Social Networking, Part 1 (Beginnings)

Genesis 11:1-9 Wednesday, November 11, 2014

*Ge 11:4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

# Introduction

1. Al Gore might dispute it, but according to Craig Detweiler, author of *iGods*, a British computer scientist working at a physics lab in Switzerland by the name of Tim Berners-Lee (hardly a household name) built the first web browser, the first web server, and the first webpages.

* And it was on those first webpages that Berners-Lee first described his project as “the world wide web.”
* Berners-Lee (modestly) called it an act of desperation --- he and other physicists were frustrated at the amount of research that wasn’t readily retrievable, which meant work was being duplicated in other facilities.
* He built it in 1990 on a NeXT computer (Steve Jobs company *after* Apple dismissed him). He introduced the web standards like URL’s, http, and HTML.
* Detweiler points out that “His world wide web offered a unifying language, a way to organize and follow the pockets of research happening among scholars across the globe.” (p. 74)
* As with most inventions, his creation stirred quite the utopian viewpoint. Detweiler quotes Mathemetician Ralph Abraham as saying:  
    
  “The WWW is miraculous. It is theological creativity in action. If you look at the Web, there are all these different pieces of software without which it couldn’t run. These pieces were created by volunteers, people who were responding to a kind of divine guidance. They were being pushed toward creative synthesis. The miraculous way the parts go together can’t be a coincidence. There were too many different inventions in totally different labs.”
* Of course, the web had to go through several years of transition before it became available to ordinary people who weren’t involved in academic or government research.
* But it is important to remember what Berners-Lee said: “The web, of course, is not a network of computers. The web is a network of people. The web is humanity interconnected.” (74)
* It was only natural then that social networking would follow soon after the Internet became readily available.
* The fact is, social networking began before Berners-Lee invented the Internet.
* The PLATO computer system actually spawned the earliest forms of social networking utilizing the computer as early as 1976.
* PLATO was one of the pioneers in online education, and they invented these tools almost by accident.
* Their system included one of the earliest versions of email, chat rooms, and instant messaging (among other things). (131-132)
* They had a bulletin board system in 1978.
* By 1980, Usenet offered a way for articles to be posted to newsgroups.
* AOL, CompuServe and Prodigy came along in the 1990’s, offering access to the Internet --- access as I understand it that was limited to their particular server and offered no way of crossing into another server.
* In 2002, Friendster launched the first of the modern-day social networks. They were also the first to turn “friend” into a verb.
* In 2003, MySpace added to the features of Friendster, especially allowing embedded music.
* MySpace quickly exploded, but it became a hangout for creeps.
* Facebook grew slower. It was created in 2004, but began with only the Harvard student body.
* They expanded through the Ivy League schools, then to Stanford, and did not open to the general public until 2006.
* Facebook offered a more mature version of MySpace --- social networking all grown up.
* And today, we have a literal explosion of social networking sites available to us: LinkedIn, Photobucket, Flickr, DIGG, Twitter, YouTube, InstaGram…

1. So, when we speak of social networking, what exactly are we talking about?

* It can be difficult to define precisely. It is certainly more than Facebook.
* If we think about it, social networking is a form of interaction and communication, a kind of relationship that takes place through the Internet and online mediums.
* It relies more on images and text – written discourse – although it is not limited to that.
* YouTube relies on video images and the spoken word and very little written text at all.
* We could define social networking as a form of interaction in communications and relationships that takes place through the Internet and relies on video imaging and some form of written or oral communication.
* That is modern-day social networking.
* But I want to argue that social networking existed long before the modern-day mediums of social networking were created.
* There is nothing new under the sun – certainly people had social lives long before the creation of the Internet.

# Division

First, I want to identify the foundations of social networking; then I want to point out the features of our fallenness in social networking; and finally, I want to offer a possible formula for reformation and redemption in social networking.

## Foundations of Social Networking

1. What we call “social networking” today really amounts to relationships.

* Whether we gave it a special name to acknowledge the new powers of communication that are available to us today,
* …or simply as a way of congratulating ourselves because of our supposed progress and advancement, I cannot say.
* Certainly, technology has greatly expanded our ability to connect, to build relationships.
* In many ways, it has enhanced our ability to be friends to others in unprecedented ways.

1. But when we boil it down, we need to remember that it really is just a way to build, conduct and maintain relationships.

* I don’t want to get ahead of myself, but we really do need to remember this.
* When we deal with social networking, we are not dealing with some issue that was completely un-thought of when the Bible was written.
* As I said, there is nothing new under the sun. And it really does point to the perfection of the Bible that this is not an area where the Bible is silent.

1. If we think of social networking in those terms, then we can easily trace the history of it.

* So, I don’t want any gasping when I say that the first social network began in the Garden.
* I think the pundits of today would describe their social network as “analogue.”
* Certainly it was fruitful.
* Their status quickly changed, and changed again.
* I believe that we could learn much about social networking simply by examining the history of the relationships that we see in the Bible.
* Of course, we see all the signs of affection in Adam’s relationship to Eve. Adam was immediately inspired to write a poem to Eve.

## Features of our Fallenness

1. After Adam and Eve, the next relationship the Bible highlights is the relationship between Cain and Abel.

* And that story introduces one of the common features of human relationships in a fallen world – envy.
* That feature has not left us yet.
* If social networking through the medium of the Internet has enhanced our ability to be friends, it has also at the same time increased our temptation to this all-to-common feature of humanity.
* Cain’s envy drove him to kill his brother Abel.
* God cursed Cain from the earth, Cain feared that all men would want to kill him, God provided him with a special mark so that men wouldn’t kill him.

1. But Cain didn’t trust God, and that marks another feature of our fallenness.

* Rather than trust the Lord, Cain built himself a social network for his own security and protection --- the city of Enoch, the first city in the history of man.
* That city grew, relationships continued to degenerate until they became degraded (see Gen 6:1-5).
* Until God determined to destroy the earth with a flood.

1. And that brings us to the Tower of Babel --- 100 years after the Flood

## Formula for Reformation and Redemption

# Conclusion