

# **CHRISTIAN WORKER, DO YOU EVER GET DISCOURAGED BECAUSE SOME FOLK LAUGH AT YOU AS YOU PUBLICLY IDENTIFY WITH THE CAUSE OF CHRIST?**

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You stand in the street at an open air meeting, or giving out tracts or whatever, and you become the target of a sneer. A crowd goes past and someone cracks a joke at your expense - a cruel jibe designed to inflict hurt as opposed to good natured banter - and you are almost ready to pack the witness in. If so...consider the following:

- 1)** Who is laughing at you? Perhaps one of what the writer of the Book of Acts called "*certain lewd fellows of the baser sort*" (Acts 17:5) It need not be Pharisical to view them (if applicable) as Job did in chapter 30 of his book. Quite a number of observations flow from the lips of this holy man of God: that they were children of fools and base men (v8) whose fathers he disdained to set even among the dogs (v1) viler than the earth (v8). Is it a shame on you that such should but mock you in passing? Job complained that they spat upon him - into his face - and perpetuated the abuse into the lyrics of a song which became a by word (v10).
- 2)** OK perhaps it is not a crowd of jobs, but someone very respectable. A college professor or a well to do person who sneers at your stand. Does this radically change the situation? Such betrays his standing in society. Nabal was a very well to do business man (1 Samuel 25) with much going for him. But when he sneered at David and his stand for God, he but denigrated himself and lived up to his name which means "folly"
- 3)** Consider their laughter. It is the laughter of a fool which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot, and also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 7:6). Does such laughter worry you? John Gill comments on this point: "*As the noise and sound of the one under a pot is very short, they make a blaze for a while, and is soon over; so though the laughter of a fool is loud and noisy, it makes no melody, no more than the noise of thorns; and is but for a moment, and will be soon changed for weeping and howling, which will last for ever; Job 20:5* "
- 4)** Remember what the Bible further declares of such laughter: "*Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness* " (Proverbs 14:13). Answer me this. Would you like to possess such humour as theirs? Where does it lead? What is the end of such humour? Not merely that it dies out. That would be bad enough. But the end of such humour is sorrow and depression. Their barbed wit is momentarily. It will soon past and they will pick on someone else...indeed it is likely that they pick on one within their own number for such society cannot live in peace among themselves, being "*like the troubled sea that cannot find rest whose waters cast up mire and dirt*" (Isaiah 57:20).
- 5)** Why do they pick on you? It is not you personally, but Christ in you that is so obnoxious to them. Why do they hate Christ? Did He not die for the ungodly? Did He not provide for such as them a road to escape the madness of their sin? If a mentally deranged person made you a target of his sense of fun, would you be offended? Would you think less of yourself? Would you not put it all into perspective and realise that such humour has no real basis in normal society? The laughter of the ungodly against you is equally unfounded. Such is spiritually deranged. Those who sneer at you only denigrate themselves. They are laughing at wisdom.

Your embracing of the truth as it is in Jesus is like Noah entering into the ark. By doing so, *"he condemned the world"* (Hebrews 11:7). Your stand for the Bible upsets the wicked because the Bible condemns their sin. It condemned your sin too, but you have made peace with God which shows that it can be done. Your decision to follow Christ only highlights and further condemns their refusal to do so. Hence the sneer. \* See below (No.16 for additional thoughts on Noah).

**6)** Notice how the sneer has replaced the reasoned arguments. What does this tell you? What argument is there for following in the way that leads to death? Even if they insist on following such a road, what reason can they give to have you leave the right way to go with them? A sneer often covers up a bankrupt mind void of any reasoning. It is bad manners to sneer - a thought for Christians too! Be careful never to sneer at anyone. *"Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal"* (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:1). You may oppose, but do not wrap your opposition in a sneer. Such tactics denigrate the worth of your argument. The Lord Jesus did not sneer. True, he said some pretty hard things against individuals (*"that fox"* meaning Herod: Luke 13:32) and different groups (*"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"* Matthew 23) but these are not sneers. The sneer is found in the attitude that gives rise to the words. If you must oppose, do so in a manner befitting the cause you are seeking to defend.

**7)** Note how mockers usually need a crowd before engaging in vilification. All pure show feeding their vanity. How many actually laugh? By contrast, especially if you are standing on your own, you need no human eye to praise. You look further ahead to the praise that matters - that of God. The scoffer on his own might well be a different kettle of fish. No false courage now to back him up. No friends to give him support...perhaps a very lonely character indeed. What help does his scoffing give him then?

**8)** Often the chief mocker goes too far...and sickens one of his own. What is acceptable to one man is often unacceptable to another. The writer has witnessed the friends of mockers almost pulling away the chief mocker and rebuking him. The devil often oversteps himself. Always remember that God is in control. I think it was Calvin who observed that the Devil may go about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour...but there is a bit in his mouth and God holds the reins. It has not been unknown for a companion of the mocker to quietly apologise afterwards for the embarrassing behaviour of a friend. But such will largely depend on your response. You have nothing to lose if being reviled, you revile not again. Reviling should not be confused with rebuking. A rebuke can be delivered graciously without a raised voice or bitter words or recriminations.

**9)** Even if you have a loner...is this what he gets his kicks out of? Opposing that which is good and wholesome and godly. Rather infantile is it not? Inflicting his godless views upon you who has chosen the better road. Not even "views" in any reasoned way, but words usually loaded with lies and innuendoes but very little if any of logic or fact. When he has finished his harangue, ask him has he exhausted his repertoire? Show him a more excellent way. Ask him is he willing to sit down - say over a coffee - and discuss what he is offering you and compare it with what you are offering him. It may be that his scorning is a cry for help. If he cannot so much as defend and explain his hostility to you or the gospel, then it is a further admission of the bankruptcy of his views. Be sure to tell him so!

**10)** Onlookers observing your response may be impressed with your response. Follow the determination of the Psalmist who wrote: *"I said, I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with*

*a bridle, while the wicked is before me*" (39:1). This might lead to that situation spoken of in 1 Peter 3:1 where a soul "*may without the word [of God] be won by the conversation [life]*" i.e. where the life seems to speak louder than words...although obviously the word of God must come in sooner or later. Peter however is elevating the power and influence of a godly life (v2).

**11)** The darker the night, the brighter the light shines. Spurgeon said that every star is precious in the darkest night. The rudeness of the other will make your decency look even better! We mentioned Noah above (No.5). What makes Noah stand out is that he stood practically alone. Even when Elijah thought he stood alone, God assured him that there another seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Not so Noah. Only seven others joined him in the ark. How his life for God would have stood out in the midst of a scene harrowingly described in Genesis 6:5. Let this really encourage you if loneliness overtakes you in the work of God or you are being verbally assaulted (or worse). It is another case of the Devil over stepping himself and God in His sovereignty overruling.

**12)** The mocker riding on the wave of his own glory will soon betray his folly verbally, perhaps giving an opportunity to expose such & preach truth. Just sit back and listen. The lie must always be exposed. It is only a matter of time, and experience will teach you to detect, expose and exploit the world's folly. There is an old principle that the bigger they are, the harder they fall and this is true when they feel they are on the crest of the wave. Preface your remarks with something like: "Hold on mate. You've got problems with that. What about...? It doesn't add up does it? But the Bible does. The Bible says..." The Lord Jesus used this method very effectively when the Sadducees sought - with an element of mockery - to overthrow the Bible teaching of the resurrection. They assumed that the Bible taught that there would be marriage in Heaven (and thought wrong). Their whole argument depended on it and was easily toppled. Note how the Lord Jesus very effectively silenced them - to the marvel of all men - in the silence that followed their downfall. Ride out the storm and then come out of the bunker with all guns blazing! Truth is on your side. Although it might be temporarily fallen in the streets...it can't stay there forever.

**13)** Suppose you did keep silent - or quit - how long for? Perhaps some day you come home really discouraged. In your hurt, you say that you will no longer put your head over the parapet and you take it a lot easier. Jeremiah tried that one when the going got tough. Listen to his words: "*Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay*" (Jeremiah 20:9). It is not really the answer. If you have a bad day... do what the disciples of John did when they laid the decapitated body of their master in the grave (a most discouraging moment) They "*went and told Jesus*" (Matthew 14:12). Tell Him of your sorrows (Psalm 55:22/1 Peter 5:7) and then put it all behind you and get out again. Every war has its casualties. Every war sees individual battles won and individual battles lost. Remember that over all we are "*more than conquerors*" (Romans 8:37)

**14)** Suppose you were so discouraged as to turn back altogether? I mean: Pack in the whole matter of being a Christian? It is possible that the pressure being brought to bear upon you may even bring you to that position. In your heart of hearts you know that this is the road to nowhere. What are you going back (note the word) to? The old ways of sin? The lack of peace that passeth all understanding? A conscience full of guilt and overflowing? Do you think that would bring you peace even with your tormentors? It is likely that they would pick on something else. They would not even be content that they had drawn you aside, but would probably

throw it up into your face. On a practical note...remember that you do not have to take mockery of your faith if you are in the workplace or school or wherever. Does the attacks upon you amount to practical bullying? If so, then you have recourse to the proper authorities, even if secular. The state is ordained of God (Romans 13) to protect you. Obviously, we are speaking about extreme cases.

**15)** Such trial, like any trial, only serves to toughen you and make you a good soldier of Jesus Christ. When you think of good soldiers - crack regiments - you think of awesome training grounds with assault courses and screaming Sergeant Majors etc. You do not tend to think of afternoon teas in drawing rooms. If you are under the attack of a sneering mocker...let the experience toughen you. See it as training for the day when *"evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse"* (2 Timothy 3:13). The old soldiers look at their medals with pride. They remember the various battles they fought. Do thou likewise. It will help you face the next one. With the whole armour of God...you cannot lose.

**16)** I remember preaching once on Noah building the ark. I thought of the various people who would "come from miles around" to see what all the hammering was about and to certify the rumours: "You're joking, aren't you. Is this a wind up?" First of all when Noah told them what he was doing, they would have said: "Noah...you'll never build it!" Then when its huge frame dominated the sky line, the second line of attack would be: "Noah...you'll never float it!" Probably when the rains came and the huge vessel was lifted up by the waves, I'm pretty sure, someone managed to thump the side with his fist and cry defiantly ere he drowned: "Noah...you'll never survive it!" Always remember, they all with one accord began to make excuse. Don't be disappointed if you don't get the last word...be content to leave that privilege to God. Remember, there is coming a day when *"every mouth will be stopped and the whole world will become guilty before God"* (Romans 3:19).

**17)** I read recently a quote from John F. Kennedy who said: "When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity." If a worldly man can think like this...how much more the child of God? Paul saw his imprisonment (surely a crisis?) merely as another means of furthering the gospel (Philippians 1:12) If you are being scorned...see that it is part of the all things that work together for good (Romans 8:28)

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The purpose of this article is to fortify Christian workers who may otherwise be discouraged. We want to see Christians in this wicked world witnessing fervently to the truth and power of the gospel.