



Preacher's Pen by Gene McCoy

Careless Christians

How many ways does Scripture warn us against carelessness? This is true not only with regard to our personal salvation (1 Pet. 5:8), but also with regard to our testimony of life (Eph. 5:17), which affects the salvation of others. It is to the latter that we focus our attention, with particular application to the Christian's use of social media.

The general reminder is that we are responsible to God for every word (Matt. 12:36-37). Jesus says we will be judged in accordance with our words.

Care must be given not only to the veracity of our words, but also to the venue in which they are communicated. A person may be guilty of gossip even though the information being related is true. Similarly, we may violate biblical teaching by speaking truth in an inappropriate manner or place. We must speak in love only words that build up, giving grace to those who hear (or read) (Eph. 4:15, 29). Concerning the effect of our conduct upon non-Christians Paul says our speech is to be gracious (Col. 4:7). This is especially important when using social media.

Consider the damage Christians with good intentions do to the reputation of our Lord and His church on social media. Besides the careless re-posting of propaganda (political and otherwise) are the open attacks on others' character and motives — particularly attacks on other Christians. Paul instructs us to put aside anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive or obscene speech (Col. 3:8). We sing "What A Friend We Have in Jesus" or "I Am a Friend of God" but then apparently forget that

fact when posting on Facebook. God may not be your Facebook friend, but He does read all your posts!

Every post on social media should be preceded by an honest consideration of its potential effect upon the Lord and His people. Will the message enhance my testimony for Jesus and draw people closer to Him? Will my words support my profession of relationship to the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10). Will this build up the body in love and make for peace (Rom. 13:10; 14:19; 2 Thess. 5:11)? Does this contribute to civil discourse?

My teacher, Gareth L. Reese, says, "If it doesn't build up, shut up." In all truthfulness, none of us needs to weigh in on every topic or conversation, anyway. A good rule, especially relating to social media, is "less is better."

A specific concern pertains to profane postings by Christians. Brothers and sisters in Christ who would never employ in their daily discourse the crudest form of profanity, much less any profanity at all, have re-posted others' messages and memes in which such language is used. Posting such can be understood as tacit approval of the lewd and crude content.

There is another strange practice by Christians in the world of social media. It is strange in that the one posting the profanity apparently thinks the readers can't fill in the blanks. You know what this is about. Don't you? It is a game people play by which they give you the first and last letters of a profane word and fill in the appropriate number of blanks with symbols. It isn't that they don't think you, the reader, won't know the

profane word or won't say it, if only in your mind. To the contrary, they practice this knowing you will say the profane word, if only inaudibly.

Maybe they are so naïve as to think that leaving out letters and leaving the word incomplete absolves them of responsibility. From the standpoint of integrity, perhaps we should have greater respect for the potty-mouthed non-Christian than for the Christian who tries to sanctify his profanity by playing such games.

What is particularly troubling, as well as self-condemning, is the fact that these same individuals would not permit their children to use such words. Many of these adults would punish their children by taking away their electronic devices if they ever posted to social media in the same manner as the adults.

I appeal to Christians to apply biblical teaching when posting on social media. Please review Eph. 4:17-5:20; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1-17; 4:5-6.

For perspective, read:

<http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/is-it-sinful-to-useprofanity.html>