

The background is a vibrant, multi-layered illustration. On the left, a dark, menacing skull with glowing red eyes is set against a backdrop of flames and a red and white checkered pattern. In the center, a white dove with outstretched wings is surrounded by colorful, abstract shapes. On the right, a woman with long dark hair is shown in profile, looking towards the left. Below her, a smartphone displays a red home screen with various app icons. In the foreground, a white envelope with a red seal is visible. At the bottom right, a smartphone shows a green call button and a yellow profile icon. A blue book is open on a surface to the right of the woman. The overall style is a mix of traditional religious art and modern digital imagery.

A Guide for those who Guide

Help in Discussing Modern Media
with your Family

*A Publication from the
Commission of Modern Media
of the
Reformed Congregations*



What does the Word of God say?

Introduction

Since the introduction of the radio, television, the personal computer, and the Internet in the previous century, new developments in modern media and communication technology follow upon previous ones with an ever increasing speed. Each new development calls us to consider how its integration into our personal life relates to what God's Word says about how we should live before God. Hence, this question has been considered in many contexts. Such considerations are never finished because new developments continually present themselves.

Often a particular example of communication technology, such as the Internet, DVDs, smartphones, Facebook, Hyves, computer games, etc. is adopted as the basis of an evaluation or discussion. Then an attempt is made to formulate a biblical perspective about that particular device. Such an approach is no doubt both necessary and profitable. However, this approach is of itself insufficient in a day and age where modern media has increasingly become

part of our life, and particularly the lives of our youth. Biblical directions for our way of life are continually becoming more focused on the issue of our relation to and use of modern media. Therefore, in this guide we have chosen another approach. Instead of thinking through various aspects of media and its technology in the light of the Bible, we have used fundamental truths of the Bible as the basis of our discussion. From this base we draw applications for living in a world in which the media plays such an important role.

Fundamental Truths

Excessive quoting of well known, fundamental truths of the Bible can lead to a superficial understanding of these truths. If we do not carefully consider the deep significance of these truths, we run the risk that they are degraded to a dry set of standards that have very little implication. That is how the serious earnestness and great significance of truths such as sin, grace, righteousness, and salvation

can be lost. Therefore, without the least pretension of completeness, in this guide we have chosen to only briefly explain these important truths in the context of how they function in the life of grace.

The authority of God's Word is already declining in our (post) modern society. The media is continually usurping the Bible as the fountain by which society sets standards and establishes values. These developments emphasize the need to read the Bible, like it was done in the Reformation, word for word; they underline how essential it is to seek personally and conscientiously for the real meaning of the fundamental truths of the Bible. It is not our intention to propagate new visions of thought. Our goal is to make clear how the principles of God's word apply to real-life situations. The church has the duty to ensure that Christians may hear God speaking through His Word.

Use of media

It is essential that our use of modern media is subservient to our fundamental purpose of life. Really, the question is whether or not we will subject ourselves in our use of media to what God has revealed in His Word. This is the essence of this guide. It attempts to explain the fundamental truths of God's Word in relation to the Christian lifestyle, and particularly the modern media culture, in such a way that it can be clear how they are to be exercised in the daily practice of life. These fundamental truths are dealt with in three columns: The first column, the biblical directives about a theme are made clear; the second column deals with the applications we can make from these directives; and the third column gives some concrete guidelines for the use of media and is often illustrated with examples.

Parents have to wrestle for the hearts of the young as if they themselves can put them on the correct path. This requires effective listening, conversation, guidance, and direction.

Parents, office-bearers, youth leaders, and others tasked with guidance of the young people will be able to find this document a useful guide for this critical task which is ultimately to be done with a prayerful looking up to Him of whom Paul spoke to the Galatians, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world". (Galatians 6:14).



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1 Development and Preservation

Before creation was violated by sin, God placed man in Paradise. The Creator gave Adam and his posterity the instruction to “dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Thus the commission to develop and preserve the earth. The character of this commission was one of good works, in perfect harmony with God’s will and law, and solely to His honour.

However, in Paradise Adam and Eve chose to bid farewell to the fear of the Lord. This had dire consequences for each and every one of their future posterity. The heart of man is now “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9) and in the sight of God is no longer capable of fulfilling the purpose for which it was once created (Hosea 6:7; 1 Corinthians 15:22a; Romans 5:14).

After Adam and Eve had sinned, God expelled them out of that Paradise forever. However, their commission to develop the earth remained (Genesis 3:23); but that abiding task proved to be almost impossible, because man had caused God’s curse to come over themselves and the earth upon which they lived (Genesis 3:17).

Some people have been very optimistic about the possibilities of creation after Adam’s fall and Noah’s flood; according to them, the effects of the curse had been restrained. The inherent goal of common grace, independent from saving grace, then becomes, “to develop the original possibilities of creation.” But other people have been less optimistic; man had, by sin, forfeited the privilege to utilize the earth and develop it further.

- Creation contains immeasurable treasures and the sources of science and technology.
- Technology can be a blessing if people allow themselves to be guided by God, and identify and use opportunities to develop technologies in dependency upon and love to the Creator and their fellow man.
- Technology, and especially digital technology, can be seriously detrimental to both young and old people in the church.
- The beautiful time of Paradise is gone. People consider themselves as God’s and consequently think they are able to create their own imaginary world (virtual reality). This is clearly seen in modern media. People do not realize sufficiently that it is only a self-deceiving illusion.
- God may justly demand from us that we conform to His holy will; but He also holds before us that we are incapable of doing that by saying, “From me is thy fruit found” (Hosea 14:8).
- God’s common grace still gives us the opportunity to develop and preserve the earth according to His command. This definitely also applies to developments in modern media.
- The wages of sin is death. By regeneration and faith it is possible to love God, to visibly hate sin, to do the will of God, and to partake of the reconciliation in Christ. Such people in particular know that they are obliged to utilize responsibly

1. For every medium you must ask: What is positive about its use? Answer this question in relation to:
 - The service of God
 - Helping fellow man
 - The task that God has given me in my life
2. Also ask yourself this question: What misuse(s) or danger(s) are inherent with the use of this medium? Answer this question in relation to:
 - The use of my time
 - The risk of addiction
 - Forgetting about my relationship to God and my fellow man
 - Disturbing of creation/good relationships
3. Teach children that modern media can be a curse as well as a blessing.
4. It is the responsibility of caregivers to establish boundaries.
5. Parents are to provide their children with responsible alternatives to spend their free time.

After the Fall, man still remained endowed with some remnants of the image of God in which he was created (Romans 2:15). No one may despise the earth or her elements of culture. We may, though it should be in a detached sense, enjoy the good things of the earth. We are the stewards of the earth and we will have to give an account of what we have done with it. Therefore, we need to labour diligently in our calling and ensure that nothing of God's creation deteriorates through neglect.

Creation, and the technological potential which it contains, is not to be rejected as worthless. The possibilities can have a very positive role in science, industry, education, interpersonal communication, etc. God's charge for us to develop and to preserve the earth remains (Genesis 9:7); and those who through regeneration and conversion begin to love God's commission and commands will also have an ardent desire to fulfil this original task.

If it is right, a Christian will fulfil his daily calling in society and utilize all of its developments, all the potential that the world offers in terms of technology, science and art, in a responsible manner. If it is right, a Christian will also critique the sinful origin and utilization of these things, and, where necessary, will change them to enable a prudent, godly use. Meanwhile, creation is oppressed by human sickness, hunger, and immense environmental problems; but also by the high demands of an entertainment industry which despises God's law. Technology can be the means to achieve good, but it can also function as a life-consuming idol.

the possibilities that exist in creation.

- After the return of the Lord Jesus it shall be very interesting to see how the, then sinless, possibilities shall redound to the honour of God.

6. Virtual reality can be very useful for training purposes; for example, the flight, train, or ship simulators that pilots, train drivers, and captains use in training. But we must, however, reject Virtual Reality when it is utilized for entertainment, or where an environment is developed in which users themselves set the moral standards.
 - Games such as "World of Warcraft" are played in a virtual world that players themselves produce.
 - In the game "Second Life," the players themselves set the standards and values.
7. We may morally use with thankfulness the possibilities that modern media offers. "And they that use this world, as not abusing it" (1 Corinthians 7:31).
 - By using modern media such as e-mail, Skype, etc., mission workers can conveniently maintain more contact between themselves, with family members, and with their home congregations.
 - Consider also all the benefits from using modern media within health care, etc.

2 The Fear of the LORD

After creation and the fall into sin, the command, “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God” still applied to Israel (Deuteronomy 6:13). This command also applies to every member of the New Testament church. The word “fear” in the context of “the fear of the Lord” denotes reverencing, honouring, and obeying Him. Those who fear the Lord desire to avoid doing, or omitting, anything that is contrary to His will. Also after the Fall, a person who fears the Lord has an ardent desire to serve Him out of love rather than out of dread (Psalm 2:11; Jeremiah 10:6-7).

True life is only to be found in the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the source of all true wisdom (Psalm 111:10), and those who live in the fear of the Lord will continually strive for an orderly and wholesome conduct of life (Proverbs 14:27).

Every member of the church, who lives under the administration of the Covenant of Grace, is called by the preaching of God’s Word to live a holy life in the fear of the Lord. Really, to live in the fear of the Lord is beneficial for anyone (Proverbs 12:13).

- Do we desire to fear the Lord with all of our strength and abilities?
- A large part of the digital culture runs directly contrary to the fear of the Lord and God’s will and law, and is saturated with an aversion to or hatred of God. This, like so many other aspects of society, does not provide man with any advantage or gain for eternity.
- The digital culture often degrades God and the creature He created in His own image--man--in the most insulting manner. God will not treat this as a trivial mistake.
- Digital communication with each other can easily be anti-social by hindering face-to-face interaction.
- The fear of the Lord produces an ardent desire to live honestly and decently in this present world. If this is lacking, people will quickly slide into a sinful lifestyle.
- Digital communication can lead to being severely influenced by an ungodly world, but it can also be positively used for pastoral work and spiritual dialogue.
- A life in the fear of the Lord may mean that the belongings of the prince of darkness are kept out of the home altogether.
- A life spent fearing the Lord, and experiencing the love of God in our heart, may appear dull and dreary to some, but in reality it gives greater joy than what the world ever will be able to give.

1. Discuss with your children what the “fear of the Lord” means by using Joseph, Daniel, Moses, Obadiah, Hebrews 11, and other biblical examples of godly piety and answer the following questions:
 - a. What was the secret of their life?
 - b. What conclusions can we draw from these biblical examples of the fear of the Lord that should guide our family life?
 - c. What consequences will this have for our use of media in our family?
 - d. What restrictions may you experience thereby?
 - e. Speak with your children about the necessity and the possibilities of a life in the fear of the Lord.
2. External barriers and the internal ability to defend are inseparably linked. Although the fear of the Lord makes one to depart from evil, it would be a gross over-estimation in self-confidence to think that someone who fears the Lord does not need any protection against sin. For example, consider filtered Internet in this context.
3. Can your use of media be part of your prayers?
 - ✓ Can you ask for a blessing upon what you are doing?
 - ✓ Can you give thanks for its use?
4. When someone fears the Lord, then He occupies the highest place in their life. How should that affect the place of modern media in our daily life?

3 God's Honour

Someone who fears the Lord desires to uphold His honour and to love Him. Such a person acknowledges that He is the only true God, who also has the ultimate authority over their life (Malachi 1:6). He is also acknowledged as the One who has given a wholesome structure to the world. Thus this God is not one of the meaningless idols of the heathen.

Those who in this life have learnt to advance the honour of God may await the return of the Lord Jesus with a quiet and restful heart. When Jesus returns, all nations and peoples shall truly see the glory of His divine honour and majesty. However, those who have not learnt to advance God's glory in this life shall by God's glory then be banished away forever.

The New Testament calls both Jewish and Gentile Christians to honour, obey, and glorify God, who is so worthy of such a service. And not by a self-centred, self-regulated religion, but in uprightness. Those who love God from the heart earnestly desire to live according to all of His wholesome commandments (1 John 5:3).

- Those who know something of God in His glory desire to distance themselves from everything that is contrary to His honour and esteem.
- Those who receive an eye for God's honour and glory will certainly also receive an eye for the detestable danger of idols.
- People sometimes serve materialistic idols, but often young and old also lay their offerings upon the altars of intensely-served digital idols.
- If the first impression of God's honour and glory that a person receives is when Christ returns, it is too late and they will forever wish that they had lived their life in the fear of the Lord.
- Those who in this life have spent their best time in media activities, without considering the glory of God, will on the last day realize that their pleasure has gone forever.
- Those who love God and His honour often do not have an easy time in the world, or live in great comfort; but when Christ returns they shall be translated from the "Fear of the Lord" into the "Joy of the Lord" (Matthew 25:13).

1. Teach children to limit the time they spend using media. Those who are continually online are steadily drawn towards the world. This is not to the honour of God; He deserves the highest place in life.
✓ Do you really need to be constantly available or online? Also in your devotion time?
2. The use of modern media for empty entertainment is to be avoided. Such use is focused entirely on one's own pleasure and leads away from the honour of God.
3. As a parent or caregiver, you have the responsibility to teach the difference between relaxation and empty entertainment.
✓ Consider Philippians 4:8 in this light.
4. Teach your children that relaxation is important for a healthy life. A child's relaxation can to some extent include the use of modern media. What that "to some extent" means will depend on the age of the child.

4 Sin

The Bible uses various words to denote sin. A common characteristic of all these words that the Bible uses for sin is that they are all verbs; they all describe a deliberate action. The word “sin” does not describe a condition or fate, but an intentional choice of the person committing it. Someone who fears the Lord loathes and abhors sin.

The meaning of one of the words that the Bible uses to describe sin is that man does not actually attain to what he was meant to attain. Man does not fulfil the purpose God entrusted him with in creation. Man ignores God’s covenant and commandments. Sin makes man guilty in the eyes of God.

Another word for sin that the Bible uses has the connotation of being crooked, to deviate from the path that God intended man to walk on. Here, the emphasis is particularly upon the evil inclination of man’s will. Not only are his deeds tainted by sin, but so is his corrupt disposition.

A third word for sin in the Bible points to standing up in rebellion against God; it denotes a conscious and deliberate rising up against the lawful authority of God. It reveals sinful man to be an apostate (Isaiah 1:2).

Finally, the Old Testament also uses a word that teaches another aspect of sin; one can sin in ignorance without deliberate intent or enmity against God or his fellow man. If the person had known that he would be committing sin, then he would not have done it. Yet, such a deed is still sin (1 Samuel 26:21; Psalm 19:12).

- Sin is not just a waste of earthly things (a waste of time; a waste of money). The fear of the Lord teaches that by sinning, man is actively insulting his Creator.
- Do we actually believe that sin is so abhorrent? Do we therefore desire to forsake our sinful desires, because they are so offensive to God?
- Every person, and certainly every Christian, is to carefully examine his use of media by asking, “Am I seeking to advance the honour of God with what I am doing, or am I actually grieving God by breaking His commandments?”
- No one may underestimate the nature of sin. Hence, everyone needs to be acutely aware, also when utilizing modern media, of their corrupt and rebellious heart that seeks to go astray from God.
- Sinners break God’s law. They are to lay aside the sin which does so easily beset them (Hebrews 12:1). But sinners, with their evil hearts, that sin so deliberately, that does not seek the honour of God, and that is so corruptly inclined and rebellious of nature, are also invited to flee for refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has perfectly fulfilled the will of God as the Substitute for such lost sinners.

1. Various aspects of sin.
 - a. Read with each other Numbers 25:1-9, 2 Chronicles 12:14, and Ezra 9 and 10, and then discuss together how evil sin is.
 - b. Explain to your children the various aspects of sin (as outlined in the first column).
 - c. For each aspect of sin, think together of some concrete examples. Where possible, use examples from modern media.
2. Because of the evil inclination of the heart of man, parents are duty bound to protect their children (and themselves!) from evil as much as possible. Explain to your children why you do this and show them how profitable it really is.
 - ✓ An effective Internet filter is essential. This cannot be over-emphasized; nothing less will do.
 - ✓ Our media utilization is to be restricted. Some media we do not use at all while some media we will begin to use only at a certain age. In addition, we always should limit the amount of time that we spend using media.
3. Examine your and your children’s use of media by the standards of the Ten Commandments. Do this as openly as possible with your children.

In the New Testament, sin often means lawlessness or the committing of unlawful deeds. Furthermore, it can also mean that someone considers himself free from any moral law or standard (1 John 3:4).

The word sin often appears in the singular bearing the character of disobedience and unbelief, or not trusting in God. However, sin can also mean the corruption of the will and the service of unrighteousness. Therefore, the singular word “sin” also comprises the plurality of sin and sinfulness.



4. The love of God mortifies the love of sin. Therefore, frequently direct your children to the great Object of God's love, namely His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5). It is essential that we learn to know and love Him. His blood washes and cleanses from all sin (Zechariah 13:1; 1 John 1:7). Encourage your children to distance themselves from sin and to strive against it.

5 Our Conscience

The conscience of a faithful Christian allows itself to be bound to the law of God. The true Christian namely loves the law of God (Jeremiah 31:33). However, other people within the church also have their consciences shaped by the law of God.

Our conscience functions as a silent witness to all that we do and have done. It is more than just a memory; the conscience is a sub-conscious voice which continually acts as a witness who accuses or acquits.

After man's fall into sin, the conscience is no longer perfect. Therefore, it can no longer be a fully reliable standard by which we establish right and wrong.

A conscience that is continually ignored diminishes in strength. Over time, such a conscience will be, as it were, seared shut with a hot iron and will be silenced.



- God's children have received a speaking conscience by the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who have been brought up within the church and who respect the authority of God's Word are often prevented from living out a sinful lifestyle by the voice of their conscience.
- In particular, parents, teachers, and other instructors have a holy calling to show forth a life of loving God's law so that the consciences of their children and students may be moulded accordingly.
- Is our conscience being shaped in accordance with the Bible's teachings? Are we willing to listen to the voice of our conscience?
- If we are actively utilizing modern media in a manner that is clearly contrary to God's Word, then we are silencing the voice of our conscience.
- If our conscience tells us that pornography, or sinful entertainment, is really not so bad, then our conscience is wrong. God's Word and law are always much safer guides.

1. Whenever we utilize modern media, we need to ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this and what do I want to achieve?"
✓ Example: I am a student and am doing my homework. I am looking for a book review on the Internet. I resolve not to click on any of the advertising "pop-up banners" because one thing leads to another.
✓ Example: I am bored, so I am going to sit behind my computer and surf the Internet.
2. If we expose ourselves to the evil influences and content of modern media, we dull our conscience. We will no longer consider evil to be evil; we become accustomed to it.
3. If we notice that we are becoming unduly influenced by what we see on our computer screen, then we must establish definite boundaries. If we don't, the situation will only deteriorate from bad to worse.
4. Is a young person prepared to show someone in higher trust, a parent for example, where he or she has been on the Internet or on their cell phone? How can this be done in practice?
✓ The knowledge that someone else will be privy to your media use can be an effective deterrent to falling into sin.
✓ However, it is of far greater importance to consider that the Lord hears and sees all that we do.

- Guilty feelings about a sinful use of any form of modern media, and a fear that the voice of our conscience has been silenced as with a red-hot iron, are both evidences that the conscience is still speaking.
- For all those who have a conscience that is afflicted by the sin(s) of illegitimate use of media, this applies, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

5. Not what I think, but what the Bible says is vital. Regularly ask yourself what the Bible has to say about your use of modern media.



6 Watch and Pray

The Lord Jesus said to his weary disciples, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). These words, “Watch and pray,” do not only apply to a physical awakening from a natural sleep, or remaining awake. This is evident from the fact that there is a relationship between being watchful (and praying) and not entering into temptation.

How severe temptations can be for someone is apparent from the Scriptures where we read of how the Pharisees contended with Jesus (Mark 8:11). They tried to catch Him in His word so that they would be able to accuse Him. In this manner the “old serpent” (Revelation 12:9) tried to dethrone the Lord Jesus by using his “generation of vipers” (Matthew 12:34). The devil attempted to prevent Jesus from fulfilling His divine commission.

Thus a Christian, if it is right, will not allow himself to be lured aside by a seemingly attractive, but yet deceitful temptation, from fulfilling the commission which he has received from the Lord, namely to live a holy life to the honour of God. By “watching and praying,” sin is detected and rejected in its repeated attempts to take possession of the whole man and to lure him away from his purpose of life, which should be focused on God and His service.

- After the fall into sin, the entire creation, also science and technology, is subject to the curse; therefore, countless aspects of this sinful world are used by the prince of darkness as a continual temptation. We can think of the printing press/technology, materialism, desire for pleasure, and so forth. Consequently, the words of Jesus, “Watch and pray” are also very relevant for Christians today.
- The culture of digital media contains many temptations to lure people away from their real calling to fulfil God’s wholesome commandments. These temptations excite the sinful passions of the heart, which never are satisfied.
- Baptized Christians especially are called upon to resist the world, which is in the grip of the powers of darkness. They also are to despise all of the world’s sinful attractions. A real future is only to be found in persevering in our duty to love and serve Christ by the enabling unction of His Spirit.
- “Watching and praying” may never become superficial activities, because then there is no longer any real watching or any real praying. Those who truly watch also vigorously strive against sin; and those who truly pray expect all their safety from their Keeper and cleave to Him (Psalm 121: 5).
- No one may ever underestimate sin; neither may anyone ever plead their inability as a reason for not striving against sin. There is water of life in the Fountain of life.

1. Although no protection can be 100% effective, technical help, such as an Internet filter, can be of great assistance in keeping as much evil as possible away from your computer screen.
2. It is also true for the use of modern media; never try to see how far you can go, but rather distance yourself from sin and temptation as much as possible.
✓ Example: You test the Internet filter on the home computer to find out what you can still see or read.
3. A young person may not yet fully perceive what the dangers and possibilities of modern media actually are. Parents, teachers, office-bearers, and others with a guidance role can help young people to fully comprehend what the influence of media on their lives may be.
✓ Example: Never post any words or images on the Internet that you will not be able to retrieve.
4. It is not wrong to know the possibilities and benefits that modern media offer, but we do not necessarily need to be the first to implement the latest developments.
✓ New developments in modern media often have an enthralling effect on us, but it is better if we adopt a more reserved attitude.

When Christ says, "Watch and pray," as recorded by Matthew, then the original word for "pray" has the connotation of calling upon God. This calling includes faith in the One that is being called upon and persistence in calling until He answers. However, it also includes something of expectation, a hope that trusts that God will not only hear, but also will provide that which is necessary. Thus it is evident that true watching and praying are essentially exercises of faith in the upright believer.

Furthermore, entire congregations, such as Sardis (Revelation 3:1-2), also receive the directive to be watchful. Likewise, people who in name are Christian, but in the real practice of their life are not, receive the admonishment: Watch! Those also, who live under the administration of the Covenant of Grace, but who at the same time are in a world full of temptation, are called upon to be watchful.



5. The risk with modern media is that we continually breathe in more of the worldly spirit it often contains. Egoism and depravity are streaming into our eyes and ears.
✓ Example: Advertisements that come to us via digital media are designed to cause us to make impulsive and fast decisions, and immediately do what we find pleasure in.
6. Parents, make the use of modern media part of your family prayers and let your children see that the devil still goes around as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). It is also necessary that children learn to pray, "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."
7. The Bible gives examples of unconverted people who fell for the temptations of the world, such as Achan, Gehazi, and Absalom. The Word of God is also frank about children of the Lord who have fallen into temptation, such as Lot, Samson, and David. This should drive us away from trusting in ourselves and incline our hearts to continually seek the Lord and to ask Him to help us to "watch and pray."
✓ In this context, reflect on Romans 11:20b and 1 Corinthians 10:12.

7 A Stranger in the World

Those who, by grace, begin to live in the fear of the Lord become deeply convinced that they grieve and anger God by their sin and that they are estranged from God and His commandments. They bemoan their separation from God. They seek God and continue to seek Him, because they can no longer live without Him.

Those who seek God know of a growing desire to surrender the rule over their life to God and no longer to live according to their own will. Out of love to God, they desire to subject their will to His will, because such a person will begin to love the law of God (1 John 5:3).

Those who fear God are no longer a stranger of Him, but become a stranger on this earth and in this world, which is subject to the curse of God. They receive the citizenship of the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2: 12 and 19). They no longer feel at home in situations which are governed by sinful man with all of his optimism and self-conceit. They are taught by the Word and the Holy Ghost to guide their life by the laws of the kingdom of God.

Being a stranger and pilgrim means that the believer separates himself from the motives, styles, and purposes of this carnal world (1 Peter 2:11). This is a direct consequence of Christ having delivered His people from the kingdom of this world and having made them citizens of His own kingdom.

- Do we really desire to be a stranger in the world in response to the great love of God in Christ?
- Those who live in the fear of the Lord do not feel comfortable with the sinful lifestyle of the world. They hate the sin they are confronted with, including that from modern media.
- Those who fear God do not need any further commandments or prohibitions; out of love for God, they prefer to stay as far as possible from sin, rather than trying to see how close they can get to it. This not only applies to the digital culture, but to all aspects of life in this world.
- Those who live in the fear of the Lord will try to use all of God's gifts, including technology, for His service and kingdom. However, there will always be some tension; a fountain cannot bring forth both fresh and salty water.
- The sorrow after and the desire for God, together with being a stranger here in the world and a citizen of God's kingdom, are to be chosen far above the pleasures of an ungodly world.

1. Being a stranger in this world does not prohibit the use of media, but it will certainly determine how we use media.
✓ Example: When we get up in the morning, the first action of the day will not be to turn on the computer.
2. The Bible calls Abraham "a stranger" (Hebrews 11:13).
 - a. Read Genesis 13 and consider how Abraham, in contrast to Lot, was a stranger in the practice of his life.
 - b. Why did Abraham and Lot make such different choices?
 - c. What were the short- and long-term consequences of their choices?
3. Discuss with your family what boundaries are to be applied to the use of modern media in relation to being a stranger here in the world.
 - a. How selective are we in the use of modern media?
 - b. Discuss with each other the statement: "The Internet offers endless possibilities for idle entertainment, but strangers on the earth will "avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Proverbs 4:15).

- Those who live in the fear of the Lord desire, according to the measure of the talents that He has given them, to labour for their fellow man. They desire to teach others, especially the young, how they are to use the possibilities and potential of creation which are tainted and, at times, ruled by sin.
- If someone professes to be converted and to be a citizen of the kingdom of God, but does not distance himself from the sinful elements of modern media, then there is something wrong with that conversion.
- The knowledge that there is always wheat and chaff intermingled in the Christian church did not prevent Paul, in the preambles to his letters to the various congregations, to address them as “saints,” for example, “Beloved of God, called to be saints” (Romans 1:7). Therefore, every member of the Christian church is obliged to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God.

4. The use of modern media gives an extra dimension to the practice of living as a stranger in the world.
 - a. How can a Christian family use and/or misuse media?
 - b. What decisions have you made in your family, and what standards have been set?
5. Variations in the use of modern media can in practice lead to new disputes. What is permissible by one may be forbidden by another. It is important that our children learn to deal with this. As parents and guardians, we have our own individual responsibility. We may not brush aside our responsibility with the argument that “almost everybody does it.” “Everyone else is allowed, but I am not ...!” is a persuasive argument that children often use. However, in the nurturing of our children, such arguments should never be the basis of our decisions. How do you deal with it?



8 World Conformity

Paul admonished the Christian congregation at Rome, and in them the entire New Testament church, with the words, “And be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). He meant: Do not allow your life to be influenced by the spirit of this world. Do not let your life be fashioned by this sinful world with regard to your lifestyle, way of thinking, judging, and dealing.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome about another conformity. They were ordained to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

Paul wanted to say: “Live in the fear of the LORD: be changed, renewed, and reformed in your mind (Romans 12:2). Free yourselves from the thinking of this present world, which is characterized by carnal inclinations and desires.”

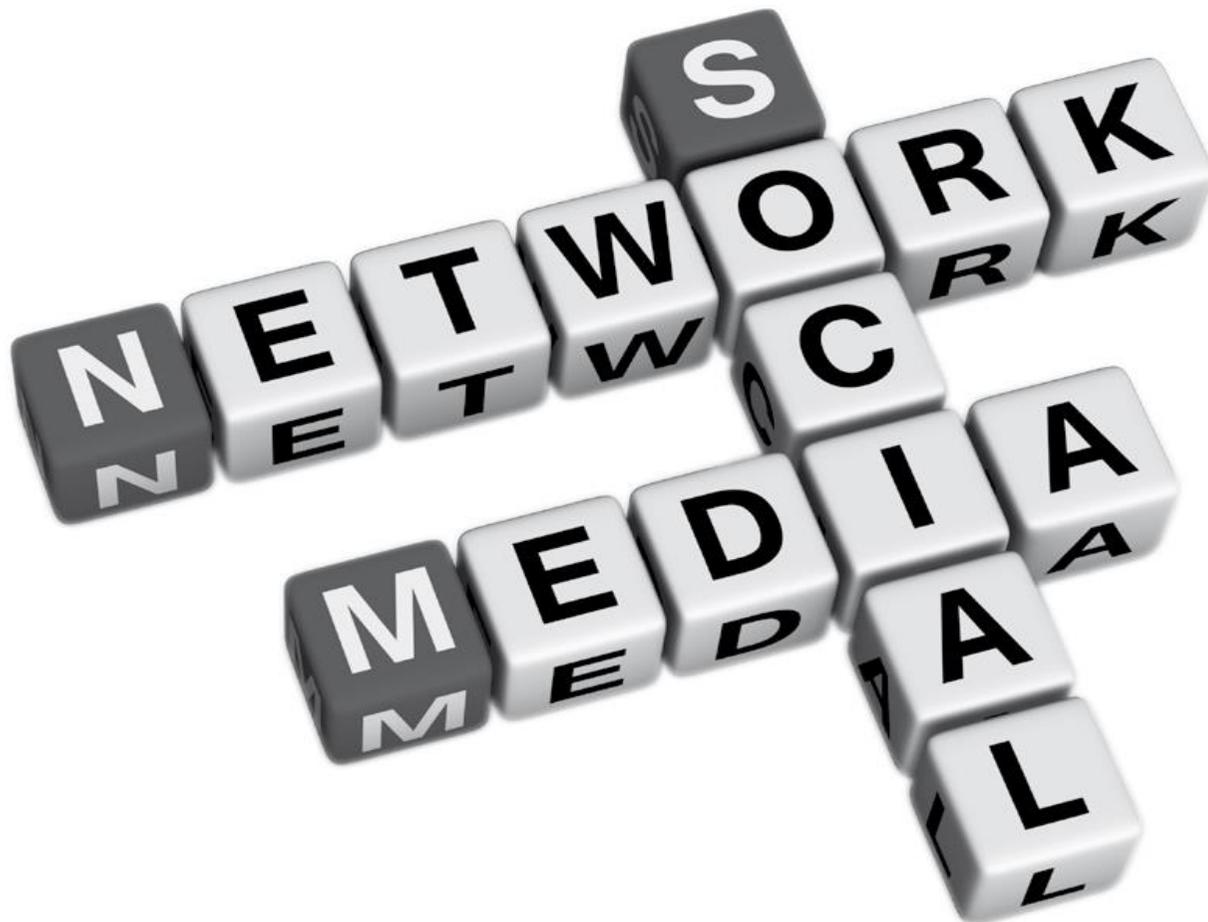
Paul says, “Be not conformed to this world.” In the original, a word is used that particularly indicates a certain period of time and that word also makes a link to the spirit of that time. The world of our present time is ruled by the spirit of selfishness. It is a lifestyle which Scripture summarizes as, “The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16).

- Those who distance themselves from the culture of modern media (for example, choose not to have e-mail) are not considered to belong to our modern age. This not only applies to modern media, but also to the many sins that have become common place in our society. Notwithstanding this, Paul admonishes to not let the world pressure you to sin, “Awake to righteousness, and sin not” (1 Corinthians 15:34).
- The apostle asks us, out of love to God and His service, to distance ourselves from carnal (i.e. sinful) intentions, from selfishness, from the lust of the eyes and sinful desires, and from striving for power and making it in this world. It is precisely all these things which are so important in the digital world and technology.
- The apostle emphasizes that the fear of the LORD, repentance and faith, and the seeking of God and His kingdom are to be our primary aims.
- In many cases, the digital world can lead its users to addiction and inner compulsion, and often it has no qualms doing that. Quite the contrary! The digital culture can result in people considering that being a citizen of the kingdom of the prince of darkness is the most desirable thing for them. Digital technology often freely offers all those sins that Paul warns against and seeks to advance all that evil to a status of being the moral standards of society.

1. We do not use modern media for gossiping. Gossiping is a clear characteristic of world conformity.
2. Those who present themselves on the Internet easily go beyond the boundaries of simplicity and sobriety.
✓ Example: Posting your own profile on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Hyves, etc.
3. When you use modern media, you can be easily influenced by the sinful purposes of the world. What do you do the instant sin is presented to you on the screen?
4. Christian thinking is steadily marginalized by the use of information that comes via the Internet. Discuss with your family examples which show that this is the case.
5. The question of what God’s Word teaches us about modern media, and the answer(s) to that question, will prevent us from using modern media and exposing ourselves to it in a thoughtless manner, and that as a consequence, we will begin to think as the world does.

- The very least that a Christian is called to do is to maintain a distance from media and not to allow his or her life to be governed by it. The motivating factor should not be to earn a place in heaven, or to establish and maintain a good reputation in the eyes of man, but love to God.
- “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).

6. Modern media brings the world closer to us than ever before. The constant stream of information is like the steady drip that hollows out a rock.
✓ Example: Because we are, more or less, unintentionally confronted with and informed about major sporting events, we do therefore become involved. It starts to be part of our life. Why is that?



9 Godliness



Those who live in the fear of the Lord show, if it is right, something of godliness. The original meaning of the word also has the connotation of piety, and piety does not indicate a dry devotion, mysterious worship, or asceticism. Originally, the word pious had the meaning of being strong, brave, and courageous. Therefore, those who are pious oppose errors and falsehoods in doctrine and life.

There is no place for legalism in the correct understanding of godliness and piety. Nevertheless, God's children esteem the law of God highly. However, their desire to live according to God's commandments is not to earn something thereby before God; they exercise true piety out of love for the Lord and His law (Psalm 119:47).

Godliness has everything to do with our normal everyday life. True believers, however, do not necessarily have to avoid those who do not serve the Lord. True believers are not of the world, but are still called to be effectual in the world, as well as in the church. They are to shine their light before the people of this world (1 Peter 2:12). The calling is: Shine!

Paul encouraged his hearers to exercise themselves in godliness. The original word "exercise" is related to the word "gymnastics." Godliness requires effort.

- Godliness and piety are not just a private matter, but should come out in our lives by vividly demonstrating to the community by words and deeds the value of a Christian life and the advantage of living in the fear of the Lord.
- Do we really believe, even if it is just with head knowledge, that a life with the Lord is worth far more than all that the world can offer? Do we also know something of this by experience?
- Meditation and prayer are essential elements of the true exercise of godliness. Ministers and believers of the past sometimes dedicated hours in a day to seriously apply themselves to this. However, the exercise of godliness also includes evaluating our own lifestyle by God's Word and His wholesome commandments of love. Furthermore, it involves directing our fellow man to the rich privilege and glory there is in serving God, instead of grieving Him by an addicted servitude to the digital culture and all sorts of other sin.
- One of the causes of the secularization of the West is that Christians often do not clearly shine the light of God and His grace.
- Many exercise themselves for countless hours per day in sports and/or daily immerse themselves in the digital culture. It is much more profitable to exercise oneself in essential godliness, and not just be outwardly involved in the church and its associated activities.

1. Everyone is called to demonstrate in their use of media that their lives are bound to God's commandments of love. No one has any permission to live a life without God.
2. Elements of media can be so worldly that we are to totally reject their utilization.
✓ Example: Movies. Even if there were such a thing as a virtuous film, it would be swamped by an unimaginable number of films with evil content.
3. Repeatedly ask yourself whether your use of media is steadily drawing you away from the Lord and His service. For example, does it:
 - a. Often take up too much of your time;
 - b. Expose you to so much worldly material that you become accustomed to it;
 - c. Distract you when you are busy with the things of God's kingdom;
 - d. Tempt you to sin against God's commandments; or
 - e. Consume you with the business of the here and now?
4. Many of the biblical saints have given an example of a godly lifestyle in circumstances in which they were confronted with many temptations. Consider Joseph, Daniel, Cornelius, and other biblical examples. How was godliness evident in their lives?



5. Godliness requires exercise and perseverance in prayer. Godliness manifests itself by adopting a biblical approach to the use of modern media. In practice, this means:
 - a. Using media in dependency on the Lord;
 - b. Being constantly watchful for the temptations that we are unavoidably confronted with when using media;
 - c. Disciplining ourselves to flee from, and strive against, these temptations; (see Solomon's instructions in this regard, for example, Proverbs 23:26-35).

6. A godly lifestyle will not always generate positive reactions. We do not need to be surprised at this, because it has been foretold (2 Timothy 3:12).

10 Temperance

The original meaning for temperance is self-control. Those who live in the fear of the Lord seek, by the power of Christ and the enabling work of the Holy Spirit, to live a life of self-control and to depart from evil.

In the time that the Bible was written, the Greeks considered temperance an exceptionally commendable virtue. Those who lived in temperance gave evidence that they had succeeded in guiding their own lives without others dictating over them.

The Holy Spirit, who instills the fear of the Lord, also gives, as His own special grace, temperance as one of His fruits (Galatians 5:23; 2 Peter 1:6). Every true believer has something of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in his life. Such a person is thus renewed in the image of the One who created him.

Temperance, or self-control, is not the same as ascetic merit. The believer really tries, in thankfulness, to exercise self-control, because he sees God's commandments as wholesome rules of love.

- A Christian does not need to be ashamed of a distancing from, and a cautious use of, media. Those who are courageous enough to be independent thinkers are not always despised by this present world of multi-cultural individualism.
- If a believer does not exercise temperance or self-control, then he is far from living in the fear of the Lord.
- Anyone who does not deal with the goods and possibilities of the world in a sober, self-controlled, and temperate manner, is not a wise steward of the Creator. This also applies to developing and utilizing modern media.
- Someone who lives in the fear of the Lord can indeed repeatedly fail in the exercise of self-control in relation to the use of modern media. This is because sin retains a power in their life that is not to be underestimated. The Lord desires that such a person will also repeatedly come to Him for self-control and forgiveness. Those who confess and forsake sin shall receive mercy.

1. The practice of life clearly shows that there is a real danger in losing sight of temperance in our use of media. It often consumes more time and money than we expected. It can easily control our life in a manner that is not beneficial. Discuss with your children where in your life that would be applicable, and make new agreements and standards.
2. We do not need everything that is available or possible. Desiring to be always involved with the latest media developments is contrary to the biblical directive for temperance.
 - a. It is not necessary to always have the fastest computer, the fastest Internet connection, the latest smartphone, etc.
 - b. In principle, our attitude is to be critical.
3. The biblical word "temperance" has the connotation of self-control. Therefore, we need to live in moderation. We have to constantly remind ourselves that even the permissible use of media becomes sinful if we lose the balance of moderation.



4. It is advisable to shield young children from the influence of media as much as possible. In this manner, they will learn from a young age to exercise temperance in regard to the use of media. It is beneficial for children to become accustomed to boundaries.
 - a. Establish minimum ages for the use of the Internet, MSN, cell phones, etc.
 - b. Also establish time limits for the use of these media. As necessary, use means of assistance in this regard such as the program "KidsWatch."
 - c. Ensure that your children also make use of other (permissible) forms of relaxation, including games and activities that require interaction with others.

5. The world of modern media is full of distractions and temptations that are directed at the impulsive response of the end user, and these will only increase. It is advisable to consciously resolve to minimize these impulses, as much as possible, and to set apart time for ourselves in an environment where we are free from them entirely.

11 Fasting

“Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? ... wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness?” (Isaiah 58: 5-6). All aspects of the life of someone who fears the Lord should show something of this fasting, which is characterized by temperance and soberness.

This fasting is not just simply going without food for a while; much more importantly, it consists in a forsaking of all that is dishonouring to God, and a turning to the Lord. In the New Testament, fasting is a sign and representation of the regeneration and conversion that takes place in the heart, of hating and forsaking sin, and promoting social justice.

- A Christian should not experience the avoidance of evil as an irritation, but as part of his reasonable service of seeking his salvation and joy in God as Lawgiver.
Do we know of the real value of abstaining whereby we gain time, rest, and quietness?
- Those who fear the Lord will, without objection, or maybe with much strife, but yet with love, distance themselves from the evil that presents itself in modern media. They seek to avoid it.
- The Christian duty to distance oneself from evil should not be presented to society, or young people, as a legalistic endeavour or an odious task. Society and young people need to know that a Christian avoids evil out of love; that it is done in thankfulness.
- Those who do not personally know of the fear of the Lord are also called to forsake their ungodliness and the transgressing of God’s law.

1. The fact that something is not forbidden does not necessarily mean that its use is recommended.
2. When we come to the conclusion that we cannot go without the use of certain media for even one hour, then we need to seriously ask ourselves if that medium has the right priority in our lives.
✓ How long can we go without our cell phone?
Or without MSN, Facebook, Hyves, etc.?
3. We must reject the use of even some permissible forms of media, because they are for the greater part used in the service of sin.
✓ Imagine that a profitable film was shown in a cinema; even then we would not go there.
✓ We will not tune in to an interesting programme on a radio station known for its ungodly content.
4. Our use of media on the Lord’s Day is to be kept to an absolute minimum. The computer stays turned off and the telephone in principle is not used.
✓ Can we also turn off our cell phone?
✓ What are the risks of a sliding scale if we do turn on the computer to listen to a sermon if we cannot go to church?

Conclusion

This booklet has explained some of the key biblical principles and has given some direction for your use of modern media in light of what the Bible teaches about these principles. How can you make further use of this booklet? Without being exhaustive, you could consider the following suggestions.

You could use this booklet as a “talking point” to discuss with your children the use of modern media. It is obviously not advisable to try to cover everything in a single session. It is better to take the opportunities that arise to deal with just one or two of these key principles. This booklet could also be used at church group gatherings or congregational evenings as input for a topic on how to exercise a biblical lifestyle in this media age. Office-bearers could use this booklet at house visitations, or at catechism classes, to raise the subject of the use of media; the minister could use it for his sermons. We should not forget that, above all, conversion is necessary. The Heidelberg Catechism sets before us the dying of the old man, which consists of a sorrow about sin as it reveals itself in the deepest aspects of my existence, and a desire to hate that sin and to flee from it. Secondly, there is the resurrection of the new man, which is revealed in a joy in the Lord and His service, in the fear of His Name, and in walking in His ways. May the Lord give this through His Spirit. Then something of what Paul said to the Galatians becomes visible in our life, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).



A Step to Heaven; A Step to Hell

It was once said that the discovery of the printing press was a step towards heaven *and* a step towards hell. This was because the same printing press can print both godly and wicked books. Does this not also apply to the computer? On this painting of the Dutch artist, J. de Visser, you can see something of both these good and bad aspects. The numbers relate to the 37 Bible texts depicted on the painting.

1. Which side do you choose? Right or left? Green or red? Up or down? "He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth" (Proverbs 10:17); see also 1 Kings 18:21.
2. Green is safe, wise, and trustworthy. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10).
3. Is what the Lord says in the Bible important to you? "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89), and "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).
4. Do you seek for answers upon your difficult questions? You may find the keys in the law of the Lord. It is a key with a cross. "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Galatians 5:18).
5. Fear God and keep His commandments, and do this out of thankfulness. "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8).
6. You may use media; after all, we can no longer do without. Or not?
7. "Backspace" or "return." Know your boundaries. When do you go too far, and how will you know that? Do not shift the landmarks that your fathers have placed.

8. One-way traffic. Which direction are you going? "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither" (Proverbs 9:4).
9. What are you looking at? Use filters. It involves the inclinations, the nature of your heart. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).
10. A life of prayer close to the Lord gives true joy. "They shout for joy; they also sing" (Psalm 65:13).
11. Do you find you cannot do this? Then ask help of the Lord. Where does the filter for the screen come from? "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).
12. It must be visible that you are a Christian. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23a).
13. Follow the purple line. Purple is the colour of suffering. Not participating in what my friends do often involves suffering. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction" (Proverbs 3:11).
14. Do you recognize the colours of the rainbow? They are the colours of faithfulness. The Lord always gives what He has promised. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace" (Psalm 37:37).
15. You walk in the "grey" zone. Be warned. Before you know it, it will go wrong. "Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 28:14).

16. Curiosity is the cause of a lot of evil. Secretly spying through the keyhole to find out what there is to be seen. Therefore, forsake evil and live.
17. World Online. The whole world within easy reach. You can step into a sinful world with just one click of your mouse. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).
18. Your mobile phone. Which functions do you use and which ones do you leave? Everything shall perish with its temptations.
19. Contacts with many friends on Hyves, Facebook, Twitter, MSN. Real friends? All of those contacts are time consuming, and what do you really gain? Consider the "friends" of the prodigal son.
20. Games with violence. Already accepted? What does the Heidelberg Catechism have to say about the sixth commandment?
21. Downloading music. Where is the boundary? Are you perhaps breaking the eighth commandment?
22. Fighting. Who wins? "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19). "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17).
23. Without noticing, you have come upon the domain of the evil one. He intends nothing other than your demise. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies. Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

24. This is a “no exit” road. Literally and figuratively. Go back! “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Ephesians 5:14). “All they that hate Me love death” (Proverbs 8:36).

25. Second life. Why would you flee into an artificial world? Does it actually exist? It is nothing but a glaring illusion? Maybe the world of the prodigal son?

26. Wasting time. Time is precious. “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isaiah 55:2a).

27. Spending too much time on the Internet estranges you from your relations. You become isolated and lonely.

28. You become addicted. This comes at the cost of a worsening relationship with those whom you love. “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12).

29. Looking secretly at that which is not allowed. “Stolen waters are sweet” (Proverbs 9:17).

30. Never enough. Are you no longer able to stop? “The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give” (Proverbs 30:15).

31. There are many temptations. “A foolish woman is clamorous” (Proverbs 9:13); “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14).

32. You are playing with fire. “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Proverbs 6:27).

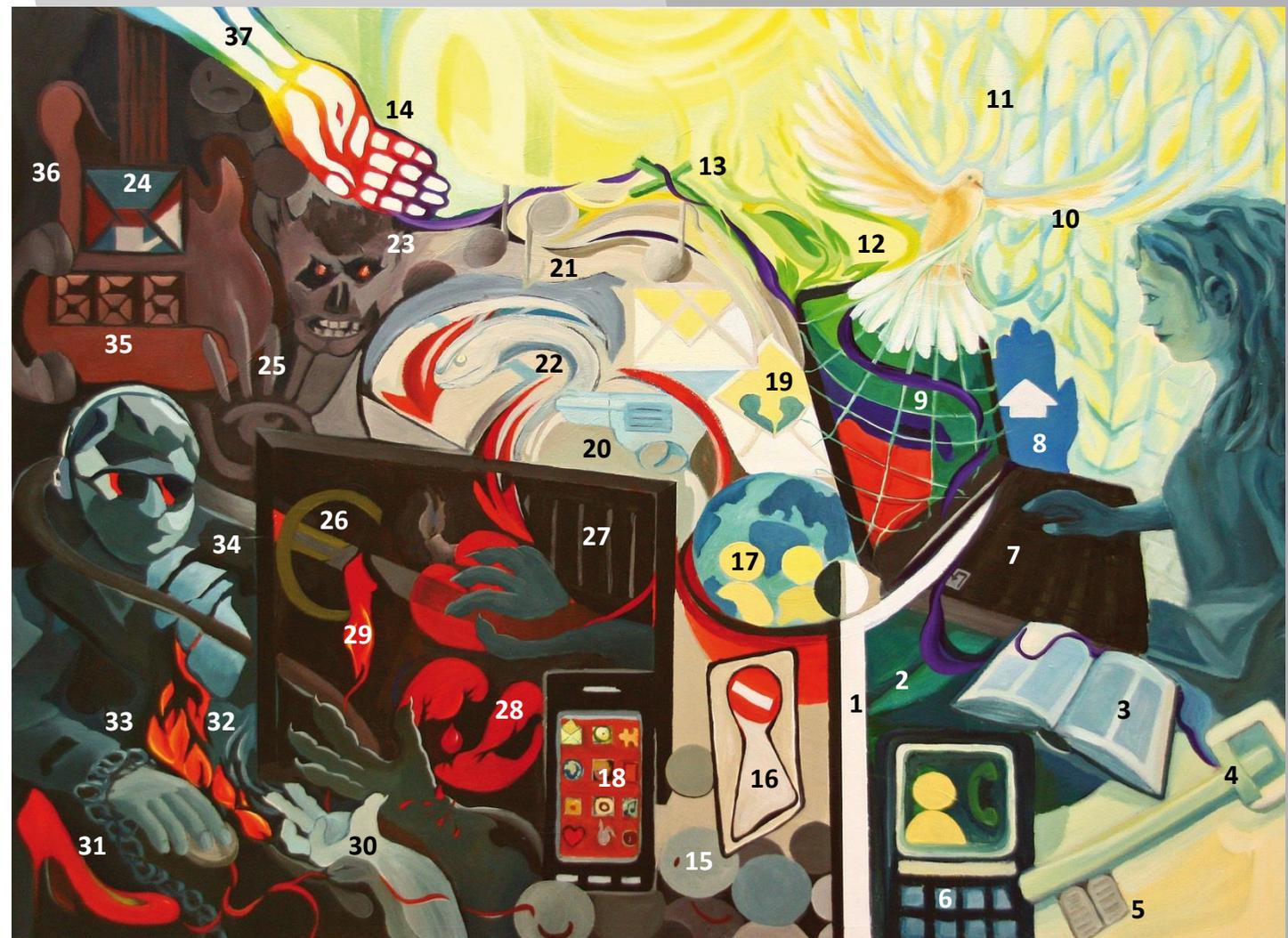
33. You are caught. “As a fool to the correction of the stocks” (Proverbs 7:22b); “And delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

34. Who rules your life? “And he shall be holden with the cords of his sins” (Proverbs 5:22b).

35. In the power and grip of the evil one. “For it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six” (Revelation 13:18).

36. You must ask for help. Do not delay. “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee” (Luke 15:18b).

37. Ask God for the forgiveness of your sins. He is ready to answer. Think of Manasseh. “And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him: and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into His kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD He was God” (2 Chronicles 33:12-13).





What are you....

connected to?

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright,
and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight,

O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Psalm 19 : 7-14