

The Christian Mindset for Social Media



Social media can also be a vacuum that sucks you into a spinning vortex from which you cannot escape. Political rants, mocking, bashing, swearing, bullying, name-calling, belittling, etc. – all of these done by those who call themselves Christians. It's heartbreaking.

EVERYTHING you say, EVERYTHING you do is under the microscope of unbelievers. And if you truly profess to be a Christian, being led by the Holy Spirit, “dead to self and alive to Christ,” (Romans 8:5-17) we must think long and hard before we post or comment so we do not bring shame to God’s name.

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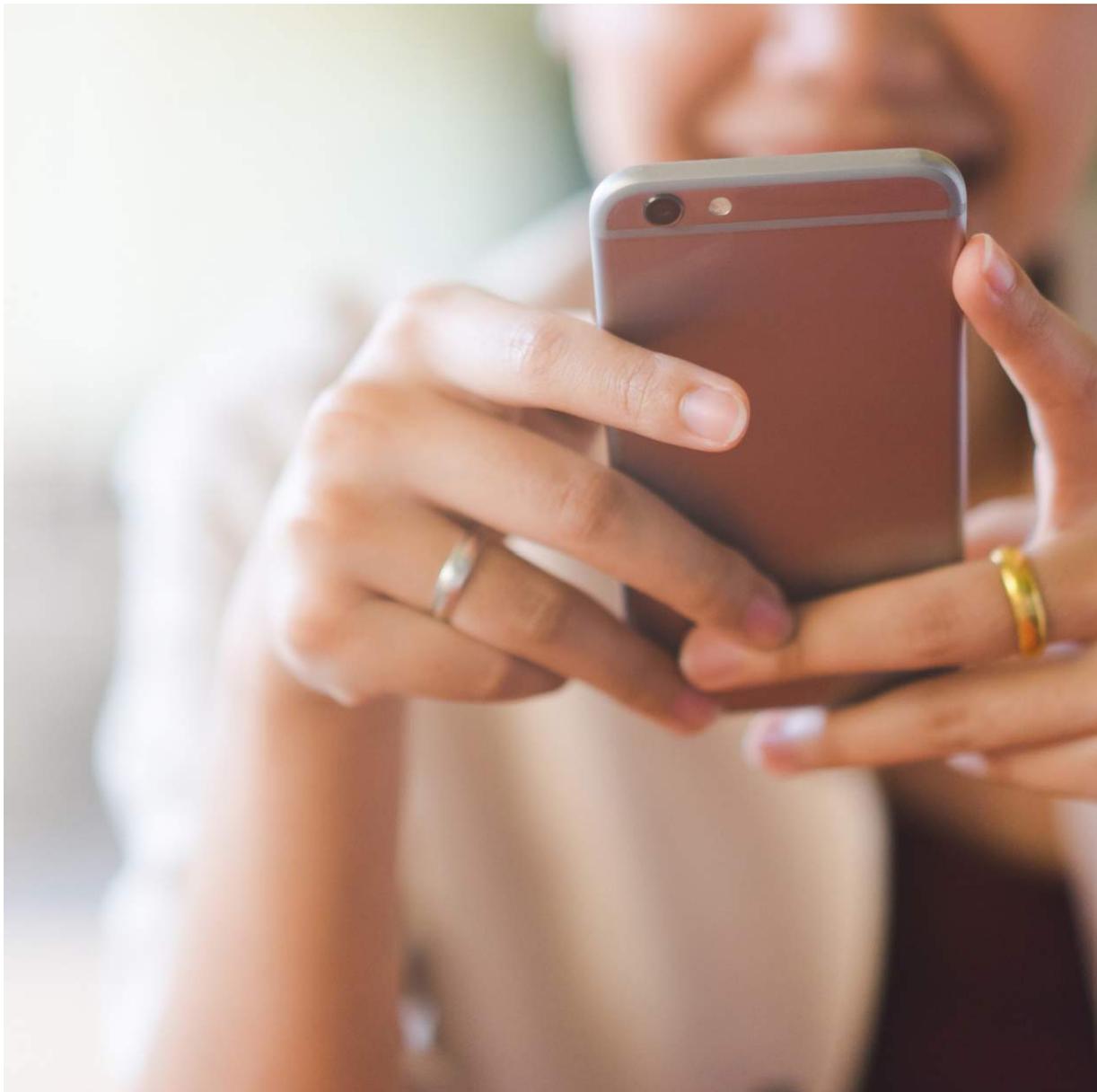
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How Can We Be a Light to the Lost, As We Use Social Media to Share Our Thoughts About the World



"All the ongoing discussions, rants, and opinions regarding political correctness dilute the real value of Next Door. There are other forums for this type of banter. At one time I thought Next Door was for helping each other in the neighborhood with referrals, local items regarding safety, items for sale or free, lost and found, neighborhood events, and generally good neighbor stuff. Let's put some of this unfiltered energy to good use and just be a good neighbor."

Text: 2 Timothy 2:22-26

Themes from Text:

- Out of the heart
- Foolish and Stupid Arguments
- What produces quarrels?
- The Lord's servant
 - a. Must not quarrel
 - b. Be kind to everyone
 - c. Able to teach
 - d. Not resentful
- Responding to opposition
 - a. Gently instruct
 - b. A desire for repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth
 - c. A desire for people to come to their senses
 - d. A desire for people to escape from the trap of the devil

Quarreling on Social Media

I belong to this group called Next Door that allows neighbors to share information that is pertinent to our local community. Most of the posts are about lost dogs or cats, our warnings about break-ins, or asking for recommendations for some service needed. I don't keep up too much with what goes on with this site, but this is what popped up today: All the ongoing discussion, rants, and opinions regarding political correctness dilute the real value of Next Door. There are other forums for this type of banter. At one time I thought Next Door was for helping each other in the neighborhood with referrals, local items regarding safety, items for sale or free, lost and found, neighborhood events, and generally good neighbor stuff. Let's put some of this unfiltered energy to good use and just be a good neighbor. I thought it interesting that someone in Next Door was having such a reaction to their neighbors' post.

Many are having the same reaction to social media. It is certainly a toxic environment on many levels. It is a shame that what can be used for good gets coopted by those who just want to quarrel. Yes, much of what we see is not information sharing, encouragement, or even healthy persuasion. It is pure and simple, quarreling. That is what the Bible calls it. Though social media did not exist in the first century, there were people, and people are the same then as they are today. We are warned in the Bible about promoting controversies, gossiping, slander, bearing false witness, causing division, and stirring up trouble. The reason these are so harmful in a Christian context is that they are contrary to the Good News of the Gospel, in substance and tone. Christians, like other citizens of this great country, have first amendment rights to free speech. But just because can say something does not mean I should. Paul warns: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak." (1 Cor.8:9) Paul talks about his rights in 1 Cor.9 but then says: "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." (9:12b) Again Paul says, "Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial." (1 Cor.6:12) A Christian is called to a higher standard of conduct

in the world. We do not represent ourselves, but the one who bought us. “You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.” (6:19b-20) In the days to come, I will be exploring the teachings of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:22-26 that could not be more applicable to today’s social media world.

Social Media & The Heart

If you missed the first article called “Quarreling on Social Media” I encourage you to read it first. Our text to explore is 2 Timothy 2:22-26. Paul begins where all quarreling begins, in the heart. He says, “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2:22) Every word and image we post, and every post response comes from a place inside our hearts. “For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45) Are you irritated? Are you mad? Are you feeling unheard? Are you bitter? Are you lonely? Are you fed up? Are you feeling better than others? Are you sympathetic or indifferent within your heart? Are you letting too much emotion show or not enough? Which picture of Jesus do you have in your head with you post a condemning piece, Him turning over the tables of the money changers, or Him dealing with the woman caught in the act of adultery? Do I use a story of Jesus to justify my heart-response? These impulsive responses are youthful, the youth whose brains are not fully formed, and who often do not think before they speak. Yet, Paul gives us several controlling words to guide our responses: righteousness, faith, love, and peace, all from a pure heart. Once I know that my heart is pure, I still must decide to test my words. Is this post righteous? Is this post faith-based? Is this post out of love and said in love? Will this post produce peace or more chaos and conflict? One of the hardest things to do is to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. (Jas.1:19) The person who speaks before they understand is not wise. Seek clarification. Make sure you know why someone thinks what they think. And if it is so important for you to respond, perhaps it would be wise to make a phone call first to try to make sure you understand what you are responding to. Let’s check our hearts before we post.

Social Media & Stupid Arguments

Paul says, “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.” (2 Tim.2:23) What makes an argument foolish and stupid? There are two ways. First, it could be an argument that is not worth making over a subject that is not worth the argument. Why do we feel like we have to fight every battle, no matter how insignificant? I wish I could take back all the stupid arguments I have been involved in. They were so meaningless. They had nothing to do with wisdom. Proverbs 20:3 says, “It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.” Proverbs 16:32 says, “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.”

Proverbs 17:14 says, “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so, drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.” This is just a sampling of Biblical wisdom on the matter. James 4:1-4 says quarrels come from our evil desires, and we don’t have what we want because we don’t ask God, or we ask with wrong motives. That brings me to the second reason arguments can be stupid and foolish. It is because of how we argue. We often don’t talk about the substance of a matter. We get personal. We get sarcastic. We ridicule. We put others down. These are usually a sign that we have a weak position or that we are just too lazy to study the subject at hand and to present evidence for a different position. Smart-alecky and snide remarks are cheap arguments. So, there are some things not worth arguing about, but if they do warrant an argument, then let’s learn to fight honorably.

The Origin of Quarrels

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:5: “For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.” Take that in for a moment. Paul and companions were called by God to go to Macedonia, their first entrance into Europe. It was an exciting time. A new continent opened to the gospel. But what did Paul find? Conflict and quarreling. It was all around him. He couldn’t get away from it. It seemed everyone was angry and upset. What did this produce in Paul? Fear. Conflict produces fear. And what do we do when we are afraid? We either fight or flee. We either punch back or we run away or distance ourselves from the conflict. If that is not a commentary today, I don’t know what is. But where do the quarrels come from? James 4:1-3 tells us: “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so, you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so, you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” There is a lot there but focus on the word “pleasures” or “desires.” There is something we want, and we do not easily get it. It is as simple as a child who wants something, can’t get it, and pitches a fit. If we are ever going to figure out this culture of quarreling, we are going to have to figure out what we want so badly that we are willing to go to war. The answers may sound noble: fairness, justice, what is right, respect, even, love. Too bad the way we try to obtain these often has the opposite outcome. Things get less fair, more unjust, less right, disrespectful, and more unloving. Two wrongs never make a right. We should learn to ask each other amid the conflict, what do you want, and if it is holy and good, how can we have it without hurting someone else?

The Lord's Servant

Our anchor text is 2 Timothy 2:22-26. Please read it again. Hopefully, we all agree that we are the Lord's servants, and we do not represent ourselves in anything matter under heaven. Jesus is Lord in all things pertaining to our earthly existence. So, when it comes to conflict on social media this is His domain, not ours. Our Facebook page is Jesus' Facebook page. So, imagine that when your fingers touch the keys, they are Jesus' fingers touching those keys. What would He say and how would He say it? Paul gives us four answers.

Must not quarrel

Able to teach

Be kind to everyone

Not resentful

The first is straight forward. If you are a servant of Jesus, you are out of the quarreling business. Period. You **MUST NOT** quarrel. That is not an option. Take that tactic off the table. There are ways to fight back without getting into a useless quarrel. Secondly, we are to be kind to everyone. Get that? Everyone! No exceptions. Your and my kindness does not depend on their kindness or lack of it. The principle of holiness is "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." (Rom.12:21; read Romans 12:14-21) Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. It is a position of understanding. It is a position of wanting to not make matters worse. It looks for something good to say about the opposition. You are just going to have to trust Jesus on this one. Thirdly, we are to be able to teach. Yes, we can express ourselves and state our position on matters. We are teachers of what is good. But, in context, this teaching is about spiritual things. We get to choose what we are going to teach. What truths are we going to layout and explain? The content of our teaching must be in harmony with the gospel. Anything beyond that is outside our authorization. Fourthly, we must check our hearts. Any hint of resentfulness will fuel quarreling. The hurts you bring to the fight will drive the fight.

When a matter gets personal and we not only disagree with our opponent, but we do not like, even hate, our opponent, we will find it almost impossible to avoid quarreling. Deal with your resentment before you step in the ring. Remember whose servant you are and engage as Jesus would.

Responding to the Opposition

I am a debater, and I learned good and bad ways to respond to an opponent. It is extremely important we respond to people in social media in some very strict ways. Paul gives us four. First, we need to learn the art of gentle instruction. The opposite would be harshness. Our goal is to bring people to a different position. Do I beat them with a stick? Or do I patiently and gently teach? This doesn't mean I can't be firm and resolute with the truth. But, the tone of voice, the words we select, the images we use, and the fervor employed all affect whether we will be heard. If another cannot hear you, they cannot understand you, and if they do not understand you, they cannot consider your position and change theirs. Second, we must keep our aim, in matters requiring repentance, that God will lead the person to a new position. We are not alone in the argument. If we teach gently, then God is at work in bringing our opponent to a place of change. It is not your job to get someone to repent. It is God's job. Stay in your lane. Thirdly, our desire in any conflict is for people to come to their senses (also realizing that we may need a little more sense in the conflict too). I know we would like to shake people back into their senses, but that is not how it usually works. The prodigal son (Luke 15) came to his senses in the pigpen, as the Father patiently waited on the front porch. Some people will have to learn from experience. Fourthly, remember that the other person may be taken captive by the evil one. What do we do when someone is held in captivity to a tyrant? Who is the real enemy here? Paul said in Ephesians 6 that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities of this dark world. The real enemy is the devil. Let's make sure we are all fighting the instigator of quarreling and not one another. Perhaps if we can convince our opponent that we have a common enemy who is trying to divide us and destroy what we both love, and keep us from having what is truly good, then we will stop quarreling with one another and turn our combined attention to the real enemy. Surely Satan has invaded social media and is using it as another tool for division. We must see through his evil scheme. Now go out there and change your game plan and make Jesus proud.