

Question: I know the Christian life is serious business. But do Christians need to look like they swallowed a sour pickle? Is there no place for laughter in the Christian life?

I understand medical science has discovered that laughter causes our bodies to produce endorphins which can serve as healing agents. The writer Norman Cousins decided to put this theory to the test when he learned that he was suffering from a serious illness. He rented and watched numerous old comedy movies. As a result, he became convinced that his life was extended by laughter. This idea seems to be supported by the wise man of the biblical proverbs when he said, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22 NIV).

Our creator demonstrated a sense of humor by his work in creation. He made long necked giraffes, elephants with hoses for noses and fan shaped ears, monkeys and their antics, cows with bagpipes, bullfrogs and basset hounds among other things. Although very serious about his message, Jesus used humorous illustrations in his teachings. For example, he asked, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:1-5 NIV). Of the legalism of the Pharisees, he said, “You blind guides! You strain the gnat but swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:24). Try to picture those scenes in your mind without laughing. Along with these words, Jesus demonstrated his sense of humor by attendance at events of joy and laughter like wedding feasts and by comparing the Kingdom of God to a sumptuous banquet (John 2:1-11; Matthew 22:2).

However, there was also a very serious side to our Lord Jesus Christ. In an important prophecy about our Lord’s suffering and death on the cross, the prophet Isaiah called him “a man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). Neither the devastating effects of sin on our world nor the death of our Lord for sin are laughable matters. But in his first recorded sermon at a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus quoted another prophecy from Isaiah that says: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, . . . to comfort all who mourn, . . . to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of

ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:1-3; compare Luke 4:18-21). After reading from this scripture, Jesus made it clear that by his coming into this world he was fulfilling this prophecy.

An inappropriate sense of humor that is filled with vulgarity, mean-spiritedness and disrespect of others is totally out of place in the Christian life. But neither does an absence of a sense of humor reflect the spirit of Jesus and his message of love and hope. The word “gospel” literally means “good news.” We have enough sorrow and pain in this world without adding to it. While not denying the sometimes harsh realities of life, Christians should strive to live and declare a message of eternal joy and gladness found through living in the presence of a gracious God. That’s what salvation is about.

Keep smiling. It makes people glad to have you in their lives.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2013/03/22