

Turning Off Tech to Turn On God

1 Cor. 6.12-20; Matt. 24.10-12, 24; Rom. 12.1-2; 2 Thess. 2.3-4, 8-10

What can the Bible tell us about how to respond to social media and AI? Technology wasn't around in Bible times, but Satan was, and his tactics haven't changed. He's attacking children and families. How can we use technology for good, and evade the enemy's plans to promote evil?

Social Media and AI: Where we are, and where we're going...

A Biblical Response to Social Media and AI

- Question 1: Is it profitable? (1 Cor. 6.12a)
- Question 2: Will it master me? (1 Cor. 6.12b)
- Question 3: Can it deceive me? (Matt. 24.10-12, 24)
- Question 4: Can I avoid deception? (Rom. 12.1-2)
- Question 5: What's this leading to? (2 Thess. 2.3-4, 8-10)



Anyone who grew up in the 1960s or likes old TV shows will recognize the words “Danger, Will Robinson!” It’s a famous catchphrase from the television series *Lost in Space*, spoken by the robot B-9 (“benign”) to warn his young human, Will Robinson, of approaching danger. We’ve come a long way since then, and today the roles are reversed. While technology today can warn us of dangers, diagnose diseases, and help us find our car keys, it’s becoming increasingly clear that we also need to guard ourselves from the dangers of technology.

16 year-old Adam Raine did what millions of American teenagers do: He turned to ChatGPT for help with his schoolwork. His parents saw no problem with it. But after Adam committed suicide last year, his parents reviewed his ChatGPT conversations. What they discovered, in the words of his father in testimony before the Senate, was, “What began as a homework helper gradually turned itself into a confidant, then a suicide coach.” Adam’s father wasn’t the only parent to testify before congress following the tragic death of a child.

While cases of artificial intelligence prompting young people to commit suicide are rare, the effects of social media and AI are already having a dramatic effect in society, and future impacts will be far greater. All you have to do is look around in almost any public setting, and see how many people are engrossed in their smartphones. While this is true of older people as well as youths, smartphones didn’t go mainstream until 20 years ago, and we who grew up before then learned to practice social skills. Youths growing up today often never develop those skills.

And what is the result of young people using AI to do homework? Pew Research reported earlier this year that 54% of teens ages 13 to 17 have used AI chatbots for schoolwork; they are implicitly being taught that they cannot think for themselves, that they have to depend on what an online source tells them. Many young people use AI for casual conversation or emotional support! Says Robert Maginnis, an expert in the field, “AI begins as a tool. Then it starts talking back.” Its power, he writes, is that, “It can speak directly to one person, remember the conversation, respond instantly, flatter, reassure, advise, and simulate concern.” The key, of course, is that “A chatbot can sound as if it cares without caring about anything.” “Social media,” he writes, “learned how to capture attention. AI is learning how to capture trust.”

What does all this have to do with family? Heavy social media use has been linked to a breakdown of parent-child relationships. A study of almost 10K teens found that those who spend more than two hours a day on social media had significantly increased odds of having negative relationships with parents.

Richard Blake, a psychologist based in Austin, says that social media can promote family estrangement by exposing children to others who encourage them. For example, a child might see a video on TikTok – ‘I cut off my parents, and I’m much happier now. They were a pain, and now I’m great!’ – ...and people will mimic that.

Furthermore, it’s addictive. Some countries – Canada and Brazil, for example, are banning social media for kids. A new Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 60% of Americans want more control over social media companies. Last Monday, an

Appeals Court allowed lawsuits to proceed against social media platforms over claims that they are addictive and hurtful. Neurosurgeon Dr. Lee Warren states, “The systems are basically training these kids’ brains without their consent. . . Parents are just now realizing that these software platforms are creating revenue by changing the architecture of their children’s brains. It’s leading to anxiety and compulsive behavior.”

What social media started, AI is exploding. Consider what leading AI voices themselves say! Demis Hassabis, head of Google DeepMind, told *Fortune* magazine that humanity stands on the edge of a “golden era of discovery” and “radical abundance,” with AI curing major diseases, solving the energy crisis, and letting humans “travel the stars and explore the galaxy.”

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, writes that the coming years will bring “massive prosperity,” “fixing the climate, establishing a space colony, and the discovery of all of physics.”

Dario Amodei, CEO of Anthropic, calls AI a “country of geniuses in a data center” that can remake the world within a few years. Then he adds, ominously, “for good or ill.”

In the last two centuries, science has promised to do away with God, and create a utopia. Our scientific advances have only served to increase destruction and evil. Socialism and its ideological cousin communism promised in the last century to alleviate inequality and bring in a culture of health and peace. Instead, it delivered suffering and death on a massive scale, with more humans killed by communist governments in the

20th century than in all previous recorded history combined. And now, AI CEOs are promising to cure all our diseases and create a new world. But great advances in technology cannot change human destiny.

And this is where we see the fingerprints of Satan in social media and AI. Satan is a deceiver, and he is seeking to supplant spiritual truth with artificial spiritual encounters. Various “AI Jesuses” have sprung up, enabling people to “talk to Jesus” and have him answer their questions, only it isn’t Jesus. Just as AI bots can make politicians say things they never said and make it look real, so too AI preys on those who are confused or lonely or hurting by giving them a “Jesus” who combines biblical truth with progressive lies. On our Assured By Grace podcast, Danny and I addressed this a few months ago.

But this is nothing new. Satan has sought to counterfeit what God says since he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. He sent false prophets in the Old Testament. He got Jewish religious leaders to ignore Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah so the nation would reject Jesus. He prompted false teachers to infiltrate the New Testament church. He’s worked to confuse and undermine biblical teaching throughout church history. Instead of obeying Scripture, many today claim that “God told them” how to live. A recent parody advertised The Progressive Bible, that comes with perforated pages so you can simply remove passages that don’t align with your beliefs. It’s funny – but it reflects what many are doing.

So how should we respond to social media and AI? I submit that we should not declare it good or bad, but recognize that like anything, it can be used for good, or for bad. We should

understand its dangers, learn to avoid them, and recognize how it fits in the larger context of biblical prophecy and history. This morning I want to answer five questions with Scripture to help us respond wisely to social media and AI.

A Biblical Response to Social Media and AI

- Question 1: Is it profitable? (1 Cor. 6.12a)

While the Christians in Corinth didn’t have social media, they did have worldly wisdom. The heritage of Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle and Socrates gave them a false sense of self-sufficiency. They used pithy slogans to justify sexual sin. Paul cites one of these slogans in 1 Cor. 6.12: “All things are lawful (permissible) for me!” You might hear something like that today: “I can live any way I want to live!”

Instead of arguing about their slogan, Paul says they’re asking the wrong questions. In 1 Cor. 6.12a he writes, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.” The Greek word for *profitable* is *συμφέρω* (*sumpherō*), meaning helpful, beneficial, for the common good. This is a great question to ask about our social media involvement. Is it helpful for me and for others? Is it beneficial for the common good? And in particular, is it good for my spiritual life? Instead of focusing on whether or not it’s bad, ask if it’s doing good.

- Question 2: Will it master me? (1 Cor. 6.12b)

In the second half of 1 Cor. 6.12 Paul raises another issue. He says, “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

This is the most prevalent danger of social media and AI: People are getting hooked on it, addicted to it. They find that it is controlling them, overpowering them. Someone has said, ‘Satan never rattles the chains he brings to bind you with.’ Every Christian should realize that Satan knows he has lost you for eternity, but he takes great pleasure in enslaving you in sin, and destroying the abundant life Christ has for you. Beware of the chains of technology that can enslave you.

- Question 3: Can it deceive me? (Matt. 24.10-12, 24)

The third question comes from Jesus’ Olivet Discourse just days before His crucifixion. He was addressing the disciples on the Mount of Olives. They asked Him when the ‘end of the age’ would be. He began to speak of coming tribulation and wars. Then He said this (Mt. 24.10-12):

“At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.”

A few moments later, in v24, He added this:

“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.”

Many people are being deceived today into thinking that AI is going to save us. Many speak of it as if it were a deity. Add to this the way AI is being used to counterfeit the teachings of Jesus. Whenever you are on social media, ask yourself, “Can

this deceive me?” Jesus said Satan would use ‘signs and wonders’ to deceive even the elect.

- Question 4: Can I avoid deception? (Rom. 12.1-2)

That leads to a positive question: *Can I avoid deception?* How can a Christian avoid being deceived by some spiritual-sounding teacher or podcast or AI-bot? The answer is simple, but challenging. In Rom. 12.1-2, Paul kicks off the practical instruction of his epistle this way (NKJV):

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Allow me to summarize what he says there: ‘Because of all that God has done for us, we should live our lives sacrificially for Him. In order to do that, we need to be transformed by renewing our minds, so we’ll live the way He wants us to live.’

How do we ‘renew our minds’? By exposing them to His Word regularly. The best thing a Christian can do to thwart the harmful influences of social media and AI is to immerse himself or herself in Scripture, which is an infallible source of truth and wisdom. It may sound old-fashioned, but I urge you to read a Bible printed on paper. You can use your computer to study the Bible, but it comes with many distractions just a click away. A printed Bible is a safe place to learn.

- Question 5: What's this leading to? (2 Thess. 2.3-4, 8-10)

Finally, I want to answer one final question: *Where is all this leading to?* We know that the ultimate problem of mankind is sin, and it results in death. So whatever utopia AI promises, it cannot do what trusting in Christ alone gives – eternal life, and abundant life! But what is it leading to?

I'm not a prophet, but I think New Testament prophecy gives us a clue. In 2 Thess. 2 Paul responds to Christians in the church in Thessalonica who had been fooled by false teachers into thinking the 'day of the Lord' had come. In verses 3-4 he writes:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

And he adds this in vv8-10:

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

I don't know when Jesus will return to take all who are His to be with Him, but the prophecy I just read, and more details

that are recorded in the Book of Revelation, suggest that the capabilities of AI that we are already seeing are what Satan will use to control people, deceive mankind into thinking he is their savior, and exalt himself as lord of the world.

God has enabled mankind to create marvelous things in the last century – things never even dreamed of in all previous human history. But two thousand years ago, God recorded in prophecy that in the end times, a great leader empowered by Satan would overpower the world, control what people would see and believe, and perform signs and wonders to deceive mankind. The creators of AI today are saying that's what it's going to do in the coming years.

That means two things: AI may be used to bring great evil to the world, but it points to the soon return of Jesus to take us to be with Him.

With that in mind, let me end with this. You've heard the Latin phrase, "Caveat emptor" – which translates directly in English as "Let the buyer beware." Before you buy, make sure you check to make sure you're getting what the seller is telling you you're getting!

Carefully check the social media and AI exposure you and your family have, and make sure you're getting what you think you're getting. And keep one eye on biblical prophecy. "Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

Digging Deeper

1. While using social media and AI can pose many dangers, they can also be used for good. The secret is to consider how and when and for what you are using technology. How has social media helped you? Have you used it to encourage and even minister to others? On the other hand, in what ways has it hindered or interfered with your spiritual walk? Are there ways that it has 'mastered you'? A good way to evaluate how technology is impacting you is to discuss this with others, and compare their experience with yours.
2. A big challenge for parents today is guarding and guiding growing children through the minefield of social media and AI. The creators of online platforms design them to captivate and even addict young people. In the same way we protect our kids from harmful drugs, we must also protect them from online dangers. What guidelines do you have for your children – for TV, smartphones, and laptops? Parents, talk with each other to compare approaches. Talk with your children about what they may have seen with other children, and keep tabs on how much, and what, they are watching.
3. The best thing any Christian can do to thwart the harmful influences of social media and AI is to immerse himself or herself in Scripture, which is an infallible source of truth and wisdom. To understand the dangers of this new technological frontier, here are two podcasts that contain excellent insights from Scripture, and practical instruction for believers:

John Lennox: Will Technology Change What It Means to be Human?

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=KIo9qL2LD90&is=Gto2U10ebkmdsG1I>

AI: Friend or Foe? With Jared Bridges, Editor in Chief of the Washington Stand and Bob Maginnis

<https://washingtonstand.com/podcast/ai-friend-or-foe-ep-256>

