

20D Christians and Fear of Technology

Many today have expressed fears of new technology. Should we ever be afraid of technology?

A recurrent theme in Scripture,

- At the annunciation,
- To the shepherds,
- During the storm at sea,
- After the resurrection,

has been, “Fear not!”, “Don’t be afraid!”

One verse I find particularly profound is Luke 12:32: “Fear not, little flock. It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” This single verse includes three primary ways that God relates to His followers: as Shepherd, as Father, and as King.

We can be critical and cautious about technology but shouldn’t be afraid.

Sadly, evangelicals have often opposed new technologies, often for reasons based on misunderstandings.

Radio – In the 1920’s Americans learned that radio can be broadcast over the airwaves. Some teachers reminded believers that Satan is the “prince of the power of the air.” (Eph. 2:2)

Television- When introduced in the 1950’s the promise of television was that it would bring the world into your home. (We don’t want the world and its values invading our home.) By the end of the decade, however, 80% of American homes had a TV set.

Bar Codes - The UPC (Universal Product Code) standard was developed in 1970, eventually appearing on grocery products, shipping labels, and luggage tags. Obviously, this was the mark of the Beast or its precursor. Believers were informed that every code contains the numbers 666 (except it doesn’t).

Super-Computers – In 1975 the story circulated about a giant three-story computer in Brussels (at the Common market Headquarters) known as The Beast, which would monitor every transaction and control every person on earth.

Internet – In the early 1990’s there was initial push-back against connecting desktop computers to the internet, because it would bring all the pollution on the World Wide Web into one’s office.

Artificial Intelligence – In March of 1987 many evangelicals read this: “The AI symposium confirmed my conviction that the Artificial Intelligence movement is perhaps the most potent threat to Christianity in the near future...According to AI advocates it has been proven that man is merely a complex computer...” [1]

Y2K – On the morning of January 1, 2000 almost all computers and embedded processors were supposed to crash since they wouldn't be able to handle the 4-digit date change from 1999 to 2000. A few patches were made. January 1 came and went with hardly a hiccup.

Airplanes – Christians weren't specifically opposed to airplanes, but I do recall hearing one evangelist saying (with humor), "I'm not sure I should fly. After all, Jesus promised, "Low, I am with you always."

Current fears

Smart meters – These electric meters broadcast information about your power usage to a central office or a handheld unit (saving the need for a human meter-reader going to every home). After installation, some users reported headaches, blurred vision, fatigue, and, in the extreme, cancers. These meters typically deliver a short burst of data four times an hour at a voltage level similar to that of a smart phone and directed away from the dwelling. Neither the IEEE nor the American Cancer Society is worried about smart meters.

5G – The worry here is that 5G technology will turn us into a surveillance state like China. 5G is simply the fifth generation of wireless telecommunications, intended to be the backbone of the Internet of Things. It requires a higher frequency for signals, more complicated coding, and more towers. It will eventually make my 4G phone obsolete.

Brain-Computer Interfaces – Will they control us? Can they read our minds? The popular example is Elon Musk's Neuralink product. Electrodes on the brain read out EEG signals that, when amplified and processed, can allow a paralyzed person to operate machinery. The major concern is that long-term implanted electrodes risk cerebral infection or that stray currents entering the brain could damage the neurons.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) – What does the Bible say about AI? (In the book of Joshua we read that Ai was a major defeat for Israel!) We're not to fear AI, but I'd suggest that this is the major current area where we need to be cautious. People tend to forget that a Chatbot is only software, a language model, a complicated neural net with word probabilities, and take it too seriously as it "answers questions." One man with marital problems was told to abandon his wife. One depressed individual was urged to end his life. AI has no inherent values, compassion, or emotions. It is a powerful tool, but only a tool.

When we look at who's fearful of technology, it is seldom young people. If anything, they are often too optimistic about the results of technology.

According to [Douglas Adams], a society's overall perception of technology falls into three categories: First, "everything that's already in the world when you're born is just normal." Second, "anything that gets invented between then and before you turn thirty is incredibly exciting and creative and with any luck you can make a career out of it." Third, "anything that gets invented after you're thirty is against the natural order of things and the beginning of the

end of civilization as we know it until it's been around for about ten years when it gradually turns out to be alright really.” [2]

Elias DeSouza reminds us that early believers made use of Roman roads and ships. By the first century they began transitioning from written scrolls to codices (stacked pages of papyrus, precursor of the modern book):

The apostles and other early Christians availed themselves of the latest technological developments to spread the gospel message faster. They used the best transportation means available and did not hesitate to adopt the codex, the latest writing technology available, to record, preserve, and communicate God's Word. It is not far off the mark to say that the apostolic church was always ready to use the most effective technology to carry forward God's work...Thus, technology should not be ignored, avoided, or rejected on biblical grounds; rather, it must be cautiously embraced, just as God's people have done throughout history. [3]

Conclusion: Don't fear technology, but be wise and careful in its use.

References

1. “The Artificial Intelligence Movement-A Greater Threat to Christianity than Darwinism?” *Intercessors For America Newsletter*, March 1987.
2. De Souza, E., “Digital technology and the Christian life,” *Reflections-the BRI Newsletter*, July 2015.
3. Ibid.