

Should You Be Concerned About Facebook Blocking Posts They Deem Misinformation?

In March, about 200 ministers received an unexpected gift from an unlikely source, a streaming kit from Facebook. These were offered to help pastors and ministers livestream their content during the coronavirus pandemic. This came as a pleasant surprise since many Christians have had concerns over the removal of Christian content from their Facebook posts.

But recently you may have also noticed posts on Facebook suddenly blocked and replaced with a message that states “Partly false information checked by independent fact-checkers.” It seems that many are experiencing the same thing. The question is: What’s going on? Is it as simple as it’s portrayed?

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg claims that he’s making a priority of protecting Facebook users from misinformation. Concerning the coronavirus, Zuckerberg wrote on his Facebook page Thursday, “Through this crisis, one of my top priorities is making sure that you see accurate and authoritative information across all of our apps.”

According to an Associated Press article on April 16 the company also disclosed, “it put more than 40 million warning labels in March over videos, posts or articles about the coronavirus that fact-checking organizations have determined are false or misleading. The number includes duplicate claims – the labels were based on 4,000 fact checks.”

Furthermore, in efforts to contain “misinformation,” the company will be sending notices to users who have clicked on, reacted to or commented on posts featuring harmful or false claims about COVID-19.

The questions here needs to be, who are the fact-checkers? And how are they determining the information to be false or misinformation? Are they unbiased, true fact-checkers?

Misinformation over health concerns is understandable. There have been many health claims made of first one thing and then another killing the coronavirus, and people have died from trying some of these claims.

But I also understand that some of the things removed from posts have been like the recent post made by a well-known minister who shared a documentary about the coronavirus coming from the Wuhan lab. This was determined to be "misinformation," yet it is currently being reported on the news that the virus did indeed escape from the Wuhan lab.

However, there are other areas being labeled as "harmful misinformation" and removed, such as posts by Facebook users that appear to promote or organize protests against stay-at-home orders due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In an interview with ABC's George Stephanopoulos on *Good Morning America* on Monday, Zuckerberg was asked if this fits Facebook's "harmful misinformation" designation.

"We do classify that as harmful misinformation and we take that down," Zuckerberg admitted. "At the same time, it's important that people can debate policies so there's a line on this, you know, more than normal political discourse. I think a lot of the stuff that people are saying that is false around a health emergency like this can be classified as harmful misinformation."

Facebook is not the only one to establish these policies. Google and Twitter are launching more stringent controls, as well as altered algorithms and thousands of fact checks to aid in stopping the spread of bad misinformation online about COVID-19.

However, I've seen Facebook posts with the "misinformation" banner across it that had nothing at all to do with COVID-19. It is under the guise of "protecting" their citizens from the evils of the Western world. Communist regimes refuse to allow their people to read or listen to news from the United States or other democratic nations. The only news and information released by the media is what the government sanctions. Travel is limited or prohibited, therefore keeping individuals from investigating facts and determining for themselves if something is false or not.

We recently produced a movie about what could happen if abortion in this country is not banned, called *The Letter – What's Next?* This poses the question, What follows infanticide?

Not only as Christians but as Americans, we must always be cautious of the next step. The question arises, What is the progression from here? Will posts and comments by Patriots be deemed as "harmful information"? Will Scriptures posted by Christians be classified as "harmful misinformation" and taken down? It is by ignoring these small signs and putting our heads in the sand that more and more liberties are taken from us. This is a time to remain watchful and alert. (Though not fearful and paranoid.)

Currently, along with the generous gift to ministers, the social media giant is allowing churches and ministries to livestream from their platform. And, according to an April article by Dan Van Veen for Assemblies of God News, "There is a group of a couple thousand Christians at Facebook – believers from around the world, who meet, pray, and worship together." If not in person, they connect online and virtually, praying and supporting each other.

If you're concerned about being censored, you have the ability to check if there are fact checkers on your Facebook account by going to Settings, then Blocking, and typing in the words

“fact checkers” in the space for blocking people. Five fact checkers came up when I did this, which I blocked. I prefer being free to check facts for myself.

Of course, this article is not to bash Facebook, but to inform you and let you decide for yourself if you’re being protected or censored. It’s also to encourage you to pray for Zuckerberg and the decision-makers at Facebook. Pray for continued openness from the company so we may share the gospel on the platform without censorship or bias. Pray against the adversary who will oppose every avenue of preaching the Good News and getting the message to all of the world so Christ can return.