

Religious Indifference

by Catherine Booth

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and overcoming indifference to spiritual things, as it is a major obstacle to salvation.

Scripture: Proverbs 1:32, Matthew 16:26, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, Hebrews 2:3, James 4:14

Topics: "Spiritual Apathy", "Eternal Salvation"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches about the danger of religious indifference, using the example of Gallio who cared for none of the spiritual matters presented to him. She emphasizes the importance of awakening souls to the reality of God, eternity, and salvation, highlighting the folly and wickedness of remaining indifferent. Catherine urges individuals to overcome ignorance, wilful ignorance, and pre-occupation of mind that lead to spiritual apathy, stressing the need to prioritize the salvation of their souls above worldly pursuits.

Transcript

ACTS xviii. 17 - 'And Gallio cared for none of these things.'

WHEN riding in the train a little while ago, I overheard a conversation between two gentlemen--a young man on one seat, and an elderly man opposite to him on the other. They were conversing about some person recently dead, and I heard the young man say to the other, 'Oh, he had no more religion than I have.' I thought to myself, There is a state of confessed indifference on the subject of religion! I wonder whether that young man is an infidel; I will try to get an opportunity of speaking to him before the journey ends. And so I did; and I found that he professed to believe in God, and the Bible, and Heaven and Hell, as much as I did, and yet he had betrayed in that conversation that he had no religion, and that it was a matter of indifference to him, and I thought, Now this is the state of tens of thousands in this so called 'Gospel land'; they, like Gallio, 'care for none of these things.'

These words with respect to Gallio were not spoken directly of his spiritual state, but with respect to matters that affected him more as a magistrate and a ruler; nevertheless, they convey an idea to us of his indifference on great spiritual questions, which concerned him really as much as they concerned Paul, only that he did not see it. If it had been, as he supposed, a question of mere names and Jewish ceremonies, his indifference would have been justifiable, but he was mistaken here; his premises were wrong, and therefore his conclusions were wrong. The question as to how God ought to be worshipped and served, as to whether the Bible were a Divine revelation, as to whether Jesus Christ were really the

Son of God, were questions quite as important to Gallio as they were to Paul, if he had only seen their importance. His indifference sprang out of his mistake. He was mistaken about the whole question, and therefore was indifferent, and he drove them away, as having no responsibility in the matter.

This is just the position of tens of thousands round about us today. They have heard about religion; but they have a notion that it is a system of absurdities, and contradictions, and cant, fit only for half-imbecile minds, that it is no question of theirs, and so dismiss it from their minds--they `care for none of these things.'

Now, I want tonight to talk about this state of religious indifference. I want just to inquire into it for a little. In passing, we might say--Who knows what Gallio lost by his indifference? If he had just taken the trouble to inquire into these matters, about which Paul had been dragged before his judgment seat, who knows what the issue might have been both to Gallio and the Church of that time? For anything we know, we might have had an Epistle of Gallio to the Churches! He might have helped to roll along the rising tide of Salvation, and been instrumental in the conversion of hundreds of souls; but all this was lost for the want of a bit of trouble! Oh! what a great many blessings, how much light, how much instruction, and how much influence for good, many professing Christians lose for lack of a bit of trouble', And how many sinners will lose their souls from the same cause! No soul was ever saved yet who was TOO IDLE TO SEEK!

But I want to distinguish, in the first place, between indifference and indecision, which is quite another state of mind. Indecision always pre-supposes controversy going on in the mind--a state of unrest. A person may be undecided who is not indifferent. He may be wide awake, anxious, deliberating, and arguing the question as to whether he shall give his heart to God or not--that is not indifference.

Neither is it infidelity. Infidelity is not indifference. Infidels are rarely at ease; they wish they were. They would give anything to be at ease. I have met and talked with many, and God has used me to the saving of a few; but, with one or two exceptions, I never met with an infidel who, on close conversation, made it manifest that he was satisfied with his condition.

He is in the position of the man who had been to a lecture, the object of which was to prove there was no God, and, as he was coming out, another man said, `Well, hasn't it been good?' `Yes,' he said, `I am almost satisfied. I intend to send the lecturer a sack of corn; but, if he had quite satisfied me, I would have sent him two.'

And there are many in that condition; they are not quite satisfied. This is a state of unrest, not of indifference.

Indifference is often a state of mind of people who intellectually believe in God, and in Divine revelation. How wonderful it is that any being with a mind, a conscience, and a soul, can remain indifferent after he has once heard, or once professed to believe, that there is a God, an eternity, a Heaven, and a Hell, and that he is a candidate for one or the other! Nothing can explain this mystery, except that `the god of this world hath blinded his mind.'

If people were to be told half as much with respect to their bodily danger as they often hear in one sermon about their souls, you would never be able to make them indifferent any more, until they had adopted the means recommended for the improvement of their temporal condition. You convince a man that he is out of health, show him the importance of seeing a physician and getting a remedy, and if he is a sane man, he will never rest again till he has put himself under the means which he thinks most likely to cure him.

But it is not so with people's souls. How can this be, when the interests at stake are so much greater? How can you account for it? You get them to a service, and a little bit aroused; but the first great anxiety of the Devil is to get them to sleep again. He says, 'I must not let that man hear such truth any more'; and he finds something to attract his attention as soon as he gets outside. The seed is sown, but the birds evil spirits--come and snatch it away before it has time to take root. The great effort of the Devil is to keep people indifferent, and nothing does he dread so much as awakening and arousing preaching, or other instrumentalities calculated to awaken and alarm them.

Oh, that the Church understood this! Oh, that Christians understood it? It seems to me sometimes, instead of understanding it, they appear to be partners with the Devil in trying to keep people asleep. They shrink away from any direct, personal, earnest, thorough dealing with souls that would be likely to awaken them to a sense of their danger.

They do not recognize the fact as they ought, that Satan has got men fast asleep in sin, and that it is his great device to keep them so. He does not care what we do, if he can do that. We may sing songs about 'the sweet by-and-by,' preach sermons, and say prayers, and go the jog-trot round and round, barrel-organ fashion, till Doomsday, and he will never concern himself about us if we don't wake anybody up; but, if we wake anybody, he will gnash on us with his teeth. This is our work--to wake people up. That is your responsibility, you Christians. If that man with whom you are coming in contact dies, and is damned, in his sleep, and you never went the common-sense, reasonable way to wake him, God will demand his soul of you. Wake him! WAKE HIM! Remember, sinners are indifferent.

Let us look at one or two causes of this indifference. I say, continually, How is it that we cannot get men awake?--cannot get them to realize the verity and importance of spiritual things? How is it they can be indifferent. The first cause is, that they are in ignorance of their danger. They are like a man walking asleep by the side of a precipice--they do not see their danger--they do not apprehend the dire, devilish, damning character of sin! They do not realize the consequences of sin--they do not understand--they are in darkness, in ignorance, on the whole question. Now, what we want to do, is to enlighten them--make them face the great problems of existence--Life, Death, Judgment, Eternity, Heaven, and Hell. Enlighten them: they are in ignorance.

Ah! how many in wilful ignorance! 'Of this they are wilfully ignorant.' There are some in this Hall. You need not have been ignorant. Some of you had a Christian mother, who did her best to enlighten you before you came to the age of maturity. Some of you have sat under Gospel ministries, where there has been both light and power, and yet you remain wilfully ignorant. God has taken endless trouble with some of you. He has knocked you about to try to awaken you but you would not be aroused. He has got your head round sometimes, and made you face the problems of the future; but, as quick as ever you could you have turned it back the other way; you would not look, you are wilfully ignorant. Mind, it won't make DAMNATION ANY EASIER! You will be woke up by-and-by, never to go to sleep again. If you once get to Hell, there is no sleeping there; indifference is the last thing that will ever visit that dark, black abode!

You can shut your eyes now. Oh! yes, against the glorious Sun of Righteousness Himself; you can turn your head away, and refuse to see; but you will never go to sleep any more, when once you are awaked for the last time. May God wake you now! 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.' You can do it, or He would not bid you do it. It is your work to arise. God will make you stand, and keep you going when you are up. 'Arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Will you awake tonight? will you face right round? will you let the light of the eternal world come streaming on your spiritual eyeballs? Will

you look? If you will only look, you will be saved; if you go to sleep again, Christ Himself cannot save you. The Lord help you to wake up!

Another cause of this indifference is pre-occupation of mind. A lady said to me, 'How have you managed to get your children converted so early?' 'Oh!' I said, 'I have been beforehand with the Devil. I have not allowed my children to become pre-occupied with the things of the world, before I have got the seed of the Kingdom well in. I have taken time by the forelock, and cheated his Satanic Majesty out of his opportunities! and now he can only grin and abide the consequences.' The Lord help you to be beforehand with the Devil with your children! You have a baby--don't be afraid of beginning too soon. If you give the enemy an inch, he will take a yard. Be beforehand with him. The reason why the great proportion of people remain indifferent, is that they are pre-occupied in the race for riches, for learning, for gentility, for position; there will be more souls lost through striving after position, among decent people, than through all other sins put together, and all other ambitions put together. They say, 'We will be up in this world, if we go down in the next.' And some of them get up, and the higher they get up, the deeper they fall. The Lord have mercy upon people who are selling their souls, and the souls of their wives and children, for position.

I said to a gentleman at St. John's Wood once, 'Have you settled this matter?' He said, almost grinning in my face with vexation, 'No, I have not. The fact is, I have no time to think about religion.' He was very much annoyed that he had been made to think about it for three-quarters of an hour. I said, 'You will have to find time one day, how shall you manage that? Death won't ask your leave; don't you think it would be wise to find a bit of time to prepare for it?'

Pre-occupied--full of other things. People tell us in our 'anxious Meetings,' 'I am so busy,' or, 'I am set on this or on the other.' And, alas! alas! While they are running hither and thither, the reckoning-day comes; death overtakes them; bronchitis, or fever, or apoplexy, or accident comes, and they ARE GONE! They never thought they would be damned, they never intended such a thing. THEY! not likely, with all their light and opportunities. Oh, dear, no. But they were pre-occupied, they did not see whither they were going. Satan took care to, keep them too busy to look God, and death, and judgment, and eternity in the face.

We read that there are something like 350 people killed in the streets of London every year. How is that? Oh! they tell us it is through pre-occupation of mind. Here is a gentleman walking to his office, his thoughts are carrying him on swifter than he is aware of, he is not thinking of the hansom or the omnibus close by; he is wondering whether that ship has come in, what he shall make by that cargo, or by that scheme he is negotiating; he forgets he is in the midst of danger, when on comes the hansom, and down he goes, and he is killed.

He was preoccupied. That pre-occupation led to his destruction. Oh, what an illustration of people on the platform of time! The Devil never lets his people be awaked if he can help it; HE never puts them on the sick-bed. It is GOD DOES THAT. Do not think Satan will make you break your leg, or do anything else that will give you time to THINK. He will keep you going, and never give you one stopping-place, nor one hour to look back and think of God, or eternity, or your soul. He will keep you on, on, on, rushing on ever.

The other morning, as I went through the City, I said to a friend who was with me, 'Look at the men streaming along, look how they go, how energetic they are, how intent; you can see what is going on in many of their minds.' I said, 'If we could only get people as much concerned about God, eternity, and the Salvation of the world, as these men are about their earthly affairs, what might not be done?' If you were to

Speak to them about eternity, they would think it an impertinence that you should dare to intrude religion upon them at such a time, when they are so full of other things: and on they go, and there is scarcely a week passes but brings us the intelligence of some suddenly gone into eternity. The day dawned on them most unexpectedly, perhaps in the height of their prosperity, when God said, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.'

Let me try to show you the folly of this state of indifference. It would be very foolish to expose yourself to any great temporal loss or suffering, if by a little forethought and consideration it might be averted. Suppose you were afflicted with some terrible disease, which by the use of judicious means might be arrested, and your life be saved; but when your friends warn you and counsel you to seek medical aid, you say, 'I don't care about my lungs or my liver; here are these books, I must attend to them; here is this shop, this building; I cannot stop to think of my body'; and on you go, indifferent to the consequences. What folly. Your friends would say, 'He is mad,' and truly you would prove yourself to be so. Ah, you say, 'There are no people so foolish as that.' No, perhaps not in temporal things; but, alas! There are thousands of such 'fools' spiritually. How the Devil laughs at such people! What chuckling they have over them down below!

My friend, will you stop? Will you give your soul a chance? Will you make a bit of time to think about your dying bed, and the judgment bar? Will you stop in your chase after riches, position, learning, pleasure? Will you pull yourself up, as a rational being ought, and face about, and look God and eternity in the face? Oh! will you? Would to God I could make you! would to God I could come and put my arms around you, and entreat you, with tears and prayers, to stop and think! If you will only stop and think, you will be saved. It is not in human nature to go into Hell with the full realization of the danger. If you will not think now, remember, I beseech you, that you will have to spend eternity in thinking.

Oh, how wicked in the sight of angels, and all holy intelligences, thus to murder your soul for want of a little thought! Oh, how wicked to circumvent the purposes of God, and help the Devil to damn the world, when a little thought and consideration would have prevented it! Oh, what a monster of wickedness you are to be thus indifferent! What an example to set to all created beings! what a strengthening of the hands of all the wicked! What a vile murderer you are in the estimation of angels, and even of devils, for they can see the heinousness of your conduct, whether you see it or not!

You are worse than an infidel, for you are more inconsistent. He does profess not to believe in a God; but you profess to believe in one, and yet take no notice of Him. He professes to believe there is no Hell or Heaven; you profess to believe in both, and yet you are plunging down to Hell; your sin is more monstrous than infidelity. You are saying, 'I care for none of these things.' I say, this indifference is the height of folly, and the extreme of wickedness. May God help you to see it! HAVE YOU A SOUL? A woman was very angry once when I asked her this. 'What do you mean?' she said. I said, 'I mean what I say: HAVE YOU A SOUL?' She said, 'Do you mean to insult me? Of course I have a soul as much as you have.' 'I am glad to hear it. Is it saved?' 'Saved? No; I don't know that it is.' 'Then how monstrously inconsistent for you to be so offended at my asking if you had a soul, and in the next breath you confess it is not saved. Do you not see what monstrous folly it is to profess to have a soul, and yet never to take one hour's serious consideration to know how it is to be saved? You had better believe you have no soul at all, you would be far less inconsistent and wicked.'

My friend, have you a soul? Will you stand there and tell me you have, and, at the same time, that you have never taken any time to consider what is to become of it that you have never faced the great

problems of this Book, nor asked yourself what you are going to do in case of death; that you have no plan for Salvation, and yet you believe you have a soul! Surely the time past shall suffice for such folly. You will act like a rational being, you will face the fact of your soul's destiny, and settle the question whether you will be saved or lost for ever. Will you? I call on you in the name of reason, of God, of Christ, of eternity, to settle it, whether you will have your soul saved or not, and if you will, come, and let it be done tonight.

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