

SARCASM USED AS AN OFFENSIVE SPIRITUAL WEAPON

Sanctified sarcasm is cutting, painful, insulting, and offensive but its intent is loving, truthful, instructive, and corrective. It may be exaggerated, humorous, facetious, crude, disrespectful, mocking, irritating, angry, or reproachful. In contrast, ungodly sarcasm is unloving, mean, vindictive, and often not true. A sarcasm's true intent is clear from the context, intonation (lowered pitch), stress (louder), elongation ("Excuuuse me!"), words of excitement spoken apathetically ("Wow" "Yay"), or a sing-song melody ("Sor-eeeee!"). Context, however, is the only indicator of sarcasm in the Written Word. Sarcasm is an offensive spiritual weapon because it can be used against unbelievers and carnal believers to overcome and hopefully replace their ungodly attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. It is "divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor 10:4); but its use may be successful (Job 38:4-5) or unsuccessful (1 Kgs 22:15-28; Jn 9:27-34). Quick thinking is needed to use sarcasm in the heat of battle.

- *sarcasm*: is "the use of words that mean the opposite of what you really want to say, especially in order to insult someone, to show irritation, or to be funny" (Merriam-Webster). "In sarcasm, ridicule or mockery is used harshly, often crudely and contemptuously, for destructive purposes. . . . 'What a fine musician you turned out to be!'" (dictionary.com). Or "I like dogs too. Let's exchange recipes." It may be used "to highlight the obviousness, stupidity, or annoyance-factor of a situation" (Sarcasm Society). "If I throw a stick, will you leave?" Sarcasm comes from the Greek verb *sarkazo* "to tear flesh like dogs" (LSJ) and is used of the bitter Megarians "tugging away like a pack of curs with grinning chops savagely bared in their ravenous hunger" (Aristophanes, *Peace* 482). Sarcasm is irony with a bite: it tries to wound with biting, tearing, hurtful remarks. Beware: some offensive spiritual weapons such as a warning, rebuke, and sarcasm may be used *against the godly* to protest or to fight against God's will: "Then they said to Moses, **'Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?'**" (Ex 14:11)
- *godly and ungodly use of sarcasm*: since sarcasm is used by both Jesus and by God in speaking to men, it cannot be inherently sinful. It can be a sinful comment lacking the fruit of the Spirit (*viz.* love, gentleness, and kindness) or a godly spiritual weapon. As with rebuke and judging, intent determines if sarcasm is right (instructive or deterring) or wrong (mean or vindictive). Sanctified sarcasm *is* compatible with such verses as "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up. . . that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:9 ESV) and "treat others the same way you want them to treat you" (Lk 6:31). Godly sarcasm does not intend to deceive.
- used *humorously* by the angel of the LORD *to overcome the fearfulness and reticence* of Gideon: "The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, **O mighty warrior**'" (Judg 6:12 RCL). **"Go in this your strength** and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" (6:14). Gideon was threshing wheat in a low-lying wine-press, that is, in the upper stone "*trough* in which the grapes were trodden with the feet, whence the juice flowed into a vat" (Gesenius), to avoid detection instead of on a windy hill. "The Angel in His greeting. . . addressed Gideon as the man he would become by God's enablement, not the man he was then. In the same way, God had called Abraham the father of a multitude before he had any children. He called Peter a rock before he behaved as one. He also calls Christians saints even though we are not yet as saintly as God will make us" (Constable).
- used *reproachfully* by God *to defend himself against Job's arrogance and accusations of being unjust*: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, Who set its measurements? **Since you know** (Job 38:4-5). **'You know, for you were born then, And the number of your days is great!'**" (38:21). "God's role in His speeches was not that of a defendant on trial, whom Job the prosecutor charged with injustice. Rather, He was the Prosecutor asking the questions of Job, the defendant. He asked him more than 70 unanswerable questions and proved him both ignorant and impotent. Wiersbe found 77 questions that God asked Job in chapters 38-41. Since Job could not understand or determine God's ways with nature, he obviously could not comprehend or control God's dealings with people" (Constable). With questions and sarcasm God overcame Job's pride (Job 42:6).
- used by an *angry God to overcome complaining and replace it with appreciation and contentment*: "Say to the people, 'Sanctify yourselves. . . and you will eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, 'Who will give us meat to eat, for life was good for us in Egypt?' Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat. **You will eat, not just one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out your nostrils and makes you sick [perhaps vomiting from overeating], because you have despised the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, 'Why did we ever come out of Egypt?'**" (Num 11:18-20 NET).
- used by an *exasperated God to overcome the unfaithfulness of the sons of Israel* who have confessed and repented of their *idolatry* for the ninth time: "The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed. Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, 'We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.' The LORD said to the sons of Israel, **'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.'** The sons of Israel said to the LORD, 'We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day.' So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer" (Judg 10:9-16). "The Lord reminded them. . . that their behavior had fallen into a pattern of apostasy, oppression, confession, and deliverance (vv. 11-12)" (Constable). God honors their confession and forgives their sin but refuses at first to show compassion and remove their discipline because of their repeated failures to forsake idolatry: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion (Prov 28:13).
- used *mockingly* by Elijah *to overcome false prophets, false gods, and false religion*: "At noon Elijah mocked them, **'Yell louder! After all, he is a god; he may be deep in thought, or perhaps he stepped out for a moment or has taken a trip. Perhaps he is sleeping and needs to be awakened!'**" (1 Kings 18:27 NET). Jeremiah uses sarcasm to overcome the idolatrous kings, princes, priests, and prophets of Israel, **"Who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' And to a stone, 'You gave me birth'"** (Jer 2:27). Amos calls the elite women of Samaria **"you cows of Bashan"** to insult and stop them from oppressing the poor in order to support their extravagant lifestyles (4:1).
- used *facetiously* by the prophet Micaiah *to point out and hopefully overcome King Ahab's apostasy*: "The king said to him, 'Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?' And he answered him, **'Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king'**" (1 Kings 22:15 ESV). Micaiah mocked Ahab's negative volition by telling him what he was instructed to say (22:13) and what the king wanted to hear (22:8). His answer was so obviously fake that the king immediately sensed his sarcastic humor and disrespect, *i.e.*, "Go kill yourself!" (22:16). "I can almost hear Micaiah, mimicking the false prophets and going into a sing-songy voice" (Nathan DeWitt).
- used by the men of Jabesh *as a ruse of war against Nahash the Amorite*: "Then the men of Jabesh said, 'Tomorrow we will come out to you, **and you may do to us whatever seems good to you**'" (1 Sam 11:10; cf. 11:1-11).
- used by Joash *as a belittling insult against Amaziah to overcome his pride and hopefully to prevent war*: "Joash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, **'The thorn bush which was in Lebanon sent to the cedar which was in Lebanon,** saying, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' **But there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon and trampled the thorn bush.**" You said, 'Behold, you have defeated Edom.' And your heart has become proud in boasting. Now stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you, even you, would fall and Judah with you?" But Amaziah would not listen, for it was from God, that He might deliver them into the hand of *Joash* because they had sought the gods of Edom" (2 Chr 25:18-20). The sarcasm here is a put-down in the form of a parable: the lowly thorn bush is Amaziah, the majestic cedar is Joash, and the wild beast is Israel's superior army.
- used *as an insult* by Jesus *against rejectors of God's Word*: "Do not give what is holy **to dogs**, and do not throw your pearls **before swine**, or **they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces**" (Mt 7:6).
- used by Jesus *against religious leaders to try to overcome their hypocrisy*: "You blind guides, which **strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!**" (Mt 23:24).
- used by an annoyed blind man *to overcome and silence unbelieving critics*: "I have told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? **Do you want to become his disciples, too?'**" (Jn 9:27)
- used as a *warning* by God *to overcome the desires of the mind and of the eyes*: "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. **And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes.** Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (Eccl 11:9). The sarcasm is "If you want to be judged by God, do whatever you want." Cf. Eph 2:3; 1 Jn 2:16.
- used by the apostle Paul *to overcome carnality and carnal Christians*: **"You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.** For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, **but you are prudent in Christ;** we are weak, but **you are strong; you are distinguished,** but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now" (1 Cor 4:8-13). The intent of this sarcasm is to love, reprove, overcome, instruct, and correct the carnal members of the church at Corinth by making them look foolish in front of everyone.
- used by the apostle Paul *to overcome legalism and legalists*: After saying circumcision is not necessary for Christians, he fires a crude, humorous, sarcastic remark at the Judaizers who insist on circumcision for salvation: "As for those agitators, **I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!**" (Gal 5:12). "In other words, don't stop at the foreskin; get rid of it completely to prove how holy you *really* are. Genius" (StackExchange).
- used by Paul against the church in Corinth *to point out and overcome their stupidity*: **"For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.** For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. **To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison"** (2 Cor 11:19-21). The shameful behavior of these false teachers is the exact opposite of Paul's.