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Conducted by  
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*“Does God have a Sense of Humour?”*

I must admit that this question, received recently, is one, which I have never previously encountered. Indeed, it is one that has never occurred to me to ask!

But it has obviously occurred to someone, and it is a question, which might well arouse our curiosity.

**Does God, have a sense of humour?**

The short and simple answer must be that, since the Scriptures do not provide us with the answer we can only speculate, and anything that I may write will only be conjecture - which may, or may not, be helpful, but which will not be harmful!

The word in the question, that creates our difficulty, is the word 'humour,' because it does not occur in the entire Bible.

**Humour and Laughter**

We are aware, of course, that humour is invariably associated with laughter, and

here we *do* have something on which we may take hold, since in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament there are words which relate to laughter.

To be specific, there are three Hebrew words which have been rendered 'laugh' and which express emotions ranging from delight and joy, through admiration and pleasure, down to scorn and contempt. One of them - '*laag*' - may even be used to stand for '*jest*' whilst in the New Testament, there is even a word - '*entrapelia*' - which is translated '*Jesting*.'

However it has to be noticed that neither of these two words is used in a *good* sense.

The Old Testament word '*laag*' is used of the act of making mockery of sacred things; that is, of joking about matters which ought to be treated with reverence.

The New Testament word, found in Eph. 5:4, is actually translated 'jesting' in the AV., and 'levity' in the RSV and other later versions.

Therefore, if the questioner had asked, "*Does God Laugh?*" we should have been on safer ground, and could have answered, "*Yes! The Bible tells us that God laughs.*"

### *The Laughter of God*

But, what are we to make of the 'laughter' of God? We find mention of it in the familiar 2nd Psalm verse 4, where God 'laughs' at the foolish rulers of the world who plot against Him. This is even more explicitly expressed in Psalm 37:13, where we read, "*YHVH laughs at the wicked (man) for He sees that his day is coming.*"

These and other passages, such as Psalm 59:8, make it plain that what is indicated here is scornful laughter. God is not amused, and none of the references to His laughter, has anything to do with humour.

### *Anthropomorphic Language*

Whilst we recognise this fact, we must also understand that, when God is described as 'laughing', the inspired writers are using anthropomorphic language; that is to say, they are describing God's response in human terms.

Anthropomorphism is a literary device that is frequently used in the Scriptures, simply because we have no other way of conveying how God feels about *anything*, other than by using words that express emotions which we, as human beings, experience ourselves.

### *Does God Repent?*

I think one of the clearest examples of what I mean, is found in Gen. 6:6, where we read that there came a time when, because of mankind's utter depravity, God was '*sorry that He had made man.*' The older, traditional, version even says that it '*repented*' God that He had made man, and that word 'repented' is one used of God repeatedly in the Old Testament.

Now clearly, there can be no question of God *changing His mind* about the creation of Man. Yet, when the emotion of regret or sorrow or repentance is used in connection with a *human* act, it invariably implies that there has been a change of mind, brought about by a change of circumstances, which had not been anticipated.

Obviously, then, since God is 'all-knowing' Gen. 6:6 cannot possibly mean that, because He failed to anticipate the subsequent wickedness of Man whom He had created, God 'changed His mind.' What it means is, that the historian is seeking to convey God's reaction to Man's wickedness in such terms as would be used, if He were Himself a Man.

And indeed, this is the only way in which we human beings are able to understand God's actions. We necessarily think in human terms. When we express a thought, we are restricted to the limitations of human language.

But we must always remember that God is not a man, as He Himself makes

abundantly plain in **1 Sam. 15:29**. After stating in the 11th verse of that chapter, "*repent that I have made Saul king*" God declares, in the 29th verse, that He is "*not a man that He should repent*." This truth is further explained by His statement, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways*," found in **Isa. 55:8**.

### Our Problem

The trouble is, that although we profess to *know* this, we are *still* inclined to think about God as though He were some sort of 'Man' - though, of course, perfect and glorified!

And it is this that creates all kinds of problems for us.

*Because* God is not a man, He never needs to change His mind. He is not subject to 'after-thoughts', and even when we read of His anger, it is anger, which we can never fully comprehend.

Therefore, when we speak of Him expressing scorn, or regret, or anger or sorrow or even laughter; and whilst we do our best, within the narrow limits of human thought and language to describe His 'feelings' the truth is that the 'feelings' of Deity are quite beyond our understanding.

### So, does God have a Sense of Humour?

Perhaps the statement made by **Goethe**, the great German poet, gives us something to think about. He said, "*Men show their character in nothing more clearly than by what they think laughable*."

If, in this discussion, we are thinking of that human characteristic which, sadly, often produces laughter by poking cruel fun at the mental or physical inadequacies of others; or which causes amusement by making the colour or race or language - or even the religion - of another person the butt of demeaning ridicule, we may be absolutely sure that the answer to the question is, "Emphatically not! God has no such sense of humour."

The teller of unkind 'humorous' tales may acquire a reputation as a one who '*has a great sense of humour*', and may be considered '*very funny*' but such a characteristic can never be said to be '*Godlike*.'

### The Ability to Laugh - a Gift from God

Men far wiser than I have regarded laughter as a gift from God, but have, at the same time, made it plain that it is a gift which must be *used* and not *abused*.

**Sheridan** wrote *Wit loses its respect with the good (people) when seen in company with malice; and to smile at the jest which places a thorn in another's breast, is to become a principal in the mischief*."

Even **Martin Luther** expressed a view of laughter that differs radically from that still held by certain religious people today, whose Calvinist theology apparently causes them to see life as 'all doom and gloom.'

He said, "*The Gospel of the grace of God is nothing else but laughter and joy*."

There is no doubt; also, that people about whom we read in the Bible believed that the ability to laugh comes from God. For instance, when Isaac was born, Sarah said, "*God has prepared laughter for me, and everyone who hears will laugh with me*" **Gen. 21:6**.

Notice that she said 'with' me; not 'at' me. She was sure that others would share her joy - and laugh with her.

Whilst we cannot - dare not - presume to say that God Himself has a sense of humour, I think we might concede that the burdens and problems of life can be made a little easier to bear, when one has the ability to '*see the funny side*' as it is so often expressed.

This would be, in effect, putting a sense of humour to a legitimate use.

**The Final and Authoritative word**

Of this we may be certain; the Lord Jesus was not opposed to laughter, as an expression of joy, thankfulness and praise. He once said, in words that are often overlooked, "*Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh*" Luke 6:21.

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