

# View

## Laugh!

Believe it or not, there are some Christians who are uncomfortable with any laughter during a worship service. They feel humor is out of place in the pulpit and that doing everything "decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:20) demands a humorless approach to every aspect of the assembly.

A well-known preacher friend of mine, an older man, was confronted after a sermon by one of the members at the church where he was holding a meeting. The man said, "I don't believe we should use humor in the pulpit." The preacher's answer was simple: "I do."

So do I, though with several qualifications. For example, it can be overdone, ill-timed or used for the sole aim of getting the praise of men (cf. I Cor. 4:5). I heard of a preacher who really wanted to be a stand-up comedian and his preaching was laced with funny stories. It was almost as if he was auditioning every time he preached. Not funny!

Humor should be used appropriately. A funny story that makes fun of someone else is never appropriate. I've even heard the equivalent of the old "take my wife, please" joke from preachers. Not only is that inappropriate, it's dumb!

Humor that makes the preacher look good is also inappropriate. Someone once observed that the only proper personal humor that preachers should use is that which is self-deprecating. That may be an overstatement, but there's truth there. A story should not be a vehicle for self aggrandizement or a veiled attempt to draw praise, that's for sure.

It is also not appropriate to tie a humorous story with a serious scriptural point or when discussing a difficult trial that some in the church may be experiencing. I've heard really strong biblical points destroyed by a feeble attempt to illustrate the point with humor. I've heard totally inappropriate humor at memorial services, which seem designed to draw attention to the speaker instead of to the dearly departed. There is a time to laugh and a time to mourn (see Eccl. 3) and we should not confuse the two.

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## The church of Christ

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### Services

Sunday Morning Assembly  
9:30 AM  
Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM  
Wednesday Bible Study  
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.  
Private classes arranged  
at your convenience.  
[www.folsomchurch.com](http://www.folsomchurch.com)  
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But humor is good medicine, as the saying goes. Pr. 17:22 says a “cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” Cheerful hearts love humor and find humor in everyday situations. Cheerful hearts are quick to respond to humor and quick to laugh, even – especially! – at themselves.

Cheerful-hearted people are secure and love life and other people.

You see that on the rare occasion when someone greets you when you get on

the elevator or as you pass by them on the sidewalk. They smile and say hello and you feel just a little bit better. “A cheerful heart is good medicine...” – even someone else’s cheerful heart!

In preaching and teaching, humor may help open the doors of the mind to hear something that may be difficult to accept. A humorous story may help to cement the point in the mind of the listener (as long as they remember the point and not just the story!).

I’ll never forget my first preaching experience at Folsom over fifteen years ago. I had never thought about humor and its use in the pulpit much. Most of the preachers I had been around in my life were pretty serious when preaching. Some were almost angry during the sermon; at least it seemed that way to me. But within the first five minutes of my first sermon at Folsom, people were laughing at something I said (I think I made a comment about how close city hall was to the prison, not trying to be funny).

That laughter sent a strong message to me. It told me that these people are in a good mood; That this is a church full of cheerful hearts who really want to be here. Kudos to the leadership at the time, by the way (Bill Mosely, Jim Fannin

and Roy Bridge) for doing their part to create that kind of atmosphere.

There is nothing worse than entering a church building where there is little friendly talk, no laughter, no apparent cheer. Often, when the last “Amen” is said, people in those churches rush out the door to get wherever they

would rather be.

It’s not like that here at Folsom – never has been, as far as I know. This is the most cheerful church I’ve ever been a part of. Most everyone seems happy to be here.

By the way, cheer really is “good medicine.” The current issue of *Harvard Men’s Health Watch* (April 2009), in an article entitled “Hearty Humor, reports a test from the University of Maryland. In the test, “endothelium-dependent” blood flow during laughter was 50% higher than blood flow during stress (higher blood flow is better for you than lower). Exercise improves blood flow in a similar way and the reports suggest that Norman Cousins may have been right when he said, “Laughter is a form of internal jogging.”

I don’t know about you, but I’d rather laugh than jog any day, so I hope they find more research that proves Cousins was right. The report concludes that more experiments are necessary to find out “if mirth can help stave off heart attacks and strokes.”

In the meantime, concentrate on the blessings that you have as a Christian and you’ll surely smile a lot.

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