

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

EMPTY LAUGHTER

*A STUDY OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
PART FORTY EIGHT OF SIXTY FOUR*

"Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness" (James 4:9). The writer is not teaching that all laughter and joy is to be destroyed by the Christian. The religion of Jesus is not one of gloom, but of radiant joy. Many times we are exhorted to rejoice (Philippians 4:4). There is a peace of God that gives the child of God a light and joyous heart that makes singing irresistible. Thus we are exhorted, "Is any cheerful? let him sing praise" (James 5:13). Yet, the Bible is a deeply serious book and should cause us to be sober in our thoughts.

There is a laughter that God does not approve. It is an empty laughter, a hollow joy, based on worldly pleasure and sin. "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 7:6). Jesus pronounced a woe of those who laughed while not recognizing their spiritual condition (Luke 6:25).

Much of the laughter of this world is based on sordid things. The laughter of the smutty story should be turned into the mourning that will be blessed (Matthew 5:4). The ring of revelry should cease. The laughter of self-satisfaction and

pride is empty and vain. In its place should be heaviness knowing that arrogance opposes the Creator. James speaks of "your" laughter and "your" joy which suggests a selfish pleasure in contrast to the joy of the Lord which comes by dedicated service. "Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter" (James 5:5).

The lover of the world laughs when he should mourn and be afflicted for his deeds. He is near to losing his most valuable possession by laughing himself into hell. A deep sense of sin should come upon the wicked, especially those who once confessed Jesus as their Lord. If a person can laugh knowing he is a sinner subject to God's judgment, his heart is hardened. To take pleasure in sin is to delight in that which opposes God. Let not your life be filled with empty laughter, but let it be filled "with joy of the Holy Spirit" (I Thessalonians 1:6).

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