

"Tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"-1King 22:16



The Trouble with Facebook

The Internet has featured some very surprising sites, doing all sorts of stuff that no one ever envisioned prior to the Internet. Could anyone really have imagined a worldwide garage sale going on twenty-fourseven, as eBay certainly is? What about being able to watch the NCAA tournament game of your choice via CBSSports.com, instead of having to take the game the local CBS affiliate decides to show? Sites like googlemaps.com and mapquest.com have made paper maps and Mapsco books obsolete antiques.

Yet of all the surprises of the Internet who would have ever dreamed one of the biggest and most popular sites would be a place where people can connect with their friends, share pictures and tell about themselves? Yet such is certainly the case. Recent stats tell us that more than 94 million Americans are on Facebook. Of all Americans who are connected to the Internet, 43% are

on Facebook. Globally, Facebook has more than 400 million active users, and 50% of active users log on to Facebook in any given day, spending almost an hour there every day. Each month more than 3 billion photos are uploaded to Facebook, while 5 billion pieces of content (like web links, news stories, notes, etc.) are shared every week. It is not all people at home on their PC (or at work when the boss isn't looking!) either. There are more than 100 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices. Facebook has become an Internet force rivaled only by big names like Google, CNN and iTunes. It is rapidly replacing even email as the way people keep up with one another.

Yet there are some very troubling aspects to Facebook, particularly for parents. Of course, Facebook is not evil or wrong. There is nothing wrong with being friends with people and building relationships, virtually or even face-to-face (does anyone still do that?). That said, using Facebook needs some careful thought.

Troubles with Facebook

First, there is a lot of content on Facebook that is simply pagan to the core. Many people seem to exult in posting pictures of themselves drunk, drinking and getting drunk, usually while participating in other sinful lascivious – and sometimes Christians don't fully comprehend what is going on around them. Get on Facebook and you will know in a hurry. The question here is "What influence does this kind of nonsense have on Christians seeing it?" If a Christian adds an old high school buddy and then goes to his Facebook page and sees wild partying, does this contribute to an envy of sin and worldliness in his life? Perhaps not. The answer depends on the strength of that Christian, but it is not a far reach to see newer Christians, particularly young in age Christians, looking longingly at the "far country" the Prodigal journeyed to. Facebook makes seeing that kind of sin very, very easy, and often makes it very glamorous and desirable. Parents would never tolerate a teen-ager coming over and boasting of drinking and fornicating at the top of his lungs in their living room while their child listened. Why then is such permissible on Facebook?

Second, Facebook may feed narcissism. Sin is based in pride and self-centeredness (James 4:6; 1 John 2:15-17). While it is certainly not wrong to show a picture of yourself or tell someone about your vacation or day at

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work, sometimes Facebook seems to almost encourage a look-at-me mentality. Facebook prompts you to tell what you are doing now and some take up that challenge with excruciating detail. Does anyone really care that you are headed to the grocery store, your shoelaces are untied or that it is time to brush your teeth? Even more, what does it say of the person who seems to think that people do want to know these tidbits?

Third, there is the issue of idolatry. For some, their life becomes increasingly wrapped up in being on Facebook. It becomes the center of their lives. There is even discussion now about people being addicted to it, constantly checking it and even missing sleep to stay on it. Paul says “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Cor 6:12). We need to think seriously about this. It seems there is a tendency among young people in particular to pursue Facebook constantly, even if it damages family relations, school work, or other parts of life. The “social merry go round” that is happening on Facebook is always “on” and kids can feel like they are missing it if they don’t check in constantly. Friends and friendships and Facebook become more and more important, soon eclipsing almost everything else. Isn’t that the definition of idolatry? If my connection to friends and socializing is the most important part of life then isn’t that taking a place only the Lord should have? Here is a good check that may be more revealing than we wish: have you checked Facebook today? Okay, have you read your Bible and prayed today? Makes you think, doesn’t it? Facebook (and other technologies) must never be allowed to crowd out what is eternally significant and important, and some of that includes face-to-face contact with others.

Fourth, some people would rather post on Facebook than follow Scripture. Sometimes relationships can get fouled up, which leads to someone getting their feelings hurt, being angry, or feeling betrayed (or all three!). What is the biblical way of handling this? Matthew 18:15 makes it clear that one must go to the person he/she is unhappy with and get it worked out. All too often, however, in this Internet age people dump their anger and unhappiness on Facebook for everyone to see. Sometimes people are “called out” by name. Other times there are veiled references that are not very veiled, as two people slug it out on Facebook. There is nothing right about publicly hashing out differences instead of following the mandate of Scripture.

Finally, what about stealing? If I am checking Facebook at work instead of working, aren’t I stealing from my employer? He/she isn’t paying me to be on Facebook. Yes, people can take breaks but a quick check of Facebook can easily turn into a long visit, occupying time I should be working. Christians should be excellent workers, not idle and lazy and cheating their employers (Eph 6:5-8). Three out of four workers admit to spending thirty minutes or more on the Web instead of working. That is a lot for a business to absorb, isn’t it?

There are other issues. What about being a good steward of our time (see Ed Crozier’s article “Confessions of an Internet Junkie”). What about people (especially non-Christians) writing something on my Facebook wall that is inappropriate or even downright sinful, and it remains there until I get back on and can delete it? What about people who cultivate an inauthentic profile on Facebook to appear to others better than they really are?

Conclusions

Obviously, these are not criticisms of Facebook per se. It is how one uses Facebook that matters. Some of these problems and abuses could also apply to other sites, like MySpace or Pleo. Employees can steal from their employer by surfing eBay and ESPN.com as well as Facebook. Yet because Facebook involves one’s public persona, and one’s relationships with others, there may be some unique temptations there.

By now, the reader may wonder if I am on Facebook. The answer is “No, I am not.” I have researched it, talked with others and watched close family members who use it. I suspect that before long I will probably try it. But I am concerned about Facebook. There are some special difficulties associated with the online world of Facebook. If I do get on, I hope that I will remember God is on Facebook! Yes, He is, because our Lord is everywhere and sees all that we say, do, and post. May that knowledge guide every Christian using Facebook to use it well, wisely, and for good purposes, instead of letting it become a stumbling block. - Mark Roberts

*⁴⁰ “Behold, I long for Your precepts;
Revive me in Your righteousness.
⁴¹ Let Your mercies come also to me, O
LORD—
Your salvation according to Your word”
(Psalm 119:40-41).*

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