



BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Is the Word of God compatible with the modern social media culture? Not surprisingly, the answer is an explicit “No!” The apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 has delineated certain biblical principles concerning our Christian conduct and practice, which certainly includes our use of social media.

In Ephesians 5:1, we are instructed to “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children”. Now, on social media, whom and what do most people tweet, tag, comment and follow? Is it God or godly stuff? Quite unlikely, isn’t it? To put it bluntly, people would rather follow those who post about “Hollywood” and never about God’s Holy Word. They would rather follow those who arouse their sensuality than those who promote sanctity. The world and all its pleasures are what people avidly follow on these sites. The natural but tragic tendency is, instead of being influenced to walk in Christ’s love (as exemplified by His offering and sacrifice for our sins), people on social media are walking with the world and all

that is in the world. They are anything but “followers of God”!

BE NOT PARTAKERS WITH WORKS OF DARKNESS

To be followers of God, we are to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (v. 2). Our lives ought to display Christ and diffuse the “sweetsmelling savour” of the Gospel of salvation. Christ, who knew no sin, has laid down His sinless life as a “once-and-for-all” atonement for our sins. As the Sin-bearer for all mankind, He has paved the way for us to be plucked out of the depths of our sins and be called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. Our aspiration to walk in Christ’s love is not compatible with our allowing ourselves to be bombarded and enticed on social media by all the evils mentioned in v. 3, – “fornication”, “all uncleanness”, “covetousness”. These are certain temptations, which are so prevalent in the social media culture, that divert our attention away from the Gospel of Christ.

Notwithstanding the benefits of proper social media usage, this is a common sore point among all social networking sites. We cannot escape the obscenities and filth of what ungodly people post there; neither can we evade the allure of commercial advertising posted all over their pages. Yet these are the most likely things that catch our attention as we scroll up and down the pages of social media – things that should “not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (v. 3b). With these dangers lurking everywhere on social media, waiting “in ambush” for the gullible and willing victim, people are prone to devour the sensual rather than the spiritual content of social media.

Sadly, social media is often the platform for gossip, slander and scandals. It has become the medium to express corrupt speech,

unwholesome talk and suggestive jokes – the very things specifically prohibited by v. 4 – “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.” When filthiness, foolish talk, jesting, together with fornication, uncleanness and covetousness constantly preoccupy hearts and minds of Christians given to indiscriminate social media usage, there is little room left for gratitude and thanksgiving to God.

“FORFEIT” NOT INHERITANCE IN GOD’S KINGDOM

Associating with these evil practices and activities is not a light matter. The gravity of the matter is driven home by the unequivocal, strongly-worded warning in v. 5. Four types of people (who in actual fact encapsulate the sum of all these evil expressions) are mentioned, who will not “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”. They are the “whoremonger”, “unclean person”, “covetous man”, and “idolater”. Paul is bluntly reminding us here that if any among us is such a person who is caught up and addicted with the filth of the world in the lusts of the flesh, he may not even be saved at all! Such “mistaken” and misguided Christians have actually become “idolaters” – the world has become their god, and Facebook their church!

Such are not only mistaken, they are also deceived, as intimated by v. 6 – “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience”. Social media is also a favourite “hunting ground” for deceivers. With “vain words”, they will spread gossip, and promote all sorts of falsehood and lies. Time and again, the Bible warns us not to be deceived. Why? Well, simply because Satan, the father of lies, is the master deceiver. And his children, “the children of disobedience”, will follow his devices. Some will deceive you with fake profiles and

pictures, and “photo-shopped” images. Some others will deceive you by dishonest soliciting of favours or emotional appeals for sympathy. Social media has become the platform for all sorts of *modus operandi*, resulting in scams, extortion and even blackmail.

Furthermore, it does not take great intelligence to realize the sheer amount of “vain words” being posted, texted, or tweeted every moment of the day in social media. Well-documented statistics have shown that about 700 Facebook status updates and over 600 tweets (many of which are truly vain and idle words) happen every second! Scripture is replete with warnings against such ungodly communication – “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29); “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak (or post or text or tweet), they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

God’s Word is clear on the incompatibility of the prevalent social media culture with Christian living. Thus the explicit prohibition given is: “Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (v. 7), who have no inheritance whatsoever in God’s kingdom. The principle of biblical separation applies here – we don’t just indiscriminately click and “like”, tag or twit, and follow this ungodly culture!

RATHER WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Be that as it may, there is nothing wrong with social media in itself. In fact, now as “light in the Lord” and “walk(ing) as children of light” (v. 8), we see a positive and negative exhortation in vv. 9-13 that can apply to our interaction with the ubiquitous phenomenon which we have grown accustomed to living with, namely social media.

As Spirit-filled Christians using social media networks, the gauge of all that we do online is summed up in the phrases, “in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (v. 9) and “proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (v. 10). Our social media usage ought to be governed by these oft-repeated questions: Is it good? Is it righteous? Is it true? Can it be proven acceptable to the Lord? If we can answer in the affirmative, then given the potentially wide audience “viewing” our righteous and biblical online discourses, the far-reaching impact for the truth’s sake cannot be underestimated.

On the other side of the same coin, we are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove” (v. 11) those shameful “things which are done of them in secret” (v. 12), including via social media, that these may be exposed. This brings to our attention the largely thankless but most needful ministry of correction and refutation of error. Walking as children of light and being enlightened by the light of God’s Word, we have the mandate (and therefore duty) to expose prevalent error and earnestly contend for the long-held biblical truths which are now being systematically distorted, ridiculed and misrepresented by God’s enemies within and without. Having a steady presence on social media for the purpose of being an outspoken crusader against sin and error is one way we can use social media to our advantage.

Truly, this is in line with the biblical perspective as emphasised by Paul’s exhortation in v. 13 that “all (erroneous) things that are reprov’d (and refuted) are made manifest (exposed) by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” In the spiritual battle for men’s hearts and minds, “silent truth is no match for outspoken error”. May the Lord grant us wisdom in our needful interaction with social media “for the truth’s sake”!