grades have visited internet sites with adult content. In recent years, this has become more common for girls as well.

Pornography warps the natural development of sexuality in young people. The graphic content contained in pornography inflicts severe trauma on our children. It will lead them down paths of perversity that, in their normal development, they never would have considered. The sad reality is that many young people don't seek pornography; it pops up at them unawares and drags them in.

The Bible has much to say about the sin of fornication, but I believe that one passage in particular really brings out the effects of this sin. "*Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body*" (1 Cor. 6:18). Fornication, unlike any other sin, can have a damaging effect on us. It is the one sin, the Bible points out, that we take our bodies and use. It is a sin against God and our own bodies that are to be a temple for God. Because of its severity, this sin will have many long lasting effects both physically and mentally on children. All sorts of diseases can be contracted, and many psychological problems can exist as a result of this sin. Whether it is the viewing through media or participation in the act itself, the Bible makes it clear that we are to flee fornication.

Facebook depression is a clinical term researchers have given to a new phenomenon that results from teens spending too much time on social media. These teens exhibit all of the classic symptoms of depression. When teens feel a lack of online acceptance from their peers, it can trigger depression.

This desire for acceptance has led many teens to post inappropriate things online. Some teens want to be the next internet sensation. They often perform physically dangerous or humiliating acts. They post pictures of themselves partying or participating in illegal activities. For many teens, social media becomes a show, a place for them to make their lives look more exciting than others.

⁴ **Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe, MD, & Kathleen Clarke-Pearson, MD. 2011.** Clinical Report - The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. *American Academy of Pediatrics*. March 28, 2011, pp. 800-804.

At the very heart of this issue is the most basic tenant of living the Christian life. *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Matthew 16:24) Young people, being a Christian means that you no longer live your life for yourself. It’s not about doing whatever you can to cause other people to notice you. It’s about living for Christ, and causing other people to notice Him.

We live in a world where everybody wants their fifteen minutes of fame. People will do all kinds of things, and put it on some form of social media just to get attention. We have become more focused on glorifying ourselves, but service unto Christ requires us to deny ourselves. It requires us to become more like Him, so that others may see Jesus living in us.

As parents we must realize how susceptible our children are to harmful influences. The Bible makes it clear that children are easily led astray and deceived. *“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive”* (Eph. 4:14). Children are not miniature adults. They are not as able to discriminate between good and evil. They don’t have the discipline to choose between the truth and cleverly crafted philosophies. That comes with maturity and training.

Fathers and mothers need to be a defense for their children. We need to recognize that popular culture is our enemy; it’s competing for our sons and daughters, and it’s up to us to defeat it. Popular culture is devoted to inciting teenagers against their parents and undermining traditional values. It is a 24-7 attack on all things related to godly living.

One way that parents can be a defense for their children is through restraint. Limit excess to television, games, and other forms of media. Keep televisions or computers out of their room. It’s not a matter of trust; it’s a matter of protection. As the parent, you should monitor what your children watch and have the ultimate say over programs or internet usage. At the very least, filters should be in place blocking harmful material from your children. By taking this simple step, parents will help their child become happier and better. Children need less time with the influence of the world and more time with your influence.

We need to provide them with a safe environment. We may not always be able to protect them once they leave our home, but within our home they should be able to find a place of comfort and reassurance. We can accomplish this by having a home built on the content and authority of God’s word. *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom. 12:2). As we have stated, the world will have more than enough opportunities to influence our children. They literally face a non-stop assault today. What are we as parents giving them to combat this attack?

We need to provide them with a solid foundation in the word of God. Their minds need to be renewed through the study of scripture so that they will be able to discern what is good and what is evil. This responsibility rests squarely on us as parents.

Another way to accomplish this task is through discipline and setting boundaries. *“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die”* (Prov. 23:13). When children are young they should have borders placed around their movement, language, and behavior. As they grow older some of these borders are taken down, or moved back in order to give them more latitude. Some borders are reinforced because your children will try to break them.

No matter what children may say, they know that the fact you thoughtfully and consistently enforce rules of behavior means you love them. These rules are proof that you care. Equally important, they train children to build boundaries for themselves. From your rules your children will learn what is acceptable and what is not, what is good and what is bad.

Young people and parents, we live in an ever changing world. A world in which we must have a solid foundation in the word of God, so that we may apply it to new challenges in our daily lives. *“And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.”* (1 Chronicles 12:32) New technology does not present loopholes to obeying the commands of God. We must make sure that we are using that new technology in accordance to God’s commands.