

# Frivolity and Folly

A heartfelt plea to the People of Prophecy

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I am about to attempt to put forth a subject that I am quite concerned over. I am also aware that any attempt to deal with this subject among Adventists of any type, is to open oneself up to the most scornful and indignant attacks of almost any subject I have ever discoursed upon. It seems nothing is more offensive to the average Adventist than to intimate that he or she should cease and desist from foolish talking, joking and jesting. The very fact that they become offended and angry is, to me, a very bad sign.

I speak the truth when I tell you that I have never even commented on this subject at any time, but I have received a barrage of angry, offended rhetoric in reply. So right at the start of this article, I am going to deal with some of the most common objections.

About the first reply is an angry blurting of; "Well, we are not supposed to go around with a long face all the time." "Well, we are supposed to be happy; you are just a grouch. If you don't like it, go off by yourself somewhere."

OK, but is jesting, joking and levity actually synonymous with happiness? And is refraining from foolish talking, jesting, and trifling conversation, synonymous with gloominess and a long face? Isn't time we looked at this not from the angles of our deceitful hearts, but from the view of God and His inspired instruction in the Word?

"We may have true Christian dignity and at the same time be cheerful and pleasant in our deportment. Cheerfulness without levity is one of the Christian graces." AH 433.2

Here we see clearly that cheerfulness is not dependant on foolishness to exist. In fact we see levity is really a counterfeit of cheerfulness and Christians should not partake of such a spirit.

Brothers and Sisters, I am going to tell it straight—there is not going to be any silly talk, jesting, teasing or joking in heaven, and if we expect to be there, we need to overcome this now!! We are claiming to be living in the last few moments of probation on this earth. These are deep and solemn times that try men's souls, we are claiming that the Latter Rain is already sprinkling and how do our claims match up with our behavior when not actually sitting in meeting?

"We need not encourage that mirth which dissipates reflection, leaves no time for consideration, and establishes habits of lightness and cheap talk which grieve the Holy Spirit of God and unfit us for the contemplation of heaven and heavenly things. This is the class that will have cause to mourn and lament because they are not prepared for the elevated joys of heaven. They are banished from the presence of God." HP 245.3

I am going to set forth observations made as I attended a Holy Convocation recently, where some of the most solemn and advanced truths were spoken from the pulpit. I know there were times when the presence of the Spirit was felt—but why was it not witnessed in a much greater amount? Could it be that careless habits and practices of those, who are claiming to be among those that are preparing a character to be sealed, may be grieving the Spirit and offending the holy messengers and so robbing us of the blessings Heaven waits with longing to bestow?

If, as we teach, this is indeed the Judgment of the Living, then does it not behoove us to examine our conduct in the light of the Day of Atonement and see if there are not elements that are badly out of

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place among us? Brethren, it is time we stop right where we are and take a good look.

I am not in the habit of attending convocations often and so maybe this is why some of these things stand out so plainly before me. I felt deep sorrow at times as I witnessed foolish talk, jesting, teasing and so much idle levity, among even the messengers that came there to preach and represent their ministries—all of which claimed to be presenters of solemn Present Truth. At the same time, I do not want to leave the impression that there was not also a high percentage of profitable discourse among those attending as well. But the good does not excuse the bad.

I realize for myself that I must have the constant presence of the Holy Spirit and the heavenly angels to enable me to have any hope of living a consistent life in Jesus—I strive to cultivate an atmosphere of prayerfulness at all times and if I find myself in a situation not conducive to heavenly meditation, I try, if at all possible, to remove myself from it quickly.

When traveling with a group that was on their way to this holy convocation, I was intent on keeping a prayerful attitude. I felt it was important that if we were to have the presence of the Holy Spirit with us during the meetings, that we should each strive to bring Him with us, as we arrived at the destination. So it was with actual spiritual distress that I found those around me engaging in foolish talk, jesting and teasing of one another in cheapness and levity.

I want here to point out that one of the worse joking habits I see among Adventism is the habit of teasing; giving one another silly names, and trying to fool or trick one another with their words. The wise man points out:

Proverbs 26:18 “As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, 19 So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?”

“Will you excuse levity and careless acts by saying that it was the result of thoughtlessness on your part? Is it not the duty of the Christian to think soberly? If Jesus is enthroned in the heart, will the thoughts be running riot?” CH 295.1

And yet this is so common among Adventists that at times I have despaired of ever hearing two sentences in a row from some, that would be solid and sensible truth. They tease one another about physical characteristics; they tease about idiosyncrasies that the truly polite would never mention; they tease about ethnic origins; they tease about the countries they each represent, they tease about anything and everything—and if rebuked they hotly and indignantly reply, just like the mad man in the proverb, “I am only joking”; “am I not in sport?” “Can’t I just have some fun?”

What did our Lord warn us of? Matthew 12:36 “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. 37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Brethren, if we are to be justified or condemned by our words—are we not on terribly shaky ground with all this foolish levity??

Now, in my observation, it seems to be more common with the brethren than the sisters to indulge in this type of foolish talking, jesting, and joking and what is commonly called horse-play. However we sisters can have our own habits of idle talk and chit-chat that can be grievous to the Heavenly Watcher as well. None of us should feel that we don’t have need of watching that unruly member—the tongue. But remember that it says of the 144,000 that no guile is found in their mouths.

This quote shows something about the importance of correct and controlled speech in those claiming to be the remnant.

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“None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths. We must be divested of our self-righteousness and arrayed in the righteousness of Christ.” 2SM 380.2

I have seen some of the brethren manifest a habit of teasing and joking at the expense of some of the sisters, who, bore with it in good natured patience. And yet, how inappropriate such behavior is among the remnant, who should never in any way mock, tease or belittle one another. For a Christian gentleman to tease a lady like this is not acceptable before God and the angels. Our sisters deserve to be treated with dignity and proper respect. It is equally out of place for husband or wife to crack jokes, tease, or otherwise jest about, or at, their spouses—whether or not they are present!

To return to my situation while traveling to the convocation: I bore with the foolishness for a while, and then spoke a gentle rebuke, urging the importance of a prayerful spirit. For a while things came right side up. But soon, it gradually started up again. I found myself pleading with the Lord to rebuke the evil spirits that were obviously in transit with us.

Twice more I rebuked this, and the third time was a very scathing rebuke, given as I could feel the very presence of the Holy Spirit departing from our midst. Although it resulted in stopping the foolish, joking behaviors, it was obvious that it was deeply resented by at least some of the party.

Why, oh why is this, brethren? Why is it that when someone calls us to lay aside folly so as to be able to enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit and angels, that the rebuker is so hotly resented as to be even hated? Why is it that the truly godly among us often find that solitude is to be preferred, because of the levity and trivialness of those who profess Present Truth?

Does not the wise man tell us:

Proverbs 10:19, “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”

“We should never give sanction to sin by our words or our deeds, our silence or our presence. Wherever we go, we are to carry Jesus with us, and to reveal to others the preciousness of our Saviour.” DA 152.3

It is a struggle for those who truly want to cultivate a godly character, and like Enoch, to walk with God in preparation for eternity, to associate with these light and trifling ones and not lose their contact with the Holy Spirit and fall into the same folly. It is indeed a very successful trap the devil sets for Adventists. And that fact that some of the brethren that stand in the desk with powerful messages of end time import, will descend to the depths of foolishness when in the ordinary situations of life, is to be wondered at.

I do not hold myself aloof from this problem of combating frivolity and foolishness in words and deportment. All this is also a big challenge in my own life and I am not immune to being swept up in it.

There is another very serious fact that we need to consider when we are so quick to dismiss the concerns of those who would warn us of the dangers of lightness and folly. Those who are looking on, and realize that we are preaching such solemn truths, and then see silly lightness and folly practiced by us when out of the desk—can it be wondered that they would dismiss the whole thing as a farce? Will they not say that truly we can’t even begin to believe what we claim to teach?

If you are a seeker for truth and are brought under conviction to seek guidance to find the way to the foot of the cross, and you approach a minister to seek spiritual counsel, and he starts right off by joking and jesting—how can you then proceed to discuss the deep burdens of your heart with such a person? It is a known fact that once a person has been led to laugh at a subject, it is almost impossible for him to take it seriously after that.

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“The conversation should be upon spiritual and divine things; but it has been otherwise. If the association with Christian friends is chiefly devoted to the improvement of the mind and heart, there will be no after regrets, and they can look back on the interview with a pleasant satisfaction. But if the hours are spent in levity and vain talking, and the precious time is employed in dissecting the lives and character of others, the friendly intercourse will prove a source of evil, and your influence will be a savor of death unto death.” CCh 174.2

While at the convocation the spirit of ribaldry at times showed up most inappropriately. Here is one example I was party to. I knew that it was God’s will that those attending this convocation should search their hearts and see if there were any hard feelings that were between them and their brethren. I knew myself that were some things I needed to make right with others, and I proceeded as I had opportunity, to do so. Then upon learning that certain of the brethren were about to depart, I realized I needed to speak to one of them and be more open about my admissions and confessions. Upon approaching him I spoke a straight forward confession, saying nothing to arouse the curiosity of those who were not privy to the situation, but enough for the Brother to know what I meant.

There were quite a few people standing nearby, and when I said these things, there was a sudden outburst of hilarity and laughter. Now I was startled and at first I considered it must be they were laughing among themselves at something else. But it was not so. Sadly this group of professed believers in Present Truth, who knew and taught that we all need to be doing this very thing—seeking to come together with our brethren and heal rifts between us with heartfelt confession—seem to feel this confession to be a comedy show, or something of that nature.

I don’t know what to say about this kind of attitude. When mentioning it to one involved, they excused it with ‘oh, it was just so cute’. BUT really—was it not the spirit of Satan that would make a joke out of something as serious as confessing one’s wrongs? He knows that if he can keep this light, trifling, jesting spirit that the True Holy Spirit can never be present in any great amount—because the deep repentance that He generates is the absolute antithesis to lightness and triviality. Anyone seeing the ribaldry that attended my attempt at confession and repentance would likely think twice about exposing themselves to the same. There were unseen beings that joined in that mirth—I know it—fallen angels delighted in the lightness of those who stood by that day.

I urge all to do some research and read what the Spirit of Prophecy has to say about some of the early times in the Advent movement when the Holy Spirit moved upon hearts and you will not see one example of hilarious laughter, but rather, solemn quietness, humility of soul, and weeping before the Lord.

Is it not as a part of the false charismatic movement that we see this laughter and gaiety? It is called the ‘holy laughter movement’—but there is nothing holy about laughter involved with what should be sacred. Why am I putting these things forward so strongly? Because I truly believe that not only are divisions and dissention and backbiting among us keeping back the shower of the early and latter rain, but so also is this light spirit of trifling and jesting.

“Oh, you are making a big deal out of nothing” some might say. I reply as did David: 1 Samuel 17:29 . . . “Is there not a cause?”

“Those who indulge in chaffing, mirth, levity, and vanity of spirit, which arise from a superficial, cheap experience, have no real, solid foundation for hope and joy in the love of God and belief of the truth. The giddy, the heedless, the gay, the jovial spirit is not the joy which Paul is anxious that Christ’s followers shall have. This class spend their time in frivolity and excessive levity. Time is passing, the end is near; yet they have not laid up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come that they may lay hold on everlasting life. We need not encourage that mirth which dissipates reflection, leaves no

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time for consideration, and establishes habits of lightness and cheap talk which grieve the Holy Spirit of God and unfit us for the contemplation of heaven and heavenly things. This is the class that will have cause to mourn and lament because they are not prepared for the elevated joys of heaven. They are banished from the presence of God." HP 245.3

I have to say that I carried away many spiritual blessings from that holy convocation—but also some sadness as well. Please give prayerful consideration to the quotes that follow as I believe they show a true and balanced picture of what we need to be if we are to receive the greater manifestations of the Holy Spirit upon this movement.

Brothers and Sisters, I know by what the Lord has revealed to us in His inspired counsel that unless we rid ourselves of this spirit of levity and trivialness, joking and ribaldry, that we will be found in the ranks of those who march with the careless and happy throng who will join in the festivities and pomp of a world wondering after the Beast and receiving his mark.

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"The holy deportment of the minister of Christ should be a rebuke to vain, frothy professors. The love of truth and holiness manifested in your serious, heavenly conversation, will convict others, and lead them to the truth, and those around you will be compelled to say, "God is with this man, of a truth."—Vol. I, p. 434. GW92 251.1

"Make no backward movements. The Lord is our helper, our guide, our shield, our exceeding great reward. Do not allow levity to come into your experience, but cultivate cheerfulness; for this is an excellent grace. We cannot afford to be unmindful of our words and deportment." MM 213.4

"You may never know in this world the mischief you have done to some soul by your little acts of frivolity, your cheap talk, your levity, which was wholly inconsistent with your holy faith." MYP 201.1

"There is great danger in indifference upon this subject; no folly is so subtle as thoughtlessness and levity. On every hand we see youth of a frivolous character. All young people of this class should be avoided; for they are dangerous." MYP 267

"Humility should take the place of pride; sobriety, of levity; and devotion, of irreligion and careless indifference." 4T 582 (1881).

"Our Saviour was deeply serious and intensely in earnest, but never gloomy or morose. The life of those who imitate Him will be full of earnest purpose; they will have a deep sense of personal responsibility. Levity will be repressed; there will be no boisterous merriment, no rude jesting; but the religion of Jesus gives peace like a river. It does not quench the light of joy; it does not restrain cheerfulness nor cloud the sunny, smiling face." SC 120

"If the association with Christian friends is chiefly devoted to the improvement of the mind and heart, there will be no after regrets, and they can look back on the interview with a pleasant satisfaction. But if the hours are spent in levity and vain talking, and the precious time is employed in dissecting the lives and character of others, the friendly intercourse will prove a source of evil, and your influence will be a savor of death unto death. I cannot distinctly call to mind all the persons in your church who were shown me; but I saw that many had a great work to perform. There is too much talking by nearly all, and too little meditation and prayer." 2T 186.1

"It is the favorite occupation of some of this class to engage in trifling conversation and levity. This habit they contracted, and indulged upon occasions which should have been characterized by solemn meditation and devotion. In doing this, they manifested a lack of true dignity and refinement, and forfeited the esteem of sensible persons who had no knowledge of the truth." 2T 554.1

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“Is your conversation free from levity, pride and malice, deceit and impurity? Are you without guile before God? Words exert a telling power. Satan will, if possible, keep the tongue active in his service. Of ourselves we cannot control the unruly member. Divine grace is our only hope.” 5T 175.1

“The example which Christ has given to the world forbids all levity and cheapness, and if the life is made fragrant by the grace of God, these elements will not appear. A genuine cheerfulness, an uplifting influence, will flow forth from all who love God and keep His commandments.” TMK 138

“All lightness and trifling is positively forbidden in the Word of God. His conversation should be in heaven, his words seasoned with grace.” 2T 338.