

Facebook and the Christian

by Tony Mauck

In just over six years of existence, Facebook is the largest social networking website and now boasts over 500 million active users. *Facebook* is a household word. Two years ago, I jumped in feet first and have amassed over 750 “friends” in that time.

Not unlike most activities in our world, depending on the nature of their use, Facebook can have both a positive and negative impact on the lives of believers. Whether it’s television, the internet generally or recreational activities, the nature of one’s involvement should constantly be monitored:

- Is this activity interfering with holiness in any way?
- Is it putting me in harm’s way spiritually?
- Does it control me? Am I able to exercise self-control?

Like most other things, Facebook can potentially be used for evil, but that should not necessarily provoke a knee-jerk reaction that declares it categorically sinful. Some respond out of fear or ignorance and speak negatively about it because they’ve heard some horror stories.

USED WISELY: POTENTIAL FOR GOOD

One of the great positives is the opportunity to use Facebook for the purpose of teaching and edification. This medium has allowed me to communicate personally with so many more people about spiritual things than I could have without it. Even if a post is only one sentence, a spiritually-based thought can effectively communicate to hundreds of people your confidence in God and the power of the gospel.

A preacher-friend posted on a Wednesday morning recently, “... encouraging all FB friends to Be Spiritual today. A spontaneous prayer, a glance to God’s glory in nature, a conversation with another that includes the name ‘Christ.’ Make it You and Jesus today... And then go praise Him in church tonight!” How many will read and do just that?

Used properly, Facebook can be a powerful tool for encouragement and nurturing relationships. When a brother or sister experiences some crisis, you can easily and quickly send a message of comfort and convey your concern.

You can acknowledge birthdays. It’s pretty amazing to have 50 or more people, from hundreds of miles away, wish you a Happy Birthday! And that’s the thing, I am staying in touch with people from my high school days (some I had not seen or talked to in 25 years). I can now more effectively communicate with fellow laborers in the gospel, friends from my days at Florida College, and from the places I have preached through the years. To know just a little something about their lives and to communicate on an infrequent basis is quite encouraging.

Another great benefit for me, a middle-aged (?) preacher, Facebook can facilitate staying connected with young people and in finding out what's going on in their world. You may discover some things you didn't want to know about their activities, but knowing their particular struggles can assist in the development of teaching that could help them.

USED UNWISELY: EXCESSIVE DEVOTION

Time spent on Facebook is not necessarily wasted time. Interacting with people can contribute to positive spiritual benefit. However, like any object or activity in this world, excessive devotion results in that thing becoming a snare to one's soul. Whatever is allowed to dominate our affections can become one's idol, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). Whether it's a false belief, an activity or even a person, we must not allow this to interfere with loyalty to God, His truth and thus be harmful to one's faith.

I will not begrudge the avid Facebook devotee his or her hour per day perusing the posts of friends and interacting with them. We could suggest, as some have, that an hour spent on Facebook could be better spent in Bible study, meditation and prayer, but we could also say that about watching television, playing games, engaging in sport, talking on the phone, texting and shopping. It's not that any of those things are inherently sinful activities, but we must not neglect the soul in the myriad of avenues that exist for spending our time.

Facebook is indeed massive. Facebook supplies a myriad of attractive applications, everything from games, competitions, causes, message groups, and more that could potentially soak up a great deal of time.

While one might contend that I can do all of the encouraging I need to do through such a medium as Facebook from the comfort of my home, that's just simply not so. In some instances, no substitute exists for actually being in the physical presence of a person who needs the solace and comfort a brother or sister can provide (Matthew 25:34ff).

POTENTIAL PITFALL: A ME-THING

What you post sends a message. What impression did you leave? While I should want to "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15), if every post is about me and what I'm doing, might that suggest that my focus is mostly on me?

The material on your Facebook page influences others. Before we post, ask yourself how this message will be perceived by others and whether it conveys something consistent with your profession as a Christian.

And while we might want to use the medium, and our first amendment right to "free speech," to blast our elected officials, remember Peter's words to "honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17) and Paul's words, "...to pray for all who are in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1,2). Several who did not vote for President Obama, and who are also not thrilled with the direction we are headed as a nation, have posted, "Pray for President Obama."

BEWARE: YOUR SINS WILL FIND YOU OUT!

How alarming it is to run across pictures of fellow believers at parties where alcohol is being consumed, people are dressed inappropriately and/or engaged in lascivious dance! In some cases, one might not even be aware the photos were taken and yet they show up on the person's Facebook page because they were tagged in the photo by the one who took it.

Recently, I heard a prediction that more and more people in the future will be changing their identities to escape from the deeds of their past!

Remember, Facebook is in many ways a public display of your character. What image do you want to portray?

"Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles..." Peter reminds, so that "they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).