

Jokes Becoming more than Jokes

Jordan Kelley
Friona, TX

It's August. August means end of summer... parties... football... parties... new schools... and lots and lots of parties! With all the excitement, its easy to get carried away as Christians and let our guard down and "have fun." Even though, I have been there before and have seen my own friends get hurt because they were not thinking right, or they were just "joking around." As you will find out, jokes can become more than jokes.

After school one day, I was talking to my friends Josh and Steve. We were making plans on what we were going to do at a State Solo and Ensemble Competition that we qualified for. Of course, you HAVE to bring Halo, the iPod, and most definitely, Call Of Duty 4! But then one of my friends said, "Hey, any of ya'll going to bring the good stuff?" My other friend responded and said, "What, you're going to be an idiot and bring beer?!?" "No," he replied, "I mean protection." We started to laugh because we knew he was not serious. But not even ten minutes later he asked again. Josh decided that we should buy some just for fun. Me, being led into temptation and not thinking right, gave in and went along with them. Steve went in and bought them and gave them to the rest of us. To make a long story short, we took them to the State Competition and Steve came to us in the morning and said, "... Guys, I had a chance last night but I didn't want to get caught so I didn't go." I was glad he didn't follow his fleshly desires but was mad at him for his reason. So what started out as a joke, turned out to be a cover up for reality.

As young Christians, we need to remember that the Devil is out to get us as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). Even though the Devil is after us, he was also after Joseph in Potiphar's house with Potiphar's wife. His wife wanted to sleep with Joseph, just as the girl wanted to with my friend Steve, but Joseph knew it was wrong and he RAN! It does not say in the Bible that he ran just for emphasis, it says he ran because that's exactly what he did. HE RAN! (Gen. 39:16; read all of Genesis 39 for context). The Devil was even after Christ as he was fasting for 40 days, but Christ denied him three times (Matt. 4:1-11).

Also as young Christians, we come in contact with people who love to joke around as my friends do and say things like: "Hey man, did you ever know that your mom looks good in that?" or "Dude... your mom is FINE!!" Things of this sort are just completely unacceptable and not what a Christian or anyone else needs to be saying. The Bible even talks about course jesting, which is saying nasty jokes or comments. We as Christians have to put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-20) and we will have to give an account on the judgment day for every word we did OR did not say, for every action we did OR did not do (Matt. 12:36). So in the end, I have changed. I have seen where I was wrong, repented, and am striving not to do these actions again. Please, likewise, if this story fits your life, change now before it's too late. If you are not a Christian and want to be but do not know what to do, you first have to hear the word of God and believe it is the Inspired Word of God and that it is true (Rom. 10:17). You must then realize you are sinning and

you need to repent, or try as hard as you can not to do those sins again (Acts 2:38). Once you have made the commitment to repent, you must then confess with your mouth in front of a preacher, elder, deacon, or a congregation that you believe that Christ is the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13-20). You can then be baptized to wash your sins away and have God remember them no more. You will rise as a new creature, ready to serve God to the best of your ability, remaining faithful until you die (Acts 2:38; Rev. 2:10). If you are a Christian and have fallen away, you must acknowledge your sins before the one you have sinned against. If it was a private sin, go to God in prayer. If it was a public sin, confess it before the congregation asking them to help you and for their prayers on your behalf (1 John 1:9). Then you must repent of those sins and remain faithful until death (Acts 2:38; Rev. 2:10). I hope this article is useful for you, or friends and family because that was my intent. May God be with you!

Standing in Your Youth

Matt King
Pineland, TX

The scriptures provide us with many opportunities to examine ourselves. One is in the Lord's Supper, of which Paul said in **1 Cor. 11:28**, "*let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup*". Another is in the work we do (**Gal. 6:4**). I like Paul's question in **2 Cor. 13:5**: "*Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?*" What a great question; how well do you know yourself? Paul precedes that question with the instructions to "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves*". In all of these exhortations it is made clear that self-examination is healthy, needed, and should be a regular practice. May I encourage you as you examine yourself regularly to dissect your convictions: What do you believe? Why do you believe what you believe? Where is the source of your conviction? As young Christians, let us ask ourselves these questions often because, as we know, there are plenty of reasons to stand for something, and most of them are not good reasons...

Some will stand for almost anything, and with little reason. In his instructions to Timothy, Paul reminds us of the importance in having a good cause for the stances we take and the disputes that may arise because of them: "*But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife*" (**2 Tim. 2:23**). We need to have a reason for our convictions; we all know some who would argue with a brick wall for standing in their way! What good is debate or argumentation without substance and purpose?

Others will stand for the sake of tradition. Jesus reminds us in his rebuke of the Pharisees that "*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (**Mark 7:7**) or holding the "*tradition of men*" (**6**) is "*laying aside the commandment of God*" (**8,9**) and is indicative of a heart far from the Lord (**7**). Paul reminded the brethren in Colossae not to be cheated by "*philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world*" (**Col. 2:8**). Are our convictions grounded in these things?

Others will stand only to gain a reputation. Politicians or religious figures are sometimes accused of outwardly standing for what will secure votes or boost their social

status. When it comes to religious conviction, the scriptures clarify the importance of authentic belief and obedience. We remember those Pharisees in Jesus' day doing their works "to be seen by men" (**Matt. 23:4**), whom Jesus labeled "hypocrites" (**13**), "son[s] of hell" (**15**), "blind guides" (**16**), and "fools" (**17**). Jesus also spoke of hypocrites who would sound a trumpet before themselves (**Matt. 6:2**) and pray standing on the street corners so that others would see their good deeds (**5**). How much better are we if our stand for the truth is grounded in our love for ourselves or for human recognition?

Some will stand for whatever is important to their friends. Influence and pressure may force false convictions on those who are not firmly planted (**Psalms 1:3-4**). Paul warns us of being "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (**Eph. 4:14**). Is this the reason we stand for Jesus Christ? Because our friends do? Still others may hold a certain conviction out of fear, some out of pride, or some will just never stand for anything! Alexander Hamilton said "Those who stand for nothing fall for anything".

Let us make sure we know what we stand for, where we stand, and why. Peter said in **1 Pet. 3:15**, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you". I used to think that meant we have to immediately know book, chapter, and verse for every question that comes our way, but that is not the case. Being ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us does not mean we have to memorize the Bible cover to cover, but surely Peter intended more from us when asked why we have hope in Jesus than the answer, "I just do, okay?!" We need to be able at the very least to tell people what we did to be saved, how we know we are saved, and what they can do to be saved; the hope that is in us comes from Jesus Christ, and we need to be able to communicate that truth. But our lifestyle and practices need to be grounded in the doctrine of Jesus and his apostles as well, and we must do our best to learn and commit to memory effective scriptural support for those things (**2 Tim. 3:14-15**).

Paul was a man of genuine conviction. As he wrote to the Corinthian brethren in **1 Cor. 9**, he applied the struggles and rewards of physical competition to those of our spiritual journey. He encouraged the brethren to live as if life were a physical race where only one contestant is rewarded a crown. Paul said, "Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air" (**1 Cor. 9:26-27**). Paul was not uncertain about the source of his convictions; he knew what he was fighting for. He was not uncertain about what his convictions were; he knew where to throw his punches. And he surely was not uncertain about the reason behind his conviction; he knew why he was punching in the first place!

We should be aware that the denominational world contains many who are ready to tackle our convictions. I recently read a post in a religious online forum that accused the "church of Christ denomination" of producing "droid slave" women because of our beliefs on women's roles in the church. Many in the religious world would also accuse us of "splitting hairs" in our conviction of the necessity of baptism in salvation (**Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27**). In the matter of our *a capella* song worship (**Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16**), we are thought to be neglecting the weightier matters. Our lack of recreation in worship is considered too strict, our adherence to the New Testament church example is considered obsolete, and, worst of all, our careful treatment of the

word of God (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**) is considered tedious and impractical! We've got to know WHY we believe WHAT we believe and be ready to stand for it!

I love the words of the Greek physicist Archimedes, whose studies in leverage brought him to say the famous words "Give me a place to stand, and a lever long enough, and I will move the world". The Lord has provided those of us who are young Christians with a place to stand in Him (**1 Thess. 3:8**), a lever long enough (**Heb. 4:12**), and a world to move (**Matt. 28:18-20**). God bless you in your stand for the Lord!

Love

Matthew Perez
College Station, TX

"We love because he first loved us." - 1 John 4:19 -

Love, how amazing it is. It is a concept we should know and search for daily to fully appreciate it. It is a concept we should spread and share to one another as we venture from day-to-day. It is a concept that is too magnificent and amazing to keep bottled up. Through this act, families share each other's laughter, affection, dreams, and hope. On the other side, without this gesture, families are confused, lost, mistreated and, sadly, torn apart.

"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31) - In this passage, Christ lays down two fundamental, and profound elements to our faith. The first commandment is straightforward, yet essential for the adoration we possess towards our FATHER. The following verse tells us to share the love that GOD has shown to us, to our fellow peers/friends/compadres/buddies/acquaintances/amigos and, as Christ so eloquently put it, to our 'neighbors'.

It is important for everyone (and especially every Christian), to understand completely the notion of love in its entirety. This kind of unchained and appealing love that a Christian is to have must be displayed by what he does. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35) If we continue to demonstrate and show our love to the strangers we meet; to our peers outside of the church; with the close friends we hangout with; and ultimately our family when we see them - we're already following the trail and example that Christ set before us. More so than this, we're obeying the 'new commandment' Christ laid down for you and me.

Sometimes I know it seems to be easier to be a tad 'stand-offish' at times, or impetuous towards one another, or maybe a little rude than it is to really show an act of kindness, or to extend a helping hand, or to give up your time for someone. But the latter is some-

thing we should be incorporating into who we are and what we enjoy doing. Not only will it be uplifting and encouraging for the other party, but through this key element will be imitating Jesus Christ. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to GOD" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

So Brethren, continue to shine through and shine bright, constantly advancing each day with a sincere love for thy FATHER, thy self, and for thy neighbor. And let us sustain the love that GOD has gracefully showered upon us by keeping his commandments - "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3).

The Voice of Experience

Senior Sketches

Compiled by Warren E. Berkley

Paul Williams

LIFE BEFORE BAPTISM -- Verna Lee Van Horn, a Christian, agreed to marry John Homer Williams even though he had lost his faith when he was taught evolution in college. Homer agreed that she could go to church and take the children, and on August 12, 1930 I became the firstborn of two children. My sister and I grew up in San Bernardino, California where Dad kept his word and Mother took us to church from the time we were born. Dad was a school teacher and a great father. He did not smoke or drink, and I never heard him curse or tell a lie. With his emphasis on schooling, I became an academic achiever in school, but I was a skinny kid without much athletic ability. Mother had a positive manner and was a real achiever in everything she put her hand to. She liked to tell that one night during a summer gospel meeting she took me outside during the sermon. With the windows open, it was clear to everyone what was taking place. When she brought me back in, the preacher stopped his sermon and said, "Amen, Sister Williams!" From the time I was seven years old I took piano lessons, and I loved to sing. I was always outgoing and willing to talk and make speeches. I can never remember a time when I did not want to go to heaven, and when I was 11 I was baptized by Alton Wimbish.

LIFE AFTER BAPTISM -- I met Helen Orendorff at church and we started dating before I was 15. I finished high school at age 16, did one year of college at San Bernardino Valley College, then got engaged and enlisted for one year in the army. At my discharge, Helen and I married in Tacoma, Washington August 28, 1949. In my 1938 Ford we

journeyed directly to Abilene Christian College where I enrolled and Helen got a job at the First State Bank. During the three years it took to complete my degree, I preached every other Sunday (until I preached against dancing and was not invited back), and I worked part time at the bank. It was during those years that Reuel Lemmons spoke about preaching the gospel in South Africa, and I decided to go there some day. Helen is a very good money manager, and we were able to pay for my schooling without help from my parents and we had no debt when I graduated in 1952, just when the trouble over church support of institutions was getting hot.

This issue presented me with quite a struggle. In the little town of The Dalles, Oregon I was isolated from other preachers. I read *The Firm Foundation* and *The Gospel Guardian*, both weekly papers, and studied my bible. Bro. Wright Randolph, the preacher in San Bernardino during my teen years, had put a firm foundation under me, and I was fully convinced that everything we do must have scriptural authority. The result was that I had to oppose church support of orphan homes, colleges, and sponsoring churches.

Then we decided it was time to go to South Africa. But in 1956 churches were splitting over institutionalism and no one knew this 25-yr.-old from the west coast. Instead of going to South Africa, I went to Akron, Ohio. Then to Alliance (where I had the “baptism of fire” experienced by most young preachers) and Columbus, then to Indianapolis and Plainfield. It was in 1968 that we and our five sons realized my dream of going to South Africa where I have preached ever since.

I have written mostly about my early life. It was at that time that the course of my later life was determined. The teaching I received from the sermons, the Bible classes, and associations at church literally saved my soul. I received much good from my college studies, but my early convictions made me look at all things in a critical way. I used college—I did not let college use me. Those same convictions continue to govern my life.

Advice: Young preacher, keep your goal to go to heaven. Don't let anything push you away from the clear path to eternal life. God will bless you with usefulness.