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The Deep Limitations of Digital Church



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Do you go to the Internet for church? Cathy Lynn Grossman of *USA Today* reported this week on the increasing use of digital technology by churches. This trend is not new, of course, but some of the developments she traces are fresh and innovative.

She begins with a look at Christ Fellowship in McKinney, Texas — a church Grossman describes as “on board with almost every high-tech gambit under heaven.”

She then writes:

“Find the church by going online — the 21st-century version of sighting a steeple on the horizon. Beyond their website, Christ Fellowship has a Facebook page to give it a friendly presence in social media.

You can download the worship program by scanning their customized-with-a-cross QR code. The worship services are streamed online from their Internet campus — with live chat running so you can share spiritual insights in real time.

Afterward, says senior Pastor Bruce Miller, ‘someone will ask you, ‘How did it go? Did God help you, today? How can we help you?’ Just like we do when people come to our building in McKinney. We are here to help people find and follow Christ,



wherever they are starting out from.'

And wherever they are in the digital world.”

There is something good, healthy, and Great Commission-minded about the eager use of new communication technologies. Digital technologies and social media have transformed our world, redefining how human beings engage one another and how we all access information. A church without a digital presence is a church that, to many people, simply doesn't exist.

I am very thankful for the ability to access massive sermon libraries in audio or video form from preachers of the past and from pulpit titans of the present as well. Go online and you can read the sermons of Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther, and a host of others. Preachers in churches of any size can establish a global reach for their ministry. Digital technologies allow the collapse of distance and time and these platforms also allow the Gospel to jump geographical and political barriers.

For all this we should be thankful. I eagerly use online Bible programs and do research through digital media. I am thankful for the platforms for ministry and communication represented by social media. I am grateful for these new tools and technologies and I make use of them to reach people around the world.

At the same time, there are dangers. John Mark Reynolds of Biola University is cited within the article, and he addressed the danger inherent in these technologies: “How can the Christian Church utilize the tools media has given us without being subsumed by them? You don't want delivery to become everything.”

That is a crucial issue. But the challenge should not be addressed only to churches. Research indicates that a significant number of Christians are tempted to allow these technologies to serve as a substitute for participation in a local church. This is deadly and dangerous for believers.

Christ clearly intends for his people to be gathered together into congregations. The fellowship of the saints is a vital means of grace for the disciple of Christ. We can be enriched by means of listening to sermons online and by delving deeply into the ocean of knowledge found within Christian websites, but these cannot replace the authenticity that comes only by means of the local church and its ministry.

Believers need the accountability found only within the local church. We need to hear sermons preached by flesh-and-blood preachers in the real-time experience of Christian worship. We need to confess the faith together through the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We need to confess our sins and declare forgiveness by the blood of Christ

together. We need to be deployed for service in Christ's name together.

Without apology, we can learn much from preaching heard or seen over the Internet. Churches should engage digital technologies with the same eagerness that we use jet aircraft, copy machines, the printing press, and the telephone. At the same time, none of these can replace the fellowship of the saints and the centrality of the local church.

A digital preacher will not preach your funeral. The deep limitations of digital technologies become evident where the church is most needed. Don't allow the Internet to become your congregation. YouTube is a horrible place to go to church.

It may be true that most people in this culture are, as Cathy Lynn Grossman observes, "in the digital world." Just don't forget that we are all in the real flesh-and-blood world, too — and that is where we go to church.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

Cathy Lynn Grossman, "[Church Outreach Takes on a New Technical Touch](#),"
Wednesday, April 18, 2012.

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