

Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



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11 Questions to Help God's People Avoid Online Warfare

With the election cycle heating up, our online world has become a roaring fire. It has become a seedbed for hostility and chaos. Look no further than the President's insensitive, unfiltered tweets and the opposing media's responses. The hostility that gets stirred up is what Bill Murray called "the clash of clans." I like to say that social media is the place where you can make pseudo friends or lifelong enemies real fast with just a click of a button.

Social media can be a world without guidelines. Without them, our enemy will make sure demonic chaos and hatred are inevitable. With our current revenge/cancel culture we hear accounts almost weekly in which important people lose jobs or positions of influence because of insensitive tweets or online remarks. Countless others never get hired as potential employers check what is posted on the job candidate's social media walls. The Bible spoke of this phenomenon long before our online world.

- **Luke 6:45**...an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. (For out of the abundance of the heart the evil person posts on social media 2018 Translation).

- *Matthew 15:11 ... but what proceeds out of the mouth (from the keyboard), this defiles the man."*

The challenge with social media is that the filters and feedback that normally come with face to face interactions are removed. We are in front of our phone or computer screen as controllers of our universe. We are free to put forth whatever bubbles up out of our hearts.

Even though we call it "Social Media" a big problem is that we usually don't have to take people into account. It is just us, our hearts, thoughts, feelings, reactions, and our ability to express them any way we deem appropriate with a click of a button. We have all seen major fussing and fighting in media posts that make them look more like the center stage for a WWE event than social media. The unfiltered, online rants cause much harm.

Passive-aggressive or hostile postings are in complete contrast to how Jesus instructs us to walk relationally. We need to help ourselves and others keep away from online warfare. We need to fight the devil through prayer (Eph 6:10-18), not fight others through postings.

Clear Biblical perspective on how to respond in the face of evil communication

- *1 Peter 3:9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead...*
- *Proverbs 15:1-2 A gentle answer turns away rage, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (2) The tongues of wise people give good expression to knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out a flood of stupidity.*
- *Proverbs 15:28 The heart of a righteous person carefully considers how to answer, but the mouths of wicked people pour out a flood of evil things.*

We are never to repay evil for evil with online posts.

Remember that if you wrestle with a pig in the mud you both get dirty and only the pig liked it.

Leaders need to help others avoid this and live above reproach themselves. The following are some questions to help people consider before posting.

11 Questions God's people need to answer before posting.

- **Why am I doing this?**

Motives are everything in good stewardship. When we live for the glory of God, it changes the way we approach things. We no longer give knee jerk reactions to blow off steam or make

ourselves feel better. Doing a motive check in the presence of God allows Holy Spirit to speak to us about the “why.”

Remember the warning about motives in Romans 8 before responding “If you are in the flesh, you can’t please God.”

- **Will this glorify God?**

God's people are to live by a higher standard, His. Here are some good questions before posting, "Does this reflect God? Will it point people to God? Does this reflect love, truth, and purity?"

- **Do my words reflect the fruit of the Spirit or the lusts of the flesh?**

The Bible is not fuzzy about this. Paul says the lusts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are obvious in Galatians 5:18-24. If it is “perverse, full of hate, rude, producing rivalries, jealous, angry, selfish, or promoting factions or tribalism,” it is the flesh. If it comes across mean, hateful, or passive-aggressive, it is clearly the flesh. On the other hand, if it is “Full of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, if it’s gentle, and under self-control,” it is likely of the Spirit. If you can answer “yes” to the fruit of the Spirit test, then you can engage without compromising your faith.

- **Are the standards of Philippians 4:8 considered?**

“Finally, brothers, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

- **Will this really help any conversations?**

We may have the right to comment on every post, but that doesn't mean we should. Paul says it well in 1 Corinthians 10:23 “All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.”

- **Would I say this to people face-to-face?**

Social media gives a lot of power to cowards. Cowards with power are dangerous to relationships. If we are following Jesus, there is no place for cowardly behavior. Sitting behind a screen with no accountability empowers people's sinful nature to be bullies and manipulative. You no longer have to look your victims in the eye. It is the essence of unfeeling, uncaring hurtfulness.

- **Are my online comments simply an easy way out of real responsibility?**

There is a thing called "click activism." That means we can have the feeling that we are really doing something significant if we sign a petition, hit the like button, or share. Social media is a

great place for the illusion of good intentions, but God is into real action. Action is what makes changes, not good intentions. We are not called to be avatars in a virtual world. Behind every post is a real person created in the image of God. How about taking some real action and have real conversations face to face?

- **Is this post creating or amplifying my frustration?**

Remember some of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and attributes of God's love (1 Cor 13) are patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. The lusts of the flesh are the exact opposite, frustration, hostility, and quick-tempered reactions. These amplify the flesh. Am I allowing social media to create (or amplify) frustration? A good spiritual rule of thumb is to stay off social media if we are discontented, frustrated, or upset because it will only help amplify those things.

- **Does my response express any love for people who are made in the image of God?**

Even unbelievers in whom God's image has been disfigured by sin still bear His image. Because of that fact, we should express dignity to others. This is part of what Jesus said, "Love your enemies and do good to those who spitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27, 35). The Biblical perspective is that we show respect and honor to all people who are made in the image of God (Galatians 6:10, 1 Peter 3:15).

C.S. Lewis expressed the idea that everyone bears the image of God in his magnificent sermon "The Weight of Glory."

"... it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit..." C.S. Lewis

- **Does this post please God or just me?**

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now the God of peace...(21) equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. (Philippians 2:12-13, Colossians 1:18, 1 Thessalonians 4:1).

How does your interaction with other Christians look in front of a watching world? God designed His house to demonstrate the gospel solution to a polarized world. For Christians to argue and fight on social media before people who need Him is a great defeat for the cause of Christ.

Paul echoed a warning when Christians were suing fellow believers in secular courts. He was shocked that they were appealing to the world to determine how they treated each other. Paul

said an alarming thing; *it would be better to be cheated and robbed by your brother than argue with him in secular courts* (1 Corinthians 6:1-7).

- **Before reacting to any post, remember that everything you read and hear is spun.**

Everyone spins things based on their inner worldview. We are not getting all the facts to make an impartial judgment, so be careful when you criticize or defend people based on the information you receive from the media. They are all relaying selective information.

With our election cycle in full swing, it is not a matter of if, but when the next social media debate will strike. When it does, remember that you're stewarding your words and your online presence for Christ. Putting everything you do on social media through that filter will help ensure that you represent Christ—and your faith—well.

Colossians 3:17 Everything you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

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