Now and then I will read an article or study that talks about the deleterious effects of our cell phone addicted culture. In practicality what the authors are generally talking about are the ways our lives are changed by having instantaneous access to a vast array of information and the urgency with which much of that information is presented. Some of these side effects are amusing, some are dangerous and some manage to be both amusing and dangerous. For an example of the latter category reflect for a moment on the man who detonated a bomb on New Year’s Day in Nashville, Tennessee. He was convinced that there were lizard people living among us and the way he knew that was because he was able to find like-minded lizard people enthusiasts in cyber space. But to paraphrase your mother, “It’s all fun and games until some lizard person enthusiast levels a city block with an explosive laden RV.” But there are also less tangible consequences to our addiction to cyber-space. And one of these is the psychological impacts that come from the amplification of our inherent fear of missing out. Much of the programing and content of our new electronic overlords is predicated on exploiting this fear. Here is what I mean by that. There are the obvious clickbait articles that end contain phrases and titles like “you won’t believe what happened next” or “This city named world’s most dangerous for orange juice drinkers.” These are written to make you feel like what lurks behind the next click will change your understanding of the cosmos. But there are also slightly less obvious ways that our smartphone-connected world makes us fear that we are missing out on something and this has to do with the system of alerts that many cell-phone applications employ. For example, most of our smartphones baseline programing notify us anytime we get a text via a beep or a vibration or both. These beeps or vibrations trigger something in our brains that make us believe that whatever bit of information it is that created this alert is the most important thing in the world and that if we don’t look at it right this second our life might as well be over. Personally, I know of numerous times where I have been on the phone with someone I like and will hear the little ding alerting me that a text has just come in. From the moment I hear the alert I can hardly concentrate on my current phone call because I am obsessed with finding out what earth-shattering bit of information just came in. Now most times it is something like Auggie asking me what’s for lunch or Amy wondering if I could stop and get some bananas on my home. Perfectly reasonable things but nothing which puts the future of humanity in the balance. And yet in the moment my brain is singularly focused on finding out just what lurked behind the text, what paradigm shifting piece of information just came across the ether. But I think one of the major problems with the constant state of agitation that our electronic devices keep us in is that we are losing the ability to discern what is really important and what is not. And I make this rather long introduction to set up the context in which we read the words we have today from St. Paul.

He says, “I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.” This is one of those passages that has a wonderful underlying message but, like the Beatles song *Helter Skelter,* it also opens itself up to some less than desirable applications. So, let me first comment on the less than desirable aspects before I get to what I think is the main take away from the text.

Many places in the Paul’s writings we find him offering specific advice in support of a more universal principal. So, in this case he is saying specific things like live like you don’t have a wife or any possessions. If you were to look at this and ignore the underlying principle you could come away thinking that Paul is telling you that if you leave your wife you will be living in accordance with God’s will. But that is reading it the wrong way and missing the big idea that he is getting at. Paul is offering examples in support of his main point which is about priorities and how we should live in regards to our relationship with God. Paul is giving a sense of urgency because he believes that the old order is passing away. In other words, there is a new world emerging whose priorities are different than the old. So, things like rejoicing or mourning are not as important as they were in the old order because all of these things will be consumed by the love of God. Paul is not so much saying that these things like wives or mourning are unimportant it is just that they are not as important as what has happened in the coming of Christ. And this is where I want to go back to my introduction. Very important events have the ability to change our priorities. When your house is on fire you are not overly concerned if your kids have remembered to flush the toilet.

But we seem to live in a world where everything is telling us that it is as important as what Paul is telling us today. George Bernard Shaw once complained that journalists are seemingly unable to discriminate between a bicycle accident and the collapse of civilization. With our new technology everything is acting like it is the collapse of a civilization. And so how do we discern and prioritize? How do we feel the urgency that Paul is trying to convey today when everything is telling us that its urgent?

One thing I can think of is to follow the teachings of Jesus when he was asked what was the greatest commandment. If you recall his answer was, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” When we see something screaming at us telling us that we must look at it now, we need to ask if it concerns one of these two subjects. Paul’s sense of urgency is based on the first, that is making ourselves available to fully love God. Earlier I said that Paul was using examples of ignoring our wives or possessions to convey the importance of focusing on God. But here is the thing that is unique about making God our first priority it allows us to better engage with our lower priorities. Normally, if we make something in the created order our first priority all other relationships suffer, like the guy in Nashville who was worried about the reptilian industrial complex. However, with prioritizing God and by giving God a sense of urgency all of our other relationships grow and prosper because they are properly ordered. Loving God first allows us to love others in the way that God loves them. That is why Jesus prioritizes the two commandments in the way he does – first love God then you will be able to love your neighbor as yourself. And hopefully this will also go a long way towards eliminating the anxiety that is triggered by our new electronic reality. Loving God first can help put the rest in perspective so that we are not tossed to and fro by the whims of our age but rather our deeply rooted in the love of God so that we may be his both now and forevermore.