Social Networking, Part 4 (Problems & Solutions)

Philippians 2:4 Wed, December 10, 2014

*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

# Introduction

1. Last week, I started by pointing out what Christ said about seeking to save our lives.

* *For whosoever will* ***save*** *his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* Matthew 16:25
* *Whosoever shall* ***seek to save*** *his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.* Luke 17:33
* *He that* ***loveth*** *his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.* John 12:25
* Christ was speaking about ultimate things – and yet, we find that even in the small things, we can only preserve our lives by losing them.

1. The point is that we put too much value in ourselves.
2. What Christ taught is very radical, especially in the world’s eyes --- that self-sacrifice is the only path to glory.
3. Whatever you make into an idol, you lose. When we save our lives, or seek to save our lives, or love our lives, we lose them.
4. Technology, and especially social networking, has given us a tremendous power to seek to save our lives.
5. It does not offer a new idol – it merely offers to promote a very old one – the self.
6. Social Networking has only improved on that idol, offering us a new, improved self – the pixilated self.
7. The Bible teaches us, over and over again, to run the opposite way that social networking wants us to go.

* As Philipians 2:4 says, to “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

1. As Christians, we must not allow ourselves to be herded by our devices and our technologies.
2. We must learn to examine the demands they place on us and to resist those demands that contradict our Christian calling.

# Division

1. Last week, I reminded you that there is something in our own hearts that makes us susceptible to the pull of social networking.
2. This week, I want to begin by showing you some of the features of social networking that especially draw our hearts after it.
3. When I finish, I want to look at some Biblical solutions for these problems.

## The Features of our Problem

Two idols of the mind are enhanced by social networking – self-worship (image, profile, status) and the worship of relationships (which is another form that self-worship takes).

### Self-Worship

We need to start at the base, the foundation that all social networking is built on --- and that is your profile.

* If social networking is a technology-enhanced tool for relationships, then profile is important --- because you must have something to build relationships on.
* That makes a little thing like “profile” a big deal --- because the truth be told, in social networking, people are building a relationship with you *through the medium of your profile.*
* Your profile then is the cornerstone, the rock (or sand) that your online relationships are built on, and the keystone that holds those relationships together.
* Now, the further along our culture gets into the social networking craze, the more our terminology changes to reflect the way social media defines us.
* I frequently hear the term “brand” now in reference to a person’s profile.
* Athletes and movie stars started the trend of developing a personal brand --- probably the most famous and successful was Michael Jordan – who did it, ironically, without the aid of social media.
* But today, every athlete is concerned about his brand --- and how to turn it into a profit.
* I just read an article about Carmelo Anthony, who has hired a team of experts to help him improve his brand. With all the millions he makes for losing, apparently he intends to buy a legacy.
* The obsession with profiles and personal brands is not limited to athletes and high-profile public figures.
* The truth is, everyone on Facebook is becoming more and more aware of the need to market themselves – to develop their own personal brand – through the persona they present in social networking.
* Some of this is only natural. As our society catches on to social networking, we are changed by it.
* Now, when someone wants to know about you – whether a potential boss, a potential friend, a teacher, and etc., they look at your Facebook page.
* Since we all know this, we become more careful about what we post – more careful to control the image that is seen by those who visit our Facebook pages.
* Of course, the concern with our profile and our personal brand easily and naturally becomes a concern with image.
* Let’s do a thought experiment.
* Say you are clowning, and you put on one of those “mob suits” with the wide pin strips and the long tails, and you put on one of those Fedoras and pick up a Tommy gun.
* And suppose you take a picture of it, and you put it up on one of your bookshelves around the house.
* When people see that picture, they catch a snapshot of something you did one time.
* Now, suppose that you make that your profile picture, and suppose that you put it on your front page.
* Now, you are saying more than what you were saying with the snapshot.
* This has become an identity – this is the way you want to be identified.
* This quickly becomes your persona --- it is no longer a private moment: it has become a public persona, and quickly becomes who you are or how people see you.
* This is the point I am trying to make – your Facebook page tells a story.
* Roland Barthes described the mental process of a photograph or selfie:  
    
  “I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know I am posing, but (to square the circle) this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality: what I am, apart from any effigy.” (*iGods*, p. 188-189)
* Essentially, he describes it as authentic inauthenticity – that is my description. Detweiller adds this thought:  
    
  “Think about the poses we adopt because we know the image might show up on Facebook or Twitter. We project a version of ourselves that we’d like to see forwarded to envious friends.” (189)
* Barthes again: “I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object…” (189)
* It is this concern with image that we as Christians must guard against.
* I don’t think I need to paint a picture here to help you see how easily this lends itself to self-worship.
* It points out one of the glaring pitfalls of social networking – the innate longing to be seen as something.
* When the social networking craze was just taking off, I warned of the exhibitionist tendencies that are inherent in social media.
* Some referring to it as “oversharing” or “underbragging.”
* We all know to roll our eyes at the person who posts about the cup of coffee they are enjoying at Starbucks.
* Why do I need to know what you had for dessert?
* Nonetheless, we all know how to post pictures designed to show off what we are doing, or to make ourselves look sophisticated, or to put ourselves in the most flattering light possible.
* But the more sophisticated Facebook users have mastered the art of the “underbrag” (as Craig Detweiler calls it – pp. 154ff).
* It is bragging without bragging – managing to sound humble when you show off.
* The point is that whether you overshare or underbrag, you are putting your life on display.
* Tell me that you aren’t thinking about what impression you will be making with a particular picture or post.
* And as Roland Barthes pointed out, the truth is that even when you are getting your picture taken, if you think it might end up on the World Wide Web, that influences the way you pose.
* And of course, there is the status feature, which is closely connected to your profile.
* This is another avenue for self-glory --- *seeking* status through the status feature.
* Status updates certainly can be a way of oversharing (or underbragging – if you know what you are doing).
* But we should also recognize that a lot more goes into our status on Facebook than just what we say.
* Who we are friends with, for instance, does matter.
* Craig Detweiler talks about the fact that because he lives in Malibu (as a professor at Pepperdine), he regularly runs into movie stars in grocery stores and restaurants.
* He talks about the temptation to post about it on Facebook.
* And of course, we all have certain people who we hope will be our friends on Facebook.
* It is important that we recognize that posting these things feeds our self-interest --- because when we post these things, it is more than just friendship.
* It now becomes advertisement --- you are *advertising* these friendships, who you saw, what you did, who your friends are.
* They become important ways that we seek status.
* And that brings up the next point I want to make:

### Relationship Worship

1. One of the ways that we worship ourselves, promote ourselves, even glory in ourselves is through our relationships.

* We all know the old maxim, “It isn’t always *what* you know, but sometimes *who* you know.”
* We all have relationships that are more about ourselves than they are about the other person.
* And we all understand the tendency to name-drop if we meet important people or have important friends.
* I want you to think about how easily our relationships feed the idol of self.

1. One way, of course, is when friends become a way of seeking status upgrades.
2. But another, more subtle way that social networking defiles our friendships and turns them into mediums for self-worship is by turning our friends into an audience.

* As yourself, are they my friends or my “fans”?
* Are you reaching out to your friends to serve them, or are you performing for them to get their applause (in the form of “likes”)?
* How much of what we post is posted in order to get these “likes”?
* While I am on it, I hope that you will consider the limits of the “like” feature. (*iGods*, p. 161)
* For one thing, there is no “dislike” button --- apparently Fundamentalists aren’t the only ones who are against “negativity.”
* But for the Christian, shouldn’t this present a problem?
* We have all been told, “if you can’t think of anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”
* And certainly, there is some wisdom in that. But there are some glaring follies in that philosophy as well.
* John the Apostle couldn’t think of anything to say about Diotrephes – but that didn’t stop him

3Jo 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

11 **Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good**. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

* Our Lord Jesus Christ couldn’t think of anything nice to say about the Pharisees. But that didn’t stop him.
* By the way, did you notice what John said? **Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good**.
* I notice that we aren’t even given an “unlike” button, for when we change our mind. For that matter, there isn’t a “love” button either.
* We can’t always like the things we see on Facebook or Twitter or our favorite blogs. What are we supposed to do them?
* But we can be sure that the “like” button influences what people post, and how they word what they post.
* And besides that, why is it so important for us to “like” things? I don’t like everything God sends my way.
* I don’t believe the disciples liked everything Jesus taught them – I doubt it entered their mind that this was important, and I am positive it didn’t matter at all to Christ.
* We don’t have to like everything we see. That is a particular conceit that is growing on our culture like green on moldy bread.
* It really does feed our sense of self-importance that we feel the need to advertise everything we like.
* And that is to say nothing of those who seek the praise of man when they should be seeking the praise of God.

1. Closely related to this is the rising phenomenon of Facebook Envy (which I have mentioned a time or two recently).

* More and more, we are measuring ourselves by what we are able to post about ourselves on line, and by what others are posting about themselves.
* When you start measuring yourself by who your friends are, or how many friends you have, or what you are doing that is cool (and postable), you are falling into a trap.
* And when you find yourself growing envious of what others are doing, or what friends they have (or how many), or what their friends are saying to them, liking of theirs, or doing with them, then you are already snared.

2Co 10:12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

1. Are you enjoying your relationships, living in them, or are you posing them and recording them and embalming them?

* It is an important question --- what are your relationships about?
* Are they about yourself, and promoting yourself?
* Or are they about your friends?
* As disciples of Christ, we really must beware of the Escapist World of Social Networking
* Voyeurism begins to replace personal interaction.
* Social networking allows us to escape reality. And Christians must resist this temptation.
* But it also encourages us to seek to escape responsibility.

## The Solutions to our Problem

1. Solving the image problem through glory-seeking.

Php 2:1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

1. Solving the relationship problem through friend-seeking.

* Social networking as the modern-day tower of Babel --- building a false unity, a singular mind.
* God wants unity – but not an artificial, man-made unity.
* A unity in Christ.  
    
  1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1. Solving the knowledge problem through God-seeking.
2. Solving the sin problem through law-seeking.

# Conclusion