

Facebook: Faith Or Folly?

Facebook (FB) is a social networking website that connects 500 million people worldwide. Many Christians have FB pages (including this writer). As with most other things, FB can be a benefit to or blight upon one's spiritual life. Please carefully consider your use of FB (or any other social networking site) to see if you have chosen to be God's friend (John 15:14).

Faith on Facebook. Some brethren are using FB as an effective tool to advance the gospel of Christ. I know brethren who post daily Scripture readings, spiritual songs with comments, and regular Bible study articles. Some post links to Bible study material and their congregation's website. There are Bible study groups on FB, too. All of these shows FB can be a great tool to help you spread the gospel of Christ and have a godly influence for truth and righteousness. We commend these efforts to you.

Folly on Facebook. Sadly, there is also a great deal of sin and danger on FB. Christians are not immune to its temptations. Pride and arrogance, anger and hate, gossip and backbiting, immodesty and profanity -- all these and more are among the sins that can be observed and participated in on FB.

Much of the chatter on FB amounts to "thinking out loud." That is not always a good thing (especially with 500 million people "listening"). And don't kid yourself: strangers are only a couple of mouse clicks away from every word and every picture you post. After all, the "www" means something: World Wide Web! What you post on FB goes around the world in a split second. And, it is out there forever. Yes, you can erase postings (and some should!), but someone has already seen it, possibly saved it, or forwarded it on to someone else.

Why is FB so popular? What makes people post things on FB they would not otherwise say or do? What are some of the follies of FB?

1) FB presents a false sense of freedom from accountability. Typing away on a keyboard can lull you into thinking that whatever you write and post is just "keeping it real" and that you are "just being yourself" -- and "that's always a good thing." Well, not if the *"words of (your) mouth and the meditation of (your) heart"* are not acceptable to God (Psalm 19:14). Some things should neither be thought nor spoken: *"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things"* (Matthew 12:35). We must remember Jesus said, *"every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of*

judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37). That goes for FB postings, too.

2) FB offers an apparent removal of moral restraints. I'm not sure whether FB gives one the feeling that moral restraints do not apply when posting, or if the postings on FB indicate that one's moral restraints have already been removed. Probably both. Either way, the result is sin and disgrace. Photos of Christians immodestly dressed provocatively display attitudes of worldliness. We are not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17). Christians must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts to live "*soberly, righteously and godly in this present world*" (Titus 2:12). FB reveals that some Christians are failing to use moral restraint in word and deed. FB is seen as a tempting "escape" from the bonds of morality imposed by the gospel. Brother or sister in Christ, if you are on FB, be sure your speech is pure and your photos are decent! And, that those posted on your page are, too. You should have zero tolerance. Delete offensive postings and remove "friends" who are not decent. Guard your influence (1 Corinthians 15:33).

FB holds up privacy to public display and discussion. The decorum of decency and privacy is gone. I don't consider myself a prude, but some of the things discussed on FB ought to remain private! Manners and common courtesy should be hallmarks of Christians; instead, they seem to be ancient relics. Additionally, some of the things on FB are, frankly, mundane. Who in the world is interested that I "ate my Wheaties" or am "headed to bed"? God's word says, "*He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive*" (Proverbs 17:27-28). It may be time for some Christians to sign off of FB and at least be considered perceptive.

4) FB provides the perfect venue for those without tongue control. Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying if you are on FB then you have no tongue control. I am saying that FB makes it easy to exercise "loose lips" (or in this case, loose fingers). All kinds of disruptions, distortions, evil surmising, gossip and rumormongering has found its way onto FB. And that means these sins have already found their way into the hearts, the thinking, the attitudes, the language and the conduct of those who post such destructive words. Instead of carefully choosing words, FB makes it easy to post before you think. And that gets you into trouble. Remember, great forest fires begin with a small spark (James 3:5). So, don't light the match; post the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

5) FB lends itself to mindless chatter -- and worse. As someone who writes for public consumption and criticism in this bulletin, I am aware of the effect

and the reach of written words. Once written and published, words can do much good or great harm. I try to be thoughtful and careful with what and how I write, knowing my words will outlive me. FB (along with all the other social networking sites -- plus email, for that matter), makes it very easy to thoughtlessly write without considering the consequences. Mothers used to tell their daughters not to write anything in your diary you don't want others to read. Now, everyone's diary is open to everyone else on FB!

If you ridicule someone you have become arrogant and unloving. If you post profanity and join in coarse joking you have lowered yourself to join the world in the sewer of vulgarity (Ephesians 4:29; 5:3-4). If you post unfounded rumors, malicious gossip and tale bearing you have left the land of brotherly love and crossed over into the land of bitterness and malice (Ephesians 4:31-32).

6) FB can consume your time. We must be good stewards of our time (Ephesians 5:16). FB can be addicting; stealing away hours of productivity in school, on the job and in the kingdom of Christ.

The next time you feel the urge to post a message to a friend, why not call them instead? I'm sure they would love to hear your voice. Now that's a novel idea! (Proverbs 27:17).

A word to parents. Do you know what your child is posting on FB? If not, find out. You wouldn't let your child bring a stranger into your home without your knowledge and permission. Do not let them indiscriminately bring strangers into their lives on FB. Adolescent brains are not fully developed yet to be able to completely assess actions and consequences. Don't be naïve, don't make assumptions, but get the facts. Such knowledge is vital in order to train your children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6).

Adapted From Joe Price