

Why Do You Laugh?

Ecclesiastes 2:1-2; Proverbs 17:22

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Laughter is a Divine medicine to the soul when used properly (Proverbs 17:22). Laughter lifts the spirit and improves the health of the body. Many studies have shown the relationship of laughter to good mental and heart health. As God's people we should express our joy with laughter (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

King Solomon raises the matter of laughter for our consideration in our text. What we laugh at and what we don't laugh at says much about us. What role does laughter play in the life of a Christian? Are there any boundaries that we should set around our laughter? Will simply immersing ourselves in laughter bring true happiness?

Let us consider this Lord's Day the following main points from our text: (1) Solomon's Experiment with Laughter (Ecclesiastes 2:1); and (2) Solomon's Conclusion concerning Laughter (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2).

I. Solomon's Experiment with Laughter (Ecclesiastes 2:1).

A. King Solomon is the human author of Ecclesiastes. The Hebrew word for "preacher" (Ecclesiastes 1:1) means "one who gathers or assembles." The title of this Book of the Bible is "Ecclesiastes", which likewise means in Greek "one who gathers or assembles." Solomon tells us that he gave himself to a study of all the activities, employments, and pleasures of man from a mere earthly perspective of one who lives "under the sun." Solomon tried everything "under the sun" to see if he could find a lasting joy. He was the richest and wisest ruler at that time. If anyone could find happiness in pleasure, amusements, music, women, power, fame, servants waiting to do his least command, the best food and wine, the most beautiful gardens and exquisite architecture, it was Solomon. But what he found was that they were all vanity and emptiness—happiness was temporary and did not last (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

B. In Ecclesiastes 2:1-2, Solomon turns to various pleasures, which he personally tested to see whether they would bring lasting happiness into his life. The first pleasure in which Solomon immersed himself was that of mirth and laughter. If tears and sorrow bring pain to the soul, he reasoned that mirth (entertainment) and laughter bring joy to the soul.

1. Solomon reflects within himself as to where he might find true joy and contentment: "I said in mine heart" (Ecclesiastes 2:1).

a. It is good to reason in our minds about important matters. The problem here is that Solomon is not using God's Word to give him direction, but is rather reflecting on what will bring him happiness apart from the Lord and His revealed will (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

b. This is the starting point of Solomon's defection from the Lord. He had forgotten His God. He has left His first love. We can tell we are heading for a fall away from our God, when Jesus and His Word are not in our desires, thoughts, or decisions. When all that is important is what we want, we (like Solomon) have forgotten the Lord and are heading for a fall.

c. What is amazing about Solomon's defection from God is that he was wiser than any other man (except Christ—1 Kings 3:12). That is what pride will do in taking our eyes off of Christ and placing them upon ourselves and our pleasures. Solomon also seems to have enjoyed a blessed communion with the Lord for the greater part of his life, for it was not until he was older that his idolatrous wives turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:4). What a warning to us all! If we allow our desires and the pleasures of this world to rule us, we will fall away from Christ and will reap the sorrow and grief that Solomon reaped. But thankfully the story of Solomon does not end on that note; for Solomon speaks in Ecclesiastes as the restored/repentant Preacher (Ecclesiastes 1:1). Christ pursued Solomon with an everlasting love, and by His

power rescued him from his rebellion and idolatry (just as Jesus does with us).

2. What did Solomon say in his heart according to our text?

a. First, “Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth” (Ecclesiastes 2:1).” If true joy was to be found in laughter, amusement, and entertainment, Solomon was going to test it to see for himself.

b. Second, Solomon said in his heart: “therefore enjoy pleasure” (Ecclesiastes 2:1). Satisfy your desires with what pleases you.

(1) Remember that Solomon is not evaluating here pleasure from God’s perspective, but from man’s perspective (“under the sun” Ecclesiastes 1:14). Pleasure is that which “pleases” us. Now not all that is pleasure or pleasing to us is sinful and wrong (Psalm 16:11). Our greatest pleasure as Christians comes not in pleasures that are contrary to God’s will, but in pleasures that are according to God’s will (loving and serving God and one another, enjoying His blessings to His glory, communion with Christ—Proverbs 3:13). Laughter is good and beneficial to our health (Proverbs 17:22—from the same Hebrew word used for “mirth” here). But, the mirth, amusement, and laughter of the world without Christ will not bring a lasting joy. It will rather bring a person laughing himself all the way to hell and everlasting torment.

(2) What is the difference between godly laughter and ungodly laughter? We don’t often think about such a distinction.

(3) **Godly laughter** is our joyful and thankful expression of God’s goodness to us (Genesis 21:6; Psalm 126:1-2). Times of celebration of God’s goodness at birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, promotions at work, or gatherings for fellowship should be filled with laughter and joy in giving thanks to God for all His undeserved blessings to us (Deuteronomy 12:7—bringing the tithes to the Lord). **Godly laughter** is pure and wholesome—it rejoices in that which is morally good according to God’s commandments—not that which is opposite to moral purity. **Godly laughter** builds up and edifies the soul—it strengthens and does not destroy the soul (clean jokes). **Godly laughter** is an expression of our enjoying God, enjoying God’s blessings, enjoying God’s people, and enjoying God’s salvation. **Let us ever enjoy** with much laughter our family, children, grandchildren (especially when life is hard). **Let us ever enjoy** with much pleasure lawful hobbies and recreations that give us a healthy break from work and yet do not consume us. **Let us ever enjoy** with gladness whatever God has blessed us with (1 Timothy 6:17). But let these blessings not replace God, but rather direct us to God who has given them to us rather than excluding Him from our laughter and pleasures (Nehemiah 8:10).

(4) **Ungodly laughter**, on the other hand, makes fun of God, God’s people, God’s blessings, and God’s Word (Genesis 18:13; Psalm 22:7). **Ungodly laughter** is used excessively or at inappropriate times (James 4:8-9). **Ungodly laughter** is laughing at sin (whether in the form of dirty jokes, filthy language, or sinful behavior). How much of the humor of the world by way of jokes or comedy either has the audience laughing with mockery at that which is righteous, or laughing with approval at that which is wicked? Laughter is a gift from God, but it must never be used to imply our approval of that which is immoral. We must not be entertained by that which is morally repugnant to God (profane or blasphemous speech which drags that which holy through the gutter by way of dirty jokes or lewd behavior). **Ungodly laughter** is laughing with disrespect when we are justly corrected by parents or laughing at a spouse to humiliate them in a heated argument.

(5) When we think that we can fill up the emptiness in our lives by merely introducing laughter or entertainment into our lives, we have deceived ourselves and have fallen into the same sin as did Solomon. If we make laughter or pleasure an end in itself, we will find it to be a dead end. When laughter and pleasure lead our hearts away from God, away from His commandments, away from our joy in the Lord and in His blessings, we have fallen into a sinful use of laughter and pleasure for which we need to repent and to seek His mercy and forgiveness.

3. Doesn’t the Lord Himself laugh at the wicked? Yes, He does (Psalm 2:4). But He does not laugh in approval of their sin, but rather with complete disapproval of their vain attempts to overthrow His Anointed One (Christ), whom He has seated upon His throne. Certainly, in the same sense we may laugh at the

vain attempts of Christ's enemies to overthrow the King of Kings (Psalm 33:10-11).

4. What about Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 7:3?

a. First, godly laughter is not opposed to godly sorrow. There is a time for both (Ecclesiastes 3:4). There can be no godly laughter and joy over the blessings of God where godly sorrow over our sin and the sin of others is unknown in our lives (Psalm 30:5; Matthew 5:4).

b. The contrast in Ecclesiastes 7:3 is not between a godly sorrow and a godly laughing, but between a godly sorrow and an ungodly laughing (as we see in Ecclesiastes 7:4-6).

c. Thus, biblical Christianity is not a religion of gloom and doom. It is a religion to be taken seriously, because life and death, heaven and hell will stand or fall upon one's faith or unbelief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. But let us not forget that Jesus came to make our joy full (John 15:11). He came that we might enjoy all His blessings in a way that an unbeliever is unable to do (1 Timothy 6:17). God is not a kill-joy. Satan is the ultimate kill-joy, who brings only momentary laughter, so that people laugh themselves all the way to the lake of fire. Jesus Christ is the ultimate joy of man's desiring. To enjoy Christ is the only way to find true joy and true laughter now and for all eternity.

II. Solomon's Conclusion Concerning Laughter (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2).

A. Solomon's conclusion concerning mirth and laughter (apart from communion with Christ) is the same as every other pursuit Solomon made in order to find true joy: "this is also vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:1). If the joy of the Lord is not our strength, we will not enjoy a godly laughter in anything that we do. We will find what Solomon found: all such laughter is vanity, a mere vapor that is so short-lived and passes away so quickly, and what is left in the soul is simply that same absence of true joy.

B. Solomon goes even further in stating the conclusion to his pursuit of true joy in laughing and pleasure in Ecclesiastes 2:2.

1. First, to pursue laughter in order to find true joy is madness or foolishness (it is "mad"). It is like starving oneself in order to satisfy one's hunger. Or it is like jumping into an icy river in order to get warm. For to pursue laughter in order to find true joy only reveals to a man that he has not found true joy. Ungodly laughing is in effect laughing at the very chains that shackle the sinner and enslave him to an eternity of hopelessness and helplessness in everlasting torment. One who can laugh at that which is immoral, profane, and sinful is mad and insane, for he is laughing at that for which men will be ever tormented in hell.

2. Second, to pursue laughter in order to find true joy leads nowhere. That is the point of Solomon's rhetorical question: "and of mirth, what doeth it?" What does mirth or laughter (apart from the joy of the Lord) accomplish in satisfying the soul of man? Nothing!

C. Solomon could afford to hire the best entertainers, the best comedians, the best plays in order to find true happiness. He tried it, and it didn't work. So many seek to bury their sorrow, discontentment, and emptiness within by filling their lives with entertainment, amusements, and laughter. All they are doing, however, is coming to realize more and more that a true and lasting happiness is not found in these things. They are learning where true joy is not found, and that is why they continue to search. However, the one who comes to Jesus by faith alone, repenting of his/her sin, looking to His mercy, receiving His forgiveness, and walking in loving obedience to His commandments learns that true joy is found only in Christ. The search is over. Let us come daily to Jesus to drink of the wells of salvation, joy, peace, and true laughter in the free blessings given unto us in Christ. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

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