

# Social Media and the Church

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We live in the age of technology. This age has been characterized in other ways by other people, social commentators, and gurus of culture.

Famously, Canadian philosopher [Dr. Charles Taylor](#) calls our age the “age of authenticity.” To be authentic is the final word in credibility. We must be true to ourselves. Dr. Ed Stetzer calls our age the “[age of outrage](#).” We are constantly annoyed at each other and positioning for our tribal groups to gain precedence over one another.

What is behind this?

Part of it is philosophical. Dr. Neil Shenvi has described how “[critical theory](#)” is moving from the universities to the mainstream, and in some cases to the unthinking church. Critical theory is based on the proposition that we are defined by the group to which we belong—gender, race, culture, and others—and that each of these groups is vying for hegemony over the other.

In addition to these philosophical roots, there is also a technological engine that is driving the development. The printing press changed Europe and changed the world. The use of gunpowder changed the world through shifting the balance of power to those who could employ it best.

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Not all of technology, by any means, is bad. Just as pornography is widely available across the globe and into the privacy of home more than ever before through the smartphone, so also are Bibles, various translations, biblical teaching, and spiritual resources.

In the smallest village where books would take months to penetrate, there are now farmers with smartphones.

We must not be luddites when it comes to technology. But we must also be aware of what it is doing to us. And one of the things it is doing to us is raising the possibility for anyone—and I mean anyone—to become famous.

The barrier to massive distribution of your image and your content globally is a free app from Twitter or Facebook. After that, it’s up to you. There are ways to pay for advertising, of course. But the barriers are far lower than ever before to developing your technological authentic self and promoting your outrage to anyone who will listen.

We see people more anxious about their appearance because of the image-modifying software that Instagram can perpetuate. We see social media bullying. We see YouTube videos with tens of thousands of clicks propounding the greatest nonsense as unvarnished truth. We see “fake news.”

Technology is the engine driving all this. What should the church do about it? I have two thoughts, and they balance each other but are not at tension with each other. Think of them as twin tracks of a train (to use a rather older piece of technology as analogy).

On the one hand, we should embrace technology and use it as fast, as well, as popularly, and as broadly as we possibly can. The Reformers popularized the gospel through the use of the printing press.

We must do the same with technology today. For some of us—digital natives, if you will—this seems instinctive. For others, it seems strange. We should nonetheless all of us embrace the technological revolution and use it to boast about Jesus as widely as we possibly can.

On the other hand, we should not brag about ourselves. The great danger with this ability for increased exposure of the self and our own ideas is to create a larger-than-life personage that is our attempt to dominate and become gods of the technological age, pushing our own self agenda.

To manage to promote Jesus without promoting ourselves requires wisdom. But more than that, it requires character. And character is formed by teaching. And the teaching comes from the Bible, the church, and the life of prayer in the school of Christ. Suffering. In other words, the larger and faster we promote Jesus, the deeper and greater must be our humility. If not, God help us.

Here is a quick A.B.C. tool to take some next steps:

- **Assess.** How much time per day do I spend looking at a screen? How much time do I spend per day checking social media profiles or streams?
- **Balance.** Put in your schedule activities that are social in nature but are not only driven by online interaction. For instance, arrange a time to have coffee with friends.
- **Christlike.** Build your online life around Christlike priorities. How can you share the message of Christ online? How can you speak the truth in love (in love!) online?

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