Christians In Cyberspace

We've heard it before, "There's nothing good/worthwhile on television," and yet that media has been and is being used to spread the gospel. So, too, it is with cyberspace, or the Internet. "The Internet is a minefield of dangers and depravity." True, but it is also being effectively used to teach people about salvation in Christ Jesus. For instance, a single Facebook post inviting people to services, advertising sermon topics, or linking to sermon outlines and videos can reach hundreds (or thousands) of people who would not have otherwise been invited, or had the opportunity to hear and see the truth of the gospel. The reality is that both mediums, and all others for that matter, can be either good or bad, or helpful or destructive, because they are produced *by* and *for* people. The quality and capabilities of them are thus determined by how they are utilized. So, please consider the following observations, along with a little advice and perspective, regarding Christians and the use of the Internet generally, and social media specifically, for spiritual purposes…

Faith, thankfulness, and praise that is *projected* in social media, should also be *practiced* in the pew and in day-to-day living. One of the problems associated with social media, in its various forms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) is that they allow a person to select the image of themselves they want to project. This enables us to put forth a persona that is "edited," and may not be an accurate representation of who we really are in total. It's easy to portray yourself as a spiritual, blessed, thoughtful, kind, and appreciative person on the Internet, it's another matter entirely to BE that person with more than just posts/tweets, comments, and likes. Christianity that is merely *posted* online, rather than *practiced* in life, is *pseudo-Christianity*. *"Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth,"* James 3:13-14.

Keyboards and touchscreens shouldn't be utilized to write things that wouldn't (or shouldn't) be said face to face. In times past, the advice was to hold on to an angrily written letter for a day or two and reread it before deciding to mail it. Such was good advice that can and should be translated to the emails and other electronic posts and messages of today. Really stop and think BEFORE you hit "Send." Another related and good piece of advice is to never write things to or about someone that you wouldn't (or shouldn't) say to them face to face. Keyboards and touchscreens have a tendency to embolden us to communicate things electronically that we would never say in person. Perhaps this is because you can't really get your face slapped or your nose punched through even a high-resolution screen! Remember that our words, whether transmitted electronically or delivered in person, should be *wise,* with *grace,* and for *preservation,* cf. Colossians 4:5-6. *"But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God,"* James 1:19-21.

It's much easier to identify problems than offer solutions. In other words, it is easier to criticize than to construct. Criticizing and being overly critical is just plain easy through social media. It only takes seconds and very little, if any, thoughtful reflection. Additionally, it is almost effortless to subsequently "hide," "unfriend," or "unfollow" anyone who might happen to challenge you for criticizing without first-hand knowledge, or for failing to offer any constructive solutions to go along with your criticisms. Likewise, it is easy to find articles online that are critical and seek to undermine every aspect of Christianity: God; the Bible (as His Word); His church (as an organization); and/or His people. There are, however, relatively few of them that offer any valid *constructive* criticisms of how to improve our understanding of God, or our association with and obedience to Him. Note God's words through Paul to the church at Ephesus on this point, *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word that is good **for edification** according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear,"* Ephesians 4:29. Perhaps we need to remember that this command applies to *typing fingers* as well as *speaking mouths*.

The Internet and social media can be powerful tools to *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works,"* but please be sure to do so in a manner that will *"glorify your Father who is in heaven,"* Matthew 5:16. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)