

What Does the Bible Teach About Social Networking and Sound Conduct

(Based on a lesson: "When Facebook Meets the Good Book" by Zeke Flores, and on my own experiences and study - PRB)

Introduction:

A. What is social networking?

1. Something that has existed since human beings started communicating in the Garden of Eden; it has grown with technology.
2. Social networking began with face to face conversation, progressed to writing, a reliable postal service, telegraph, telephone, email, bulletin board discussions, cell phones, texting, multimedia texting, blogging, MySpace, Pleonast, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.
3. "A social network is a social structure made up of individuals (or organizations) called 'nodes,' which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships, or relationships of beliefs, knowledge, or prestige." (Wikipedia)

B. A few things are certain:

1. It will continue to grow with the technology.
 - a. I started out in 1991 with the local college freenet where surfing the net had to wait three more years for the universal use of hypertext, and pictures were rare, the main browser was Lynx, and everything was plain orange text on a CRT.
2. The rules of courteous behavior will not change (see Netiquette).
3. Christians must conduct themselves as Christians regardless of the setting in which they find themselves.
4. God's will for Christians has not changed with the technology.

C. Social networks are relatively the same.

1. You construct a public profile outlining some info about yourself (hobbies, preferences, tastes, activities, etc.).
2. You add "friends" with whom you share a connection who can see your posts, pictures, shared links, etc.
3. You view and interact with their list of "friends" and add them to yours.
4. There is a constant running "chatter" of posts and updates that range from the silly and trivial to important news about loved ones.
5. Conversations and discussions follow "threads" which can be informative or wander all over the map.

D. People, not social networks, are good or bad.

1. For good or ill, information and influence can travel across the globe in
2. With care, it can be a pleasant and effective means of interacting and keeping involved in each other's lives.

E. But what happens when social networking clashes with sound doctrine and public moral conduct?

I. RIGHT REGARDLESS OF THE VENUE

- A. Thoughts: keep them clean – Phil. 4:8; Prov. 4:23
 - 1. Wherever we are, our thoughts are bombarded by sinful influences.
 - 2. Our minds were created to be kept holy by dwelling on holy things.
- B. Words: keep them proper – Eph. 4:29-32, 5:4
 - 1. Controlled speech not only indicates a controlled mind, also indicates the influences on that mind.
- C. Eyes: keep them guarded – Matt. 6:22-23; Job 31:1; Psalm 101:3
- D. Activities: keep them Holy – Col. 3:17
 - 1. Not necessarily religious, but set apart from sin. Whatever we do must not be something we would be ashamed to tell the Lord and our grandmother.
- E. Friends: keep them godly – 1Cor. 15:33-34
 - 1. Those who are closest to us are those whom we become most like.
 - 2. Your closest friends ought to be those who will help you please God and help you get to heaven.

II. OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED

- A. Evangelism – Matt. 28:18-20; 2Tim. 2:2
 - 1. In Bible times, evangelically-minded people went from door-to-door, house-to-house personally.
 - a. This represents an opportunity to do the same across the country
 - b. Bible correspondence courses, our website; 20 years of emails answering thousands of Bible questions.
 - 2. You can: post links to sermons/articles, e-mail friends and invite them to worship/study, post Bible verses as status updates.
- B. Encouragement – Heb. 3:12-14
 - 1. Discouragement is powerful; some find it easier to post their fears in cyberspace than to tell someone personally.
 - 2. This is a good opportunity to: let others know what's bothering you, read what is troubling other people and respond encouragingly
 - 3. Rom. 12:15
 - 4. It is not limited to a few times each week in the building.
- C. Education – 2Tim. 2:24-26
 - 1. Often what many people and some Christians post indicate they are not thinking clearly or spiritually minded.
 - 2. We can: Be a real "friend" - Send a private message to help.
 - 3. Send links to articles/sermons that address their problem.
 - 4. Correct them when they act improperly.

III. DANGERS DELINEATED

- A. Wasted Time - Eph. 5:15-17
 - 1. Same can be said of anything - TV, hobbies, sports, etc.
 - 2. An occasional peek into what others are up to can be good; what is bad is when it becomes addiction that robs us of time we should devote to other, more important, things.

3. Ten minutes a day can be a good thing; ten hours a day is a sinful waste of time.
 4. Put a man in room with reward, gift, treasure, and bullhorn. Tell him pick one and leave three. When it comes to the Internet, he may ignore the reward of a good wife; the gift of children, and treasure of God's word for the bullhorn of telling cyber world how much he hates job, or a verbally flirtatious relationship, etc.
- B. Wasted Speech – James 3:2, 5-6
1. There are things posted that people would never say to their Christian friends or anyone else face-to-face.
 - a. Topics they would never bring up, reactions they would never voice, emotions they would never show.
 - b. But internet communication lowers inhibitions and people act and write as if no one notices.
 2. Torched relationships thru anger expressed, torched reputations, and a tainted Gospel.
- C. Wasted Influence – Phil. 2:14-16
1. Cyberspace can be a treasure of information or wasteland of immorality
 - a. You make the difference.
 2. If people know you're a Christian, show them that it matters to you by your behavior and conversation, especially online.
- D. Photo Foolishness – 1Tim. 4:12
1. Photo foolishness is when Christians post pics of themselves in places where no Christian ought to be and wearing or doing what no ought to wear or do.
 2. Don't post a picture that you wouldn't bring to services and show the elders before worship begins.

Conclusion:

- A. People, not social networks, are good or bad.
- B. This is not really about social networking; it is about how Christians conduct themselves in every place and time.
 1. This is about keeping ourselves unspotted from the world and making the most of our opportunities.
 2. Who you are on Sunday evening in services ought to be who you are on Sunday night on Facebook.
 3. Rom. 13:12-14

Netiquette

(Revised from "A Guide to Etiquette on the Net", contributed by Maria Georgiou.)

1. Internet etiquette or netiquette guides us in proper behavior on the Internet. There are widely accepted rules of behavior to follow when you're online. It is very important to learn and follow these rules. Sometimes the online world can feel "pretend" because you cannot see the person with whom you are communicating. So, it is very important to remember that you are dealing with "real" people online and you should use your very best manners -- just as you would at home, work, or at school.
2. Do unto others, as you'd have others do unto you. Be polite and courteous at all times. Remember that you're not communicating with a computer screen, but with a human being who has thoughts and feelings just like you. So, always think of the person on the receiving end of your messages.
3. Do not TYPE ALL IN CAPITAL LETTERS for emphasis. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING. If you need to emphasize a word, use asterisks, like **this** or lines, like *_this_*.
4. Remember that the written word is hard to interpret. When you speak to someone, that person can hear the tone of your voice. If they can see you, they can take visual clues from your face and body to better understand your meaning. All of this is lost in text, and sometimes responses can come across as mean or rude, even when you did not intend them this way. This is the reason some people use emoticons (visual clues) in their e-mails, it saves a lot of confusion.
5. Do not to use rude or bad language online, ever. Some providers will terminate your account. Even if they will not terminate it, it is never acceptable to use bad language.
6. Don't break any laws. When you're on the net, follow the same rules of behavior that you would in any role in your life. Remember, if it is against the law in the physical world, it is against the law in cyberspace.
7. Be universal. Other users have different Web browsers, different online services, different e-mail programs etc. So don't, for example, send out e-mail with text formatting -- boldface, italics, indentations, etc. -- because many other programs will not be able to read the formatting and the recipients will receive your e-mail filled with muddled codes.
8. Be brief whenever possible. No one wants to read through a lot of unnecessary information. If you are replying to an e-mail, try editing out unimportant information and anything that is repeated.
9. Don't flame. Do not send rude, angry, or offensive e-mails or postings. It's bad manners and can get seriously out of hand (flame wars). So don't flame others and if

you are flamed, do not respond: you will never win. If you are flamed in a forum or chat room, or if you receive hateful e-mail, report it to the moderator.

10. Identify yourself. If your employer, teacher, or parents require you to use an online name instead of your real one, that's fine - use your online name consistently. Never send e-mail without including your name at the bottom of the e-mail. Similarly, don't post forum messages without identifying yourself, this is seen as rude.

11. Make a good impression. Remember that the written word is the only way you can represent yourself online, so spelling and grammar count. If you are going to be writing a large amount of text for other people to see, make sure you break it up using paragraphs, it will make it easier on the eye for those that will read it.

12. Be patient with newcomers. Once you have become an Internet expert, it is easy to forget that you started out as a newbie too. Learning the rules of cyberspace is much like learning a new language; it takes practice, and includes making mistakes. So if you come across someone else's mistakes on the net, don't put them down, just politely point them in the right direction for guidance (send them a copy of these rules to get them started on their way!).

Things to remember about your e-mail account:

Check e-mail regularly... so you can respond quickly

Delete messages after you read them... frees up storage space for more productive use

Don't send confidential information in your mail... others may be able to read/access it

Don't be hasty when you send... if you write a message when you're upset, wait before you send it

Respect the privacy of others... don't share someone's email address without their permission

Always fill in the subject box so people can see what the mail concerns

Don't send chain letters... they're as annoying on the internet as they are in real life

Do not forward emails. They contain addresses and names of persons who may not want you to share them with others.

Do not forward hoaxes and urban myths. You may think you are doing others a favor, but this uses up resources and perpetuates nonsense. If you receive a message about a virus or a lost child or an award, check it on Snopes or some website dedicated to exposing e-myths.

Things to remember when participating in a discussion group:

Before asking or responding in a newsgroup, take the time to feel the group out

Stick to the topic of the discussion group

When quoting someone, use only the portion of the quote that is absolutely necessary

Avoid "flame wars"

Don't send personal messages to an entire newsgroup, use e-mail