

Minimize Electronic Spirituality, Part 1

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I almost used the word “Delete” instead of “Minimize” in the title of this chapter. However, electronic spirituality, that is, using resources like the computer and the Internet for the sake of the soul, can be practical at times. When the spiritual need of the moment is information, computer-driven resources will usually provide more information and present it faster than any alternative. For example, if you need a Bible and don’t have one with you, being able to read the electronic text from a screen is a great blessing. Other than extreme circumstances like this, however, pull the plug on electronic spirituality.

In general, Christians engage in electronic spirituality in two broad ways—individually and interpersonally. Here I am addressing the former, that is, when individual believers pursue their devotional practices of Bible intake and prayer by means of a computer or the Internet. Note that I am distinguishing between devotional experiences and study. While book-based study has its advantages over electronic processes, admittedly there are times when the accessibility and speed of electronic tools argues for their use in Bible study and other research.

It’s not surprising for people accustomed to doing almost everything else in front of a computer to practice their personal spiritual disciplines there too. I know, for instance, of believers committed to communing with the Lord in private each day, but do so after getting their daily Scripture passages and other devotional readings emailed to them or after the text pops up automatically on the computer screen morning by morning like electronic manna.

Remember, however, that a daily time of worship before the Lord is the seeking of a Person, not just information. In these moments the Lord bids us, as in Psalm 27:8, “Seek My face,” not mere facts. We come to these times to relate to our God, not to a machine.

Can’t we relate to God through words on a screen as well as through words on a printed page? Yes, we *can*, for the power is in God’s Word, not in the format by which it is read. But I question whether it is either easier or simpler to relate to God through an electronic device than otherwise. Dealing with a computer is proverbial for an impersonal experience. “I hate it when a computer answers the phone instead of a real person,” we complain. Why, then, especially since we have other means available, would we want to use such an impersonal means to relate to the most important Person in our lives?

When your individual spirituality becomes more dependent on technology, your devotional experience can be derailed by hardware crashes, software glitches, connectivity problems, power failures, and other technical contingencies. And besides the ordinary distractions when trying to meditate on the text of Scripture or focus on the Lord, doing this in front of a screen also subjects you to the distractions of incoming email and other sounds or messages produced by your computer.

Quicker computer speeds and faster Internet connections do not upgrade intimacy with Jesus. Despite its allurements or convenience, electronic spirituality does nothing to improve individual spirituality that cannot be gained by simpler means. Minimize electronic spirituality and simplify your spiritual life.

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