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## The Christian and Social Media

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is*

*not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Romans 8:5-14*



What were you doing in 2005? Seventeen years ago, what was going on in your life? Some may be thinking, “2005! That is forever ago? I wasn’t even born!” And others are thinking, “That seems like yesterday.”

For me, I was a senior at Texas A&M. I was finishing my undergraduate degree; I was in the middle of figuring out where I was going to work and where I was going to live after graduation. There was a lot going in my life that definitely had an impact on the coming years. But little did I know that something else was happening that had a far more consequential impact on society (and all of us today whether we know it or not) than my post college decisions.

I was approached by a friend with a question that I had never heard before and it confused me. The friend said, “Hey, do you have a Facebook account?” I said, “What’s a Facebook? And why would anybody think that is something that is worth doing?” I was convinced that this little fad would fizzle out. Why would anybody care about looking at what other people were doing or looking at profiles or pictures? That is pointless.

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I was convinced that this little fad would fizzle out.

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But after a little while, I ended up setting up a Facebook profile. And do you know what? Seventeen years later, I still have that same Facebook profile. At the time, it was only available to college students. But eventually Facebook opened up to everyone and that ushered in The Age of Social Media.

And what started off as a little niche application that college students could use to connect with other students

on campus has exploded into literally a seismic, society shifting technology that has more of an impact on our day to day lives than most other major technological shifts over the last one hundred years.

And, of course, it isn't just Facebook. A few years later Twitter came around (and I became a twitter user). And that is about where my social media repertoire ended. But there is also Instagram and Snapchat and TikTok and numerous others. And in some ways, this has been a valuable addition to our lives. It allows us to be connected to people in a way that wasn't possible before. Friendships can be nurtured. You can stay in touch with people. You can even have opportunities to serve others and share the gospel in ways and to audiences that weren't possible before.

But there is also a negative impact that social media has on society, and that includes all of us. We have been influenced to think in certain ways that aren't always good because of social media. There are marriages that have been ruined and homes have been broken because of choices people have made using social media. Kids want to use social media so much that some are willing to lie to their parents about having it. People who proclaim to be Christians, act in ways that they should be ashamed of and say things that they should be ashamed of on social media. I have watched as people have sat in worship services and they have been more concerned with checking their Instagram accounts or Facebook profiles than being engaged in the worship service.

I want to be clear that this is not just directed to young people. Like so many things in life, social media can be a good thing if consumed and used in the proper way. But it can also be determinantal if used and consumed incorrectly. Just like money or sex or food or countless other things, it can be a blessing, or it can be bad if used in an ungodly way. So, the question we need to ask ourselves is "are we walking by the spirit" when utilizing social media?

In the passage with which we opened, Paul reminds us that those who are carnally minded and who seek to fulfill the lusts of the flesh cannot please God. Those that are of the Spirit seek to follow the will of God and are made alive in him. Our use of social media and how we utilize it can be an indication of which mindset we have. Are

we striving to fulfill our fleshly desires? Or the will of God?

I am not here to say that social media is wrong or sinful. Like I mentioned, I have utilized social media in one form or fashion for about 17 years. But it is something we need to be careful to use in a godly way. So, it is important for us to take some time thinking about and talking about "The Christian and Social Media." We will notice 5 specific areas where we need to be careful when using social media.

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## Where do we place our priorities and find our self-worth?

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The first area in which we need to be careful is "where we place our priorities and find our self-worth." One of the things that spurred me to put this lesson together was a survey that I recently saw. 3,000 kids were asked what they wanted to be when they grow up. And, of course, we have all been asked that question. What did we say when we were kids and were asked that question? We probably said that I want to be doctor or a police officer or a ball player. Right?

Well, when Harris conducted this survey of 3,000 kids, what do we suppose the most popular answer was? Not a teacher, not an astronaut, not even a doctor! It was social media influencer or YouTube star!

Our children from a very young age are placing a tremendous amount of value on their profiles and social media presence. It is what they want to be. It is what they see as the most important thing in their lives.

People do all kinds of things to draw attention to themselves on social media. Just so they can get a bunch of comments or likes on their latest picture or post. Girls will spend hours doing their make-up and making sure they are dressed perfectly so that those pictures that go on Instagram are perfect. People will do all kinds of dumb things so that they can post a cool video to YouTube or TikTok, so that they can go viral. They have begun to believe that their value is defined by how many friends they have online or how many likes they get. But listen to me young people, your value as a person is not defined by your social media profile.

That does not determine how successful or how loved or how valuable you are. Your value as a person isn't how many followers you have or how many likes you get. Your identity isn't your Instagram account or Snapchat profile or your YouTube channel. As a Christian your identity is in Christ. (Colossians 3:1-3; Galatians 2:20)

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## Your value as a person is not defined by your social media profile.

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We must see our value as a child of God, washed in the precious blood of the Lamb, who redeemed us and loves us. We must see our value as a member of the body of Christ that is loved by our family here. Our true value is not based on the number of followers or likes. Our value is not based on what we see and what we post and what people comment about us.

The fact of the matter is that so many people dedicate so much of their time and their mental energy to social media. They let it consume so much of their day. And this leads us to the second area in which we need to be careful...and that is "where we spend our time."

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## Where do we spend our time?

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According to Forbes Magazine and a recent survey by Uswitch: "Americans spent an average 58 minutes a day on Facebook – or 325 hours a year. Instagram was the second most used service, and it remained most popular among Gen-Z users, who spent almost 53 minutes per day, or 297 hours per year; while Snapchat was also popular with the younger crowd, who racked up 50 minutes per day on the app or still 277 hours a year."

The average Gen-Z (young person) spent an average of 9 hours a day in front of a screen of some sort! And I can just see the wheels turning in some of the adults' or older peoples' heads. You are thinking, "Yup those young people. When will they learn!"

But listen to this news. It isn't just our young people that are spending this much time on social media. It isn't just the middle school or high school kids or college folks. It is a lot of adults (including

many of those reading this article).

Just think about how often we open our favorite social media app (whether it's Instagram or Facebook or whatever). And then think about how often we are opening our bibles. How do those compare? A lot of people aren't opening their bibles today. Instead, we're looking at things like social media. Every day, 66% of evangelical believers are looking at Facebook, 39% are looking at YouTube, and 32% are opening their bibles.

The problem is that we are more concerned with fulfilling our worldly desires. We have turned our phone or our social media profile into an idol. And just like God condemned the children of Israel every time they turned to idolatry, we will be in trouble if we allow the idols we have created to come between us and God. (1 Corinthians 10:7-14)

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## We have turned our phone or our social media profile into an idol.

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Some may be thinking, "Jeff is it really that big a deal? I'm not bowing down and worshiping it. I haven't made a golden image of it!" But we still treat that phone like an idol. It still demands our attention, doesn't it? And think for second, have we ever picked up that phone and checked it during church? I know some of us have. Or when we should be focusing on our family or our friends, who are in front of our face, or studying the word of God, we have decided instead to check what's on Instagram? If we have and it has become a habit, it is becoming an idol in our life!

Instead, we need to make sure that our focus and our priorities are on our service to God. (Luke 12:34) Jesus says that where our treasure is, where we place our resources (and that includes our time), is an indicator of the condition of our hearts. So, I ask of us, where are we placing the priority? Where is our treasure? I pray that it is less on social media and more on our service to God.

The third area that I want to notice and be careful about is "What We Look At." Obviously much of our time on social media is spent visually looking at one thing after another. And it is important to remember how much influence what we look at has on whether we are walking after the flesh, or

after the spirit. (Matthew 6:22-23)

Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that what we look at illuminates or shines a light inside of us that will have an influence for good or evil. So, I ask what are we looking at on social media? Some people spend all their time looking at the pictures of all the vacations that other people are taking or the fun they are having or the toys they are buying. And next thing we know we are trying to keep up with the Joneses. We are spending money that we might not have so that we, too, can post some cool pictures on social media.

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## What do we look at?

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Some people spend their time looking at all those good-looking women or good-looking men on social media. And for some that could lead to lustful thoughts, which can lead to sinful actions and poor choices. Choices that have led to broken relationships and broken marriages. This can be an issue especially for our young women; they look at those pictures of the other girls in their school or they are looking at those “social media influencers” and they want to look like them or be like them. They begin to wonder why can’t they look like that or why can’t they be like them, and it is destroying the self-esteem of so many.

Some spend their time looking at every post or video or thread they can find about the latest political controversy or conspiracy theory or news story. They are consumed by reading or watching the latest news, posts that tell us why this country is going downhill or why this political party is trying to destroy this country or why life as we know is ending. And they end up angry and bitter and deceived. However, we would do well to remember the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:8. Paul urges us to spend our time thinking about those things that are good, that are beneficial, that are godly, that will draw us closer to God. Do we think that looking at all those videos about the latest political controversy fit the description of what Paul said we should dwell on? Do we think that looking at all those profiles and pictures and posts and videos are good and lovely and Godly?

We must remember that what we look at and consume will influence how we think. If we are spending all our time looking at social media, it will influence how we think, act, etc. So, we must

be careful about what we look at.

The fourth area that we want to notice and about which we need to be careful is to be careful what

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## Be careful what we say.

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we say. Social Media is not just an avenue for us to view what everybody else is doing and posting, but it has given a platform for everyone to express their ideas and viewpoints. Social Media has given everyone a microphone. And what we say is broadcast out to the world and (pay attention young people) is kept online pretty much forever. What you say is recorded for everyone to search for and see. The things you say now might be seen by a future employer down the road; I search social media profiles when interviewing candidates.

Social Media gives everyone an avenue to say anything they want to a worldwide audience. It has given tremendous power to our mouth and our words. And that should give us all pause. Remember what James taught us. (James 3:2-10) James talks about the power of our tongue and the words that we say. He says that if we can control our tongue, then we have the self-control to direct our entire bodies and minds. Like horses and boats that are controlled by something so small, our lives (in many ways) are influenced by the words we say. This is especially true in the social media age in which we live.

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## Social media has given everyone a microphone.

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In Matthew 12:36-37, Jesus said that we will be judged by our words, and that includes words that we post online. Like I said earlier, social media is a place that can be used for tremendous good. I have seen wonderful content about the gospel and have been edified and built up by things that I have seen and read and watched on various platforms. Churches can use social media in ways that reach wide audiences to bring others to Christ. I have personally been blessed and encouraged by things that people have said to me or that I have read. But social media is very much a breeding ground for some of the worst kinds of human behavior and can be a place where our words can get us into quite a bit of trouble.

Social media is a breeding ground for so many of the things that we read in the scripture that are harmful and sinful, especially sins of the tongue. It is a place that Gossip can be spread like never before. The clothesline or coffee shop or the beauty salon of a previous age has been replaced by Facebook and Instagram as the place we see and hear and spread the latest rumors and gossip. “Did you see what She Posted?” “Did you read what He said?” “Did you look at what she was wearing in those pictures?”

Have we ever done that? Do we spend a bunch of time combing through people’s posts just so we can keep up with the latest news on everyone? And then maybe pass along what we think might be true; we don’t really know, but we really want to talk about it. (Proverbs 16:28) Let’s be careful that social media isn’t being used as a tool in our lives for gossip.

Social media is also a place where we see anger and slander. We see some post or some article that we don’t agree with and what happens? Well, we must comment, or we must post about how wrong that is or horrible those people are. And then what happens? Someone else sees our post. Maybe a friend or a family member. Maybe someone we know from school or work or the community. And they don’t agree with what we said. So, they comment. And it spirals as one person and then another argues back and forth. Eventually someone says something that they probably would never say face to face. But they let their anger take control and they lash out. Has that ever happened to us? I think that the non-Face to Face nature of social media creates this separation in our mind. It is just words on a screen, right? Wrong! Being angry and lashing out at someone on the internet is no less sinful than doing it to their face. (Colossians 3:6-8) Let’s be careful that we don’t let our anger take control on social media and cause us to sin.

Social media is also a place that we see a lot of pride and boasting. Oh sure, we aren’t going to post, “Look how awesome I am!” But how about that post that shows everyone all the cool stuff we just bought or the fancy vacation I just took? Or we make sure everybody knows about the promotion that I just got? Or the award that I just won? But it’s ok right? I mean we put #HUMBLED at the end of it.

Or maybe we post about the selfless stuff that I am

doing? Or how busy I was with all the church stuff that I’ve got going on? We are like those Pharisees that Jesus talked about in the Sermon on the Mount. Instead of standing on the street corners to say our long prayers, we are posting them on social media. (Proverbs 8:13) We must be careful not to use social media to boast or be prideful.

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## Do we spread strife?

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Another area on social media that is particularly troubling to me, and that we need to be very careful about, is Spreading Strife Among the Brethren. I have seen brothers and sisters in Christ on social media bickering and arguing. I have seen people post and comment about how those elders and those deacons don’t know what they are doing. I have seen people comment about how the church is messing up and how they need to do this or need to do that. What do you think the world thinks when they see things like that? Do you think that makes them want to come to church? (Proverbs 6:16-19)

The writer in Proverbs says that God hates it when people sow discord among brethren. Are we doing that on social media? I think that this has been an even bigger problem over the last couple of years. There are several factors at play, maybe because of the political climate, maybe because of the pandemic, maybe just because social media has become more and more engrained in our day to day lives. For whatever reason, we think that we need to make sure that our opinion is heard, no matter the consequences, even if it causes some division among the brethren. I urge us, though, do not cause division among the brethren over our opinions and judgements that we post (Romans 14:1-4). Just because something might be true, doesn’t mean that you have the right to beat someone over the head with it. Our opinions do not matter as much as the souls of our brethren.

So, we must be careful not to use social media in a way that causes us to spread gossip, to vent our anger, or to spread strife. Let’s be careful of what we say while using social media.

The last area that I want us to notice is that we need to be careful with what we believe (and repeat) on social media. This may come as a shock to many of us, but not everything that we see on the internet is true. Not everything that we see

posted is true. Not everything that we see tweeted is true. Just because there is a YouTube video that says something, doesn't mean it is factual.

False information is rampant on social media. Prior to social media, if we said something that wasn't true how many people heard it? We might say something to a group of people and 5 or 6 people might hear it. But on social media, that 5 or 6 is now 5 or 6 hundred. Everyone has a big microphone. So, now when something false is said or posted it spreads very quickly. And it can be repeated over and over again and "go viral" very quickly. And people that we think are credible can spread or repeat information that isn't necessarily true. Whether it is news or politics or even religious subjects, we need to be very careful about what we believe and what we repeat. (1 John 4:1) We must not believe everything that we see and read. Check and verify if it is true. And only post or repeat something if it is true.

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### Take care what we repeat.

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And why is this so important? Suppose one day we want to teach someone about Jesus? We want to tell them the Good News and what they need to do to be saved. We sit down and tell them that we want to tell them the truth about God. But they look at us and think, "Isn't that the person that posted that fake meme that wasn't real?" or "Didn't this person retweet that article that wasn't true?" or "Isn't this the guy who spouted off all that garbage about this conspiracy theory?"

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### How are they going to trust us on the truth of the Scriptures?

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How are they going to trust us on the truth of the Scriptures if we believe and repeat things that are false on social media? Therefore, we need to be careful what we believe (and repeat) on social media.

In conclusion I want to give a few practical suggestions on things to do. Parents, make a wise determination on if or when your children are old enough to handle social media. Young people, trust your parents and remember that they aren't trying to steal your fun. If you make the decision to allow your son or daughter to have access to

social media, monitor it very closely. We should definitely consider limiting the amount of time we spend on social media. It would be wise to do a social media versus the bible "time budget check" for one week. This might open our eyes to the amount of time and the influence social media is exerting on us.

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*But as Christians on social media— and the living witnesses of Jesus— we can not forget that every post, like, and share on social media represents our Savior, Jesus Christ.*

...Faithfulmedia.org



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