

POST-DIGITAL FALL: REDEEMING THE DIGITAL SPACE

“Becoming the Salt and Light”

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Revelation 21:1-8

Introduction:

Illustration: Flooding theory

“Google...is a little bit like God. God is wireless, God is everywhere, and God sees everything...for many questions in the world, you ask Google.”¹

Deadly Digital Sins:

(No. 4) Cyber Monday Sales/ E-Shop (Gluttony, Greed)

Other than Thanksgiving and Black Friday Sale, Cyber Monday is one of the most awaited days of the year in the United States. As reported, “In 2020, Cyber Monday actually surpassed Black Friday in terms of spending, which could indicate the level of deal offerings on that specific day. According to Adobe Analytics, U.S. shoppers spent \$9 billion on Black Friday and \$10.8 billion on Cyber Monday” (Abrams 2021). Black Friday Team acknowledged that the year 2020 changed everything. Many people opted to choose to shop online and digital shipping rather than camping outside the stores. Meanwhile, Lazada—leading e-commerce in the Philippines, chief operating officer Carlos Barrera said in an interview that “e-commerce has accelerated as the pandemic forced people to spend time at home and shift online for their purchases” (Desiderio 2021).

As much as many loves these cyber sales, the other end of the strand of the rope is that it leads to overbuying. The extreme case is meaningless hoarding. And yes, there is also digital hoarding. These overbought items and hoarded stuff are manifestations of sin greed and gluttony. Another form of digital gluttony is the compulsive adding or following someone famous online. People tend to like the thought that they have a connection with a certain person—most likely, a celebrity. It might be a second-hand connection but the more we create these illusions that we are “friends” with those we do not know, or that they “follow” us on social media, the more it leads us to stay in our dream world.

(No. 5) Pornography (Lust)

President of Barna Research David Kinnaman (2016) reported that 71% of adults, 85% of teens, and young adults who have viewed pornography did so using online videos. Moreover, John Fesko (2020) noted that “9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls have been exposed to pornography before the age of 18. 50% of professing Christian men and 20% of Christian women are addicted to porn, and sadly, the most popular day for viewing it is on Sunday” (p. 78-79).

In the Philippine context, April Baldo (2021) conducted a thesis study of selected children, ages 11 to 17 years old, in the Northern Philippine Conference of the Free Methodist Churches. Baldo concluded that there were advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet. While there are positive outcomes, she said, “[The Internet] exposed them to hurtful online behavior such as cyberbullying and sexual grooming, sexual risks such as seeing and receiving explicit images and videos, and negatively affected their well-being through bad eating habits (forgetting to eat) and by being addicted (high screen time) in using social media apps and online games” (p. 129-130). Sadly, the average age exposure to digital sexual content or pornography is 11 years old (Arterburn and Marsh 2007).

¹ Alan Cohen, V.P. of Airtel, “The New York Times, June 2003,” by Thomas L. Friedman
<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/06/29/nyt.friedman/>

Muyiwa Oyatogun, my seminary friend from KY said, “Porn is devilish. Porn is demonic. Porn WILL destroy you, IS destroying you. Porn not only degrades the people (most times victims) engaged in the pornographic acts but the person actually viewing it. If you are a man or woman who watches porn, I ask, no, beg, no PLEAD with you.... GET HELP!” Further, “Porn is an individual saying to that [person] on the screen...” I don’t care about you. I don’t care about your personal story that got you onto this wretched porn site. I don’t care about what will happen to you when the filming is over-how you’ll drag yourself back to your apartment and get drunk just to stop feeling the pain. I don’t care about what you’ll be facing tomorrow, which will be yet another day of this torment. I don’t want to know what you’re suffering. I don’t even want to know your name. You don’t matter. All that matters here is me...so whoever you are there on the screen—I’ll click over to some over victim soon, but you just keep up the show, okay?” - Ray Ortlund, the Death of Porn.

This is a challenge for everyone, even for married couples. Porn deceives you that what is happening there on screen is the norm of sexual acts. This is not how God designed sex within marriage. Within marriage, it is personal. Each intimacy is unique to each married couple. You are taking away the joy of this gift if you compare or make porn the standard of your intimacy. Again, flee from porn; ask help. You do not need to keep it to yourself. Let someone help you. Professionally, maybe, but it can also be through accountability or a person who can pray for you.

(No. 6) Digital Media Addiction (Idolatry, Sloth)

Digital media addiction is a behavioral problem. It manifests in an uncontrollable urge to spend most of the day binge-watching on Netflix, playing video games, scrolling through social media, and other forms of staying online. In New Zealand, playing video games ranked second as the medium for getting through the pandemic (IGEA 2022).

However, for Americans, in 2015, a total of 8 billion times a day, with the average adult checking their phones two hundred times a day. While today, 71% of Snapchat users ages 18 to 29 say they use the app daily. The pattern is similar for Instagram: 73% say they visit the site every day, with roughly half (53%) reporting they do so several times per day (Auxier and Anderson 2021).

Moreover, reported by Statista Research (2020) that in 2019, “40 percent of U.S. online users aged 18 to 22 years reported feeling addicted to social media.” While another study by California State University demonstrates that “individuals that visited any social media site at least 58 times per week were 3 times more likely to feel so-cially isolated and depressed compared to those who used social media fewer than 9 times per week” (Hilliard 2021). Read Rev. 21.

(No. 7) Identity Theft, Hacking, and Piracy (Stealing, Greed)

A report by Gallup found out, in 2018, that Americans continue to worry most about cybercrimes. 71% worry about the hacking of personal data while 67% about identity theft (Talalaev 2021). It climbed up from the 2016 report of 67%, former, and 66% of the latter (Reinheart 2017). Moreover, hacking, identity theft, and piracy are all forms of stealing. Greed can also be a driving force for someone to steal.

Nevertheless, for many, indifference towards this cybercrime is common. Yet, “70,000 jobs a year are lost in the United States due to music piracy” (Spajić 2021). Spajić went on, “More than 80% of global online piracy is attributable to illegal streaming services.” Torrent downloads are still prominent around the globe. Indeed, there is a need for awareness regarding the effect of those who are negatively affected by digital piracy, hacking, and identity theft. Either piracy of music, movies, books, software cracks, or password stealing, is unacceptable.

Main Idea: What Now?

In the passage read by Sebbie a while ago, verse 8, “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” There is warning, a distinction between the children of God and not.

- Galatians 5, “¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
- 1 Corinthians 6, “⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Transition by reading 1 Cor 6:11-20.

Redeeming the Digital World:

In a recent survey, there are 4.88 billion internet users around the world today, equating to almost 62 percent of the world’s total population. The average daily time spent using the Internet worldwide is 7 hours. In the Philippines, the social media capital of the world has 11 hours of average daily time spent using the Internet (Kemp 2021). People today are online. What does it mean to us?

Christ commanded his disciples, in the Gospel of Matthew, to “Go,” not “come,” and make disciples (28:19-20). Paraphrasing 9:37, the Indigitous—a ministry arm of Cru (former Campus Crusade for Christ)—slogan, “the harvest is plentiful [and online] but the workers are few [and offline].” Again, Christian missions is not limited to geographical locations; the church needs to ‘go’ where the people are. To engage and redeem these people in the digital world is to offer healing, restoration, and salvation through Christ. Gill stated, “Redemption means that our technology must aim at liberating what is imprisoned and in bondage. Healing means repairing what is broken, overcoming what is diseased, relieving what is hurting and suffering” (1998).

If we’re not going to do something about it then we will fall short. Beyond moralistic/ therapeutic approach... the church must engage, not to conform but to transform. The story of Christianity does not end with just utilizing digital technology but rather redeeming the inner spaces of the digital and virtual worlds. By redeeming, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only hope for all realms of reality. In my recent work (Arceno 2021), I noted: “The church has the duty, through the Great Commission, to evangelize—be the salt and light—in the dark realities of the virtual world. Just as the heart of man is corrupted, and the physical world is fallen, thus the virtual world is marred with the sinfulness of humanity which needs redemption by anchoring it in the gospel of Christ towards the ultimate restoration—the telos of Christianity” (pp. 87-88).

Finally, I end this part agreeing to David Gill (1998). He concluded in his *Prolegomena*, “A theology of technology shows that we can’t go back to Eden... Technologists who are guided by a theology... will pray and work that something of our own generation’s technology will be worthy of a place in that city of God” (pp. 173). This city of God is the New Creation in Revelation 21-22. Remarkably, “creation begins in a garden but ends with a city, which implies a certain amount of cultural and technological development” (Schuurman 2013). Let us, then, proclaim the gospel in the virtual world.

Practical Directions:

Last year I was an interim, others would treat me as youth pastor— that was fine. This time, we do not want to miss where God is actively doing something in this world. Throughout our sermon series, we all have seen how rapid the culture shifted. (Point out the gap again).

Initial observations, first, we must treat those who are online as if they are really part of the church. Not just observers or people watching to be entertained and satisfied by the service. Let us make them feel that they are there to worship. Second, we can upgrade our sound system, our Ukulele (ask kuya Manny-pickup mic or electronic Ukulele).

I know several of you are already doing this, share our worship service on social media broadcast.

Furthermore, our point is to engage the next generation. (Which will be my next sermon). Again, this time let us put some execution to our plans. Last year's Student Center is a great opportunity for us to engage them. Tell the story about Ikthus Dumaguete (Printing of thesis).

If we will not do anything; if we will remain like this—a generational, or sad to say, a maintenance church, we will not grow. Many of us are in their senior years; also, many will be soon retiring. If we choose to delay another 2 or 3 years from now, then this hall will only be left with 10 people. The church had been through a lot of trials, and challenges; you were all witnesses. On each trial, people are leaving. Why? Because we have overfamiliarity with one another. Anyway, I will preach more of this next week. But let me show this Three Waves that we were able to conceptualize.

Conclusion:

Finally, I told this to sis Cha, kuya Jon C, and several others. The church, as a whole, or at least 90% should commit to this vision. There is a wise saying, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov 29:18). Without a vision, the church will always look at the past, compare every action they do, every sermon preached by the previous pastors ("This is also the same preaching with pastor ganito-ganyan). If then, it only means 10 years or 5 years ago, if I am still preaching it, then nothing happened within that years?!!!

Church, we saw the cultural gap, the reality of post-truth age, and the presence of the next generation in the digital space, society, and their need. How many years have you been a Christian? (30? 20? Since birth?) Well, you have been partaking of the Word of God for many years. It is time for you to be the one feeding others. Let us all redeem, engage, and feed the next generation.

Ptr. John Paul Arceno

UCBC New Jersey

February 6, 2022