

# FACEBOOK

Facebook? Yes, Facebook. This 77-year-old great-grandfather has a page on Facebook. And he's a preacher, besides. Facebook is no longer only for children and young people.

One discovers that there are many useful ways to profit from this Web program. Pictures can be made available to any who wish to see them. One can post information of various sorts that all can read—and, if one wishes, the people who read, are able to post their answers or arguments. It is a tool of communication such has never been available before the invention of computers and internet. On Facebook, groups have been formed which are limited to family members; others, of all church members of a congregation; others, of entire denominations. Communication is limited then between members of a group. However, anyone within any group can copy what has been written, and pass it on to others outside of the group. More often the “pages” are open to all who wish to read and contribute to them.

In spite of the advantages of this means of communication, a warning must also be sounded. That was impressed upon me last week (week of Sept. 13). I heard the warning given by President Barak Obama, our president, to school age children. He reminded them that what they post on one of these Web programs, including Facebook, will likely remain available forever. Prospective employers in the future might check out by name an individual applying for a job. The prospective employer might much later discover foolish and indiscrete writings which would disqualify him from a job. Politicians as well as criminals have discovered that their e-mails or other Web postings can be uncovered to incriminate or condemn them—leading even to prison. His instruction: be careful what you write or pictures you might be inclined to show. That same week a similar warning was given in an editorial of the *Grand Rapids Press*.

There are at least three Facebook pages identified as “Protestant Reformed.” Protestant Reformed church members can write or debate issues on these pages. But some of the debate on discipline/doctrine is disappointing to say the least.

But need a Christian who is Protestant Reformed have any warnings concerning the abuse of what is in many ways a wonderful invention? I am convinced that some guidelines must be followed. There are, of course, many innocuous statements expressed which are a waste of time in their posting and a waste of time for any who reads them (something like: “Guess what: I'm wearing my old blue jeans today.” --Well, wonderful—but who cares?). There might be opportunities to discuss properly various issues of interest and concern. And one can do that with members of the denomination across the nation. Others, world-wide, can join in as well.

But in discussing certain subjects, especially those of a disciplinary character or disagreements on the Creeds or Church Order of the denomination, one must carefully consider whether the contributions are not in violation of Scriptural or confessional truths:

1. One must be sure that what he writes does not promote schism in the church. According to the form for the Lord's Supper, such a one is admonished that he ought not to partake of the Lord's Supper.
2. The Reformed Creeds (Three Forms of Unity) and the minor creeds (baptism, etc.) mark the difference between what is “Reformed” and what is not. Creeds are not infallible, but they remain binding in the church that is called “Reformed.” They are binding on all members until or unless the Synod changes them (according to the rules in the Church

Order). These express what Reformed churches are convinced are the teachings of Scripture. One does not deliberately deny or ignore these creeds—as long as he is “Reformed.” Whatever he writes, must agree with that.

3. The “constitution” of Reformed churches is their “Church Order.” The Church Order is not merely “advice,” but is likewise binding on the churches and must be honored and followed unless such time as Synod decides to change this. One must reflect this in his writing as well.
4. One must not backbite, slander, nor lie about brethren in his writing (cf. the ninth commandment).
5. One must respect and honor those who have the rule over you (Heb. 13:17 and the fifth command). One must post nothing in disobedience to that command.
6. What is written must meet Scripture’s demand to love one another.

But, one other matter remains very troubling. What about Christ’s instruction in Matt. 18:15-18? That treats of “private” sins. The principle Christ emphasizes is that in treating real or imagined sins, the Christian makes every effort to keep this as private as possible. Our churches treat “open” or “public” sins according to this principle (see Church Order, Art. 76-77).

On “facebook” one has the opportunity to broadcast over the whole world what one considers to be the “sins” of others—or the sins of the denomination as a whole. Those inside as well as outside of the denomination can “make their own judgment.” Some outside of the denomination have been reading what has been written—and have joined also in making comments. We must abide by Scripture and follow Christ’s instruction. This is stated not to stifle proper discussion, but to conduct it within the confines of Scripture, the Creeds, and our Church Order.

Some cautionary remarks have been posted on the facebook site as well—one striking statement comes from an individual living beyond easy traveling distance to any of our churches. He has listened for years to Protestant Reformed sermons on the Web and followed the activities of the churches. This all makes his statement more poignant:

*“For those of you who are considering departure from the PRCA because of this very difficult issue, I hope that you will take the time that you need to become refreshed, and be thankful for the sound, biblical doctrine, the precious treasure that your standard bearer, the PRCA, protects and defends for the glory of almighty God alone. I am an outsider, looking in, and, as an outsider, I know how difficult it is to find a church, not to mention a united denomination that truly represents the revealed will of almighty God, even at the personal expense of its members. I know of no other denomination of churches where I could find such a thoroughly biblical position on the unconditional covenant, such an historic view of Genesis on creation, and such a Godly and unselfish representation of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.”*

In His service, Rev. G. Van Baren

*From the September issue of "Closer Look", Hudsonville PRC*

*From the Pastor's Desk: Bible Study*

Bible study season comes into full swing this month. In our congregation there many different options for attending Bible study. There are Bible studies for couples and for singles, for the young and for the old, for men and for women. As we begin another Bible study season, I decided to write again to encourage us to participate in this aspect of our church life. I realize that some nights we just don't feel like going to Bible study. For others, attending Bible study is difficult because of busy schedules and caring for young children. There are legitimate reasons why some cannot regularly attend Bible study. We must each consider before the face of God if we have good reasons for not attending Bible study. Our lives are busy. But should the many things we have going on in our lives take precedence over attending a Bible study in the church twice a month?

Why do we have Bible studies in the church? Why should we join together for Bible study?

First, this is a way for us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18). We grow in grace and knowledge by studying God's Word, which is profitable for doctrine and life (II Timothy 3:16, 17). Our ascended Lord, Jesus Christ, has dispensed the Spirit of Truth upon the church. The Spirit of Truth teaches us about our Lord Jesus Christ through the Word. This same Spirit has given a variety of gifts and abilities to the different members of the church, which includes gifts in understanding God's Word. When we go to Bible study we then profit from the Spirit's work through the different members of the church. Together we wrestle with the Scriptures and apply the Scriptures to life. In this way, iron sharpens iron. We sharpen each other in the understanding of God's Word.

Second, we have Bible study to serve each other. I have heard some complain that they do not benefit from Bible study, which is why they do not go. We should not go to Bible study first for our own benefit. We certainly want to benefit from Bible study and if we do not we need to examine ourselves and our study habits. But we should go because we love our neighbors in the church and we want to serve them. At Bible study we learn more about the needs of our fellow church members. At Bible study we can encourage each other in the hardships of life and in our struggle against sin. It may be that God will use each of us for the benefit of others.

Third, Bible study is a visible, real expression of the communion of the saints. There is no higher expression of the communion of the saints than when we gather around God's Word. This is done in Bible study week after week.

Fourth, Bible studies are also important for the unity of the church. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 2:15). What unifies the church is the truth. Therefore, the church is certainly unified by the preaching of that truth. The church is also unified spiritually when the members meet together to discuss God's Word. The fruit of these Bible studies will be a united front against false doctrine and ungodliness in our lives.

May God bless the Bible studies this year so that we grow in the knowledge of the breadth, length, depth, and height of Christ's love for us "with all saints" (Ephesians 3:18). The idea is that we grow together around God's Word in the knowledge of God's sovereign love for us. God commands us in II Peter 3:18 "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." We grow in grace and in knowledge through study. May God grant us spiritual growth as a congregation in our Bible studies this year.

*Pastor Eriks*