

FACEBOOK AND FELLOWSHIP

Even those who may not have a computer have likely heard of Facebook if they still read a newspaper or watch television. It is the most popular of several Internet “social networks” that have popped up in recent years. From an inauspicious beginning in 2004, it has grown to a worldwide membership of 845,000,000 active users as of January 2012. It has especially captured the fancy of youngsters in their teens through their twenties, but it also includes 7,500,000 pre-teens.

For the uninitiated, a Facebook account allows one to post autobiographical material, photos, and a list of special interests (e.g., music, movies, books, politics, etc.). Another feature of Facebook is the “Wall” upon which one can exchange messages with other users. These things are there for every other Facebook user in the world to see if one chooses to allow it.

A main feature of the service is one’s “friends” list (thus the *social network* description). This list consists of other Facebook users one invites to become “friends” or other users one accepts as “friends” upon their request or upon the suggestion of others. Some “Facebookers” have thousands of “friends” on their lists.

I signed up for my Facebook account in 2009, but have made little use of it. At this writing I now have the sum total of 90 “friends” on my list (I obviously have not been recruiting others for my list, although some of my “friends” might question whether I could find any more if I tried). I probably have turned down at least this many (perhaps more) who have either asked to be added or who someone else has suggested I add them. I have had more than 90 on my list at times, but I have found it necessary to “unfriend” (yes, that’s a real word, thanks to Facebook) some along the way. I have also refused invitations from several to become their “friends.” Why have I been so “unfriendly”?

These questions bring us directly to the fellowship issue involved with Facebook “friending” (another new Facebook word). With some admitted exceptions, mentioned below, there is an implied agreement with and acceptance/endorsement of those on one’s “friends” list. The word *friend*, after all, is defined as one with whom one is on affectionate and congenial terms or one who supports and/or defends another. In

Scripture, *fellowship* has to do with those who jointly share in or willingly participate together in a given effort or activity—not all that different from friendship. Suppose Jane Doe wants to be on my list or she invites me to be on hers. Before accepting, I check her Facebook page and find Max Lucado, Barry Grider, and Dave Miller on her “friends” list and Abilene Christian University among her “interests.” If she is their “friend” (implying that she has no problems with their errors), she therefore has no problem fellowshipping them. She is therefore violating 2 John 10–11 by tacitly bidding them Godspeed. If this is not so, I am unable to see why it is not. Is not “friending” a false teacher or corrupt institution the opposite of “marking” them so brethren can recognize and avoid them (Rom. 16:17–18)?

I do not want my name to appear in a list of someone else’s “friends” if it contains apostates and false teachers, for such would imply my fellowship/friendship with them. Likewise, I will not knowingly accept one as a “friend” if I know he or she has “friended” apostates. Those few I have “unfriended” I did so because I discovered they had apostates on their lists.

Exceptions to the fellowship element of one’s “friends” list might be those who are there because they are kindred, old school chums, business associates, or other secular relationships that have nothing to do with Scriptural Truth or error. However, if they are counted “friends” because they are brethren in Christ, they had better be **faithful** brethren. Otherwise, one runs afoul of the New Testament teaching concerning fellowship and guilt by a congenial and accepting association.

While I have come across many adult saints who have not considered the fellowship implications of the Facebook “friends,” young people may be even more vulnerable to the temptation to increase of their “friends” lists by accepting every request and invitation. Christian young people need to remember they are accountable for the teaching of the New Testament on “fellowship,” as are those who are older.

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