

Who here knows what TikTok is? TikTok is a form of social media where people post videos of themselves. I think it started mostly with little dances and lip-syncing, and it expanded from there. The idea was that if you liked a video of say, fly fishing, the algorithm would show you more videos of fly fishing. And since the very early days, Calvin's principle of total depravity has been evident in TikTok ever since. There is a lot of bad stuff on TikTok. For many years I was blissfully unaware of such things because the few times I looked at TikTok was for funny cat videos so that's all the algorithm would show me. When I joined the circus and became an aerialist I was sucked deeply into the world of social media because it's the main way that hobby aerialists learn new moves. An aerialist is someone who uses something like silk or a hoop to dance in the air. Believe it or not, 99 percent of what we do in my studio is seeing a video on TikTok or Instagram and saying that looks danger, let's try it! As my social media experience was involuntary expanded, I was exposed to the seedy depraved side of TikTok, and China undoubtedly was wondering how one woman could watch so many cat videos.

Whatever you think of TikTok, it's a good slice of American life and culture. Far from dances and bad lip-syncing, it has become the platform for many people to promote their beliefs and lifestyles. In between cats meowing and circus stunts, I've noticed a couple themes in some TikTokers philosophy, and thus in American culture, which belong to what Paul would call the spirit of death.

The first to look out for yourself and only yourself. America is without a doubt the most individualistic country in the world. Some of this no doubt sprouts from our origins; The first Americans

faced a rough and wild land without the comforts of the European world, and often spaced far apart for the purposes of expansion and farming. Perhaps some of that ruggedness has been coded into our DNA. Perhaps it's just our own sinfulness, our own laziness and greed. If we are only looking out for ourselves, how many times will we miss the neighbor who needs us, who needs Jesus? How many times will quiet hints for help be ignored. If we are only concerned for ourselves, what will our culture look like in another generation or two? No relationship can survive if we are only in it and out for ourselves. That kind of selfishness is the spirit of death, and will rot our relationships and our hearts away. These are the people who so often find themselves alone at the end of the day, and of their life.

Paul calls us Christians brothers and sisters. We are to be a family. We are to show concern for one another, to bear one another's burden. When one of us stumbles, we are there to pick them up. When one of us loses our faith, we hold the faith for them until they may pick it up again. The road home holds many challenges, and we are to walk with one another. This is the spirit of life which Christ has given us.

Another trend I see a lot is do whatever feels good. There's plenty of that in America. The problem is some of the worse things in life feel good, at least for the moment. Drugs might give us a temporary high, but if you've ever watched them claim the life of a loved one, you know where that road lies. We are the society of quick highs, living only for momentary pleasure, but we weren't created for such things, and as such, the consequences are built into the system. There is no illicit addiction whose ending is worth the high, no selfishness in relationships that is worth the heartbreak, no crime that is worth the victims and the stain it leaves behind. These things are the spirit of death.

Paul calls us to live for God and by God's teachings. People outside the church often seem to think the teachings of the Bible are to rob us of fun. That's not true at all. The teachings of God are there to help us live life to the fullest, free of the pain and regret that plague our society. Living with love and respect, knowing that not all things which feel good are good, that is the spirit of life.

Finally, I've noticed a lot of people who say that the people in the church don't live up to what we preach. We condemn the spirit of death, but fall victim to it ourselves. We sometimes act in selfish ways, looking out for what we want, how we think, our way of doing things. We find ways to justify the temptations we want, taking what we want from the Bible like it's a buffet at golden coral and leaving behind what we don't like. All this is true, sometimes. But else would we expect to find in a church? The gospel is for broken, sinful people. That is why our churches are full of broken sinful people, trying to be otherwise. It's feature, not a bug of the system. And while sometimes we do fall short, we have been given the spirit of life, not a spirit of fear or death, even when we do fail.

Lest you believe that TikTok is a total wasteland of depravity, there are a few Christians on it, and one such person explains this very well.

Our culture is so often in opposition to the gospel, it is the spirit of death. But God has redeemed us, adopted us, and given us a spirit of life, a way of life that is not just for ourselves, but of God and neighbor, that leads not to death and pain, but to meaning and love. Though this spirit is within us, sometimes we will fail, but there is no greater place for a sinner to be than in church, at the feet of Jesus, striving for a better way.

Rev. Kate Mauch, May 26, 2024