

iChrist

The **iChrist** reality is not a product or a device, but a personal relationship with the risen Lord. Those who seek this reality make it their ambition to experience a seamless connection between Christ and themselves. Many **iChrist** statements in the NT readily come to mind, such as, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21) or, “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus” (Revelation 1:9). These statements underscore the seamless connection or the deep communion between ourselves and Christ. My text for this message is Paul's letter to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:1-11) and the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). Many of us are sold on Apple devices for their beauty and functionality (I wrote this article on an iPad). We like how Apple has made life easier. So, open up your iPad or iPhone and turn in your Bible app to Genesis 11 and let's get started.

iTech-Tower of Babel

Our aim is to contrast the **iChrist** reality of the gospel with the **iTech** reality of our culture. Steve Jobs is an iconic figure in the pantheon of today's techno-Tower of Babel. On Google Maps the plain of Shinar borders Silicon Valley. You may recall that the people of Shinar sought to preserve human solidarity through technology. The Lord's assessment of their efforts underscores the danger of human solidarity when it is not in union with God. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Genesis 11:6). The triune God thwarted the Shinar project by confusing their language, rendering them unable to understand one another. The Tower of Babel and its quest for salvation through technology is an ideology that is still in play today. One of its main architects was Steve Jobs.



Steve Jobs' passionate drive for product perfection is a modern variation on “Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” Oven-baked bricks is the ancient equivalent to microchips and the iCloud. Shinar brick baking is to Babel what “gorilla glass” is to Apple. The human belief that innovative products meet not only physical needs but also satisfy spiritual needs dates back from ancient times.



The “I” in iPod, iPhone, iTunes, iPad, and iCloud, stands for Apple's resolve to create devices seamlessly integrated with the *Internet* (338). You could be forgiven, however, if you thought the iconic ‘I’ represents the individual self, instead of the internet. Seamless connectivity between the internet and a device has become more than a tool. It is morphed into a philosophy of life

that preaches solidarity (salvation) in the cyber-world while isolating the individual in the real world. The mesmerizing myth of wholeness through very cool, sexy devices misses the reality of what our technology is doing to the self. Instantaneous connectivity substitutes for intimate community. Steve Jobs offers the iconic apple as the forbidden fruit. The implied message counters the biblical message of the fall of man. In the post-Christian myth the story is flipped: it is God who lies and the devil speaks truth when the serpent says, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

Commentator Andy Crouch's WSJ article, "Steve Jobs: The Secular Prophet," came out the week Jobs died (October 8, 2011). Crouch wrote, "That bitten apple was just one of Steve Jobs's many touches of genius, capturing the promise of technology in a single glance." He "turned Eve's apple, the symbol of fallen humankind, into a religious icon for true believers in technology." Jobs was able to "to articulate a perfectly secular form of hope." He was "the perfect evangelist because he had no competing source of hope."

"This is the gospel of a secular age," writes Crouch. "It has the great virtue of being based only on what we can all perceive - it requires neither revelation nor dogma. And it promises nothing it cannot deliver - since all that is promised is the opportunity to live your own unique life, a hope that is manifestly realizable since it is offered by one who has so spectacularly succeeded by following his own 'inner voice, heart and intuition.'"

Steve Jobs worked at the intersection of technology and the humanities, designing not only devices but a philosophy of life. Christians work at the intersection of Christ and culture, living out their salvation with fear and trembling. We want to compare Steve Jobs' Apple Theology and the apostle Paul's Christian Theology.



Clash of Gospels

Soren Kierkegaard in his essay *On the Difference Between A Genius and an Apostle* distinguishes between worldly authority and divine authority. He compares the genius and the apostle in several ways. Kierkegaard's distinction works just as well if you read "disciple" (faithful follower of Jesus Christ) for "apostle."

(1) A genius is born; an apostle is called. A genius adds to the accumulated understanding and science of man, but an apostle proclaims the wisdom of God, not found in the nature of things. A genius' insights are quickly assimilated and super-ceded by new breakthroughs, but the apostle's proclamation remains true throughout time.

(2) A genius is measured by intelligence, inventiveness and innate abilities. An apostle is determined

exclusively by divine authority. We do not listen to the apostle Paul “because he is clever, or even brilliantly clever” but because his message comes from God. Authority is not measured in “the profundity, the excellence, the cleverness of the doctrine” (96).

(3) A genius has the luxury of living unto himself. The genius is special and knows it. And the culture generally expects and approves selfishness in a genius. “Genius lives in itself . . . following its own genius, regardless of whether others profit by it or not” (107).

Walter Isaacson writes of Steve Jobs, the genius behind Apple, that he “stands as the ultimate icon of inventiveness, imagination, and sustained innovation”(xxi). Jobs devoted his life to innovating not only new products but re-imagining an ancient philosophy of life. To use his phrase, he wanted to “invent the future” — to “put a dent in the universe.” Jobs was a marketing and design genius who didn’t believe in market research or focus groups. He was a visionary, who trusted in his own ability to create what people would want in the future, not what they thought they needed or wanted in the present.



“Some people say, ‘Give the customers what they want.’ But that’s not my approach. Our job is to figure out what they’re going to want before they do. I think Henry Ford once said, ‘If I’d asked customers what they wanted, they would have told me, ‘A faster horse!’ People don’t know what they want until you show it to them. That’s why I never rely on market research” (567).

The genius can choose when he or she wants to perform, but the apostle has no such luxury. The apostle submits to the call of God. The apostle is “called by a revelation to go out in the world, to proclaim the Word, to act and to suffer, to a life of uninterrupted activity as the Lord’s messenger” (106). “No genius has an *in order that*; the Apostle has absolutely and paradoxically, an *in order that*” (108).

“When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach.
Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” 1 Corinthians 9:16

To draw out this clash of gospels and the difference between the genius and the apostle, we are looking at the first eleven verses of 1 Corinthians. The apostle Paul begins, “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand!” (15:1). He reminded the believers of four simple truths regarding the gospel. They had *received* the gospel.

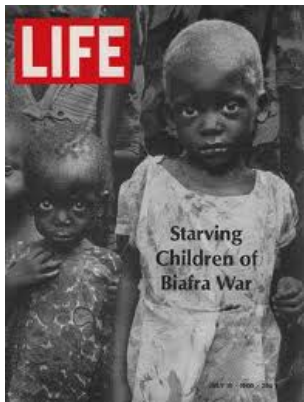
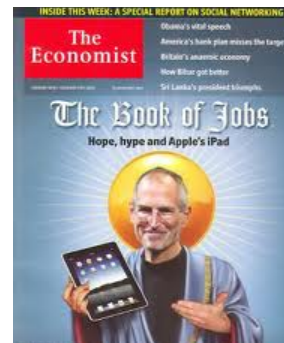


They had *taken their stand* on the gospel. They are *being saved* by the gospel. And they needed to *hold firmly* to the gospel.

“Otherwise, you have believed in vain” (15:2). It is not the mere awareness of the gospel that saves, but a person’s dependence upon the gospel that saves. Since the gospel by definition is all about the grace of God, how could it ever rest on anything other than embracing God’s gracious provision. Salvation is not in the strength of our self-righteous merit, but in the realization of our great need for God and God’s redemptive provision.

Apple Theology

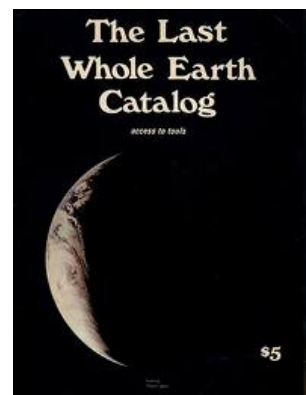
Jobs’ biographer Walter Isaacson refers to Apple’s *Theology*. It is an apt term, because the issue goes deeper than metaphor and semantics. It is not only about building end-to-end integrated products, it is also about a philosophy of life. The world instinctively picks up on this world-view clash. When Jobs unveiled the iPad in January 2010, the *Economist* put Steve on its cover robed, haloed, and holding what was dubbed ‘the Jesus Tablet.’ The Wall Street Journal said, “The last time there was this much excitement about a tablet, it had some commandments written on it.” (493).



Steve Jobs was thirteen when he decided Christianity was not for him. He confronted his Lutheran Sunday School teacher with a picture of starving children in Biafra (a successionist state from 1967-1970 in southeastern Nigeria). “If God knew about this, why didn’t God do something for these children?” Jobs asked. Unsatisfied with the answer he got, he never went back to church. At the end of his life, he told Isaacson, “I’m about fifty-fifty on believing in God. For most of my life, I’ve felt that there must be more to our existence than meets the eye” (571). At 17, he left home, moved in with his girlfriend and starting exploring Eastern spirituality. He was impressed by Zen Buddhism and its quest for individual enlightenment, intuition, and minimalism.

Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalog* gave Jobs a philosophy that blended technology and the counterculture. The first issue came out in 1968 and articulated a philosophy that Jobs resonated with:

“A realm of intimate, personal power is developing—power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is



interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by the Whole Earth Catalog.” (58).

Jobs ended his 2005 Stanford Commencement address with the caption from the back cover of the final issue of the Whole Earth Catalog, that came out in 1971. It read “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.” In his speech, he gave three stories. He described his experience of dropping out of Reed College, getting fired from Apple, and being diagnosed with cancer. He said,

“Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything— all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.”



Isaacson praised the speech for its simplicity, purity, and charm. He wrote, “You won’t find a better commencement address. Others may have been more important. . .but none has had more grace.” (457). When Isaacson says that no other commencement speech “has had more grace,” he means that Steve Jobs was winsome, reflective, and endearing. This kind of simplicity has a charm to it. The genius lets down his guard. He shows his vulnerability and offers the world a simple faith—a faith that requires no other faith than faith in oneself. Death ends all. We have nothing to lose. Follow your heart. “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.”

But is this the kind of grace we need? The apostle Paul’s is radically different. If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, our faith is futile, our sins are unforgiven, our minds are deluded, and we are to be pitied more than all others. If the dead are not raised, Paul quotes a line from the prophet Isaiah, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” Or, he might have said, “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.”



Simplicity

Steve Jobs married Eastern spirituality with Western materialism, with the result that innovative products become the essence of salvation. Our tools define us. Like the Tower of Babel, Apple’s iPhones, iPads, iPods shape our identity. They make us who we are. We are saved from being “scattered over the face of

the earth” by these ingenious devices. Steve Jobs summed up his design philosophy in a phrase: “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication” (80). His quest for “true rather than surface simplicity” meant that he controlled everything. He expressed it this way:

“Why do we assume that simple is good? Because with physical products, we have to feel we can dominate them. As you bring order to complexity, you find a way to make the product defer to you. Simplicity isn’t just visual style. It’s not just minimalism or the absence of clutter. It involves digging through the depth of the complexity. To be truly simple, you have to go really deep.” (343)

To equate simplicity with the ability to dominate a device makes sense, but when this aim is carried over into a philosophy of life it runs into problems. Apple Theology appears to segue easily from technology to psychology. If we are not careful we begin to expect people to work like devices, intuitively, simply, efficiently, and when they don’t we’re confused and disappointed.

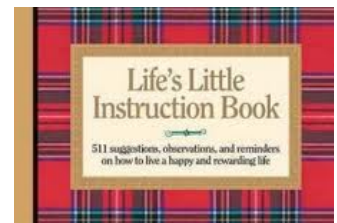
Oliver Wendall Holmes said, “I won’t give a fig for simplicity on this side of complexity, but I’ll give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.” The simplicity that allows us to intuitively grasp how to use a device is very different from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ.



C. S. Lewis wrote:

“It is no good asking for a simple religion. After all, real things are not simple. They look simple, but they are not. . . .If we ask for something more than simplicity, it is silly then to complain that the something more is not simple...”¹

The human quest for meaning is not satisfied with technological breakthroughs, spectacular achievements, and even breathtaking discoveries. On the surface we may long for something simple—a good one-liner that makes sense to us. We’d like to take a page out of *Life’s Little Instruction Book* and turn a blind eye to the complexity of the world. It is easier to be told, “It’s not your fault,” or “You are the secret to your joy and happiness” or “Believe in yourself” or “You can do anything you put your mind to.” But life isn’t like that. We know this intuitively.

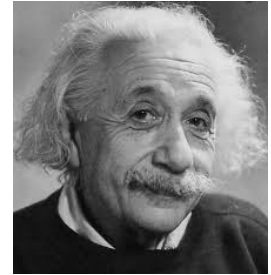


C. S. Lewis observed, "If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 40-42.

we? We are dealing with Fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about.”²

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”



The apostle Paul’s creedal affirmation is simple, declarative and clean. Christ is the subject of seven verbs: “**Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. And that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (15:3-8). The phrase “according to the Scriptures” substantiates the meaning of Christ’s death. The credible eyewitness accounts confirm the historicity of the resurrection.

This is the simplicity on the other side of complexity. Albert Einstein said, “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” Paul summed up the heart of the gospel in a few terse lines that represented hours of preaching and teaching that Paul and others had given to the church at Corinth. His intention was not to reduce the gospel to a few facts, but to summarize the depth and totality of the gospel as concisely as possible.

Reality Distortion Field

Jobs adopted the phrase *Reality Distortion Field* from the early episodes of Star Trek, “in which aliens create their own new world through sheer mental force.” (118). His ability to intentionally deceive others and



himself is legendary and may be the result of several factors, including his deep pain over being abandoned by his parents and put up for adoption, his belief that he was special, because he was smarter than just about everyone else, and his passion for perfection in the products he produced. Isaacson writes:

“At the root of the reality distortion was Job’s belief that the rules didn’t apply to him. He had some evidence for this; in his childhood, he had often been able to bend reality to his desires. Rebelliousness and willfulness were ingrained in his character. He had the sense that he was special, a chosen one, an enlightened one.” He saw himself as special like Einstein and Gandhi... He had an affinity for Nietzsche. . . .The philosopher’s concept of the will to power and the special nature of the Uberman came



² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 165.

naturally to him. As Nietzsche wrote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers the world.”³

Apple’s Chief Designer and Jobs’ trusted confidant, Jony Ive, tried to analyze Steve’s way with people:

“He’s a very, very sensitive guy. That’s one of the things that makes his antisocial behavior, his rudeness, so unconscionable. . . . He has this very childish ability to get really worked up about something, and it doesn’t stay with him at all. But there are other times, I think honestly, when he’s very frustrated and his way to achieve catharsis is to hurt somebody. And I think he feels he has a liberty and license to do that. The normal rules of social engagement, he feels, don’t apply to him. Because of how very sensitive he is, he knows exactly how to efficiently and effectively hurt someone. And he does do that.” (462)

When confronted, Steve Jobs would say, “It’s simply who I am.” This extraordinary genius of marketing and product design was seemingly incapable of self-awareness. He could be obsessed with every detail of an Apple device and every aspect of the retail experience but not give his soul a thought. He could mastermind the highest grossing store in New York City but he could not show empathy for others.

The clash between the genius and the apostle is evident. Whatever criticism others had of Paul, they could not exceed his own self-criticism. He flat out said, “I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.” The double “I am” asserted categorically that his identity and work were founded upon the unmerited grace of God. His own “I am” was redefined by the person of Jesus Christ. The “I am” sayings in the gospel of John, declare Christ to be the all sufficient source for our salvation and the ground for our being. The “I am” reality of Jesus is absolutely critical for who we are.⁴

³ Steve Jobs did not believe that the normal rules applied to him. For several years he refused to acknowledge the birth of his daughter. He refused to put a license plate on his car. He parked in handicap parking. He was too busy to flush the toilet and he claimed he didn’t need to bathe regularly or wear deodorant because of his diet. “If reality did not comport with his will, he would ignore it...” (119). When he was diagnosed with cancer in October 2003, he refused surgery for nine months, because he didn’t want his body to be opened up. As one friend put it, “I think Steve has such a strong desire for the world to be a certain way that he wills it to be that way. Sometimes it doesn’t work. Reality is unforgiving” (454).

In the name of product perfection, Job justified bullying. He generated fear and intimidation. He believed he had to be ruthless to build a team of A players. He worked on strategies of manipulation and control. He was frequently obnoxious, rude, selfish, and nasty to other people (195). Part of his bullying routine was to stare down anyone who disagreed with him (206). He baffled friends as to how uncaring he could be. He was extremely self-centered (264). He used intentional neglect to get his way. He could be charming to people he hated (312) and insulting to people he liked (312). It was in his nature to mislead or be secretive (313). Tina Redse, Jobs’s girlfriend for four years, decided that Jobs matched the criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. “I realized that expecting him to be nicer or less self-centered was like expecting a blind man to see” (266).

⁴ The “I am” sayings in the Gospel of John: “*I am the bread of life*” (6:35); “I am the light of the world” (8:12); “I am the gate of the sheep” 10:7,9); “I am the good shepherd” (10:11,14); “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6); “I am the vine; you are the branches” (15:5).

For Paul there was no explanation for his life apart from the grace of God. “No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” Yet the power of God’s grace did not place Paul above others who proclaimed the gospel. It was never about Paul, never about his ego; it was all about the gospel. The power of God’s grace flowed from the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. “Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

Paul’s testimony is for our benefit, especially for those who feel like “damaged goods,” who have come to the end of themselves, and who know that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). What was true for Paul can also be true for us, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” He sets the meaning of the resurrection in the light of his own personal history and life-transformation. Paul’s “I am what I am,” was not boastful. It was not “I am what I am” deal with it. On the contrary, Paul’s “I am what I am” was said out of gratitude for the grace of Christ.

This past year Chuck Colson, completed his long obedience in the same direction. In his 1976 autobiography *Born Again*, Colson remembers the unforgettable night when he sat down with Tom Phillips then president of Raytheon in his Boston home. Colson was in the middle of the Watergate mess. His life was unraveling and he knew it.

As Colson describes it, Tom gently yet boldly confronted him on his corrupt, self-reliant methods and his need for God. Phillips shared about his journey to Christ. He challenged Colson: “Chuck, I don’t think you will understand what I’m saying about God until you are willing to face yourself honestly and squarely. This is the first step.” Then Tom reached for a copy of C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* on the corner table. “I suggest you take this with you and read it while you are on vacation.” Tom started to hand it to Colson, then he paused. “Let me read you one chapter.” He opened to Lewis’ chapter, “The Great Sin,” and began to read.



There is one vice of which no one is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. . . . And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit. . . .Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.

As Phillips read, Colson said he could feel his face flush. Lewis’ words were exposing him. The more Tom read the more uncomfortable and unclean Colson felt. Tom turned the page and read,

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to

yourself. Unless you know God as that — and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison — you do not know God at all. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. . . .For Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense.⁵

When Tom Phillips finished the chapter, he shut the book and handed it to Colson. Chuck mumbled something to the effect that he'd look forward to reading it. Tom asked, "How about it, Chuck?" and Colson knew exactly what he meant. Was he ready to receive Christ? Colson demurred, admitted that he was shaken up, but he wasn't ready to make that kind of commitment. As Tom prayed for him, Colson had to keep his emotions in check. They said goodnight and Chuck made his way down the walk to his car. While fumbling with his car keys, Colson's tight grip on his emotions relaxed and he began to cry. He was angry with himself for this weakness. He started his car. He drove out of the driveway, but he only got about a hundred yards from the house before he had to pull over. He was crying to hard that it was like he was trying to swim underwater. In that moment, for once in his life, he forgot about his ego and his fears of being weak. There was a strange sensation flowing through his body, not one of sorrow, nor of joy, but of relief. And then he prayed, the first real prayer he recalls ever praying, "God, I don't know how to find You, but I'm going to try! I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to You." He repeated over and over the words: *Take me*.⁶

iPassion

Steve Jobs had a passion for the product, but the apostle Paul had a passion for Christ. This passion found expression repeatedly in Paul's first-person statements:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:12-14

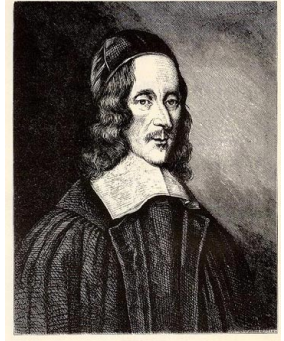
Paul's ambition was for the **iChrist** reality. He sought for a seamless connection between himself and Christ.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier, 1960), 108-112.

⁶ Charles W. Colson, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Chosen Books, 1976), 112-117.

George Herbert's poem, *The Altar*, captures the self-identity for which we seek.

**A broken ALTAR, Lord thy servant rears,
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman's tool hath touched the same.
A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy power doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy Name:
That, if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
Oh let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.⁷**



We were meant to see ourselves in the shape of his poem. What Herbert made of his poem is what God intends to make of our lives. It is not we who fashion ourselves and if we insist on controlling our destiny, we only succeed in exposing our sinfulness. The poem shows us how to resolve the clash between "It's simply who I am" and "I am who I am by the grace of God." Apple products are beautifully designed, easy to use, and connect us seamlessly to the internet. But they do not connect us seamlessly to our true selves. Using the iPhone does not speak to our true identity as image bearers of God. Text messaging does not replace the Word of God. Syncing our music does not redeem our fallen human condition.

Herbert's reference to a stony heart makes us think of ourselves. "A Heart alone is such a stone" causes us to reflect on the condition of our own heart. "As nothing but Thy power doth cut" recalls the ways in which God has worked in our lives to break our stubborn, self-centered wills and to lead us to himself. It is my hard heart that by God's grace "meets in this frame to praise thy Name." The altar, a metaphor in the shape of an "I," is not the main thing. "Oh let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine, And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine." Divine initiative is Herbert's theme; redemption is the heart of the matter. A prayer for mercy seeks the redemption to be found in Christ's atoning sacrifice. A prayer of consecration asks the Lord to set apart our lives for His purpose.

In the clash between gospels we are brought to a decision, either the way of the genius or the way of the apostle. We may work at the intersection of technology and the humanities, but eventually we discover that we live at the intersection of the fallen human condition and God's redemptive provision. The line between self-salvation and God's grace runs through every human heart.

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⁷ George Herbert, *The Country Parson, The Temple*, John Wall, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p.139.