



FALL BIBLE STUDY SERIES

STRENGTH *for the Inner Man*

Be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man — Ephesians 3:16

Apathy is not often discussed among most Christians, yet this state of indifference to God's interests is a real and growing danger, and all Christians must be aware of its warning signs. The first and perhaps most difficult step in combating this menace to our spiritual vitality is to recognize its signs. The next step is to turn away from it fully and to resolve, with God's help, not to repeat this error. It is a sad but Biblical prediction that some will recognize too late that they have fallen short of the mark and of the prize.

OBJECTIVE

Students will become conscious of the spiritually debilitating effects of apathy. They should see how easy it is to fall into such a state while unaware. They will learn to recognize the signs of this condition and to avoid this most common pitfall.

Apathy Teacher's Guide

1. The people who were invited to the marriage showed an attitude of indifference and disdain for the invitation and toward the one who extended it. The excuses given in Luke parallel the trivial excuses offered by people today for not serving the Lord. Those who were invited to the great supper considered their own involvements of more importance than the invitation they had received. As your students discuss the questions, bring out the fact that God is intimately and specifically concerned with each individual, even to the number of hairs on a person's head. (See Matthew 10:30.) However, all too often people show little or no interest in the almighty God of Heaven. Consideration of David's words in Psalm 8:4, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" might also add to the discussion.
2. Class discussion should bring out that we can stay spiritually alert by seeking to add the various Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5-10), remembering what God has done for us (2 Peter 3:1), watching and praying (Matthew 26:41), putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11), and staying focused on our eternal goal (Philippians 3:13-14). Include the fact that spiritual indifference does not happen overnight! It is a gradual process that can be so subtle, it is not always detected by the individual involved. Point out that once a person is in this apathetic state, the danger comes in not recognizing where he actually stands before God. He, therefore, might do nothing to combat this spiritual threat.
3. The Laodicean church was condemned with the words, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." This same spirit of self-sufficiency today makes it seem unnecessary for man to rely on God for the satisfaction of his needs. People are indifferent because the mindset of our society is to accumulate and to succeed, making earthly accomplishments their "treasure." Matthew 6:21 says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Another cause of lukewarmness today is that, when an individual finds the true Gospel too "narrow," he or she can always find a church that is more accommodating to his or her wishes or lifestyle. The discussion should center on the fact that God detests the lukewarm state of mind and the lukewarm church. God does not see it as a condition of simple indifference but as a sin which needs to be repented of.
4. Your students might discuss how society has become more evil in recent years and how the distinction between the "world" and the Christian has blurred. As long as the Lord tarries, however, God's people can keep themselves clean and unblemished, no matter what state the world is in. Mention Jesus' prayer for those who believe on Him: "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Discussion should bring out that in order to be on fire for Christ, Christians must be ready to stand for the right, willing to witness for Christ, and prepared to give their testimonies. See 1 Peter 3:15.
5. Many areas of life will undoubtedly be listed. These may include prayer, study of the Word, seeking for spiritual experiences or healing, denying of self, and even aligning of priorities to put God first. If we are not progressing in these areas, then we should be concerned. We should not put the problem aside. This would be a good place to bring in the key verse.

Fall Bible Study Series

6. We all know of the sin of commission, but James 4:17 discusses the sin of omission. The text in Matthew makes it clear that a lack of action is an offense in God's sight. It should be pointed out that too many Christians focus their energy on avoiding the outward sins of this world but neglect to do what God requires them to do; that neglect is as much of an offense as the former. Ask your class: When you hear a moral issue discussed, do you keep quiet rather than getting involved? Do you "stay above the fray"? Subsequent discussion could bring out that we may tend to let things pass, giving silent endorsement by not speaking out. If we do "speak out," it must be done in a spirit of love and not with hostility or bitterness. We may hesitate because of a fear of rebuff—peer pressure on an adult level—but we all have a realm of influence, where people who know us might put credence in our opinion. We have a responsibility to them to actively take a stand. This must be done prayerfully and in response to the Spirit's direction. Anything less could be a symptom of an apathetic attitude.

7. Scripture does not specifically identify what the oil represented, but it was obviously a symbol of readiness. Jesus prayed that believers would be sanctified. If we know that experience is available and do not avail ourselves of it, how can we say that we have done everything we know to do? The same is true of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded His disciples to go to Jerusalem and to wait for the enduement of power; this directive was for "as many as the Lord our God shall call." Can we fail to heed that command and expect to be ready? We are told to "walk in the light." If we decide not to seek for the blessings that God has commanded us to receive, can we assume that we have the necessary "oil"? The oil was a vitally important ingredient. The foolish were without oil, because they were apathetic toward their need for it. What a tragedy to be unprepared when the Lord comes! An even greater tragedy is to think we are ready for His coming when, in actuality, we are not. The text in Hebrews says, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1). This verse and the parable in Matthew bring out that the greatest spiritual danger lies in the false assumption that everything is fine when in reality a person is spiritually apathetic.

8. There could be many differing opinions on this question. The real answer may not be known until the day such events come to pass, and nothing indicates it will not come to pass. As a general note, however, the Church has always prospered spiritually in times of persecution. Your students might want to discuss why this has been so.

NOTES

Apostolic Faith Church

5601 SE 52nd Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97206; www.apostolicfaith.org

Memorize

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

- 2 Peter 3:17

Jesus
THE LIGHT of THE WORLD

Challenge Yourself

This lesson presented one area of our lives that Satan tries to use to gain access to our minds. Did you find yourself reacting strongly to this topic? If so, stop for a minute and challenge yourself as to how you could better serve the Lord in this area.

Scriptures used in this session

Genesis 6:5,12; Joshua 18:2; Matthew 22:2-5; 24:12,42; 25:1-13,42-43; Mark 13:35; Luke 14:16-20; 21:36; Ephesians 6:10-11; Hebrews 2:1-3; 4:1; James 4:17; Revelation 3:14-19