

Question Re Foolish Jesting and Gravity of Deacons

by G.W. North

G.W. North discusses the balance between humor and seriousness in the Christian life, particularly for deacons, emphasizing the importance of love and understanding in interactions.

Duration: 36:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 5:1-6, Ephesians 5:8, Ephesians 5:11

Topics: "Deacon"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the tragic nature of life and the constant presence of crisis. He highlights the prevalence of tragedy in history and in everyday news, suggesting that it is a fundamental aspect of human existence. The preacher argues that God came into the world through the tragedy of Jesus' crucifixion to address the universal experience of tragedy in people's lives. He urges believers to embrace the reality of tragedy and find joy in the profound love of God, rather than seeking superficial happiness.

Transcript

Just for a little while, I think I'll take another of the questions that was asked. And that will bring us somewhere up close, because particularly tomorrow morning, I don't want to have to feel that I must take up questions. I want to come and enjoy the morning meeting without being schoolmasterish.

So then, I believe I have it here with me. A question from Mr North in Reading, here. Here it is.

One. You see, some people are very, very canny. They ask a question and it's three questions.

This is the way it comes. We'll have to limit everybody to one, perhaps one of these times. Here it is.

What are the foolish talking and jesting referred to in Ephesians 5 and 4? Two. What is the difference between these and the type of joking which is fitting amongst Christians? Three. Does the gravity which is mentioned as one of the qualifications of a deacon or his wife in 1 Timothy 3, 8 and 11 mean being serious? Should every member of the church seek this gravity? Now, I don't know whether that's a loaded question.

What do you think? Neutral. Neutralize Paul. How do I find neutral? I want to be impartial.

Ephesians chapter 5. Be ye therefore imitators 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 sweet-smelling 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. For this you know that no whoremonger nor unclean person nor covetous man who is an idolater hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no man deceive you with vain words for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Amen. Now, I suppose that this is something that we ought to consider but let us understand immediately that God has given to mankind a sense of humour and often it is one of the saving faculties of a man.

The person who, if you like, has an ability to laugh at himself will save himself much of it. If some people only ever laughed at themselves instead of taking themselves too seriously everything would have been all right with them. On the other hand, if some people would only take life a little more seriously they would get on with God.

You must remember that the human nature is fallen. With some people it's fallen into deep gloom. Everything has to be deadly serious.

Usually this kind of person is very intense. They get surprised that some people could laugh about things that to them are very serious. Or, on the other hand, you get the person who is very surprised that somebody is so deadly serious about a thing that they can see the funny side of it.

And that also often can be completely wrong. And this is why we are never to judge one another, beloved. Never.

We are all fallen. We are all affected by the fall in some degree or another. And I'm going to tell you this.

I made this remark to someone else only the other day. I think it was somewhere down in Exeter. I don't know.

I stay so many places. I think it was. Because we did come from Exeter up here and it's very recent.

And I said to this person, the older I get the less I feel I want to criticize anything or anybody. If age isn't doing that for you, beloved, I'll tell you what's wrong with you. You need a new heart.

And you need to go on with God. You more and more, if you are a child of love, which if you are a child of God, you are a child of love. If you're not a child of love, you're not a child of God.

See? You do see, don't you? I hope you do. Everything other than love is born of hell and the hellish father. That which is true love, as it gets on and on and on, it gets tenderer and tenderer and tenderer and understands more and more and more.

That's why you should hurry up and get old, all you young people. Oh yes, I mean that. Didn't I tell you that you get stages of development? Jesus has described it perfectly.

There's the hard peristype where nothing enters it. You didn't know this when you were young, see? And then there's the stage where the ground is shallow. It's hard underneath, just a little bit soft on top.

And then you've got the real deep thorny things that have been sown way back in your life. Heredity, natural seeds from the soil which you've been born from, your mother, your father. After that you get the good ground.

You see, and you'll find that in your development from boyhood through puberty, adolescence, going on into courtship, marriage, or whatever it is. You will find that this will show. I told you Jesus was a genius, an absolute genius.

If only Freud and Jung and Adler and all these had studied Jesus Christ they wouldn't have needed to come up so much. He got it all in the natural thing that would reach the country peasant. They've written it all for people who've been often treated in a university isolated from reality.

Dealing in academics, I tell you the truth. I'm not saying they're dehumanized. But if you deal in academics, you tend to become unrelated.

Coming up with theory that may work. Understandings that can't be applied. Breakdown in its practical application.

Reversion to electric shock treatment in the end, you see. Or drugs. They can't do it.

They know they can't. If you take Jesus Christ, he's perfect. He just speaks in the term of what you might say a country peasant.

And he's the Lord from heaven. But it's perfect. And he's got to.

Just like that. You may only see through the glass dart, but you see. He sees with insight.

Now I mustn't give you a lecture on the psychological approach to scripture. But I'm not qualified to do it anyway. I can only tell you what a country bumpkin has discovered from a country peasant's approach.

Sorry, I'm not a country bumpkin. I was born in London. But nevertheless, it's absolutely true.

And you've got to understand that you don't understand much. And you only see through a glass dart. And that'll make you never want to criticize this person's reaction.

Or the way they feel. Or the answer they've come up with. Just get old enough.

That's all. Let God have you. Some of your pronouncements you thought have been sharp, incisive definitions of people's characters and insights into them.

You'll find it's been rubbish. Processed through your own wrong approach. You can only process things through your own understanding and approach.

You like to claim it's revelation from God. I tell you differently. Please will you be told.

God will teach you from love. Always. And until he's taught you by love, you don't know anything.

Nothing. Love comes from life involvement. Not from flashes of brilliance from heaven.

Not shafts of sunlight, but that which the shaft of sunlight produces. The warmth of the sun from the cold earth. Do you understand? Now you're responsible.

What we need to do in this understanding of different people's nature is see that we don't go in for foolish talking. Even if we are people like I think I was once. How far God has got me out of it, I don't know.

A man doesn't see himself. I think our family, for instance, was noted for repartee. I have a nephew who could outdo me.

He's been banished to the underworld. Oh, he's still alive. I mean he's in Australia.

We were born on this level. It came down through the north side. I'm sorry to say I was born like it.

With an ability to come up like a razor. Razor keen. On any subject where repartee was concerned.

My wife will tell you she suffered from it. Not so much now, praise God. But this was the tremendous disadvantage under which I was born.

It's a way in which you can appear better than anybody else. Panders to pride. In fact it builds up pride in the life.

Nobody could outsmart you. You couldn't turn everything to a quip. You'd have gone on as well as a raconteur in a professional capacity.

But that's not what God is after. He abhors it. It's all got to go by the cross.

That's why our brother chose that hymn, I'm sure. It's all got to go by the cross. God abominates it and destroys it.

Foolish jesting and talking are out for the Christian. Do you understand this? And if you happen to be one born under the handicap that I was born under on this level. On other things I wasn't born under a handicap.

Perhaps you were born under other handicaps. Perhaps you were one of these people that had to plod along deeply and meshed in the darkneses of your own soul struggling through to the surface. Any little thing that was sewn in you had to try and dodge a great big stone over the top of it before you could ever begin to get anywhere.

I don't know how you were born. But this I do know. That we must avoid at all costs the kind of cynical, clever saying that wants to lord it over everybody else.

That wants to make a more clever remark than the former one. And so on and so on and so on. Telling foolish jokes.

But all jokes aren't foolish for instance. Let me tell you one. Well I won't do this.

You can shoot me down if you wish. If you think I'm denying the very scripture. But this was one I heard in Cyprus.

I'm sure not the person that comes out with bar room and laboratory jokes. They're filthy. We're not talking about those.

Obscenities are out. Uncleaness and filthiness ought not to be anywhere near. You'll go to hell for that.

This is what it says. There's a difference here in the wording of the scripture. I hope you understood it.

It says fornication verse 3. All uncleanness or covetousness not to be named amongst you. Then he goes on in verse 4. But he's on a different level here. Neither filthiness nor foolish talking nor jesting.

He seems to classify them all together. But he's put the break in between. The break is this.

Let it fornication uncleanness covetousness. It's all classed as it. Not them.

Did you notice? Singular. All belongs to one bracket. Life comes from one source.

And it's that he deals with in verse 5. This you know that no whoremonger. No unclean person. Nor covetous man.

He's dealt with those three things. That he mentions in verse 3. Shall inherit the kingdom of God. And don't let anybody deceive you.

The other thing he's saying. But beside this. Now you're the children of God.

You're not to have be foolish talking or jesting. Let's get these things. And he doesn't say you're not to jest at all.

He says the things that are not convenient. You can say things that are completely inconvenient. But here's something which you will smile at.

It bears humor. It was in Cyprus. And you know Cyprus is now an invaded country.

The Greeks are in the minority. They are pushed out of their homes. And it was a story about two dogs.

That I was told by a Cypriot Greek. And one dog was a big fat dog. And the other one was a thin skinny dog.

The big fat dog lived in East Germany. And the skinny dog lived in West Germany. They both decided to defect.

Go to the other side. And they met at the border. Of the Iron Curtain.

And one says to the other. What are you doing? Going into. Why are you coming from.

Look you're all big and fat. Why are you coming to the West? And the other says. You're all thin and that I know.

But what are you going to the East for? Well he said. I want to get big and fat like you. That's why I'm going into East Germany.

He said. Whatever are you coming to West Germany for? I want to bark. He said.

Now. Yes. That's right.

That bears humor. I'm not wrong. Do you see.

But if I kept telling these kinds of things. You'd say. We don't want him anymore.

That's right. I don't tell those things all the time. But I think that's lovely.

Don't you? It sums it up perfectly. It's told in a humorous way. But I could have told that at a completely inconvenient time.

Right out of place. When somebody was worshipping the Lord. I could have cracked a joke.

Could have done. I never think of doing it by the way. But I'm just saying there is a possibility.

You see. These things that are not convenient. And all the foolish chatter that can go on at times.

And all sorts of things. That just spoil. Things.

Beloved. You see. It's wonderful to be taught of God.

And God gave us a sense of humor. Which I, it appears, was struck in you. When I told that little story.

But it's if you laugh at the wrong things. That the world's full of them. If they strike you as funny.

Something's got to happen inside you. Amen. Before you go.

Well, I'm going to do the rest of the questions. Can I just say. There's just one thing that I feel strongly about.

And that's about preachers. I'm not defending anyone here. But preachers sometimes have their own kind of jokes.

And sometimes they're about precious things. And that to me is awful. I couldn't counter that.

I feel it's awful. When preachers can talk together. About something that's really precious.

And make a joke about it. You know, they pass it off as though it's part of their trade. I think that's terrible.

I trust you all do too. Amen. I stand cautioned.

Nobody here knows. No, I know that, brother. I didn't say I stand censured.

But I stand cautioned because I'm a preacher. That's right. I stand cautioned.

But I don't do that sort of thing, I believe. Well, the whole tremendous thing is this. That I think then that in this.

Answer the second part of the question. What is the difference between these. And the type of joking.

Which is fitting amongst Christians. Well, I trust I told a joke. Which was fitting amongst us.

About the two dogs. Nobody was hurt. There was no cynicism about it.

It expressed a condition that exists in a nation. Isn't it? Doesn't it? That will feed you and make you fat and well. But keep your mouth shut.

That the tremendous thing about it, beloved, is that. That we can move in this realm. Where everything is pure.

And everything is sweet. And everything is holy. And we can laugh at one another.

And we can enjoy. The glorious things that God wants us to enjoy. When we come down to making jokes, quips, cracks.

Out of all sorts of things, beloved. As the brother said. They're precious and they're sacred.

I personally abhor jokes about the Bible itself. Words of scripture. Things that I could tell you that I've heard.

The brother says. On that ministerial level. Never amongst ministering elders in the fellowships have I ever heard.

Never. I've heard them in the other types of ministerial gatherings. I'm sorry to have to say.

But never, never. Never. Glory be to God.

Not amongst those who presently minister in eldership capacity. Note the word I said presently. All right.

The third one is. Does the gravity which is mentioned. As one of the qualifications of a deacon.

Or his wife. In 1 Timothy 3, 8 and 11. Please turn to it.

Being serious. Does it mean being serious? Should every member of the church seek this gravity? Yes, you should. That's before we read it.

That's because I have read it, of course. I hope you have. As the person pinned the question.

1 Timothy 3 and verse 8 says. Likewise. That's just like the bishops.

In other words, there's no difference in qualification. Whether you're a bishop, elder, overseer or what you be. Or a deacon.

Or any member of the church. Because a deacon is a member of a church ordinarily. Before he becomes the deacon.

So every member of the church must be like it. And as for me, I would never have anybody. For a deacon or an elder.

If I found him walking around all the time. Cracking jokes. And all that sort of thing.

I would like to know he had a sense of humor. Because he wouldn't be able to deal with many of the situations. That crop up where people take themselves too seriously.

From tension. And not from spirituality at all. And if he doesn't have a sense of humor.

For instance, something that was said to me since I've been up here. If I didn't have a sense of humor. About something that I'm supposed to be doing in these days.

So that we could just sort of say. Where in the world did they all get that from? You see. And you have a sense of humor about it.

You don't get all serious and say. Oh dear. Amen.

But every member of the church must be in his position. Likewise, verse eight. Just like the bishops then.

The deacons must be brave. Not double tongued. Not given to much wine.

Not greedy of filthy lucre. You know filthy lucre is only money. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

Then let them be proved. Then let them use the office of a deacon. Being found blameless.

So must their wives. Be brave. Not slanderous.

Sober. Faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife.

Ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well. Purchase to themselves a good degree.

Great boldness in the faith. Which is in Christ Jesus. Bold enough I trust in the end.

To die a martyr's death like Stephen did. For he was a deacon. The wonderful truth beloved here.

Is that generally speaking. Although we have a sense of humor. And though we don't walk around.

Looking as though tomorrow is gloomy Sunday. We don't do that. Yet we're brave.

We know the gravity of a situation. The seriousness of it all. That's right.

So that when people come with something. You don't crack a joke about it. It's serious to them.

They've got to be delivered. From probably an introverted nature. That makes them turn everything into a bad omen.

Or a sign that something's going to break down. You see. You've got to be able to say at some time.

Well of course. This thing's all wrong. You see.

But you've got to be brave. But not buried in a grave. Too deep.

Amen. Your wives have got to be the same. And not double tongue.

This is a tremendous thing. In other words. You've not got to say one thing to one person.

And one thing to somebody else. I find this is a terrible thing. And I know.

Often people don't hear you are right. When you do say. Or they'll take something.

A phrase you've used. In the middle of about a half an hour's talk. And they'll make that fit what they think.

And they'll leave out all the rest. The human heart is very deceitful. Oh.

Bad Moth said this. Somebody else said that. Well.

If it was said in the context in which he said it. It would be complete opposite. To what you've inferred from it.

This then. Is the whole seriousness of the matter. And of course.

When you're dealing with souls. At the rate. Which people have to be dealt with.

Beloved. You must remember that the basis of life is tragic. Do you understand that? To come into the world.

You caused your mother pain. For a start. The basis of life is all pain.

And tragic. Goes from tragedy to tragedy. History will tell you the same.

We stagger from the tragedy. Of Hitler's internment camps. And into the tragedy of iron curtains.

In the Bay of Pigs. In Cuba. And all the rest of it.

That's how we stagger on. Crisis to crisis. I don't ever see a paper much these days.

Like to get hold of one. I might run one into an average once a fortnight. I might see a newspaper as I'm travelling round.

You open it up. It's tragedy. Tragedy.

Tragedy. Tragedy. Tragedy.

Tragedy. Tragedy. The basis of life is tragic.

That's why God came in at redemption level by tragedy. The cross. Slaying of his son.

Because everybody basically. There's tragedy in their lives. The extrovert nature may not show that.

The introvert nature might. But still the basis of life is tragic. People snatched away in the middle of their years.

Awful diseases eating people away. Starvation over two thirds of the population of the earth probably. A new wallow in luxury moaning that you're poor.

All that sort of thing. Beloved. Therefore we've got to be great.

It is said of Jesus that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Not a man of joys. Did you know that? Yet this man of sorrows and acquainted with grief said.

My joy. I want your joy to be full. I want my joy to be your joy.

But you see joy. Hasn't a lot to do with the. Laughter and heckling peals of splashy brooks.

Joy comes up out of love. Deep and profound. It is a state of life.

It's not an acquired ability. And God. Wants us to understand this.

It's gray. And it's serious. And when we're in the church of God remembering we're dealing with people.

That have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus. At tremendous cost. If you'd handle me like that when you come and handle me.

And handle that person that you've had a feud with for this last six months. If you seriously believed. What is the heart of the gospel.

You wouldn't act as you act beloved. In the end you wouldn't mind. Somebody putting the plow into you.

And then the disc. And then drill you. And then roll all over you.

And then smash you down in powder. And then stamp even the feet of the sheep across your countenance. You wouldn't mind.

Not if you really come to reality. That's where your joy lies. That's where your pleasure lies.

Isn't that right? Wasn't it you that started out to sing to be like Jesus. And God wants us to be like this. Let's all be great.

Now I don't mean from this moment. Put a mask on your face that goes about. Now I'm great.

Of course you're not being great you're acting. But God will bring this marvelous mixture of the balanced nature of Jesus Christ. Into us.

And make us like him. Is that right? Is that what you want? Well don't try it by being something other than you are. Be what you are.

As you are. Let him take hold of you as you are. And who you are.

And let him change you. If you try to be like somebody else. He'll just sort of put you on a lead on a big collar.

And he'll let you have a long run. Like any dog. Till you've got it out of your system.

Then you'll have to come back and let him get hold of you. As you are. The real person.

And when he gets hold of you like that. He'll change you. This all has to be proved.

Every member of the church. Should seek to be. Grave.

In the sense in which God wants them to be grave. Able to laugh where laughter is needed. Amen.

Able to weep where tears are needed. Weep with those that weep. Rejoice with those that rejoice.

Hallelujah. Isn't it marvelous to be so perfectly poised. That God can sway you this way.

Or that way. To reach to that person's state of need. Or that person's state of need.

Though they be two opposites. God as Paul says. In the end.

Will make you all things to all men. That's lovely. But.

Take your spiritual life seriously. One of the great things about George Fox. About time I stopped.

About quarter to one. In his autobiography. Where he writes in his journals.

You'll find him using words like this. I went to so and so. I met a serious person.

I went to so and so. I met a serious person. I went to so and so.

I met a jingling Baptist. Or something like this. His terms are very expressive.

They really are. I met the priest of the steeple house. You know.

Very like this. But then he says. When he says this.

I met a serious person. He means that somebody. Who's seriously getting down to the fact.

That they've been redeemed by the blood of Christ. A tremendous cost to God. And you're going to go through with him.

Whatever the cost. Serious. Is that right? I take it that that's why you're all here this morning.

Somebody prayed right at the beginning. We're here Lord to worship and be from nearness. We'd be some other place.

That's right. So may God take us right on. Now let's pray shall we.

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