

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Christians in a Digital Age: Is Sin Online Public?

For many of us, in our own estimation, life is incredibly busy. It seems as though we never stop; even when we sleep it is as if we are constantly pursuing something. We have had so many innovations in our time which have made life easier and quicker in so many ways, but more impersonal and hurried in others. What we do in public has taken on a whole new level of exposure, and thus has thrust our personal/private lives and views into the realm of public, and world-wide at that.

With the advances of our time has come the widespread usage of the internet, or the “world-wide-web.” Gone are the days when taking a picture, having it developed, and then placing it in a photo album on your coffee table in your home

(or maybe getting double-prints and sharing one copy) was as far as a picture went. Now, not only can you take a picture (and/or video) with a device smaller than your palm, but you can instantly post it to the “world-wide-web” for all to see and share world-wide. This is the nature of the culture we now live in. Your picture, your conduct, your reputation, your influence is up for grabs anywhere, anytime, any day . . . maybe even in High-Definition.

This is nothing new to many of us who have adopted and embraced much of modern technology. We see it as a necessary evil and judge it an acceptable risk for using technology. Some of those who may read this are very familiar with how all of this technology works and its inner workings; others may have had no idea the capacity for good and evil, nor the exposure which the internet and handheld devices provides until this point. Regardless of our level of understanding, or very blissful ignorance, one fact cannot escape those of us who wear the name of Christian: our life is on display in more ways than we can imagine, the internet being just one facet of our already busy and very public lives. With *very few* exceptions, private life does not exist when it comes to social networks/social media/e-mail or anything which touches the internet . . . to quote a brother recently, “What part of ‘world-wide’ web do you not understand?”

Personally, I have faced a dilemma which I am sure other readers have also faced. The dilemma is “what do I say” or “do I say anything?” once I have witnessed with my own eyes something posted on a brother or sister’s webpage that does not benefit the conduct, dress, attitude, language, and/or reputation of a Christian. Of course, if I view this online then it is a public matter, to which I have tried to call public attention to the sin.

A word to those who waver on this decision of whether to confront those in sin when it is discovered online . . . you may possibly be met with accusations of just trying to find dirt on people, “you’re spying on me,” or you have ill-intentions toward that brother/sister. Of course, because we understand the embarrassment of the individual when he is discovered, which one of us is gleeful when he is caught dead-to-rights in his sin (Gal.6:1)? Focus on the sin and getting that corrected. Do not let defensive attitudes and emotions discourage you from doing what you know to be right, according to God’s word.

If you confront a brother or sister, the same rules apply, do it in all humility, considering yourself lest you also fall into the same things (Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 10:12). Always be sure to bring the discussion back to whether or not sin has taken place publicly for all to see and emphasize the fact that it must be corrected publicly,

according to God's word, if that is found to be the case. There is no difference in seeing a brother sin in public or hearing of it and confronting him about it and it happening online. Once again, it is certainly not our place to be policemen and spy on each other and try to play "gotcha!"-Christianity and go looking for people to fall. But let me strongly urge each of us to love each other enough to have the courage to say what needs to be said. Let none of us stay silent because we are afraid of upsetting someone. That does nothing but condemn both our souls to hell for seeing our brother/sister in sin and saying nothing (James 4:17; Ezek. 3:18-19).

Furthermore, some go so far as to say/think that just because they are behind closed doors in the privacy of their home that whatever they do **online** is private. This is foolish, and these individuals need educating. Just because we are online, in privacy as we see it, does not exempt us from conducting ourselves as Christians on the premise that we can hide behind a username.

That being said, it is hard for me to wrap my head around (or grasp the logic) of how someone can upload his own picture (or being tagged on someone else's picture) to the internet, place it on their account, and agree to share it with all of their "friends/contacts" on a site, but then emphatically claim that it is a private matter. Some caught in their sins online act as if any reader who addresses the sin is the one at fault for bringing it up and they are the victim, acting as if anyone who sees this picture or video is akin to being a peeping tom outside their home. Sin, no matter in what context, venue, or by what means it is noticed/discovered will condemn one's soul to hell, plain and simple; it must be corrected. Pictures, videos, or words said online are all pretty solid pieces of evidence of public sin. Since things done online are not done in a corner, it argues that we must be upright in all we do, for we do not know when our sin will find us out if we are being immoral (it could show up online within a matter of minutes!). Furthermore, what pictures/videos/comments others post of us, what we post ourselves, and so forth must also reflect the conduct and life of a Christian. There is no difference in sinning publicly in the real world and sinning in a virtual world online; it is all public.

The inner struggle over whether what is seen/heard on the "world-wide-web" is a public sin which must be repented of publicly, is what keeps many of us back from correcting those we find (from God's word) to be in error. So to this I quote again, "what part of 'world-wide' do you not understand?" Now, to answer the question of whether we should refute sin publicly and admonish a brother/sister to repent

publicly when caught up in sin online, the answer is a very simple and resounding, YES!

And so it is imperative that we as Christians, the children of God, conduct our lives according to the command of the Lord, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14ff.). As the passage implies, this light never goes out, it is always on display, and it always shines brightly for all to see. Online or offline, we are to shine our lights. (Just to cover every base, Matthew 18:15 does not apply when placed in the context of the “world-wide-web.” I believe we can draw that simple conclusion based off of the points and scripture quoted here which show things published on the web are in public domain rather than protected by privacy.)

Lastly, just as sinning online is a very public matter which can cause great harm to the individual and to the cause of Christ, conversely the choice to shine our light online can be very profitable to the cause of Christ. We must be wise in our dealings, as always. Communicating online (e-mail, chat rooms, social media, blogs) is unlike a hand-written letter where you generally take the time to think out a matter. A word of admonition for those of us who like to type a quick response: let us all use restraint and think matters through biblically and logically before we quickly shoot back with an answer online, for that is also very public and in some cases cannot/will not be removed once submitted (James 1:19-20). This tool, the internet, which can be used for evil can also be used to sow the seed and convert others to Christ. May we use it in that way, and all shine our lights in whatever capacity our abilities allow so the world may witness that being a Christian is not just a name we wear but it is who we are at all times.

Let’s call sin what it is and not apologize for doing so, brethren. The battle rages on (Eph. 6:10-13) for the souls of all men, so let us be wise (Matt. 10:16), humble, and bold. May none of us waver or grow weary in doing what we know to do that is right. Heaven awaits the faithful, press on (Gal. 6:1-3; James 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Eph. 5:15-17; Col. 4:5-6; Prov. 3:4-6)

- Matt Adams

SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"No One Is Perfect!"* (text: Eccl. 7:20); Sunday evening: Jesus Christ: A Closer Look – *A Mission For The Master's Men!* (Mark 6:7-13).