

RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE

Introduction

1. The word “indifference” is defined as, “Having no concern or feeling, no interest; showing no preference” (Webster). The more people to whom you talk and the more television you watch, the more you come to realize that this is true; especially toward religion. Many today have no concern, interest, or preference for the true religion of Christ.
2. Indifference is one of Satan's most effective tools, and some would argue that it accomplishes more than direct opposition to Christianity.
3. So why are people indifferent? Let's look at some reasons.



I. MATERIALISM

A. What is materialism?

1. Materialism refers to the theory that physical matter is all that exists. It is far more than a focus on material possessions; it states that everything in the universe consists of matter, without any true spiritual or intellectual existence.
2. Materialism can also refer to a doctrine that material success and progress are the highest values in life. This doctrine appears to be prevalent in western society today. Many are preoccupied with the material world, as opposed to intellectual or spiritual concepts. Jesus’ parable of the rich fool is an example of one that was preoccupied with the material world (**Luke 12:13-21**). Indeed, the prevalent attitude is, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” (cp. **Ecclesiastes 8:15**; **Luke 12:19**).
3. There are five questions this attitude should cause us to ask: (i) Are material things really more important than anything else? (ii) Is material success the highest goal? (iii) If “things” are all there is, then why am I here and what is life all about? (iv) If life is really just about materialism, why should I even try to live a moral life as long as I get what I want? (v) Why does what I believe about the origin of life matter?

You will either find that materialism is a distraction from the pursuit of spirituality or that spirituality is a distraction from the pursuit of materialism. There are some that try to pursue both, but such people find it is impossible and that, actually, the pursuit of materialism chokes out the word of God (Mark 4:18-19).

A Materialistic World View Encourages Selfishness And Immorality

B. Those pursuing materialism have little time, if any, for religion.

1. To be materialistic is to be worldly minded.

“For to be worldly minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the worldly mind is enmity against God [James 4:4]; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (**Romans 8:6-8**).

2. A worldly minded person has set his mind on the things of the flesh, and it is this that has resulted in spiritual death. There is no way that such a person can please God (**Romans 8:5-8**). The only way to please God is to repent of one’s materialistic world view and set the mind on the things of the Spirit (**Romans 8:6**).
3. Some claiming to be Christians will attempt to serve two masters (**Matthew 6:24**): they attend services, worship God, participate in the work of the church, but only as far as it doesn’t demand too much sacrifice and inconvenience or interfere with their worldly pursuits¹.

Indifference is the paralysis of the soul; a premature death.

¹ It is unclear to me why they keep up the charade.

C. Can a person serve two masters?

1. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).
2. Despite Jesus’ clear teaching, there are always some that think they can! These are double-minded people living two lives: they are one person when among brethren (appearing to be very spiritual), and another person outside of services; they quietly pursue a life of ease and avoid stepping outside of their comfort zone (e.g., sharing the gospel with their neighbors). Such people are often deluded... believing themselves to be spiritual.
3. Down the materialistic road:
 - a. Solomon went down the road of materialism, and he concluded in the end that it was all empty, vain, and striving after the wind (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11). Until people begin looking at life in the proper perspective, they will not be concerned about religion. Solomon, after carefully examining all earthly pursuits, came to this grand conclusion: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).
 - b. A rich man experienced a great increase in his crops and so he built bigger barns to accommodate his increase. He then said, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:16-21). In his pursuit of materialism he had no time for religion.
 - c. Many today walk the same materialistic road; ignoring Jesus’ warning: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:24-25).

The more materialistic one becomes, the more one’s indifference toward spiritual things increases (Mark 4:18-19). If you are indifferent, then you are discouraging your brethren, and you are a bad example to unbelievers.

II. HYPOCRISY

A. The hypocrisy of those who claim to be Christians causes much indifference in the world today.

1. God told David, through the prophet Nathan, that his sin (adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah) had “given great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme” (2 Samuel 12:14). It’s not difficult to imagine their indifference towards religion or the indifference of people today when they witness the hypocrisy of Christians.
2. I don’t know about you, but people have told me that they are put off Christianity because Christians are hypocrites.

The way unbelievers see it: Christians preach oneness and unity, but they practice division. To preach one thing and practice the opposite is the very definition of hypocrisy.

B. The divisions among those who claim to be followers of Christ causes indifference.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21).

1. Non-Christians and those who claim to be Christians (i.e., those in denominations) are ignorant of the distinction between the Lord’s church and denominationalism.
2. So when they see the sorry state of what they perceive to be Christianity with all its divisions, they, especially non-Christians, are bound to be somewhat indifferent toward Christianity. After all, Jesus prayed for the oneness of believers “that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21).
3. Yet even in the Lord’s church there are divisions, and this can birth indifference among Christians.

C. The unfaithfulness of members of the church causes indifference.

1. It is just a fact that within the Lord's church there are some claiming to be Christians who are unconverted, immoral, and, basically, unfaithful. Such peoples' carnal mindedness and indifference is discouraging and can also cause other members to imitate such indifference (**Galatians 5:9**). Perhaps Diotrephes comes close as an example (**3 John 1:9-10**).
2. Many worldly people are indifferent toward Christianity, and if they see Christians that are indifferent, they feel justified in their own indifference.
3. The fact is that we influence others either for good or ill; there is no neutral ground; we either gather or scatter (**Matthew 12:30**). Christians are to be the salt and light of the world (**Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:11-12**).

"You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, Do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For 'The name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you, as it is written'" (Romans 2:21-24).

A Christian that proclaims unity and doesn't strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit is walking in hypocrisy, and one that claims to be faithful and practices lawlessness is a hypocrite. The more hypocritical we become, the more indifferent we become. Such things are not only discouraging to our brethren, they give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

III. PREVALENCE OF LAWLESSNESS

A. Jesus said, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (**Matthew 24:12**).

1. This was stated in the context of the tribulations Christians would face before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Nevertheless, Jesus' statement is true in any age where Christians face trials and tribulations. The idea is that because of persecutions, trials, and tribulations many would become indifferent toward the faith. Clark comments: "By reason of these trials and persecutions from without, and those apostasies and false prophets from within, the love of many to Christ and his doctrine, and to one another, shall grow cold; some openly deserting the faith (**Matthew 24:10**); others corrupting it (**Matthew 24:11**); and others growing indifferent about it (**Matthew 24:12**)."
2. In Hebrews we read of those Jewish Christians that were suffering persecution for their faith in Jesus, and they were tempted to return to their former faith to avoid it. The Hebrew writer sternly warns them against such apostasy and the severe consequences (**Hebrews 10:19-39**). The seeds of indifference that were present in those Christians was being watered by their lawless persecutors.

B. We are living in a sin-sick society.

1. In today's society things like murder, abortion, alcoholism, sexual perversions, and divorce are on the increase. We shouldn't be too shocked because Paul warned: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (**2 Timothy 3:1-5**).
2. If we focus on the bad things in our society, it can easily cause indifference to grow in our minds. Instead, we ought to focus on good things and things above (**Colossians 3:2**) to maintain our zeal for the Lord.

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (**Philippians 4:8**).

Many Christians dwell on the prevalence of lawlessness in society and become bewildered and discouraged, and their love for the Lord begins to grow cold; and they become indifferent toward the truth. This often spreads throughout the church – a little leaven! If Christians are indifferent, you can hardly expect anything different from unbelievers.

Summary

1. Sadly, not everyone that obeys the gospel remains faithful, and not every Christian that attends services is sincere. This is often due to indifference.
2. When a person grows indifferent toward the Lord and His doctrine, they not only bring themselves to ruin, they negatively influence the minds of unbelievers. We will be judged for our own failings, but, let's not forget, we will also have to answer for the influence we have on others.
3. There are many things that give rise to indifference and we have considered three things:
 - a. **Materialism.** Many make the mistake of thinking that material success and progress are the highest values in life and are completely indifferent towards religion. Many Christians, too, are materialistic and find themselves trying to serve two masters. Thinking they are successful in doing so is irrelevant because Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (**Matthew 6:24**). One that is materialistic will be indifferent towards religion to some degree.
 - b. **Hypocrisy.** A hypocrite is one that claims to be a disciple of Christ and living in accordance with His doctrine, but, in fact, is not walking in His teachings. Things like divisions in the church and the unfaithful of members are often symptoms of indifference. The indifference of a few can affect other members and it certainly influences the minds of unbelievers.
 - c. **Prevalence of lawlessness.** The prevalence of lawless causes the love of many to grow cold; believers grow indifferent toward religion and become lukewarm or may even fall away.
4. **Overcoming Indifference.**
 - a. **Develop a love for God.** Love is a tie that binds two people together. When there is love, there is no indifference or lack of concern. Where there is love, there is vibrant activity.
 - b. **Develop a respect for God.** Solomon says, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life; to depart from the snares of death" (**Proverbs 14:27**). Indifference is one of the snares of death. When we develop a fear of the Lord, it will assist us in departing from such a snare.
 - c. **Increase in your knowledge of God's word.** God's word is powerful (**Hebrews 4:12**); it revives (**Psalms 119:107**); it gives light and understanding to the simple (**Psalms 119:130**); and it effectually works in those that believe (**1 Thessalonians 2:13**). The more we give ourselves to studying, the more our faith strengthens (**Romans 10:17**), and it will keep indifference at bay.
 - d. **Commit yourself to the cause of Christ.** A person that is committed to the cause of Christ, fighting the good fight, leaves no room for indifference.
 - e. **Pray without ceasing.** Paul wrote, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (**Philippians 4:6**). Pray for the forgiveness of your indifference; pray for the removal of the things that are causing your indifference, and pray for help and strength when the seeds of indifference enter your mind.

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Casual Christianity

Brandon Baggett

A growing trend among elders, preachers, and members of the church of Christ is to turn Christianity and worship into things that are casual in nature. On church websites and in church bulletins, various statements have been made advertising “casual worship services” in “casual atmospheres.” These sentiments are expressed to make it known that these worship assemblies are “no judgment zones.” They are mentioned so that people know that they can come worship God “as they are” and “dressed as they are.” In a similar manner, statements have been made by Gospel preachers that they try to dress and act “casual” when they teach and preach. This writer has even heard one preacher say that he tries to be “real casual” in his preaching. Is this really what God wants? Were the apostles “casual preachers?” Were the early disciples casual in their worship to God Almighty? Are we justified in trying to practice casual Christianity?

The Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines the word “casual” as relating to something “occurring without regularity; feeling or showing little concern; something done without serious intent or commitment.” With this definition, various synonyms could be offered to express what it means to be casual or to do something casually. Nonchalant, indifferent, apathetic, mediocre, and haphazard are all synonyms that relate in some way to the casual concept. Is this really what we want to offer to God? Do we want to come into the presence of Jehovah in a nonchalant way? Do we want to live an indifferent, haphazard, unconcerned, apathetic life? Do we want to haphazardly preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ? As elders, preachers, and even members of the body of Christ, do we want to paint a picture of Christianity to the world which says that we can worship or serve God in a nonchalant way? Certainly not! On the contrary, we need to be serious, faithful, devoted, and committed. Likewise, we need to grow in respect and reverence for God, His worship, and His Word. Still, many try to practice this concept of “casual Christianity.”

Casual Attitude

Some try to practice casual Christianity by possessing a casual attitude. They are not zealous. They are not serious. They are not motivated. Yet, God’s grace reminds us that we are a “peculiar people” who are to be “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-15). We must be like Jeremiah who possessed that “burning fire” within his bones and would not stop doing God’s will. We must be like Isaiah who responded to the Lord’s work with the attitude of “here am I send me.” Our Lord taught that we are to love God with “all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind” (Matthew 22:34-40). Hence, we need to be sincere, devoted, motivated, and zealous in our Christian living. However, there are countless Christians who want to serve the Lord with a nonchalant, easy going, and lighthearted attitude.

Casual Attendance

Others try to practice casual Christianity with causal attendance. Unlike the Psalmist who was “glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalms 122:1), many people are “hit and miss” when it comes to their attendance. They are there for some services, but they are not there for other services. At times, they come frequently, and other times, they are hardly there. They are not serious about worshipping God. This is made evident by their presence being very irregular. However, we are not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). True worship demands regularity. True worship demands thought, effort, and proper action. We cannot casually, haphazardly, or halfheartedly worship God and please Him.

Casual Dress

Then, there are those who try to practice casual Christianity through casual dress. This is especially true when it comes to worship. It seems as if many members of the church are growing less and less concerned about their dress in worship services. This writer has seen this in person and even heard sentiments expressing a desire for dress in worship to be more casual. Many people, especially those who are younger, desire to be able to come to services in casual attire. Many are drawn to the idea of worshipping God in jeans, t-shirts, and tennis shoes. Some have even said that “God looks on the heart and He isn’t really concerned about what we wear in worship as long as we are sincere.” Is this true? Would Moses affirm that God isn’t concerned about what we wear in His presence, seeing that he was told to take off His shoes in God’s presence? Would the Levitical priests assert that God isn’t concerned about what we wear to worship, seeing that they had specific and intricate instruction about what they were to wear in offering worship to Him? Would Timothy argue that God isn’t too picky as to what we wear in worship, seeing that Paul wrote to him regarding modest apparel in the context of the worship assembly? God is concerned about our attire in His presence. We must be concerned about what we wear to worship. Our dress must express respect and reverence. Our dress does not need to show a flippant, nonchalant, and casual attitude.

Never once do we find God commending anyone for strolling into His presence in an apathetic, haphazard, or casual way. Instead, in Isaiah 6, we find Isaiah understanding how wretched of a man he was when he saw the glory of the Lord and the cherubims praising Jehovah. In a similar manner, we find Ezekiel falling to ground as if he was dead when He was in God’s presence in Ezekiel 1. Then, in the last book of the Bible, John is pictured falling at the feet of the Lord when he recognized he was in His presence. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John understood the seriousness of doing God’s will and being in His holy presence. We need to be more serious. We need to be more reverent and respectful.

We need to develop more concern for our attitude, attendance, and attire. In a time when many want to practice casual Christianity, we need to practice true Christianity. We need to practice serious Christianity, devoted Christianity, and respectful Christianity.