

Do you have a sense of humor?

In filling out a referee's form one often comes to the question: "Does the applicant have a sense of humor?"

After reading this article it is hoped that you will be able to answer this question about yourself. And indeed to establish whether you need one at all.

Let's read what Wikipedia has to say about humor –

"The term humour derives from the humoral medicine of the ancient Greeks, which taught that the balance of fluids in the human body, known as humours (Latin: umor, "body fluid"), control human health and emotion." (Wikipedia)

I have been on an airplane many times and experienced the screen hanging from the ceiling of the aircraft displaying a comedy. You can hear passengers chuckling away, and sometimes laughing out loud. The video is serving its purpose – helping to pass the time on what could otherwise be a boring flight. **I have to stop myself from watching** – some of them are quite clever – but they would distract me from the mission ahead of me. I need to read the Bible and ask God to speak to me. There are always a number of cards that those in the fellowship have given to send me on my way. So I need to meditate on these. This prepares me for the time when people will be standing in front of me expecting something from the Lord. If I have filled my mind with light-hearted junk food then I will have nothing to say of significant meaning. **A sense of responsibility keeps me from indulging my sense of humor.**

What does the Bible say?

Ephesians 5.3-4

"But among you there must not be a even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity, or of greed because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, **foolish talk, or coarse joking which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.**" (NIV)

Alright, you might say that you have given away the "obscenity", and even the "coarse joking", but I would ask, "what about the 'foolish talk'?"

Let's look at the same passage in the AV, and we will see that some of the words used there are actually more faithful to the original Greek. Could it be that the translating board of the NIV thought that here Paul was going "too far"?

Ephesians 5.4 "Neither filthiness, **nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.**" AV

For "foolish" Strong's Greek dictionary says "silly talk or buffoonery". Today we might also call this "ragging". And for "jesting" Strong put the original as meaning, "well turned, ready at repartee, witticism, **jesting.**" So here the AV is

“right on”! Today we think this is clever. After all it is not dirty, as “filthiness” suggests, nor is it silly as “foolish talk” suggests, but it appears to us to be harmless, and what is more it evokes laughter for those who have a “sense of humor” – and so it is regarded as a “gift from God”. After all, the Greeks found it keeps the body more in balance.

The stand that this article takes is that the Bible is the Word of God. That Paul doesn’t “go too far”, and so we need to take heed to what he has written here for our good. In Hebrews it says that the “Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it **penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow**; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4.12-13)

Now that we have looked at this verse in Ephesians 5.4 quite carefully we can see that it is cutting deep, and very finely. This word has asked us **to cut out witty comments**, intentional puns, a clean funny joke, and from having a good fun time with some gentle “ragging” of each other. All of which enable us to laugh at situations that otherwise would have been dull, even tiresome, and sometimes really annoying or even quite destructive. Without this employing of our sense of humor these situations would lead to us becoming tired, irritable, cynical, even depressed.

For many years the Readers’ Digest has run a section in its magazine entitled “**Laughter, the best medicine**”. When I was young I remember staying in my grandparents’ house and making for the shelf where the Readers’ Digests were, just to enjoy this section.

But I want to testify that this ability to laugh can be triggered by the Holy Spirit, and for a disciple of Jesus it should only be so. **This is called joy**. This explains why joke, witty, pun, fun, amusement, are all missing from the daily life of the early church. Instead we are called to be sober.

1 Thessalonians 5.6 “So then let us not be like others, who are asleep, but **let us be alert and self-controlled**.” For “self-controlled” the AV puts “sober”. Strong says the original means “be discreet, sober, watch.” If there is one word we could say about the church today it is “asleep”. And surely a major contributing reason is this accepting of the world’s way of relaxing – being off watch. This is what being “asleep” means, and so we seek times of amusement.

There is a rest appointed for the people of God - but it is in the Holy Spirit. To **stay sober** and not become somber requires that fountain of joy that springs up to eternal life. This is one reason why the writer of Hebrews says in 4.9-11...

“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that **rest**, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

So if we are being asked to replace our love for some good fun, with **joy**, we should look at what the Bible says about joy. Again in Hebrews, we find in 1.9, where the writer is speaking about our Lord Jesus, it says –

“You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God your God has set you above your companions by anointing you with **the oil of joy.**” Jesus makes a very clear invitation for this anointing in John 7.38 –

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.”

Back to Paul, and in the letter to the Ephesians he says in 4.29 –

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but **only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs**, that it may benefit those who listen. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” If we are not to joke, what would the Holy Spirit like to do with our tongue? We have just learned that we should be building others up “according to their needs”.

Let’s go to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and see how this works. 1 Corinthians 14.1 –

“**Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.**” We shouldn’t be passive about spiritual gifts as the phrase “eagerly desire” suggests, and “prophecy” is especially recommended. We can see why when we consider verse 3 –

“But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”

Surely this is one reason why the Church in the West is declining in its passion. It has exchanged the Glory of God for the same mechanisms that people in the World use to get through this life. Or it has at least mixed them in and so has diminished the Spirit’s power, hence the term used by our Lord Jesus in Revelation 3.16 “...lukewarm...”

In the prophecy recited by Peter on the day of Pentecost, he says in Acts 2.17 –

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see **visions**, your old men will dream **dreams...**”

So along with the promise of prophecy are dreams and visions. These are often occurring throughout the Bible, and can be expected when the Holy Spirit comes on us as complementing and illustrating a prophecy. So let us as God’s servants do away with wasteful talk and use our tongues to bring glory to Jesus, and to build up His people.

Do you need a sense of humor then? If we mean the ability to laugh, then yes, we do need it, but since the term is not in the Bible, **let's talk about joy instead** and not do anything "behind God's back", just to have some "fun".

1 Peter 1.13-16 "Therefore prepare your minds for action be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy so **be holy in all you do** for it is written be holy because I am holy."

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