

Concerning Computers & the Internet

Dear Brothers,

It has been almost two years since our last apostolic meeting concerning our use of computers in the Edah, and since that time the number of computers and e-mail accounts in our communities has increased dramatically. At a recent Apostolic Workers' Meeting in Boston¹ we revisited this topic of computers and what place they should have in our life together. We observed that in many places we seem to have departed from the standards we had established at previous meetings,² especially regarding access to the Internet. So we want to remind our people about these standards, and the great danger to us in going past the boundaries our Father sets for us.

Here are some standards that we have agreed upon:

Every decision to put a computer into service in our clans (whether purchased, received as a gift, or through a new disciple giving up his possession) should be made in council with the elders of that clan. We really don't like computers. We want to use them as little as possible. They are very useful for bookkeeping, typing and publishing, and communicating, but for most other applications they are at best a distraction and at worst a source of defilement. Let's lean away from them rather than toward them.

Any computer that we decide to put into service should be carefully scrutinized to see that it contains only the software that is appropriate for that computer's intended use. Often new computers come with lots of foolish or even defiling games and demonstration software pre-installed. Used computers are also likely to have unnecessary and potentially defiling software on them, as well as "viruses" that could migrate to other computers and cause great damage. We should treat newly acquired computers as if they are infected with a dangerous disease, subjecting them to quarantine until someone with the necessary wisdom and skill "treats" them

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² See "(Not) Using the Internet," 960930L; and "Computer Meeting in Rutland," 970518R2.

and declares them “clean.” Children especially should be kept away from computers that have not been cleaned up in this way.

Every clan should purchase its own licensed copies of whatever software is needed for its computers. Anyone who is considering getting a computer should factor in the cost of all of the software that is needed in order to use the computer for its intended purpose. Typically the software will cost almost as much as the computer. While it is easy to copy software that others have purchased, it is neither wise nor legal to do so.

Every computer that is in service should have a steward who is responsible for its contents and usage, and no one should use any computer without being specifically covered and trained to use that computer at that time. It is very easy to do damage to a computer, or especially the information stored on it, if you have not been specifically trained in its proper use.

No computer should be equipped with a modem and Internet access software apart from the specific decision of the elders. We want to minimize the number of computers that are equipped with modems and move toward having a “Telegraph Office” in each community for sending and receiving e-mail. We do not need or want everyone to have his own private e-mail address. The Telegraph Office system will provide a way for everyone to send and receive personal messages with a sufficient degree of privacy.³

Every computer that is equipped with a modem and Internet access should be password-protected; the steward is responsible to set and regularly change the password, and disclose it only to those very few people who are authorized to use it. Consider it like the keys to a car — we don’t hand out duplicate keys to every car to everyone in the community, for it would be neither safe nor orderly for us to do so.

Any decision to search or “browse” the Internet for information should be made in council, and any such searches should be conducted with the help of someone who has been trained and covered to conduct such searches. Even an experienced computer user can waste

³ See the (soon-to-be-distributed) “Telegraph Office Manual.”

vast amounts of time trying to find something on the Internet, and in the process of searching, stumble upon degrading and defiling images and information. We send out walkers two-by-two, for there is greater wisdom and grace that way. Searching the Internet is like going walking in Times Square.

We should avoid the use of screen savers or vivid color schemes that draw undue attention to our computers by children or other passers-by. Let's keep our computer screens simple, plain, and uncluttered by unnecessary computer "gimmicks and gadgets." We don't have televisions in our homes, but if our computer screens are visually stimulating, our children will be drawn to them (Eze 20:24).

We should make regular backups of all irreplaceable data files, such as bookkeeping accounts and other business records, letters, freepaper articles, etc. Computer disks do fail, and many of us have already lost countless hours of time and valuable information by not making regular backups.

Shepherding Concerns

In addition to these and other general standards that it is wise for us to keep, we should also be careful to guard one another and those in our care from being distracted or fascinated⁴ by computers, to the detriment of our wives, children, brothers and sisters. Many marriages in the world end in divorce due to fascination with computers, especially on the part of husbands. In the Edah, we want to be fascinated by our Master Yahshua, whom we come to know through our relationships with one another. If computers can be kept in their place as useful tools and not toys, then we will fulfill 1 Cor 7:31 in this regard and save ourselves from much trouble.

For our Master Yahshua's sake,

David Zerubbabel

⁴ *Fascinate*: to transfix and hold spellbound by an irresistible power. (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)