

Modern Idols: Apathy Towards Christ

I John 5:21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

Hosea says the same thing but in a different way in Hosea 14:8, “...What have I to do any more with idols?”

It was John Calvin who said, “How idols boil up from within us.”

Idols are not merely stones and statues made of silver and gold that are bowed down to in worship but are inordinate desires in the heart that replace God, and as we saw last Sunday evening, choosing the wrong kinds of friends can be an idol in our life.

The idol of wrong friendship is not something new and particularly unique to our age. It has always been an idol that reigns in the hearts of men and women ever since the fall of man.

The Bible exhorts and admonishes us to choose our friends wisely and prayerfully. If we are not careful, we can choose the wrong kind of friends, and this can have disastrous results in our lives.

We considered three important questions that we should ask ourselves when choosing our friends: Are my friends committed to Christ? Are my friends consecrated to holiness? Are my friends concerned about eternity?

Tonight I would like to consider another modern idol and that is apathy towards Christ. Again, this is not a new idol but an old one that has plagued the hearts of many people down through the ages.

Matthew 24:12, “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

We expect the unsaved to be apathetic to the gospel. Parents are apathetic about their children. Spouses are apathetic about their marriages. Men and women are apathetic about their souls. But what about the church? Do we care about the gospel? Do we care about souls?

There are some sins which are committed so blatantly that one can have no question in his mind regarding whether or not he is guilty of sinning before God.

Fornication, adultery, theft, murder, and a number of other sins are of such a nature that one can, at any given moment in time, definitely state whether or not he has been guilty of doing these things.

Other sins pertain to general dispositions in one's heart. They are the kinds of sins which gradually pull one away from God. Although each of us would readily admit that these are sins, we are not able to spot them in our lives quite so easily as the ones mentioned above.

For example, covetousness, conceit, arrogance are sins, as all of us would admit, that flare up in our hearts. Sins which affect us so subtly as these sins are those which we must be extremely careful to avoid.

Apathy certainly falls into the second of these categories. It smites the heart first of all and later manifests itself in outward acts. The subtlety of apathy lies in the gradual manner in which it hits a man.

A man does not wake up one morning apathetic toward Christ; rather, he drifts away from Him gradually.

Consequently, as we study the sin of apathy, our attitude should be that of the eleven apostles when Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him; they asked, "Lord, is it I?" (Matt. 26:22).

How do I know whether or not I am becoming apathetic toward Christ? How does apathy manifest itself to us? Let us see how apathy afflicts the Christian.

I would like to consider two examples of apathy in the Bible and two manifestations of apathy in our lives.

A. Examples of apathy in the Bible

Perhaps the best example of apathy I could find in the Old Testament was the prophet Jonah when he was on board the ship heading to Tarshish.

The dictionary defines apathy as the absence or suppression of passion, emotion or excitement, lack of interest in or concern for things that others find moving or exciting. The word began to be used in English in the 1600's, coming from a Greek root which means insensibility to suffering, unfeeling.

On the boat everyone but Jonah was concerned about the storm, everyone but Jonah was in a state of high emotion and everyone but Jonah was taking action.

1. Apathy in Jonah

Read Jonah 1:5

Jonah's apathy towards the storm, even as it was about to destroy the boat was not coincidental.

It was part of his refusal to acknowledge his calling and responsibility.

It showed how little he cared about others. When Jonah is confronted by the sailors, he admits that he knows that he has the ability to stop the storm and save the ship. His apathy was imprudent and self-destructive.

It results in his being tossed into a life threatening situation, that is, in the next chapter, swallowed by a great Leviathan.

Jonah's apathy was destructive to himself, as well as causing harm to others. For us too it is a result of our ignoring or avoiding our calling.

If you were walking down a quiet residential street, and you saw a woman, who was pushing a stroller, collapse and fall to the ground, you would go over and help her up and make sure things were ok.

But if that woman walking on a busy downtown street, with lots of other people going by, you would be much less likely to help, feeling that with so many other people around, someone else would do so.

Perhaps that's how we are today. We recognize that the woman needs help, we even think that helping her is a good thing to do, but we are content with the idea that someone else will do it.

That image brought to mind the other apathetic people in the Bible, individuals who go unnamed but whose story is well documented. These are the individuals to whom the great prophets were preaching.

Surely it was against their apathy that the prophets were forced to preach. The prophets saw clearly the dangers that were ahead. They understood the consequences of the injustices within their society. Yet, however much they preached, the people were unable to hear? unable to comprehend? unable to act?

I try to imagine them. Did they really not see the problems that were all around them? Could they really not comprehend the stirring and passionate words of the prophets?

OR is it more likely that they saw and they understood, but they continued to go about their everyday lives, cocooned in their comfortable lives, quite as much as Jonah was cocooned in the bowels of the ship.

Our responsibility to act stems from our understanding of ourselves in Jesus Christ.

Our responsibility is a godly duty to sinners who are lost in sinful darkness.

Noah preached 100 years the gospel to a people who were apathetic and dull of hearing. There was not one person who responded to the message of Noah and fled into the Ark. How sad and tragic!!

God ordinarily uses His people as the means to reach sinners with the gospel. Sometimes the Lord may choose to use other means.

The Lord used an unregenerate Roman Catholic priest to show me my need of Christ. He read from John 3, “you must be born again.”

Those were the words the Holy Spirit used to draw me to the Lord. There were other people that the Lord used in my life as well.

Jonah is a model of apathy but Christ is a model of faithfulness.

2. Apathy in Laodicea

Read Revelation 3:14-22

Of all the churches in Revelation, perhaps the church in Laodicea is the most maligned and perhaps rightly so. They have the distinction of being labeled the "lukewarm" church.

Those who view the 7 churches of Revelation as a panoramic view of the church ages see Laodicea as representing the end-times church which is neither hot nor cold, but slumbering in their materialistic spiritual stupor.

While this view certainly seems to have some validity, I think it's more beneficial to realize that this again was a real church facing real problems and that every person in every era of the church age can glean something from it. With that in mind, let's look at the lukewarm church and learn from her mistakes.

Rev 3:15, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."

Much is made of the fact that there were hot springs in the area. Perhaps this is indeed a reference to the hot springs in Laodicea, but regardless of that, we can still infer a spiritual truth. Those that are lukewarm or "middle of the road" are less likely to be effective in service for the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ told us that "salt is good" but if the salt loses it's savor, it is good for nothing!

Rev 3:16, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Jonah was apathetic, cast into the sea, and swallowed up by a great fish. The Laodicean's were lukewarm, and in danger of being vomited out from the mouth of the Lord.

Strikingly similar language that describes how the Lord views apathy. He hates it!

A lukewarm spiritual condition is an abomination to a holy God. How can we be so apathetic when Christ hath done such great things for us?

How shall we escape if we "neglect so great a salvation" that Jesus has provided for us?

Those who choose to be indifferent to the commands of Christ and yet remain "on the church pew" do so at their own peril.

We see that perhaps the greatest danger lies in a "mediocre" type of faith. Sadly this is the predominate condition in the days in which we are living.

We find that many people professes to be a "Christian."

Most people base this profession not on the fact that they have actually repented of their sins and been born-again, but rather because of such faulty logic as "I'm a member of such-and-such church", or "I was raised in a Christian home", or "I was baptized as a child."

It is very difficult to draw a sharp distinction between the church and the world today. Much of what passes for Christianity, is nothing more than positive thinking. The fate of the lukewarm is indeed a dreadful one- being vomited out of the mouth of God.

We read in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

This is perhaps one of the most beautiful pictures of scripture. Many have made special emphasis to the fact that Jesus is on the outside trying to get in, but on a positive note-I think it's very touching and loving that He even attempts to reach the hearts of sinful men.

We love Him because He first loved us- while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us Hallelujah!

In the gospels we read about the Father who made a marriage for His Son and invited many-and yet many made excuses as to why they couldn't come. They were apathetic to Christ.

B. Manifestations of Apathy

1. *Consumed with secular interests.* As the heart turns from love and commitment to Jesus Christ, it begins to become more and more consumed with secular interests. Though I recognize that a Christian cannot live in this world without some interest in secular matters, even these must be tempered. The things of this world have a tendency to entangle us (2 Tim. 2:4) and choke out the word of God (Lk. 8:14).

In contrast to being entangled in the affairs of this life, the Christian is to look upon his period of time on this earth as a "pilgrimage" or "sojourning" (1 Pet.. 2:11). His true citizenship is in heaven, his time spent on this earth is spent as a foreigner passing through a country which is not his own.

He is searching for his true home in heaven. The writer of Hebrews (chapter 11:9-10, 13-16) described this attitude with reference to Abraham as follows:

9By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

13These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

This was the attitude which early Christians had and all Christians are expected to have with reference to their lives on this earth beneath. Yet, the Christian smitten with apathy loses this attitude. He is consumed with the interests of this world. Little time is left for the worship and service of God!

How is it with your soul tonight?

2. Hardness of heart. The result of this spirit toward the Lord is hardness of heart. The basic meaning of the word "apathy" is "without emotion." Soon the message of Jesus Christ leaves such a person without emotion. He can sit through a sermon on the death of Christ, anxiously watching his watch to see when the preacher is going to be through.

Example of David when he was in a backslidden state. Committed adultery with Bathsheba, and had her husband, Uriah, murdered. During that period of time David was still attending the House of the Lord in worship.

Undoubtedly, he heard the law of God read. He heard the sixth commandment, "Thou shall not kill." He heard the seventh commandment, "Thou shall not commit adultery."

But it wasn't until the prophet Nathan confronted David and said to him, "Thou art the man," that David was convicted of his sins.

As the message ceases to penetrate the recesses of the heart, the heart becomes grossed, the ears become dull, and the eyes are closed (Matt. 13:15). Excuses are made for not praying, not reading the Bible, and not attending worship.

In closing, apathy is an idol that must be put away. Are you afflicted with apathy? Perhaps a more realistic question would be, "How seriously are you afflicted with apathy?" Turn again to Christ. Look upon Him.

Rest in the Son of God. Christ says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Revelation 3:20). Let us pray.