

### **Keeping Humor within Righteous Bounds**

Have you ever carried a sense of humor too far and done damage or hurt to someone? I have. A sense of humor is a great thing. Everyone needs it. As a matter of fact, God praises a merry heart as beneficial and even health rendering. God's Word says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). "...for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). We are even commanded to rejoice: "Rejoice evermore" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). God doesn't bless grouchiness! However, allow me to bring up a sensitive matter.

In a great passage of Scripture, Paul slipped a warning for all of us not to take our jesting too far. He said, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks" (Ephesians 5:1-4). Contextually, Paul was saying we should follow Christ, walking in love toward those with whom we are walking. He tells us to never once let sexual misconduct, all uncleanness and covetousness even be named among us. Then he says that filthiness, which is base or low talk, is forbidden; dirty joking would fall under this category. Then there is a phrase that addresses a sin that even dedicated Christians could be easily tempted with: "...nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient...." Let's expand what is being said: "foolish talking" comes to us from one Greek word: "morologia." "Moro" is where we get our English "moron". Then "logia" means "words." Combined it means: "words moronically placed together" or "using words without thinking." More specifically we might add, speaking without thinking of the consequences. When words are used correctly, the blessings are immeasurable, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). The word "jesting" is from the Greek word: "eutrapelia", which means "pleasantry, humor, or facetiousness." It also means "well-turned." It speaks of someone who can accomplish a reaction from a well-turned phrase. The word "convenient" comes to us from the Greek word "aneko" which means "as was fitting" or "appropriate."

In this phrase God is saying, "It is becoming saints who live holy lives to avoid saying things that reflect non-thinking, hurtful words. Do not allow your humor to be tainted with inappropriateness."

An incident comes to me in my youth that will serve as a reminder to never go too far in our humor; think through the results of what may happen in our jesting.

It happened in the happy days at youth camp. The atmosphere was great. Christian teens from all over the state of Florida came together for the preaching of God's Word, singing and fellowship. Always, a spirit of revival broke out before the week was over. One of the pastors in charge of the cooking worked long, hard hours making meals and doing his best to create an atmosphere conducive to God's dealing with the teens. It was swim time for the boys and some of my friends thought it would be a great practical joke to have this man's son feign himself drowning and to be humored with what the dad's reaction might be. I did not know what was happening. I was not in the lake at the time; all I knew was that there was a great disturbance over in the swimming area. When I ran over toward the lake, all was quiet. It was not a good kind of quiet; there was rebuke in the air. I saw the father in his street clothes and apron dripping wet, with his teenage son tagging behind with his head down. No one was talking. The boys had been ordered out of the water; the fun was over. Let me explain: the son, Jimmy was in the water pretending he was drowning as his friends rushed to the kitchen where Pastor Jim, the father had been preparing the evening meal telling him in frantic tones that his son was drowning. The dad dropped everything, ran in break-neck speed to the lake and without slowing down he spotted his son and dove into the water head first from the extended platform into the lake. Jimmy surfaces laughing and surrounding boys broke out laughing, except the pastor. He was devastated. He could not shift gears from wondering if his boy was dead or alive to laughing about it as a practical joke. This was joking that was foolish, non-thinking and inappropriate. That night in the service, the spirit of revival had been quenched due to the ordeal of that afternoon. Was it worth it? Was it funny? No. Did it hurt? Yes. The only good that it could possibly have done is to have taught all of us that inappropriate jesting is not entertaining and is not right.

What would be a right attitude to take to help us keep from "...foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient...?"

### **1. A humorous response does not always make jesting right.**

Laughter can be so refreshing and the endorphins that harmonically occur do not justify what is said or done. Many entertainers and comedians will quite literally do anything or say anything for a laugh. Filthy humor is at an epidemic proportion. Isn't it sad how that many clean jokes are forgotten but those dirty jokes make an indelible impression? Sinful activity should never be deemed a laughing matter. Fornication is not funny. Adultery is not funny. Lying is not funny. Ephesians 5:11, 12 says, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret."

I personally pray this prayer with the Psalmist, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). Those of us who are outgoing must guard ourselves more strictly than a bashful person. Remember our personalities never give us a license to sin! Just because it makes a person laugh doesn't make it right.

## **2. If my humor comes at another's expense, it is not worth it.**

As a young preacher, I was preaching to a huge assembly of combined Christian schools. I was nervous, it was a large crowd and I was young and still fairly inexperienced. I wanted the youth to hear my message on this occasion and I wanted kids who were not saved to become saved and those who needed to rededicate their life to be willing to do so. I had learned the value of "breaking the ice" especially with young. Sometimes when people laugh together, we develop a chemistry that affords a better listener. At this assembly, a high school young man had just performed a special before I spoke. He was making a number of errors and you could sense many of the kids wanted to laugh, but were politely (and rightly so) holding it in. I saw this as an opportunity, which would immediately set up total participation in the message. When I stepped behind the pulpit, I made fun of the young man's attempt and, oh yes, I did get a response. Yes, the kids listened that day, however, the young man that I joked with was hurt and he and his family left the church. It grieves me to even put these words in writing. I would love to go back in time and never have said those words. I did convey my deepest apologies to the pastor and through him to the family, but it was too late. At that time I could only pray that the family would forgive me and find a place of service somewhere else. It has rightly been said, "I don't mind if people get mad at me because of my position, but I don't want others to be mad at me because of my disposition." The Bible says, "Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (Romans 14:16). Is it good to develop chemistry and connect with people? Yes, but never at the expense of someone else.

## **3. Be a stepping stone, not a stumbling block**

The Bible says, "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak" (I Corinthians 8:9). Let us keep our humor within righteous bounds. Let us pray that all we say or do will bring honor and glory to God! "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). Our humor can be and should be used of God to be a stepping-stone for others to see Jesus.

-Pastor Pope-

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