

“Watchman, what of the night ?”

“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!”

Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

▶ THIS ISSUE'S READING

PATHETICALLY APATHETIC

New Martin Luther manuscript & movie pg. 7

Editor's Preface

This June 2017, will mark the fifth year that we at Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Iowa officially began resuming the work started by the late Elder William H. Grotheer back in 1968. That the Lord has been leading and guiding throughout this endeavor has been apparent to us all. However, the Enemy of all truth has labored tenaciously to discourage and shut down the proclamation of the present truth through the republication of this thought paper and the reprinting and distribution of the Foundation's literature. All the legal hindrances and various personal grudges against aspects of this work aside, though, the greatest obstacle that we appear to be battling is apathy.

Apathy is derived from the Greek term, *apathia*, meaning "without passion or feeling." Originally having a neutral connotation, today the word carries a broader, more negative meaning indicating a 'lack of interest in or concern for things that others find moving or exciting, especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal; indifference.' Apathy, or indifference, is growing at an escalating rate. Support from our dedicated base of subscribers and believers in the cause has remained steady (to the Lord's praise), but attempts to widen our sphere of influence and witness is increasingly falling prey to apathetic unconcern. Unlike active opposition, indifference usually manifests itself in a covertly passive, yet insidious manner which can be both bewildering and frustrating. Worse yet, efforts to pene-



trate this barrier of nonchalance can be very elusive and unsuccessful no matter what one does in order to stimulate interest.

While many of us give little thought to this problem, the havoc that apathy has wrought on about every area of our lives has been much more devastating than what we generally perceive. And this is most true regarding our faith. With this issue of WWN, we will examine some of the main rationalizations and excuses used to cultivate apathy in the light of the Bible's testimony concerning such, along with the possible ramifications.

THE PERILS OF APATHETIC UNCONCERN

On September 16, 2008, Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc., a major global financial services firm and fourth largest investment bank in the United States, "shocked" world monetary institutions by filing for bankruptcy. Global markets immediately plummeted. The cascading result of this market collapse accelerated an enormous decline in values of every possible investment vehicle. Common stocks, corporate bonds, real estate, commodities like oil, copper, gold, etc., private equity and hedge funds alike were left in a flux of chaos and uncertainty. Consequently, by March 2009, the household wealth of the United States, measured by losses in financial markets and the historic drop in residential real estate, was *reduced* to a disgustingly enormous \$12 - \$14 trillion! This was instrumental in ushering in the great worldwide recession of 2008 - 2009.

The main causes behind the crisis - loose monetary policy, greater global instability and imbalance than perceived, mispercep-

tion of risk, and lax financial regulation were well known and warned against by experts from various fields of concern for years previous to the crisis. Moreover, it was revealed that much of this was being perpetrated by unethical and fraudulent business practices fostered by the various monetary institutions themselves. Chiefly through big money political involvement and influence of governmental financial policy, the relative few in positions of power were enabled to outrageously enrich their personal fortunes - all at the expense of the average taxpayer, stockholder, employee, and consumer. Yet before the financial catastrophe actually struck, and huge portions of the general public's financial holdings were *then* suddenly gone as the result of this ongoing scandal, practically everyone seemed disinterested and unconcerned. Those who did raise a voice of protest were readily dismissed as anti-American, communist types out to promote a class warfare agenda. When this unsustainable economic "bubble" finally did burst, most were caught unaware, off-guard, and ill-prepared.

The near total surprise, shock, and angst that gripped the world during and after the collapse illustrates the real danger of apathy. Only after they were *directly* affected by financial ruin, did the people pay attention to a vital issue that all along was having an impact on their personal well being. Sadly, by the time their vigilance was rudely aroused, it was too late to recoup the loss. By and large, the only ones that benefited from this corporate / political chicanery were those involved in the swindle, much to the regret and chagrin of the majority who earlier, in effect, had heedlessly acquiesced to a fleecing by these pecuniary criminals.

The cost of apathetic detachment, in this instance, has been quite literally - *costly!* And more examples could be cited of the toll that indifference has had upon us physiologically, socially, and ecologically as well. But as detrimental as apathy can be in all these areas of human life, it pales in significance to the damage that it does to our spiritual relationship with God. In fact, the intrusion of this attitude into our religious faith is often more imperceptible than usual and is therefore more pernicious. With this in mind, we will somewhat narrow our focus more specifically to spiritual apathy and mainly how it *manifests* itself. The causes and reasons as to *why* people are or become generally apathetic are many and varied (both physical and mental), making an in-depth evaluation of all these factors beyond the confines of this article.

Apathy / indifference shows or displays itself as an attitude. And while attitudes can easily overlap one another, making precise categorization difficult, the following three attitudes appear to be the most common in bolstering spiritual apathy:

1. "It isn't important."
2. "It doesn't matter."
3. "I don't care."

Now let's see, by citing a number of examples, how the Scriptures view each one of these points.

The Biblical Witness

1. What is the Bible testimony concerning the apathetic attitude - "It isn't important?"

We will first turn to the parables of Jesus: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof

goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13: 44-46).

Both of these parables illustrate the *importance* of spiritual matters. Heavenly things are characterized as valuable treasure that one needs to obtain at all costs. In the first parable, the "field" where the "treasure" was hidden represents the word of God and the treasure is the gospel of Christ. To make the treasure his own, the "man" sold "all that he hath, and buyeth that field." Likewise in the second parable, *to us*, the "one pearl of great price" is representative of Christ Himself. To obtain this pearl, the *earthly* "merchant man" (us) also, "sold all that he had, and bought it" (Christ). In a corresponding manner, *to Jesus*, this one pearl of great price is representative of humanity itself. The *heavenly* "merchant man" (Jesus) too, "sold all that he had, [in order to buy] it" (us! - compare Philippians 2: 5-8 with 2 Corinthians 8: 9). The supreme importance of seeking, finding and obtaining heavenly things could hardly be typified any more forcefully. What would have been the consequences and outcome if the 'men' had indifferently dismissed the field, the treasure, and the one pearl as unimportant? The Bible, the gospel, Jesus, redemption - "It isn't important"? Think again!

Next, and in a similar vein, the Lord, through the Prophet Jeremiah, states: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29: 13).

How much wholehearted searching after God are people with an apathetic outlook

toward spiritual matters going to do? They will *not* find him if they think that - "It isn't important!"

Now, consider the Lord's counsel as given through the Apostle Paul:

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2: 14).

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Corinthians 4: 3-4).

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ ... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3: 7-8, 14).

It is natural for fallen humanity to treat "the things of the Spirit of God ... [as] foolishness." Without spiritual discernment (a supernatural imbue ment from God), heavenly realities will seem silly, absurd, and thus *unimportant* to us. "The god of this world" (Satan) is the one behind this attitude, which shuts out "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" from shining on us by blinding the mind to our true position as sinners before God. This hides our need of salvation and hardens our heart to the *importance* of it. Paul's grasp of his own personal need of Christ was thoroughly known by him! The "things [that] were gain (important) to [him], ... those [he] counted loss

(unimportant) for Christ." He willingly "suffered the loss of all things, and [did] count them but dung, that [he might] win Christ." For Paul, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus [his] Lord," was the *all-important* "prize of the high calling of God." His zealousness in "[pressing] toward [this] mark" is an absolute rebuke to apathy in regard to God's will for us. "It isn't important?" Think again!

2. What is the Bible testimony concerning the apathetic attitude - "It doesn't matter?"

First, we will look at the teachings of Jesus from His sermon on the mount:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also ... Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6: 19-21, 31-33).

With these verses, Jesus *compares* earthly "treasures" with heavenly "treasures." The *contrast* between the two could not be any greater! Earthly treasures are subject to organic and non-organic destruction and sudden damage / loss ("moth" eaten, "rust" corrosion, and damage / loss by "thieves"). Their value is fleeting and temporary. Heavenly treasures are subject to none of this.

Their value is permanent and eternal. The contradistinction between the earthly and heavenly treasures and the disparity in their respective values most certainly shows that *it does matter* what "treasure" we value (consider *important!*), for "there will [our] heart be also." In like manner, contrary to the "Gentiles" (Gr. - *ethne*, "nations, heathen"), whose "thought" is fixated only on the earthly, God's people are counseled to "seek ... first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Again, the earthly is contrasted with the heavenly. Those things which are fleeting and temporary (food, drink, and clothing) are what actually *matter the least*. That which is permanent and eternal (the kingdom of God and his righteousness) is what *matters the most*. Either way, to think - "It doesn't matter?" Think again!

Next, we will look at another parable of Christ's:

"A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, ... some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it ... Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God ... And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." (Luke 8: 5a, 7, 11, 14).

The main lesson taught in this parable is that it *very much matters* which type of "ground" (representative of the heart condition and disposition of various classes of people) the "seed" (word of God) falls upon. That "which fell among thorns" (symbolic of the "cares and riches and pleasures of *this life*") were "choked" thereby, and God's word which they "heard" and responded to (went "forth") became displaced by worldly

priorities. Instead of mature, heavenly fruit (godly lives), earthly thorny weeds (godless lives) "sprang up." When we allow the cares, riches, and pleasures of *this life* to take prominence over the heavenly priorities of the life to come, an apathetic attitude toward those heavenly things will also spring up. They simply *will not matter!*

Now, let's contemplate the following instruction given by Jesus to His followers: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16: 24-26).

With this statement, the Savior lays it all on the line. If we reject Jesus and refuse to "come after ... and follow [him]," choosing instead to "save [our] life (we) shall lose it." To "gain the whole world (earthly temporal life), and lose [our] own soul" (heavenly eternal life) profits us nothing. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (eternal life). Do we really believe that we can respond to the call of Christ with an indifferent - "It doesn't matter" - without the most dire of all consequence as our Lord here reveals?

3. What is the Bible testimony concerning the apathetic attitude - "I don't care?"

We will begin with the spiritual condition of Israel during the post-Babylonian exile restoration period:

"The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi ... A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a fa-

ther, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon my altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible ... But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord." (Malachi 1: 1, 6-7, 12-13).

Malachi wrote his book in approximately 425 B.C. Well over a century had passed since the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. had opened a way allowing the Jews to return to their land after the 70 years of Babylonian captivity. And though the second temple had been dedicated about 515 B.C., and civil autonomy had been granted to Jerusalem under the decree of Persian king Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) beginning in 457 B.C., most of the period had been fraught by hardship and disappointment. By Malachi's time, excitement about the coming of the promised Messiah waned further, and the Israelites grew more and more tepid and apathetic toward God. The situation had so deteriorated that even the Levitical priests, the spiritual teachers of the people and mediators between them and God, were regarding the service and worship of the Lord as a "weariness" (Heb. - *Mattelaah*, "What a trouble!, toil!, hardship!") They "despised" God's character (His "name") and proclaimed the altar and the sacrificial offer-

ings on it in the temple service as "contemptible" and "polluted." Yet *they* were the ones that had "profaned ... The table of the Lord ... and the fruit thereof" by bringing "that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; (as) ... an offering" - in violation of the sacrificial law (see Leviticus 22: 17- 25). And why were they acting this way and doing these things? Primarily, because they simply *didn't* care! Their contempt for God and the superficial way in which they rendered Him service was emboldening the people to follow their poor example, thereby bringing God's curse upon both the people and themselves (see Malachi 1: 14; 2: 1-2). The repercussions of apathetic attitudes - "I don't care." Better think again!

Next, this parable by Jesus:

"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12: 16b-21).

This parable pointedly demonstrates how a self-centered, self-absorbed inclination can produce an apathetic attitude toward God. The "rich [man's]" all encompassing interest in his "fruits and ... goods" (earthly "treasure") and the personal "ease" they could provide him with ("eat, drink, and ... [merriment]"), *was all he cared about*. How-

ever, the real value of all those things became painfully apparent when soon and suddenly that "night [his] soul" (life) was "required" (taken in death). Who then would benefit from his worldly possessions? For him, they proved fleeting and temporary. Though it was God who had originally blessed him "plentifully," he was *indifferent* ("not rich toward God"). Tragically, his actions virtually declared - "I don't care!"

Now, let's see what Christ revealed about His second coming:

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24: 37-39).

For 120 years, Noah, "a preacher of righteousness," warned the antediluvian generation that the Lord was going to bring a destructive flood of waters upon them because of their evil doing and wickedness (compare Genesis 6: 3, 5-7, 17; with 2 Peter 2: 5). Yet the warning message fell upon an apathetic, unresponsive populace. Instead of heeding and preparing for the coming disaster, all, but Noah and his immediate family, carried on life as usual ("eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"). They "knew not" because *they cared not!* The warning was undoubtedly derided, dismissed, and ignored - at least right up to the time that "the flood came, and took them all away." For them, "I don't care!" was fatal. "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be." *Forever too late to - Think again!! ❖ GLP*

* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

REFORMATION 500

As October 31, 2017, approaches closer, the excitement is building. Here at the Foundation, we are progressing along with our manuscript, *Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation - Past & Present*. More details will be forthcoming in the next issue of WWN. Considering what is transpiring on the ecumenical front in our day, the Reformation, and its true significance, needs to be addressed again. The Lord willing, we believe that this publication would be a great evangelistic witness to the truth.

Interestingly, a Lutheran financial service has funded the production of a new movie about Luther entitled: *Martin Luther: An Idea That Changed the World*. Stay tuned ... !

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Founder	Elder William H. Grotheer
Editor, Publications & Research	Gary L. Patrick
Associate Editor	Dennis J. Tevis
Proofreader	Linda R. DeYounge

WEBSITES

www.alfiowa.com
 www.adventistlaymen.com
 www.adventistalert.com

E-MAIL

Editor - alfia@myomnitel.com
 Webmaster - webmaster@adventistlaymen.com

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Office phone # (641) 749-2684.