

July 2001: The Apathy Trap

by Aaron Greenway

On April 19, 1995, just after 9 A.M., a truck bomb went off outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. One hundred and sixty eight people including nineteen children lost their lives and were sent into eternity. A few years later, a man sat on a table shrouded in a white sheet with a defiant, stiff, upper lip. As the drugs were pumped into him, he too was sent into eternity. We know this man as Timothy McVeigh, the accused, Oklahoma City bomber.

Recently, in one of those ‘fun’ surveys, a friend of mine from Perú, when asked what one thing she would change about her life, her answer was “apathy.” After thinking for a moment, I thought, apathy and hardness of heart are our greatest enemies in the flesh. They are our enemy because they help us to avoid reality. They push us toward sin without having any kind of conscience about it. In apathy, we can dismiss anything we have done to wound or to harm others, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. In apathy, we can ignore the fact that our next door neighbor may be going to hell. In hardness of heart, we don’t have to love our brother, or even our enemies. And if we are really good at it, we can shroud ourselves in some kind of ministry, or some kind of duty that detracts us from what we know is right.

Mr. McVeigh was a slave to his own apathy. This is exactly why he was able to blow up a building full of people and not feel a thing. This is why he was able to defiantly glare into the eyes of his accusers while the toxins were flowing into his veins. And you know what? When it comes down to our tendency to slip away from God, to avoid life, responsibilities, maintaining relationships, etc., we will take the easy way out too. We are no different than the young man who died a few weeks ago.

The only difference between the born again believer and the unbeliever is that the Christians have a power source by which we can be refreshed, renewed, and whereby we can be softened. He is

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called the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the very person who is the rescuer of the hardened, the apathetic, and the coldness we so naturally gravitate to in our flesh. Timothy McVeigh, because he rejected Christ, did not have that outlet and therefore lost his own conscience. And while the Scripture says that he has no excuse, I do believe that God is going to hold us accountable for our attitudes.

Perhaps one of the greatest reasons we don't love, one of the greatest reasons we excuse ourselves from any obligation to love is because we have allowed ourselves to become ensnared in the apathy trap. Reading the words of my Peruvian friend brought conviction to my own heart. The war on apathy must start here. It must start now! And it takes two things. 1) It requires a willingness to be changed. This requires prayer and self-examination. 2) It requires that we take steps of love toward our brothers, toward the sinners. It requires patching relationships, working through misunderstandings, and even being vulnerable. Jesus never said that these things would be magical or even that we would feel anything before we did it. Most times, God commands us to do things and the power doesn't work until we start to do them.

Has anyone of us become trapped in apathy? With all that is going on around us, it is very easy to become like this. God will not allow us to hide behind our walls of self-protection or even our ministries. If there is an issue of unforgiveness, could we go to the person we have harmed (or who has harmed us) and reconcile? If there is an elderly gentleman who lives across the street, could we tell him about Jesus today? If we are not getting involved in our churches like we should, building relationships like we should, then why not start today? And we can read these words and not do a thing or believe we are doing enough when what are really doing ought to flow out of an abundant heart, and not out of apathy.

Being in my own church, I commit myself today to being involved in the assembly, of lifting up the body, of loving the Body of Christ, of reaching the unloved, of being softened, hearing the heartbeat of my Savior. Down with apathy and up with love! Down with hardness and up with mercy! Down with coldness and up with tenderness and warmth. Isn't this what being a disciple is about? If so, then we cannot afford to miss the boat. For our own day of reckoning is coming.