

Daily Devotional, November 9, 2020 Facebook-Friend or Foe

²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:23-26 (NIV)

Years ago, I set up a Facebook account because it seemed like a great way to stay in touch with old friends, but even more importantly, it became a really valuable way to stay on top of what is going on in the lives of my adult kids. They live far (China) and relatively near (Chicago's north side) and Facebook allowed me to see some of the interesting, fun, amazing, and even absurd things they were up to, and to see pictures of places they had been and the myriad of things they are experiencing. Although I don't search there every day, I still go to Facebook on occasion, hoping to see a post from my kids, or to check out postings that they send me. That is the best part of social media for me.

Of course, Facebook has become so much more than a platform to connect with family and friends. It has also become a place where conspiracy theories are peddled, false information is shared, and folks engage in endless arguments about politics and the culture wars. Seeking honest and civil debate is one thing, but too often folks post controversial articles and opinions designed to lure you into their gutter. It has become a place where some folks take pride in insulting and humiliating each other.

Others take great pleasure in making ludicrous statements hoping others will take the bait and get drawn into some outrageous debate. These are individuals who seem to have nothing better to do than create a post and vent. It would be wise for us to be much more discerning about accepting "friend requests" from people you barely know or someone you knew years ago and who you might know much about anymore. We need to be more cautious of "friends" who might simply want to push their unknown agenda on to as many people as they can.

How do we love those who seek to divide us, who treat us with disrespect and judge us? The passage I chose from 2 Timothy offers some insight here. Paul's advice to Timothy and to all who teach God's truth, is to be kind and gentle, patiently, and courteously explaining the truth. Taking on the role of a good teacher never produces quarrels or foolish arguments. Remember to listen to people's questions and to treat them respectfully, while avoiding foolish debates. If you do this and remain calm and level-headed, those who oppose you will be more willing to hear what you have to say and perhaps if wrong, to turn from their error.

I can wholly subscribe to what Paul says about avoiding foolish arguments. When it comes to social media, stop making enemies out of people we often do not even know. How do we love these neighbors without exception? The short answer is we remember God loves them just as much as He loves you or me. Martin Luther once said something to the effect that when you are at odds with your neighbor, remember that Christ also died for them. If Christ was willing to die for these folks, they must have worth to Him. Therefore, they must have some worth to you. To hate someone that God values and loves seems like a sin in itself. I know I need to heed the words in this devotional as much as anyone. If you feel the same way, perhaps, we can pray for each other! Let me know of your struggles and I'll be more than happy to pray for you.

Prayer: O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual patience and respect, that we may honor one another and that we may honor you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.