

## THE DIGITAL FALL: SPIRITUAL MALWARE

### Part 1 of the Seven Deadly Digital Sins – Christian Living in the Post-Truth Age

Text: John 8:31-47

#### **Introduction:**

Summary of the previous sermons: (1) God’s Creation and Humans as Co-creators, and (2) Bible Apps and the Eternality of God’s Word. Then, (3) Humanity, Fall, and Technology.

Psychologists, sociologists, and even theologians claim that there is a big gap between the three generations today. Boomers to Gen X (60s-70s) are more loyal to their work, committed, and do hard work because they experienced having nothing after World War 2 in the 1950s and several revolutions. While Millennials and Gen Z (the 1990s-2000s) are more #YOLO, do something what we want, what makes us happy. If the line before is Study—Work—Retire—Travel for Gen X is true, for the younger generation, why not do all these things at once. Work and travel at the same time—so many became vloggers and media influencers. Why work then study if you can do it simultaneously.

Moreover, have you ever encountered that today’s generation seems to be all-knowing or knows a lot of things? Even tidbits of any kind of subject. It is because of accessibility to information and data. Unlike before, in the 1970s—90s, we needed to go to a public library, ask our teacher, or do serious research just to learn something that we wanted to know. Today, information is just in our hands.

While having a conversation with your kid, if something interesting that he or she does not know about, they will immediately search it on Google and grasp a little information about it. Information is everywhere. Before, schools monopolize the source of knowledge and information. Now, Gen Z students would ask, if it’s Google-able, then why study? Therefore, the schools transitioned to teaching methodologies, frameworks, systems, and models of learning.

The same is true for the church. Why memorize a bible verse if we can just Google it in a second? This dilemma was present even during the time of Plato, the Thamusian skepticism; he said, those who write down things will tend to become lazy memorizing important information about life.

Moreover, it also shapes who holds the authority of truth now. If you have watched the documentary in Silicon Valley entitled The Social Dilemma, then you will see that everything in social media, digital technology, and cyberspace is somehow manipulated data information (not all). Since post-truth (explain) is here and now, authority is no longer based on the person who preaches in front. For example, after you have heard the term post-truth, you will check it later on Internet if I was right about the definition of it even though I already put it there on our bulletin essay.

#### **Background (transition):**

Digital technology has given us a lot of benefits in our daily living. Helland and Campbell said, “Many people using the Internet no longer distinguish between life-online and life-offline—rather, being ‘online’ has become part of their daily life and social existence. Checking emails, searching for information, and maintaining friendships and social networks are part of the everyday routine.” See the stats from WeAreSocial

Contextually, Filipinos [still] have a credible claim to the title of ‘social media capital of the world’. Filipinos spend more time using the internet than people in any other country around the world. The typical internet user in the Philippines now spends more than 11 hours per day online, compared to a global average of just under 7 hours per day. So, it’s clear that – once Filipinos do come online – the internet becomes very important to them. - Simon Kemp (as of Nov 29, 2021)

However, during our discussion with the youth last Friday, they said that even though the Internet can be a good tool for communication, learning, and accessing information, it can be damaging, disruptive, and harmful. Indeed, same as the Creation narrative, even though God designed humanity to be “good” in Genesis 1 and 2, in Gen 3, the Fall of humanity came when sin entered.

God's creation was marred by sin. The beginning of this corruption is known as the Fall in the creation narrative. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God; they have rebelled. As a result, sinful nature creeps in each human being today. This corrupted character—like a computer virus—manifests in the actions of humanity. Note that each digital technology has a purposeful design. However, due to the sin of the human creator, it can be a tool creating wretched havoc in the digital world—which I call, Digital Fall. To list some, the digital fall is evidently seen and known through these ‘seven deadly digital sins.’ Namely, (1) fake news [lies, pride], (2) pornography [lust], (3) selective posting [pride, envy], (4) online shopping [greed, gluttony], (5) media addiction [idolatry, sloth], (6) piracy [stealing, greed], and (7) cyberbullying also known as keyboard warriors [anger].

### **Main Idea:**

Focusing on the reality of the post-truth age, let us explore more about truth and grace as stated in our passage today. In our passage, Jesus maintained and stated several times the importance of truth and knowing the truth. He said, “Truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). Indeed, Jesus was fully aware that he will liberate everyone who puts faith in him. In Luke 4:18-19, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Isaiah 61:1,2)

Jesus’ claim in verse 36, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Yet, the Pharisees and other Jewish groups during that time were not convinced about the claim of Christ as the Son of God—who bears and is the truth—that will liberate everyone from the bondage of sin.

To this rejection, we all know that the contrast of truth is “lies/ lying” or in our day known as fake news. In verses 43-45, “Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!” No wonder, God included in the ten commandments, that His children must not lie (Exodus 20:16). Sadly, in this post-truth age, fake news, conspiracy theories, and disinformation are normal to hear and see on the news today.

### ***Social Media Fake News (Lies, Pride)***

Filipino Theologian Rei Crizaldo (2021) says that “social media morphed into a toxic wasteland flooded with fake news, causing its inhabitants to suffer both online fatigue and trauma, and seeing friendships built over a long period of time ripped apart in an instant.” The most shocking failed prophecy built on conspiracy was the recent election in the United States of America. This scandalous act mediated and disseminated digitally was pointed out by Harvard Divinity School Dean David Hempton (2021), during his final lecture for the historic Gifford Lecture at the University of Edinburgh, as an example of how digital technology can be utilized in its worst.

Journalist Peter Guest (2020), contextually noted, in the Philippines, fake news is rampant, and it even can get you killed. The democracy to self-publish on social media, content creation, blog sites, and personal sites equips humanity to not only upload credible and informative news but also counterfeit data information for trolling innocent, especially uninformed people.

Another form of social media sin is the so-called Twitter Alters. In an investigation in the Philippines, Paul John Caña (2020) differentiated Alter accounts to catfishing. Caña said, “Alters, meanwhile, generally retain much of their own personalities but choose to remain anonymous by not posting any pictures of their faces or anything that might easily identify them and their true selves.” As opposed to catfishing, which is for fraudulent and deceptive purposes, alters are to “serve one purpose—to generate, offer, or solicit sexual content and services.”

### ***Selective Posting #Selfie (Pride, Envy)***

Instagram has all the evidence when it comes to selective posting. People tend to curate and judge each other’s lifestyle based on each posted picture (Raising 2015). Oftentimes, we take twenty photos and choose the best one to post online. The other extreme to this dilemma is to become online social climbers. We build our own ideal self that others would see who you want them to know you; not as the real you, but the ideal you.

Filters are there to put on one’s digital cosmetics. We feel insecure or envious whenever we see our friend’s social media posts of their holiday vacations, their new dresses, up-to-date gadgets, and more. People tend to post the best version of themselves on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. to amplify the portrait of one’s ideal self. Why? Of course, the feeling of being validated through those ‘Likes, Shares, and Reactions’ that a person receives.

This thought of getting away from shame and embarrassment of the real situation of one’s life creates a seed of pride that can outgrow one’s heart. It leads to corruption, misery, and guilt. At the very least, each selected post shouts that “I am having a great life!” even if it is unreal.

### ***Cyberbullying/ Keyboard Warriors (Anger)***

In a short explanation, “Cyberbullying is deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all teens and is a peer-to-peer risk” (O’Keeffe and Pearson 2011, pp. 800-804). As said, teens are the most vulnerable when it comes to this manifestation of the sin of hate, anger, and rage. Likewise, it is also the teens that are most likely the suspects.

As said, “Cyberbullying is quite common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide” (Hinduja 2010). In Baldo’s thesis, she noted that her respondents confirmed that they experienced usual cyberbullying, reading negative comments, and sometimes being too violent for their age (Baldo 2021).

Moreover, adults can also experience these loathsome comments especially when it comes to a political stance. Keyboard warriors, mostly hiding in anonymous or fake accounts, tend to aggressively attack any person who is against their partisan. Sadly, it leads to death threats and violence.

### **Conclusion:**

Finally, the sinful nature of humanity manifests in how we use technology in the digital world. Online and offline life are intertwined and no one can distinguish the difference. A Yale theologian said, “Today, daily living is no longer divided into online and offline times or practices.”

However, the downside is we let the works of the evil win in this battle. This is not just a virtual battle but a spiritual battle. In John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The tension between using technology for God or for the world is a battle we all need to fight. Fight with Christ—making sure that he is the center of this battle. In this post-truth age, do not take part in fake news, or any other disinformation of truth. Be for truth and grace, proclaim Jesus through your technologies.