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For the Love of the Family Ministries ™
Missionaries to America's Forgotten Mission Field, the Family
The Dangers Of Social Networking Part 1
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THE DANGERS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING PART 1

The following is by Dr. Ron Williams (hephzibah@kconline.com) and is reprinted from the Hephzibah Happenings, http://www.hephzibahhouse.org with permission of the author.

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

A grief-stricken and broken-hearted father approached me after a church service in which I had preached. He asked if he could share with me concerning his son, so I could possibly use the story as a warning to other parents and young people.

Like many other parents, he and his wife thought little or nothing of the computer in their son's bedroom, nor of his closed bedroom door, nor of his countless hours online.

It was only when he turned 18 that they discovered he had been heavily involved with occultic website and with personalities on chat rooms and blogs that had won his interest and ultimate allegiance. These distraught parents were helpless to prevent him from leaving their Christian home

and consort with his new "friends" he had made on the web.

This young man was a graduate of a Christian school, and a member of a faithful family that was a regular part of a fundamental, independent Baptist church. He is now a part of a "gothic" circle of friends, dressing in black clothes, having disdained his Christian legacy. He has turned a deaf ear to the appeals of his parents to repent and come back to the truths he had been taught during his plastic and formative years.

The Modern Monster

The god of this world has a myriad of seductive and alluring temptations available today, and our young people are especially vulnerable. One of the most prominent and ubiquitous temptations is the internet. Decades ago, young hearts were warned against pool halls, dance halls, motion pictures, card playing, etc. As morally dangerous as these things were, they pale in significance as compared to the insidious dangers a teenager faces via his computer. What was only available in unsavory places before and after WWII, is now available to a twelve-year old in his bedroom by the click of a mouse.

Absent Parents

Modern families are not a cohesive unit as they once were. The stresses and pressures on the modern home are multi-faceted. Mothers have left their homes, husband and children for a career in the work place; what precious time left over in her life is inadequate for her to be a successful wife and mother (Mark 3:25). Fathers are stressed to the limit in their vocation. To succeed and to maintain their position leaves them stretched to also be a husband and protective father. Much unsupervised free time for dependent children is a dangerous factor, as their lower nature tempts them into relationships, entertainment and activities, deleterious to their character and soul. Cell phones, texting and the internet are a spiritual minefield for naive youngsters.

Peer Dependence

A Christian young person should aspire to stand alone for the Lord like Daniel of old, rather than seeking his affirmation, identity and security from his peers (Psalm 1:1). Social networking is about "self," whereas ministry is about "others." Because of its great popularity, networking has become a powerful magnet for young hearts. A youngster not involved would think he is missing out on what seems to him "everyone is doing."

It's All About Me

Narcissus was a character of Greek mythology renown for his beauty. He disdained others, caring only for himself. He fell in love with his own reflection in a pool, and not being willing to stop gazing at his own beauty, perished there, becoming a narcissus flower. His name has come to be synonymous with self-love and self-admiration. This proclivity with self seems to be a driving force behind the involvement of many youngsters in social networking: "it's all about me." By way of

contrast, Scripture tells us to deny self, take up our cross and follow Christ (Mark 8:34).

Social syncretism is doing as a group what one would not likely do on his own. Social networking tempts a youngster to gratuitously "pile on" a victim being attacked on a chat room, blog or website. This victim can be a person, group, institution, clique, etc. Young people are notorious for being ruthless with those out of favor with their particular group. In one tragic example, a thirteen-year old girl committed suicide over cruel remarks being made about her on the web. The author of those disparaging comments turned out to be a married woman who had pretended to be a teenager.

Social syncretism may also be called "herd mentality," a phenomenon in which people abandon reason and even morals to follow the crowd. In a recent experiment at Emory University, one of the professors who authored the study found that brain scans performed as a part of the study showed that disagreeing with a group stimulates pain centers in the brain. These brain scans showed participants did not just whimsically agree to go along with the crowd. Rather, the opinion of the crowd actually changed their perception. In other words, the "herd" alters one's perception of reality.

Most charactered and responsible parents do not need to see this study to know it is dangerous for their child to be involved with uncharactered, foolish and irresponsible peers. They know that "...evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). These parents instinctively know unsavory friends will contaminate and corrupt their child. Unfortunately, young people do not see this danger, which is why Paul warned about the sinister and insidious danger of this social phenomenon: "Be not deceived" (because many are deceived about the subtle danger of wrong friends, conversations, activities, etc.). Godly parents know that their child will become what their friends are: "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." (Proverbs 27:19). The Holy Spirit shows them that evil character is as contagious as a deadly, communicable disease.

The "crowd" can and will alter the moral perception and moral compass of a naive soul not grounded in Scriptures. After a certain amount of exposure and experience with the crowd, it is suddenly okay to text pictures of oneself in various stages of nudity, to discuss lewd, lascivious subjects with a bawdy relish, to aspire to a life of abandon, free of moral restraints, etc. After moral perceptions are altered, it is understandable why loving parents and concerned Pastors are now viewed by the youngster as unreasonable, obstructionist, out of touch and hopelessly old-fashioned. This principle explains why a youngster heretofore happy and content with his family, will become unruly, uncooperative and discontented after involvement with the crowd. This is why a personality that falls out of favor with "the herd" will become an object of scorn and even a "target" to be vilified even though that personality was viewed with favor or at least neutrality, before the whim of the crowd turned against him.

Once Sent, Forever Available

The so-called anonymity the web provides is illusory. Whatever is placed on a blog, chat room, website, etc., is permanently available for an interested person to see. These items can be archived, and can come back to haunt a person many years later. Unguarded, provocative remarks, photographs, videos, etc., have been searched out by Human Resource personnel years after they

were put in cyberspace, and they became the unmentioned reason why a person failed to get a job or promotion, or why some lost their positions.

No Thought for Consequences

Young people in particular are very impressionable, vulnerable and naive. Their underdeveloped minds and emotions tempt them to be involved in the "excitement" of social networking. In the privacy of their bedroom, they give little or no thought to the consequences of sharing personal information about themselves, their families and their friends, which then can be pieced together by sexual predators, criminals and identity thieves. Some information shared is scandalous, such as "sexting," whereby a cell phone or webcam is used to send images of pubescent youngsters in various stages of nudity. Other images, while not revealing body parts, are highly provocative or sensual, all of which will be available for all to see, now, and in years to come. Dangerous Addiction?

Social networking provides a sense of fulfilment for many that so-called "normal life" does not supply. Interestingly, this is one marker for addiction. This subtle addiction draws many away from responsibility for prolonged periods of time. Far from redeeming the time (Ephesians 5:16), this individual has invested many hours in voyeuristic, spiritually-damaging chats, blogs, sensuality and carnal or foolish conversations that certainly do not conform them to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), but rather desensitizes their spirit and conscience. Many are driven to spend countless hours on the web, and if for some reason they would not have access to their favorite sites, would experience a sense of emotional loss and cravings similar in intensity to a person's physical cravings for tobacco if he was to quit the habit. This addictive enslavement violates the principles of 1 Corinthians 6:12, "I will not be brought under the power of any." The obsessive compulsion to be actively involved in social networking ceases to be expedient, and becomes a dominating sinful habit pattern.

Spiritual Damage

In today's moral environment, the lowest moral denominator among young people is scandalous and outrageous. It ought not to be surprising then, that their conversation and interests are often spiritually detrimental. God wants us to be wise concerning that which is good and simple (inexperienced) concerning that which is evil (Romans 16:9). Tragically, after hours, days, weeks and months of licentious, risque' chats, blogs and websites, a young person could become "street wise," hardened against the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, and jaded and cynical about life itself! His priorities, interests and moral values will certainly not be those of his Pastor and Sunday School teacher. Could this explain why many teens are detached, palpably bored and disdainful of church services and family altar? Have I Counted the Cost?

Parents need to seriously question the need for their children to have unsupervised access to cell phones and computers. The texting, wrong pictures and doubtful conversations are elements of "liberty" for which most youngsters are not prepared. Some are texting in school and in church services rather than studying or allowing the Lord to speak to them. Privacy and liberty given by a

cell phone, computer and car, are for spiritually mature, responsible adults, not immature, hedonistic and irresponsible children. It is already a daunting challenge to reach a child's heart for Christ, restrain them and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Why would I as a parent want to greatly complicate these challenges by allowing unsupervised, and uncontrolled access to cell phones and computers? To do so in this Satanically-dominated world would be a little like teaching my child to swim while he was wearing concrete shoes!

Possible Guidelines

May I suggest some possible ways in which a parent could have some control and supervision in these areas:

1) A computer should never be in a child's bedroom, but rather in the most public place of the house, such as kitchen or other area most frequented by family members. The computer/laptop should never be behind closed doors, and should be so positioned that passers by will readily see what is being viewed on the monitor.

2) No computer for children, or any family member, should be allowed that does not have software that can regularly be examined by parent, guardian, or spouse that reveals everything that has been viewed on that computer. Accountability is crucial.

3) Texting has become a mania for many youth. This obsession, for the same moral dangers of the computer, should be inaccessible, or strictly monitored.

4) Software is available to prevent most pornography and other objectionable sites from being accessed. Every computer in a home should be so equipped. These are not "fool proof," that is why vigilance and close supervision of computers is still needed. Blessings vs. Curses

I communicate with my daughter on the mission field via our computer. This is superior to "snail mail," which took weeks, and often never arrived. Access to local and world news from a variety of sources that is almost instantaneous is a marvelous and enjoyable blessing. The ability to find an obscure or popular product "online" at a fair price saves much time and effort. I can research "the teleological suspension of the ethical," sublapsarianism or the varroa destructor mite online without a time-consuming trip to a library. I can be kept informed about groups, missionaries, ministries and Christian organizations via their newsletters. These are up to date and without cost of postage. Some of them are thousands of miles away in third-world countries, and yet I know to pray for a crisis that took place 24 hours ago. Computers provide instant accessibility to information, products and services in an unparalleled way heretofore unavailable to us. We can communicate with friends, strangers, associates and family members instantly, and over thousands of miles with a click of our mouse. Computers are a wonder of our modern age.

Oceans, lakes, rivers and ponds provide transportation, commerce, scenic beauty, food and recreation. However, they can also provide tsunamis, floods, sink ships and drown souls.

Guns provide food for the table, hunting, sports, and arm our military. We also use guns for recreational shooting and protection of lives and property. However, no thinking, responsible parent would allow unsupervised, uncontrolled access to his guns for his children.

Similarly, we must recognize that though computer technology is a tremendous help to us, it can be an unmitigated disaster for our children, and even for us as adults. Restraints, controls, supervision and accountability are not just a good idea for our computers and cell phones, they are a necessity. If a righteous man is to regard the life of his beast (Proverbs 12:10), how much more should we zealously look out for ourselves, our spouse and our children?