

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

## GOLDEN TEXT

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Corinthians 6:12).

## USEFUL PRACTICE

Social networks are a phenomenon that integrates society, but virtual relationships cannot replace interpersonal relationship,

## SCRIPTURE READING

### Proverbs 4:10-15

10 - Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many.

11 - I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.

12 - When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble.

13 - Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.

14 - Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers.

15 - Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

## GERAL OBJECTIVE

To realize that social networks are a social phenomenon, but virtual relationships cannot replace interpersonal relationship.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- I. **To present** social networks as a social phenomenon;
- II. **To show** the dangers of disposable relationships and new technologies;
- III. **To discuss** the use of social networks for the service of the Kingdom of God.

## INTRODUCTION

Due to technological advancement, multiple changes have taken place in society. The Worldwide Web, known as the Internet, connects the world. With the rise of social networks everything that happens is disclosed and commented instantly. Information is transmitted with surprising speed; but on the other hand, we live in a time in which people relate more virtually than in person. In this lesson, we will look at the concept and danger of social networks as well as the challenge of the church to evangelize people through new technologies.

### I - SOCIAL NETWORKS

**1. What is a social network?** The expression is used to refer to a global computer network (web), whose purpose is to connect and integrate people. Those who join a social networking site can connect with one another, create a profile, add friends and acquaintances, send texts, make statements, exchange information, photos and videos, in addition to establishing links. Modern social network emerged at the beginning of the 21st century and enabled users to meet old friends and expand their social circle.

**2. An opportunity for the Gospel.** The Bible shows that human beings are by nature social and gregarious beings (Gen. 1:28, 29). Such sociability also manifests itself intensely on social networks, thus being a great and rich opportunity to preach the Gospel. Since we have been told by the Lord Jesus Christ to bring the Gospel into the whole world (Mt 28:19.20), the contacts that social networks provides should be an opportunity to make disciples of people, a time for talking about the love of God as well as offering solace to the hopeless based on the Word of the Lord.

**3. The use of social networks.** Like everything on the Internet as well as in information technology, social networks present not only benefits but they can also bring harm to their users. Unfortunately, there are many who claim to profess the name of Christ, but do not honor it with their profile on social networks. Some use them as a way of showing off, others engage in endless arguments that do not edify at all. The Bible, however, recommends that we should avoid such arguments (Titus 3: 9). Having "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2: 16b) and aware that "all things" are "lawful", we must live the principle of not allowing any of them to master us (1 Cor. 6:12). More than ever, we must use discernment in this virtual world, examining everything from a Christian point of view.

## II - THE DANGER OF DISPOSABLE RELATIONSHIPS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The speed of information and the ephemeral nature of virtual relationships have caused serious damage to social relations.

**1. Distorted happiness.** The Word of God warns us about those who live a life of dissimulation and boast about themselves (Is 5:20, 21). The Bible shows that this is a dangerous path. On social networks, as a whole, people post a perfect life and a world full of happiness. Networks encourage a narcissistic practice, that is, the individual who exaggeratedly admires his own image and who nourishes an excessive passion for himself - the Bible condemns this conduct (Mark 12:30, 31). These people tend to seek futile happiness, amidst mounted photos and false smiles. It is often a life of "make believe". They present what is not true. The Word of God does not condone such a practice (Phil. 4:8).

**2. Isolation and solitude.** In the 1990s, researchers called attention to the social evil called the "internet paradox." It is about the contradiction of someone having multiple virtual relationships and, at the same time, lacking human contact. Recent studies show that the more frequent the use of the Internet, the greater the feeling of loneliness, a problem aggravated by social networks - the Bible shows the importance of fellowship (Luke 10:1). Human beings are being integrated with technology, but treated as if they were machines. This lack of balance has triggered emotional crises, anxieties, and isolation. It is a "bubble" in which reality gives way to fantasy, as it did in the days of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 6:14).

**3. Ephemeral social relationships.** According to a Polish sociologist, society is experiencing a period of looseness in social relationships. He calls this social phenomenon "liquid modernity." Times are "liquid" because everything changes so quickly and nothing is made to last, to be "solid" (Ps. 90:9). With just one click on social networks, you can block, delete or exclude people. And with another click, we can confirm, comment and like the activities of other people. This phenomenon represents a decline in solid human relations, since through technologies friendship, love and respect among people are easily disposable. Life indeed becomes "vanity of vanities" (Ec. 1:2).

**4. The false sense of privacy.** Various users of social networks are deluded by the feeling of privacy and are exposed to all kinds of constraints. Personal comments, intimate feelings; compromising photos and videos leave the private sphere to become public. This sense of privacy also favors the practice of viral sin (something that spreads quickly like a virus) (Mt 24:12). It can range from the reproduction and retransmission of pornography to the dissemination of fake and defamatory news. The Word of God instructs us to flee from these things (2 Tim 2:22, Proverbs 16:28).

### **III - SOCIAL NETWORKS AT THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The Church of Christ must be aware of the potential of social networks and must use them in spreading the Kingdom of God.

**1. Good testimony in social networks.** Christ taught that Christians are the light of the world (Mt 5:14). May this light shine forth through good works in order to glorify our Father who is in heaven! (Mt 5:16). So, in order to give a good testimony on social networks, Christians should not post negative comments or prejudge people. They should be very careful about the photos and videos they post (whether they are personal or third-party videos or photos). It is crucial to evaluate the content, coherence, vocabulary, and Christian ethics of the texts before posting, commenting, or liking on your networking site.

**2. The right use of digital evangelism.** The Internet is a great ally in spreading the Gospel. However, some care is needed not to make the message innocuous. Posts cannot be long and videos cannot be time-consuming. The message needs to be clear, concise and objective (Heb. 2:1, 2). Before sharing any content with friends, we must analyze the biblical truth of that message and its doctrinal theological content. Instead

of postings with catchwords, or self-help and positive confessions, one should prioritize Bible verses. When playing audio and videos, we must check there is nothing that could cause scandals. One should not attack anyone, but just proclaim and confess Christ (1 Cor. 1: 23, 24).

## **CONCLUSION**

Statistics indicate that more than a third of the world's population are connected to the Web and interact through social networks. Faced with these facts the church needs to instruct its members on how to use new technologies and seek methods of evangelizing through social networks. Scripture says about this, "Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." (2 Corinthians 4: 2).