

Introduction

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. **Romans 12:1-2**

1. A church has been livestreaming their morning services since the Covid lockdown. They are thinking about whether to continue with their livestream, or turn it off.
2. A young woman is increasingly worried about the use of her smartphone. It's the first thing she looks at in the morning, and she goes to sleep late and tired because she can't seem to put it down at night.
3. McDonald's in Lancaster have decided to replace several of its front-of-house staff with automated ordering touchscreens.
4. When you fire up your email software, it proudly tells you that from now on it has incorporated ChatGPT technology into the software so it can help you reply faster.
5. You receive a WhatsApp message from your boss while sitting by the swimming pool on holiday.
6. The CRISPR tool makes it possible to cure sickle cell disease by directly editing the human genome.
7. You quite fancy Eton Mess for pudding, so you pop out to the shops for strawberries. It is January.

The Bible's story of technology

Creation

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed... So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. **Genesis 2:5–8, 21-22**

I am a humble artist, moulding my earthly clod,
adding my labour to nature's, simply assisting God.
Not that my effort is needed: yet somehow, I understand,
my maker has willed it that I too should have un moulded clay in my hand. **Piet Hein**

Rebellion

5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. **Genesis 3:5-7**

"You will be like God"

"A mimetic view regards the world as having a given order and thus sees human beings as required to discover that meaning and conform themselves to it. Poiesis, by way of contrast, sees the world as so much raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be created by the individual." **Carl Trueman, The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self**

"It was desirable for gaining wisdom"

"Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering... The word 'standing-reserve' assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric... Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us an object." **Martin Heidegger**

"They sewed fig leaves together"

"It is not simply that modern methods and systems strive after efficiency but rather that they strive after the efficient realisation of ends that are almost exclusively practical, material, and this-worldly." **Craig Gay, Modern Technology and the Human Future**

“Come, let us build a tower”

1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” **Genesis 11:1–4**

16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” 18 They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. 19 No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” 20 He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” **Isaiah 44:16–20**

There is something which unites magic and applied science [i.e. technology] while separating both from the ‘wisdom’ of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men; the solution is a technique. **CS Lewis, The Abolition of Man**

Discussion

Where in our world today do we see examples of technology encouraging us to:

- remove limits from ourselves?
- remake the world differently to God’s design?
- pursue purposes other than God’s purpose?

Salvation

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. **Genesis 3:21**

“The thrall in which Christ holds the creation owes not to an unlocked technique - an advantage Jesus gains through some form of ontological upgrade - but to the divinized, Spirit-empowered humanity Christ possesses. What technologist would not wish to exercise perfect control over the weather, rule the sea, heal the sick, and raise the dead? That which sinful humanity strains to do and be, Jesus effortlessly does and is.” **Owen Strachan, Reenchanted Humanity**

18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. **Acts 19:18–20**

Consummation

9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. **Revelation 21:9–11**

“Meeting the Messiah through repentant faith corrects the Messianic expectations of the modern world. We cheer on advances in science and medicine, workplace efficiency, and even in-game streaming; but we do so with an asterisk in our minds at all times. No matter what Silicon Valley produces, it will never come within 10,000 miles of the throne room of God, where the crucified and resurrected Son of God sits at the Father’s right hand.” **Owen Strachan, Reenchanted Humanity**

Discussion

- What has been challenging or encouraging from this session?
- What one thing do you need to do to respond?
- How will this session shape your prayers?

For further reading

Digital Liturgies – Samuel D James

The Life We’re Looking For – Andy Crouch

The Frailest Thing – L M Sacasas

Breaking Bread With The Dead – Alan Jacobs

12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You – Tony Reinke

Modern Technology and the Human Future – Craig Gay

The Abolition of Man – C S Lewis