

Regarding “Negative Humor,” I would not have you be ignorant. by Chaplain Frank Wm Nagy

2 Corinthians 3:18 “We all, with our faces having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Lord’s Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).”

Christians are being changed into God’s image. We are moving from one level of glory to greater and greater glory. Isn’t that incredible, yet we are called to believe it in Christ.

You know about M & Ms ®?! “They melt in your mouth...” and multi-color your hands. Well, it was pretty much the same with the M & M Girls. Their mascara and multi-various eye paints ran all over creation, as their tears mixed with prayers. It seemed we prayed with these two every week for the same things, always with a corresponding gush of emotion and copious grand flow of pastel and charcoal-tinged waterworks.

Finally one day, M #1 announced she was leading an after-school Christian Club at East Lansing High School. I was so shocked I bit my tongue to refrain from saying she could not possibly do this. As for the second M, she and another girl, also considered an unlikely candidate for greatness, got together. They brought a young lady, who had just dedicated herself to Satan, to Christ. After a time away, the second, once-chubby Miss M returned to some of her old haunts and sought me out. She had finished Nurses training and an Outward Bound crash course with great results in God. This serene, Norse goddess presented herself coyly, “You don’t recognize me, do you, Frank? It’s M, M_____.” “Little M?” I gasped in utter unbelief. This girl was slim and showed no signs of her earlier lip-biting trademark. She had left every aspect of the insecure, ingénue caterpillar I had known so well. Here was another of God’s beautiful butterflies.

Boy, I don’t ever again want to put limits on anyone’s ability to change and grow up in God.

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We need to practice “beholding the glory of the Lord,” as God reveals His glory in ourselves and in others around us. All Christians “are being changed into the image of God, from glory to greater glory,” as we press on in the upward call of Christ. Our brothers and sisters are making strides that should only be seen in a positive light. As this is the truth, whether we can see it or not, we don’t want to state a lot of negative things about those in the family of God. Sure there may be problems, surfacing regularly, as each of us has to deal with our past hurts and the on-going attacks of the evil one, but our

attitude needs to reflect Bible truth. If we speak against our brothers and sisters we are getting to look a lot like the accuser of the brethren, Satan. Jesus is their advocate and ours, so we need to be thoroughly and uncompromisingly for our brother, even when we may not be able to support or condone something he or she believes or has done. We must watch it, because God will come to this person's defense. We may find ourselves in trouble with the Lord, who is saving them, just as He is saving us.

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One of the ways the world has chosen to be negative about people is in a form humor takes. We call this negative humor. We have all seen it in the form of classic put-downs. Shows like "Freddie," The Freddie Prinze Show, and George Lopez are making it an almost ethnic thing for Hispanics today. But it started in the late sixties with shows like, "All in the Family," "Maude" and "The Jeffersons." There are few Americans not aware of "All in the Family's" Archie Bunker's railings at his son-in-law, Michael, who he preferred to call Meat Head and dumb Pollack.

The Pollack joke was a staple of the American ethnic comedy diet for years. In contrast, interesting data comes out on the smarts of the Poles, as a people. A study was done, which rated them more intelligent, as a group, than most other ethnic European nationalities, but it also found, in spite of that, they had one of the lowest levels of self-esteem, as a people. It would appear these smart people were taken down by the poor stereotype they had been saddled with. An old saying goes, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." However, this was obviously not true for these Polish people, whose self-esteem had been all, but destroyed.

Christ's ambassadors need to reject this sneaky attack on men's souls. Satan likes nothing better than to have everyone isolated from each other, because this brings another piece of hell to earth.

Negative humor erodes confidence at the basic building blocks of relationship: a person's need for self-esteem and acceptance of others. Even comments meant for encouragement are often couched in this form of humor, nullifying any good effect meant

You know how this happens. If, for instance, I were to say to you, "I love you, you big pansy," am I not sending mixed signals? Does what I said really say, "I love you as you are," or that "I just put up with you, as I judge you in the wrong"? If you and I can't trust those, who say they love us, who will we be able to trust?

There's one major reason why people offend by couching encouragement in negative ways. It stems from the same need for self-esteem and acceptance: The offender's need for self-esteem and acceptance. The good wishes of the would-be encourager and his own needs get all tangled up in fear. Fear. FEAR! The one trying to encourage is *afraid* his or her word will not be received. They are *afraid* they will be personally rejected when this

happens. Inserting our loving comment in the middle of a “mud ball” is way of protecting ourselves. If the one meant to receive our message of love blows us off, we can just say, “psyche” or “I was only joking.”

But let’s get God’s perspective on this. Proverbs 26:18-19 says, “Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death. 19 so is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, ‘Am I not joking?’”

Sounds like God takes this whole area pretty seriously, doesn’t it?

If you aren’t 100 percent sure about it, let’s see what Paul wrote:

“Don’t use harmful words, but only helpful ones, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so what you say will do good to those hearing you. 30 Do not make God’s Holy Spirit sad. The Spirit is God’s mark to show He owns you. He is a guarantee the Day is coming when God will set you free. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults. No more hateful feelings of any sort. 32 No, be kind and tender-hearted to one another. Forgive each other, as God has forgiven you through Christ (Ephesians 4:29-32 GNB).”

Seeing how serious this is, let’s agree to work on making our “yes be yes and our no be no,” so we are not mixing the signals we send.

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Yes, things are lacking in Christians. Sometimes we’ll find ourselves only slogging on in the upward call on God’s glory road to heaven. The time comes when we need to clearly state we think something is wrong with what our friend, neighbor, family member, or brother or sister in Christ is doing. They should correct us when the shoe is on the other foot. However, we want to point out something that’s being done right to encourage them it’s not all bad news. We must correct out of love, not out of any sense of controlling, one-up-man-ship. We must speak out of a heart that wants to see the best for the other person. **We must show ourselves uncompromisingly *for* our brother.** We must make our words sing out with God’s love, so our sayings don’t continue to wound.

Remember, God says, all Christians “are being changed into the image of God, from glory to greater glory,”

Now, I know I’m probably hopelessly behind the times, using the term, “psyche.” But you kids all know what I mean. Just plug in whatever the new slang word is for “psyching somebody out” and you have the idea. How many times have you done

something, or said something mean and then said, “I was only joking”? How many times has it hurt, when somebody did the same thing to you? When someone does this, the perpetrator was not “only joking.”

Back in the day when “psyche” was the common term, we found our kids being caught up in that double-minded approach to people. Those Christian friends, living close with us, cooperated to ban the use of the word from our houses. It took some work correcting our kids and each other when the word was used, or when a left-handed compliment appeared along with a proper sentiment. It was tough for a while, but we persevered for the sake of the peace of God to reign in our homes. We pressed on and saw some real victory here.

Remember the scene from *Bambi*, where Thumper’s Mother had the young rabbit repeat his father’s advice? “If you can’t say anything good, don’t say anything at all.” What kind of negative humor have you heard? Now, is there a better way to say it? or is there any good way to say it? If there is no good way to say it, we shouldn’t be saying it at all!

Remember, God says, all Christians (and that includes you) “are being changed into the image of God, from glory to greater glory,”

Another thing we need to think about is when we speak negatively about ourselves. When we confess our faults to each other, we need to see our faults are not part of us, they are a gap, something we lack.

What is a fault? Have you ever heard of fault-lines in places, where they have a lot of earthquakes? What’s that kind of fault? Isn’t it a crack in the ground? It’s a place where some land could have been, but something’s missing. In some cases, the fault is one piece of ground pressed up tightly to its neighboring land, but there is still a weakness here, that might blow up if the pressure under this area gets too great. Hot steam might vent or lava bubble up through this fault. There is a gap here.

Our human faults are like that. They’re something we’re missing, something we lack.

God knows it’s easy for us to blow up at our fault lines, when we feel the pressure we’re under gets too great. We might tend to vent some heated words on one or another subject. We might even feel some kind of personal lava bubbling up from within us. Of course, we need God’s help for self-control, but we need to come to rely on our brothers and sisters to come to our aid.

If we and our brothers and sisters can see this, we can help each other by making up for each other’s lack. Instead of judging each other harshly, we will be ready to get each other’s back. We will be ready to step up to protect others, who are weak where we have a strength. We will find ourselves living more confidently too, as we know they will offer “covering fire” for us when and where we are caught in the middle somewhere, in a compromisingly weak position.

Zechariah 3:1-5 gives us a clear picture of how he supported a fellow believer:

The Lord showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

2 Jehovah spoke to Satan, "May Jehovah rebuke you, Satan! May even Jehovah who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! *Is this not a brand plucked out of the fire?*"

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy clothes, and stood before the Angel.

4 The Angel answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, "Take away the filthy clothes from him." He spoke to Joshua, "Behold, I have caused your sin to pass from you. I will clothe you with ceremonial robes."

5 So I said... (The Prophet Zechariah speaks up), "Let them set a clean turban on his head."

So they set a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, as the Angel of Jehovah stood by.

We see Zechariah put his two-cents worth in support of this one abused by Satan, but loved by the Lord. We too can find creative ways to come to others' comfort and aid. Whatever we do, in any situation we find ourselves, **we must show ourselves uncompromisingly *for* our brother.**

Years ago, when he was speaking on this same topic, Charles Simpson put his face up to his finger to share a good-humored parable:

Now Finger, I bin watchin' you. I bin seein' you messin' up. I know you bin fixin' to get hung in that car door again. When it happens don't expect me to be cryin' for you. You're just gettin' what you deserve.

No! When you get your finger hung in the door, you are all over blessing it. Oh, it hurts. You fuss over it. Probably kiss it. Kiss, kiss, kiss. That's my finger.

"Don't you think you're over-doing that a bit?"

No, that's my finger. That's MY finger. MY FINGER! That's my brother! That's my sister!

Consider those in the Body of Christ our own flesh and blood and you will act differently toward them.

Beware the traps in sharing your very personal stories of weakness. It's easy to tell somebody the great exploits we have had with the Lord, but people can relate better to us when we can tell them how we blew it. We are seen as more human as we are transparent about the areas where we failed. It's tough giving someone ammunition they could use against us. However, we are becoming more and more dead to ourselves, and alive to Christ. We know if and when anyone throws these things back in our face (like Satan

does all the time) we have already denounced these things we are ashamed of. We have renounced these things we have done. We have turned away from these wrongs. They are under the blood of Christ and are forgiven. If anyone, (ourselves included) brings these up, we just have another chance to confess these things, as wrong and share how great God's forgiveness has been and is toward us. No harm or foul, right? After all, those faults were never part of us, they were something we were missing; and if anyone brings up our sins, past or present, we can readily confess those to God and go on with an even closer walk with Him!

When we hear a good story; somebody else's tale of woe, we might have a tendency to want to repeat it to others. If you have the person's permission, you can feel free to do just that, but you probably shouldn't use their name. You might want to change some aspect of the story, if you think this person's friends or associates could figure out who the story was about. (After all, the one who the story is about may not have yet felt able to share it with these people.) I constantly share little histories of a person I call "Little Brother." I use this knick-name circumlocution, because this person is a well-known pillar of the community. Some biographical details from his past could harm his ongoing relationships in the state and, perhaps one day in the national scene. Even on this weekend of teaching, I have used and will use initials to designate some people, like the M & M girls. Don't think that I'm even using the right initials, when I do this. I use these initials to help me remember who they are, but these initials are also designed to keep others from identifying them, so people can't bother those, who need to be, or just wish to be left alone.

We still need to consider one other thing on the subject of speaking about ourselves. We must not cut ourselves down. We can poke fun at some of the silly things we have done and are still doing, but we have to be very careful speaking negatively about ourselves, as well. We don't want to embroider the truth so people think too highly of us, but neither do we want to turn ourselves into doormats either. Whenever you speak, let others correct you when they feel you are getting down on yourself. Let them tell you what they see is the truth and also what the Lord tells them is the truth of your past, present and future.

We get frustrated with ourselves, *I know I get frustrated with all of you*. Ahem, er... I mean I also have felt like, or am now feeling some of the same frustrations about myself, that you feel about yourselves. It's true I do get frustrated with others, like I was joking a moment ago, but I get frustrated with myself, too. The Good News for all of us is: **God is ever changing all of us from one level of glory to higher levels of glory**. Praise God!

Praise God, some things in us still at their worst will be made "the best." God is at work to fix us! We only need to patiently cooperate with Him, submitting ourselves to His plan to renovate us. We are not our own. He has paid the ultimate price for us. He owns us. God has perfect timing for all those changes He plans for our lives. We may be fussing, "Lord take some Heavenly "Proactiv" ® to this zit." Yet, we don't have God's perspective of the situation. God sees us bleeding from a gash in our chest. The Spirit is applying His life-saving CPR to our broken heart. He'll get to your "spiritual zit" in His good time. Don't you trust Jesus has sense enough to set up Holy triage for us, in order of real

importance? not just going after what bothers us at this moment? Let's face it folks, some of the things you and I don't like about ourselves are going to have to wait until God takes us to heaven. Let's not get crazy, getting ourselves straight-jacketed until we have everything right.

Richard, a Catholic Christian friend of mine used to quietly watch those, who were striving where God wasn't at work. After watching me struggle in this way for a while, his answer was the same. He'd say, "Don't sweat the small stuff, Frank." So I want to say this to you, "To you I say, "Don't sweat the small stuff, kid." Don't sweat it. If God counts it as small stuff, or even big stuff He is going to handle later, we need to rest in Him. We need to wait patiently for His work to be complete.

When you speak of yourself, don't use negative humor there either. Use a humor that lifts you up as well, okay? Okay!

Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things." These are the things our thought life should dwell on. As we set our minds more and more on these kinds of things, we will find they start to fill our heart. Out of the abundance of our hearts, these good things will flow out. We will find more and more good things coming out of our mouths when we speak.

In all we do, we want to act for the glory of God. So we also claim this passage for ourselves: "Purifying [our] souls in the obedience of the truth through the Spirit to unfeigned love of the brothers, [we seek to] love one another fervently out of a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22).

Let's set these things as goals for ourselves and continue to ask God for His grace to change. Okay?

Always speaking positively takes effort. God knows I don't always do it! Sometimes I'm ready to use flagrantly wrong words and even take the Lord's name in vain, but when I do that it's easy to see it's wrong and repent. It's harder for me to see when I use circumlocutions like "darned, dang and heck." How about those cute sounding pseudo-cuss words like Fred Flintstone's "Frazzle Razzmatazz"? Let's pull back the world's curtain of deception. I need to call what I'm doing there by its correct term: SIN! These quote unquote "more acceptable ways of doing things" are just camouflaged flesh. When we speak in any wrong way, we need to get on with confessing our sin, then quickly get back to the Lord's work, as He graciously forgives us, once more and again and again. Thank you, Jesus! Everything we do needs to center on Him. We praise Him for already forgiving us and changing us, or we come back to his throne to get his grace, forgiving us anew.

We don't want to fall prey to any aspect of negative humor. We don't want to laugh at it. We don't want to be the butt of it. We don't want to make others the hapless butt of our jokes either.

Sometimes sarcasms might be used to help people see their way from a life full of sin to the upward call of the kingdom of God. We might be able to make something funny out of wrong situations. We might be able to poke fun at those, who pharisaically and hypocritically refuse to do right. We may feel we can reserve the right to make these the butt of jokes. However, we need to be sure we are led by the Spirit, as Jesus and Paul were when they spoke in this way. Such things might be better left to the most mature. Paul, one of the best of us, found himself with his foot in his mouth in Acts 23:2-5. Some of Paul's other stabs at humor are taken way too seriously literal and are still misunderstood today.

So please, earnestly take this message to heart won't you? Be careful how you use humor.

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