

Wisdom for a Smartphone Age:
The Danger of Growing in Secret Vices

I. Vice

- A. “A vice is a habitual inner disposition to do evil or not to do good.”¹ (see Rom. 6:13)
- B. Vice is not a new problem (Gal. 5:16-17, 20)
- C. However, can you think of ways digital devices can more easily promote vice?
 - 1. What makes them potent in this area?
 - 2. It’s like Satan and the world has gone from using conventional weapons against us (bullets) to tactical nukes. Vice is being weaponized by greater accessibility and anonymity on digital devices, and the result is greater temptations toward vices.

II. Some Secret Vices That Are Amplified by Digital Technology

A. Lust of the Eyes

- 1. Seeking out images or things that God has forbidden.
- 2. Covetousness → impurity → immorality (Eph. 5:3-5).
- 3. Spurgeon, commenting on Joseph fleeing Potiphar’s wife’s advances
The ancient naturalists wrote much of basilisks, whose eyes fascinated their victims and rendered them easy victims; so the mere gaze of wickedness puts us in solemn danger. He who would be safe from acts of evil must haste away from occasions of it. A covenant must be made with our eyes not even to look upon the cause of temptation, for such sins only need a spark to begin with and a blaze follows in an instant.²

B. Materialism (pride of life – 1 John 2:15-17)

- 1. Materialism is thinking our joy, meaning, or security is found in things.
- 2. Reinke writes, “We are all hungry, thirsty, and needy for sustenance outside of us, but we give our attention and wealth to trying to satisfy our most essential longings with the goods and the vices so easily tapped on our phones. Therapeutic materialism [buying to make ourselves feel better] is a scam. We order boxes of new goods that will never heal us . . . all because we are blind to the free gifts of God offered in his Son, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood have been given to us to sustain our eternal life and to feed the flourishing of our unceasing joy.”³

C. Gambling

- 1. Gambling – to pay money to play games of chance with hopes of winning more money.
- 2. Biblical concerns with gambling (love of money, failure to be a faithful steward, exploitation of the poor).

D. Gossip

- 1. Gossip: spreading or seeking out information about others that is not and should not be public
- 2. This is always a problem (see 1 Tim. 5:13). But now it is available at weapon-grade enrichment.

E. Lack of self-control

- 1. We are called to self-control (see Titus 2 for example)
- 2. Ways that digital devices make it easy to grow in this vice: glut of games, entertainment, curiosities.

¹ *Dictionary of the Later NT and its Developments*, “Virtues and Vices.”

² *Morning and Evening*, “Morning, July 25”

³ Reinke, *12 Ways*, 140-41.

III. Gospel Hope for Those Struggling with Secret Vices (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

IV. We Must Fight Vices

- A. Proverbs calls us to be prudent when facing dangers and to take steps to avoid the danger if possible (Prov. 27:12).
- B. Fight on the Internal Front: Live by faith, not by sight
1. As Reinke perceptively notes, “When I grow bored with Christ, I become bored with life – when that happens, I often turn to my phone for a new consumable digital thrill.” (Reinke, 143)
 2. So, we must engage in the habits of grace that help us see Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly.
 3. Also, we must believe God is all – seeing and present everywhere (1 Cor. 4:5)
“no addiction in our lives is hidden from the eyes of God. Our Creator is no respecter of privacy laws. His omnipresence shatters the mirage of anonymity that drives so many people to turn to their phones and assume they can sin and indulge without consequence.” (Reinke, 137).
- C. Fight on the External Front: Cut off easy, anonymous access to areas of temptation
1. Just because the battle is ultimately at the heart level, doesn’t mean it is not also an external one (Matt. 5:28-30).
 2. So, how might we cut off access and anonymity?
 - a. Hardware
 - (i) Less devices. Devices that are much more limited in their purpose in our lives.
 - (ii) At what age does your son or daughter get a smartphone or computer?
 - b. Software
 - (i) Temptation is much more successful in bringing us down when we are isolated/alone.
 - (ii) Accountable to You, Covenant Eyes, Parental Controls (but see the book *The Tech Exit*).
 - c. Habits
 - (i) Limit privacy on devices with habits (ex. Devices live in central, public location).
 - (ii) Come up with ways to grow in skills or virtues and build them into your schedule to fill the times you are often tempted.
 - d. Personal relationships
 - (i) Be open with your spouse or a trusted and mature friend in the church
 - (ii) Train kids on devices rather than just handing them a device.
 - (iii) Open phone/device policy between spouses and for parents to see kids’ devices.

V. Application Questions

- A. Family Discussion
1. Why should we not fear confessing our sins and temptations to a mature Christian friend or parent? What are the benefits of doing that?
 2. What accountability or safeguards do we have in place to remove anonymity or the ease of accessing secret vices? Are there any areas where we should strengthen the defenses?
- B. Personal Reflection
1. What sins/temptations are more prevalent in your life through your digital devices? What will you do about it?
 2. Read Matthew 5:27-28. Have you ever considered radical measures to fight off secret sin in your life? Come up with a plan or ask a trusted, mature Christian to help you “cut it off.”