



## Dear Friends,

The public is becoming more concerned about the impact of social media on children. Jonathan Haidt in his bestselling book, *The Anxious Generation* argues that the sharp increase in teenage mental illness and diagnoses of depression and anxiety in US College students from the 2010s onwards has been driven by the widespread use of smart phones.

Haidt observes that children have less play-based activity and face-to-face social interaction but more phone-based activity and online interconnectivity. So, while parents are now much more protective of what their children can do outdoors and their interactions with other kids, it is almost impossible to limit what they are able to access online.

Governments are now treating the overuse of social media by children as a public health issue. Recently, the US Surgeon-General, Dr Vivek Murthy proposed a cigarette-style health warning on social media platforms because of concerns over the significant mental health harms for adolescents from its overuse.

Our Federal government is also grappling with how to change the behaviour of young people so that they won't overuse social media. The government has decided to fund a trial of age-verification technology. This technology is needed if the government prescribes age limits to access social media platforms.

Governments also use media campaigns to persuade young people to change their behaviour in areas such as cigarette smoking, use of illicit drugs, drinking alcohol, speeding or gambling. The strategy in some media campaigns is to scare young people into changing their behaviour. So, you graphically depict the damage that smoking does to a human organ or show what happens to a speeding car when it hits a pole.

How does the gospel change behaviour? How can we repent of ways of speaking, acting, and relating that damage ourselves and others and our relationships?

The Bible issues dire warnings to those who reject God and live their own way. For example, Psalm 115:8 warns that we become like whatever object we worship other than God.

*Those who make them [idols] will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

While the Bible warns of the dire consequences we face if we don't turn to God, we need a change of heart for true gospel change. The change of heart required for true repentance is to love God more than what drives our sinful choices. Our hearts must be gripped by God's love for us in Jesus so that we want to please him more than continue in our sinful ways.

Thomas Chalmers called gospel change "the expulsive power of a new affection."<sup>1</sup> He says that people employ two strategies for turning the heart from pursuing sin. The first is to expel sin from your life by showing its harmful effects. But, he rightly argues, that is NOT gospel change. The other is to replace the desires that motivate sinful behaviour with a greater love, namely, Jesus, so that we "exchange an old affection for a new one."

If you want the expulsive power of Jesus' love to drive out sin, pray this prayer from Eph 3:17-19:

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

God Bless,  
Mark Adams

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Chalmers,%20Thomas%20-%20The%20Expulsive%20Power%20of%20a%20New%20Af.pdf>, accessed 28 June 2024