Review: Transhumanism and the Image of God

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Transhumanism and the Image of God

By Jacob Shatzer (InterVarsity Press)

Jacob Shatzer is a myth buster. Not one of those guys on TV who uses technology and science to challenge popular myths and reveal Hollywood special effects secrets. Rather, Shatzer takes on one of the dominant myths of our time, one so popular we don't even think about it. His challenge is simple: "Tools aren't neutral; rather, they encourage us and shape us toward certain goals, and they often do so in hidden ways."

With that assertion, Shatzer, in *Transhumanism and the Image of God,* addresses what must be a concern of every minister, parent and anybody who will read this review—online, by the way. Shatzer challenges the notion that our technological tools are in and of themselves neutral and that their impact depends entirely on how we use them. The reality and significance of our (especially digital) technologies are that they "are shaping us. And shaping people, after all, is just another way of talking about discipleship."
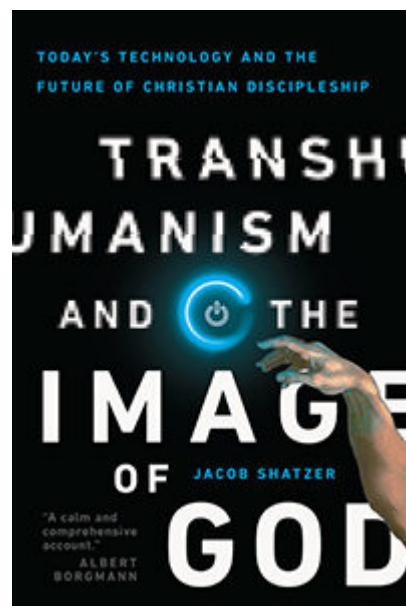
If we care about *Christian* discipleship, we might want to know something about the competition, and Shatzer helpfully discusses how current

practices in which most of us are immersed shape us in ways that make important Christian practices all the more difficult. Shatzer approaches his concerns through a discussion of "transhumanism"—a set of values, commitments and goals that would prepare humans for our evolutionary transition into a posthuman condition. Its extreme form entails having our minds duplicated in a digital format uploadable into an environment in which we would leave behind our limited condition as embodied selves. Posthumanism promises eternal life without all that stuff about death and resurrection getting in the way. It is an echo of the serpent's offer that we can leave behind our creaturely status and grab for the tree of life on our own terms.

Shatzer knows some claims of transhumanism "sound far-fetched." What matters, though, is that the values and goals of transhumanism already are present in our culture and invite our immersion in technologies that shape us accordingly. For example, transhumanism affirms "morphological freedom," "the ability to take advantage of whatever technology a person wants to in order to change their body in any way they desire." Already available are the attractions of virtual reality and social media by which we can re-conceive and re-represent ourselves in ways that come under our own jurisdiction. "Augmented reality" (in which our perceptions of the world are modified through a merger of ourselves with technology—think "Pokémon Go") already alters, not only our perceptions of reality, but also of ourselves, as lines between human and machine are blurred.

Shatzer's work is well-informed, balanced and accessible. Most importantly, he explores critical matters of technology's impact on Christian discipleship from within the commitments of Christian faith. Christians agree with transhumanism on the need for transformation of the human condition. For Shatzer, though, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ insist that God's plan for our transformation "is to become the new self through being united with the Son, not through mere morphological

freedom."

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