

Sorrow Is Better Than Laughter

*"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning;
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth"—Eccl 7:4*

Paul gives us much to think about when he speaks of foolish talking and jesting as incompatible with holiness. Not because such things are purposely sinful, but they are fleshly and animal, outside the narrow and exalted scope of the sanctification of holiness, and therefore corrupt and unclean. He couples them in equal condemnation with what natural man considers much graver sins (Eph. 5:3-4)—

*"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you;
Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting."*

It is prostitution of the mind to the panderings of the flesh, and the mind is more important than the body.

It has been pointed out that the one great and remarkable omission from the Bible as the portrayal of humanity is the complete absence of humor. It has no place there. There is joy, and laughter, and happiness, and rejoicing, and merriness (in its true sense), and lightheartedness (in its true sense), and good fellowship. But no humor—

"As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool" (Eccl. 7:6).
—no warmth, no lasting light: a brief flash, a harsh, grating sound, then cold black ashes.

This fact (the absence of humor), with Paul's and other inspired writers' remarks upon the same subject, is matter for deep thought for those who aspire to the holy reverence of sainthood.

In the first place, humor, however gentle, is rarely without a sting. The basis of every joke is the discomfiture of someone. Minor troubles and difficulties of others always appear humorous, and even major troubles have elements of humor to those who are not affected, often when the seriousness of the trouble makes them ashamed of the impulse. Humor is basically malicious; it's the natural, undisciplined mind of the flesh.

Then again, humor is false. It is evanescent, counterfeit happiness. It creates briefly and shallowly the same sensations; it calls into play the same expressions of the face, although usually contorted and exaggerated. But it creates no bond of friendship. It has no depth or permanence. It is not conducive to intimacy or confidence. In fact, it speaks sadly of a lack of depth, a shallow emptiness, an absence of consideration, a stunted immaturity, a deficiency of experience and understanding. It is sounding brass, and clanging cymbal. It has no warmth. It leaves the heart cold and cheated and uncheered.

Life isn't funny. We realize this when we face its realities—when we consider its hospitals and asylums; its lonely, cheerless homes for the cast-off aged, sitting around waiting to die; its unnumbered hosts of blind and crippled and suffering and bereaved; its multitude of pitiful, frightened, malformed unwanted children, twisted in mind and body; its endless, hopeless, plodding, stumbling parade toward the inevitable last common receptacle of all mortal flesh.

Who can joke and jest if they keep a full and sober realization of these things before their minds?

Life is no joke: it is grimly tragic. But still even amid its tragedy it can be happy and joyful with the quiet happiness of the assurance of the goodness of God, and the knowledge that all this will pass away and be forgotten when it has at last served its divine purpose, and the tried and perfected family of God is complete.

And then again, humor is often so cruelly out of place. Who has not bitten their tongue in shame and confusion after having stirred up a hidden sorrow by a thoughtless word of folly? Solomon says (Prov. 25:20)—

"As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart."

And Prov. 14:13—

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness."

And again (Eccl. 2:1-2)—

"I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure. And, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad. And of mirth, What doeth it?"

Wisdom's verdict is (Eccl. 7:2-4)—

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."

"Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."

There was no humor in the life of our Great Example, and his life was perfect in the sight of God. He was a man of sorrows and deep, intimate acquaintance with grief. With the knowledge and discernment and spiritual depth of sympathy and fellow-feeling that he possessed, it would be impossible to be otherwise than sorrowful in a world like this.

Nothing would have been more jarringly out of place, or more destructive of the power of his influence for good, than shallow, jangling humor. His mission was to those who had bitterly experienced the sorrow and tragedy of life. With them he had a fellow-feeling born of the same experiences. And to them he said—

"Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh."

"Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep."

A mutual sorrow is a far stronger bond of affection than a mutual pleasure, and the consolation of the mutual communion that is born of sorrow is often adequate compensation for it—

"By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

(Taken from "Be Ye Transformed" Volume 2 Pages 108-110 by Bro. G. Growcott)