

Can We Please Stop All the Nasty Social Media Comments?

I have had an online ministry for more than 15 years. God has humbled me with the way He has chosen to use this influence He has given me. I try not to take it for granted.

One thing that has changed since I began ministering online—and it's changed for all of us—is the rise of social media. Whether you believe it's a good addition or not, we cannot deny its impact on culture or even on the church. Personally, I have chosen to use it for good as much as possible.

Still, it disturbs me some of the ways I see Christians respond on social media. I can post one thing, whether serious or not—and I do use humor intentionally as a part of my online presence—and it never amazes me how someone might respond. I have referred to the practice as a “slam and run.” I just have to thank God at times for the delete option. But it's an example of a bigger problem. Christians aren't always behaving well online. What we'd never say offline we have no problem saying online.

Seriously, this isn't a personal plea. This is a kingdom plea. Just as the world is watching how Christians respond in public, they are watching how we respond online. We must be careful, then, with what we post. All of us will be misunderstood. But we shouldn't be blatantly offensive.

Here are seven ways Christians should behave online:

1. No soapbox. We are told to “do everything without arguing or complaining” (Phil. 2:14). That doesn't mean we can't support causes we believe in, but they should be moral and biblical issues, not personal agendas.

2. No public bashing. Unless you've practiced Matthew 18 principles, and even then it would be rare, don't address your problems with others online. It's not helpful and never promotes peace (Rom. 12:18; Heb. 12:14).

3. No little jabs. We shouldn't say things about others that may be misinterpreted as a stab against them. Guard your online tongue (James 3). I see this especially as a passive-aggressive tactic. We feel safe evoking insults or cuts to another person online that we would never say to their face.

4. Encouragement. Social media can be a great way to encourage others. We shouldn't spam with massive amounts of posts. Few appreciate the person who reshares everything they see, but most everyone likes to read an encouraging word pointed especially to them (Eph. 4:29).

5. Do to others. As we'd have them do to us. We should always think before we post. Pause. Breathe. Think. Post. Ask yourself how you would be impacted by the post before you post it (Luke 6:31).

6. Guard against pride. We have to be careful with self-promotion and bragging about ourselves online. Granted, this is coming from one who has built an online platform online, and I frequently encourage other pastors to do the same. It's one of the best ways currently to engage people for kingdom building. But this is a reminder for me too. We must check our motives, guard our hearts and never allow our egos to rob glory from what God wants to do through our online presence (Prov. 11:2; 13:10).

7. Do not allow it to be a replacement for community. It's easy to post "Happy birthday" or reply "Praying for you" without really doing so. We shouldn't trade the functions of the body for an online presence (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:24).

Those are seven that come to my mind. What would you add? (Be general, please, and not specific in your comments, so as not

to violate the purpose of the post.)

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