

A Biblical Perspective on Cell Phone Concerns

Do you carry a cell phone? If you're an adult, the chances are that you carry one with you almost everywhere you go. When newly invented, cell phones were thought to be an unnecessary novelty item, but we have quickly realized that they offer many practical benefits. As an example, we're comforted by the fact that a family member who is on the road can contact us if they run into trouble; Mother can call from the store to ask a question or to say that she's running late; and Father can call home and tell his family that his plans changed and he will be home early for the evening meal. And there would be many other examples. But with this convenience have come some real concerns. We must be aware that even the general public has rules of cell phone etiquette that they expect us to follow. May we let our light shine and not disappoint them. We must be especially careful that we honor our Heavenly Father in the ways we use our cell phone. Following are several areas of concern for your consideration.

Voice Calls

When answering phone calls or responding to voice mail, we need to use discretion as to whether the time and place is proper. Most importantly, we need to make it a priority to have our mobile device either turned off or on a vibrate mode before entering any public place, meeting, visiting in a home, at any church function, etc. For example, if you feel you need to respond to a call from children/youth that were left at home etc., it is only common courtesy to excuse ourselves and find a private room or go outdoors to return the call. It has been observed of people using their cell phones while serving at a wedding meal, seating people at a viewing, etc. Is this communication considerate to those we are serving?

Using Bluetooth in the presence of others is also inconsiderate. It's very easy to miss seeing the device; therefore, others in your presence may think you are addressing them when you are conversing with someone else. Returning or taking calls while in a social setting, be it personal or business, is rude and disrespectful. *"Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."* Romans 12:10

There is also the tendency to misuse our cell phones in our homes in the presence of our family. It is of utmost importance that we keep our God-given duties in their proper perspective. Is having our cell phones causing disruptive meal times, devotions, or other designated family time as God would have it? The way we use or misuse our cell phones is sending a message to our children, teaching them what is acceptable or vice-versa. *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* II Tim. 2:15

Ring Tones

The purpose of ring tones on a cell phone is simple and straight-forward: to alert the recipient of a call coming in to their phone. The type of ring tone used, however, is more complex and demands our attention with a closer look. There is a vast array of ring tones on the market today that can be used on our cell phones. This ranges from the basic tones to customized tones and vile music. What is our ring tone portraying? Is it bringing honor and glory to God or to self?

Consider this scenario: Grandpa has taken his young grandson with him for the day. The boy listens in wide-eyed astonishment to the catchy music blaring from the phone on Grandpa's side. He begins to formulate some perplexing assumptions. Isn't this the kind of music he typically hears in public places, but never in his home? So why does Grandpa listen to music like this? The young boy is confused and troubled. The confusion he has experienced is very real and must be accounted for. Has Grandpa given his grandson a stone when he was asking for bread? *"Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?"* Matt. 7:9

Ring tones reveal something about ourselves to the people around us, what is really in our heart. Even if you do not happen to know the latest hit song your phone is playing, God does and so does the world who hears it. Intrusive types of ring tones such as animal sounds, etc. may be offensive and not an appropriate choice. Answering machine messages on our cell phone should serve the purpose by being practical and free of silliness and thoughtless pranks. There is a challenge with those getting a new cell phone and not knowing how to change a ring tone, or having a cell phone without traditional ring tones. If you are unable to change your ring tone, please find someone who can do it for you. Traditional ring tones can be installed on all phones by someone with the knowledge to do so.

Age Appropriate Use

As the use of cell phones becomes more of an accepted normal, there is a growing concern for the danger in unsupervised access of younger and younger cell phone users. We should consider carefully: is it necessary for 12-14 year old adolescents to have a cell phone when they're with their parents visiting on a Sunday? Unsupervised usage as this can lead to unconstructive behaviors such as gaming and foolish texting between friends at other places. A suggested recommendation would be that a youth should not have their own personal cell phone before the age of 16. Dedicated attention and monitoring should be in place by parents if a

younger teenager needs to have access to a cell phone. Parents should designate a “parking spot” location in a common area such as the kitchen for any cell phones used by pre-18 year olds, whenever they’re not in use. A youth having their cell phone in a private bedroom is cause for great concern. We as Christian parents should emphasize accountability by examining our youth’s phone history of calls and texts on a regular basis. *“Let all things be done decently and in order.” I Cor. 14:40*

Texting

Texting is a rapidly growing means of communication. Texting involves typing a message on a mobile phone that can be quickly sent to other mobile phones and the recipients can then view the message at their convenience. It can be an efficient, unobtrusive way to send a quick message to an individual or multiple people.

We can begin using texting as a means to communicate without stopping to consider its dangers and misuses. Because of rapid transmittal, the tendency is to respond quickly without analyzing our words. *“The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.” Prov. 15:28* Rapid response has also led to “butchery” of the English language. Some people shorten all the words that they can and as a result forget how to use proper spelling. Sometimes shortened words are misinterpreted by the recipients and the wrong message is conveyed. We should attempt to be accurate and clear in our communication.

In order to show reverence to God and His Church, it is essential that we do not view or send texts during a church service. This should also be avoided during a meeting, or while participating in a group discussion. Viewing or sending texts while in the presence of others who are attempting to communicate with us is rude and disrespectful. It conveys to others that they, or what they are saying, are of less importance to you than your text. We must also be careful that reading and sending texts does not intrude into our family time. Unless it is urgent, we should avoid sending texts to others after typical bedtime. If the recipient does not have their phone turned off, it will alert them that they have received a text and possibly awaken them. Basically, we should stop and think and then attempt to apply the Golden Rule to our usage.

While texting is a useful means of communication, we should guard against overuse of texting. Trying to see how many texts that we can send in a month is a pointless waste of our own and others’ time. Avoid sending unnecessary messages to others in your spare time. Just because you have spare time at the moment does not mean that your friend is not busy and your texting could become a distraction and annoyance. Silly and animated texts are for entertainment only and serve no practical purpose; therefore, we should refrain from passing them on to others. We must beware lest we become caught up in foolish texting and jesting, because *“every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” Matt. 12:36* Biblical principles of communication should apply to our texts. What would Jesus think about the texts that we send and receive? *“For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Matt. 12:37* If an extended conversation is needed, it would be more appropriate to place a voice call rather than texting. Texting cannot convey tone of voice and it is very easy to be misunderstood; therefore, it should be reserved for simple, straight-forward messages. It is always best to speak face to face or make a voice call to convey important information.

Because our government has recognized the danger and distraction that texting can cause, they have created rules to ban the use of viewing and writing texts while driving a vehicle. As Christians, we must discipline our lives to obey the laws wherever we are. So that we obey, *“not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” Rom. 13:5*

God has created us as creatures of choice; therefore, our choices are either strengthening His kingdom, or tearing down. How we use our cell phones should be consistent with our Christian profession of non-conformity and separation from the world. We do well to evaluate the broad influence this has on the impressionable minds following us, and the message it’s leaving to a lost and searching mankind. *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.” Psa. 19:14*

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