

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts February 2018

Four Temptations on Social Media

By: Trillia Newbell



We live in an age when screens compete for our attention from the minute we wake up. Updates abound, feeds fill up with news, and information is always at the tips of our fingers.

Since joining the array of voices on the Internet, I have watched controversy after controversy unfold over opinions, news stories, and rumors, some of which have resulted in full-on character assaults. This isn't something happening out there in the world; it's also happening within Christian spheres. We, however, have an opportunity to be light in a world marred by confu-

sion and division. Yes, we too are divided, but we know the end of the story and can begin to work toward that end—toward unity and peace.

So, how do we share our opinions, convictions, passions, and differing opinions and still maintain brotherly love and affection? We start by naming the problems and then praying for gospel solutions. Here are four problems in our struggle with Internet controversy in the Christian life.

Our Passions Wage War

We often quarrel because we want something we don't have. Perhaps we want others to view us as right and wise. Or we want to change others' opinions . . . so we fight. Or we want someone to take action . . . so we threaten. James addresses this tendency with a rhetorical question: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (James 4:1). Passions can cause us to react, and—as is common

on social media—passionate reactions far removed from the matter under discussion often lead to sin.

Controversies Involve Real People

Because online discussion doesn't involve our physical presence, it is easy to forget the human aspect of the Internet. In other words, we forget there is a person behind that blog entry, article, or social media post. That person is made in the image of God, regardless of his standing before God. As Christians, we have a responsibility to love that person (Luke 6:27–36). That doesn't mean we have to agree with him, but the way we respond will reveal whether we uphold his God-given dignity.

What makes this difficult is that we often don't want to love the individual on the other side of the Internet discussion. Remember, our passions are waging war. But God's Word is clear: we are called to love. Did Jesus really say, "Love your enemies and pray for those who perse-

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When many of these words give rise to warring passions around volatile topics, they can lead us to sin. As Solomon noted, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking.”

with such topics and controversies (1 Tim. 5:13). Don’t let the controversy of the day distract you from the great mission of the church—to share the gospel and make disciples of all nations.

A Fresh Start

Perhaps you realize that you’ve failed miserably in your online interaction. Please know that you’re not alone, for most of us engaged with social media have made the mistakes above. I know I have.

The good news for you and me is that Jesus forgives and purifies (1 John 1:9). Yesterday’s mistake doesn’t have to be today’s. The grace available to us through our Lord applies to our online sin just as much as it does to our offline sin. We can repent and be forgiven, and—whether face-to-face with others or interacting on social media—we can live for the glory of the Lord.

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cute you” (Matt. 5:44)? That blogger you disagree with, the one who holds an opinion that is dramatically different from yours and who mentioned you by name in a disparaging way—yes, even that person is to be loved.

Do you view the person behind the screen as a person made in the image of God? Is it easier to share in a tone that is rash, harsh, or unkind because the other person is far off? Love isn’t an option for the Christian—it’s a command (Matt. 22:39). And this is true even when the other person is interacting with us digitally.

Many Words

Studies have shown that people can speak an average of twenty thousand words per day. That’s a lot of words. But with the advent of social media, the number of words we take in and send out are likely only increasing.

Fortunately, he continues, “Whoever restrains his lips is prudent” (Prov. 10:19). We must be prudent and aware that when we share our many words on the Internet, there’s a possibility that sin is present. This should help us pause and move us to measure and ask questions about our words: Is our opinion needed? Is what we are sharing helpful? Does our post/tweet/update build up or tear down?

Busybodies

The final thing I’ll address is the way social media tempts us to be busybodies and gossips. The Internet makes this incredibly easy. I’m constantly aware of things I would not be aware of if it weren’t for Facebook or Twitter. As Christians, we must ask questions about what we are reading—namely, does it pertain to us and the mission to which God has called us? If not, we are idlers, gossips, and busybodies when we engage



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