

# A Spirit of Apathy

by David Legge

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*The sermon emphasizes the dangers of apathy in the church and calls for a renewed zeal for the lost, exemplified by the Apostle Paul.*

**Duration:** 35:30

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 9:1-9, Romans 9:1-3

**Topics:** "Compassion And Empathy", "Overcoming Apathy"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by sharing several tragic stories that highlight the lack of compassion and empathy in society. He emphasizes that his message is not just for young people, but for everyone. The preacher admits that he himself lacks in the subject he is about to speak on. He then quotes from Romans 9:1-3 and discusses the importance of showing deep concern and empathy towards others, highlighting the dangers of apathy in society. The sermon concludes with a quote from Dr. Lawrence M. Gould, who believes that the greatest threat to our future is not from external factors, but from our own lack of compassion and empathy.

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## Transcript

We're going to open our Bibles at that second reading that was given today in Romans 9. Romans 9 and verse 1 to 3 and we'll just read over these verses again just to remind us of what we'll be thinking of today. I want to say first of all that what I have to say is directed towards the young people but not primarily. It's directed toward us all.

It is a lesson to us all. It's something that we need to learn and it's something that we need to follow in these three verses. Paul says in verse 1, I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, for my kinsmen, according to the flay. Let's bow our heads just for a moment and ask the Lord's help this morning. Our Father, we thank Thee this morning for Thy goodness to us.

We thank Thee for Thy faithfulness and Thy loving kindness. And our Father, we thank Thee this morning for our young people. We thank Thee, our Father, for those of them whom Thou hast saved.

And Father, we pray that Thou would build them up in their most holy faith from strength to strength and conform them more and more daily into the image of Thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we thank Thee for Thy truth. And we thank Thee, Lord, that it far exceeds all age groups, all maturity.

And Lord, we pray that this morning, that as we would open it and as we seek to learn from it, that our Father, that Thou wouldst help us. That Thy Spirit would be here in a very real way. And Lord, whatever it is that Thou wouldst have us learn this morning, we pray that our hearts would be open to accept it and grieve.

For we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. There is a kind of unwritten rule that preachers have.

It's a bit like a preacher's code. It really says that if a preacher shows deep concern or anxiety about something in his message, or if you like, if he has a hobby horse, something that he keeps coming back to and emphasizing with strength and zeal, that it shows that that preacher has a lack of that thing in himself. Now, I am guilty of that this morning because I am the first to admit that what I am about to speak about, I am greatly lacking in this subject.

Now, you remember a few gospel services ago, I gave to you a few stories about tragic things that happened in the United States of America. You remember I told you about a mailman who was doing his morning rounds and as he was going from building to building, a sniper from the top floor of one of the buildings shot him in the shoulder. He crawled into a building lobby and to his absolute amazement, he was ordered out of the building for the reason that he was dripping blood on the carpet.

You remember I told you about in Oklahoma City, a pregnant woman was walking along the sidewalk and suddenly she felt the pangs of birth coming upon her and she lay down on the sidewalk and she gave birth. An old lady walked by and stopped to help her. A taxi driver stopped at the side of the road, you remember, and pulled his window down and looked out and then pulled it back up again and went away.

That old lady, seeking to help her, ran into a nearby hotel and asked could she borrow a towel to keep the woman warm but she was refused. You remember I told you about in daytime Ohio, a woman drove her car headlong off the harbor right into the Miami River and a dozen people this time stood at the side of that harbor looking over the railing and watched as the car sunk to the bottom. They watched as she got out of her car and stood on the roof and waved her hands and shouted that she couldn't swim but she drowned.

You remember I told you that so many instances like this have happened in the state of Chicago. In Chicago sometimes the local newspaper has opened a file in their library and they have entitled it with one word. Do you remember what it was? Apathy.

Apathy. Dr. Lawrence M. Gould, the President Emeritus of Carleton College said these words and I want you to listen to them. Listen to them carefully.

He said, I do not believe that the greatest threat to our future is from bombs or from guided missiles. I don't think our civilization will end that way. I think it will end and it will die when people no longer care.

Arnold Toynbee has pointed out that 19 out of 21 civilizations have died from within, not by conquest from without. There were no bands playing, there were no flags waving, there were no shouts of victory when those civilizations decayed. It simply happened slowly.

It happened from within when there was quiet, when there was darkness, when no one was aware. Someone has said that the epitaph of our society today should be this, that this civilization died because it just didn't want to be bothered. It didn't care.

We can all testify to that can't we? But as we sit this morning snug and warm in these four walls of a church building, I don't know about you, but I feel that like a trickle down effect, like a filtering, the attitude of the world with regards to apathy has come into the church. We have assimilated a spirit of apathy. And young people, I'm talking to you and I'm not just talking to you, but I'm talking to the young marrieds, I'm talking to the middle aged people and even the older people, that the spirit of the age, if it be apathy, has affected all of us.

And like Horatius Bonner, we could say that the words that he said have never been truer because he looked at the church and he said, I looked for the church and I found it in the world. I looked for the world and I find it in the church. However, when we turn our eyes to the apostates that we read together this morning from Romans chapter nine, we see a totally different person, a totally different picture because we see the person of Paul, the apostle.

We see a remarkable character, a man, in fact, whose past has been marked in scripture by the testimony of these words, that this man, before he was converted, was full of zeal and persecuting the church. But then we remember one day, as we read the Acts of the Apostles, one day as he walked along the road to Damascus, going on his way to round up a group of Christians and to feed them to life, as he was on his way, miracle of miracles, he met Jesus Christ. And when he met Christ, his whole life was turned upside down.

His whole life was changed. He was saved. And now you could say that his testimony was this, that he was full of zeal, not persecuting the church, but building the church of Jesus Christ.

He was a wholehearted man when he was a servant of Satan, when he was a servant of Judaism. But now, because of what Christ had done in his life, he was a wholehearted servant of Jesus Christ. He was sold out for God and his gospel.

But listen, young people, older people, how different we are today from this man Paul. And if we are honest with ourselves, we would have to say that most of us don't seem to have a heart of zeal for anything. And if we do have a heart of zeal, it seems that it's a borrowed heart that we put on like special clothes for special occasions.

We only have an appearance of zeal at time. But what a change, and try to imagine it in your mind's eye for a moment. What a change came over this man Paul.

He was a zealous blasphemer, but he had now been changed to an awesome, zealous proclaimer of Jesus Christ. Now think of it. It was just at this time that the church was facing difficulty.

The church was facing persecution, and they needed a man. They needed a leader. They needed a man with great ability, with great scriptural knowledge to confront the persecution that was coming.

And God, in his infinite sovereignty, and in his infinite wisdom, provided that man. Paul to the naked eye was a mean looking man. He was small, I'm sure.

There wasn't anything nice looking about him, but he was far from a mean man. Paul was a man who was proficient in many languages. He was a man who knew the scriptures inside out.

He sat at one of the greatest rabbis, Gamaliel. He was a man who was familiar not just with Judaism, but with all education, with the philosophies and the learning of the Gentile. He was a man that we read about in the scriptures, probably became one of the greatest Christians and followers of Christ ever, yet he was a man who said of himself, I am nothing.

What a man this man Paul was. Spurgeon says of him, the lion Saul had become a lamb. The one who had breathed out threatenings and murderings now breathed out prayers.

He who seemed to burn with enmity became a flame of love for Christ. You're here this morning and you're welcome. And I don't know why you've come.

Perhaps you've come with someone or perhaps someone's singing this morning that's your son or daughter or a friend. But I want to ask you, have you ever experienced a change in your life like this? When suddenly, like a flash in your life, everything is turned topsy-turvy. Why? Because you have met Christ on the road of your life.

I wonder has there been a time in your own life where all your motives, all your aspirations, all your desires, everything that you are living for and living in has been totally changed. Why? Because Christ like dynamite has come into your life and turned it upside down. Have you ever experienced that? Do you know something? Today, right now, in this place, at this very moment, Christ Jesus is alive.

And he is able to do exactly what he did to Saul and change your life upside down. What a change there was in this man. What a preacher this man must have been.

Can you imagine to hear the Apostle Paul? What it would have been like to hear him preach just in these three short verses that we read together. You see that there are the essential ingredients of a preacher of the Word of God. This man had love, he had compassion, and he had an earnestness for the lost.

And what it must have been to have sat and heard Paul the Apostle proclaim the glorious riches of Christ. Now they say that this man was of contemptible speech, but that doesn't mean that he wasn't a good speaker. He might not have had a particularly nice voice.

He mightn't use words that were frilly and fancy. But this man, when he preached, preached words of power. This man spoke lightning words, as it were, that would have went into people's hearts like fiery darts and set them alight for Jesus Christ.

Paul was no preacher with icicles on his lips. He hadn't a breath of frost when he was speaking about Christ and God. But this man preached with fervency and power.

Oh that I would be a little bit like Paul as he preached the Word of God. Can you imagine what it would have been to hear Paul preach the Gospel? It would have been as if he was standing before an open hell, warning people, trying to stop people from falling into that pit. It was as if he was there, he had seen what hell was like, and he was warning people of the love of Christ that could save them from that destruction.

Just as they said of the Lord Jesus Christ, you could have nearly said of Paul, almost never did a man speak like this man. Why? Because he was following the example of his Master and Lord. Let's look

quickly at verse 1 that we read together.

He says, I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost. Now what's he saying here? He's saying simply this, what I am about to share with you, what I'm going to say to you, it's the absolute truth. There's no doubt about it.

It is true. I mean what I am going to say. And in order to reinforce this, he says, I'm telling you the truth in Christ.

He means I'm in union with Christ and because I'm in union with Christ, I can't tell you a lie. To bring it home further, he says that my conscience also bears me witness. I'm telling you with a good conscience.

To bring it home even further, he says, I'm saying it in the Holy Ghost. Now what's he trying to say? He's saying, listen, the words I am about to breathe, the things I'm about to say, they are absolute truth. You just don't doubt them.

I mean what I'm saying. Now why did Paul have to go overboard in showing that he meant what he said? Well you know, don't you, that the Jews hated Paul. They detested him.

To them he was a traitor. To them he was an apostate. There were even 40 men who had sworn that they would kill Paul because of his conversion to Christianity.

And it was because of that hate that was shown towards him that he wanted these Jews that were reading these verses to know that he was telling the truth. So he goes on to tell the truth. He says in verse 2, I have great happiness and continual sorrow in my heart.

Those words are very strong. They could be literally translated. That I have great grief.

Great grief to me is incessant pain in my heart. What was Paul saying? In Paul's words you can almost feel, echo the anguish of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember when he came over the Mount of Olives? Do you remember when he stood over Jerusalem with the tears tripping him? With the sorrow and the crackle in his heart broken voice and he said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee.

How often would I have gathered thy children together even as hens gathereth her chickens. But ye would not. Paul was no uncommitted bystander.

Do you hear me? Paul was no Sunday morning only Christian. But Paul was identifying himself with the people who he was brought up with. With the community in which he lived he was identifying himself with Israel.

And he says he had an unceasing endless duration of fear in his heart. And he uses a combination of words. He uses the word for sorrow and the word for physical pain.

To emphasize his discomfort and his plight over the nation. Now listen, listen to him. He's saying here, I have physical pain.

Think of that. Physical pain that I can feel in my heart. Why? Because of the sin of his nation.

Like a prophet before him, Jeremiah, he cries out, my bowels, my inward parts, I am pained at the very heart. My heart maketh a noise in me. I cannot hold my peace because thou, O Lord, hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war that we heard about in our reading.

Like Jeremiah, he stands before his Jewish brothers and sisters and cries and says, let mine eyes run down with tears night and day. And let them not cease for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach and with a very grievous blow. You know what was wrong with Paul here? His heart, like a hammer coming down upon it, was broken into a myriad of splinters.

Why? Because his brothers and sisters in Judaism were on their way to hell. And let me say this morning that Paul didn't believe in annihilation. He didn't believe that once you were dead, you were done for.

Your life would be blown out like a candle. He didn't believe you would die like a dog in the grave and that would be the end of it. How could Paul's heart be broken if he believed that? But he didn't believe that.

Paul believed what the word of God taught, that whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. We can learn so much this morning. Young people, listen.

From this man, Paul. Is your family unsaved? Are your friends unsaved? Is your mother or your father unsaved? Your sons or daughters? Your family? Are they unsaved? Well, listen. Paul's brothers were privileged as well.

They grew up on a land that knew the gospel, that knew the truth, like our children, like our people. They knew everything. They had the Old Testament scripture.

They had the prophets. They had the one true God. Yet, what a tragedy of tragedies.

They rejected it all. And today, in Ulster, in Portadown, people have grown up. Maybe people here with the gospel and yet they sit in their sins still yet and have not repented.

And people, listen. People today, in Ulster, in Portadown, need Christ. And for that reason, Paul says in verse 3. And listen, let these words burn into your soul.

I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, for my kinsmen according to the flesh. He goes on. He says for.

He's beginning to explain why he has this pain in his heart. And he says, I could wish. Now, notice he doesn't say, I would wish.

Because it would be impossible for Paul to be cut off from Christ. Because if you look at Romans 8 and verse 38 and 39, you see that he says, that nothing can separate me from the love of God and Christ Jesus. But he says, I could wish.

I wish it was almost possible. That's what he's trying to say. That I could be accursed from Christ.

And the word that Paul uses there, accursed, is the word anathema that you find in Galatians 1 and verse 8. Where he said, if any man comes unto you, or an angel even comes to you and preaches another gospel, let him be anathema. It means, let him be cursed. Let him be damned.

Do you know what that word accursed means? It describes, listen, it describes the delivering up to the judicial wrath of God. Of one person who ought to be cursed or cut off because of his sin. Now, listen.

Do you see what Paul is saying? Listen. It astounds me to even see what he's saying. He is saying that Paul was willing to bear the curse of God.

Paul, in his spirit, was willing to be a curse for Christ as a believer. He had such a love for his people, for his brothers and sisters in Judaism, for his mother and father and for his wider family, that he said these words, ah, if even my destruction could save these loved ones of mine, I could almost go that length to see them saved. Is that not amazing? Do you know what that is? That's the spirit of substitution.

Do you know what that is? That's the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ when it says that the just, the one who didn't deserve punishment, the just became the unjust to bring us for God. And Paul said that he wished to be damned. He wished to go to hell, that those who were damned and going to hell could get out of hell.

Paul was simply a reflection of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Now, let me ask you, young people, older people, what do you think of those verses? I don't sit like in a normal Sunday morning meeting and just listen to the preaching, because that's not why I'm here. What do you think of those verses? Do you think that this man was willing, if it were possible, to go to hell because of those whom he loved, who were going there? It astounds me that Paul had this constant aching in his brain.

Everywhere he went, everywhere he walked, even when he slept, he had this constant aching. Now, look at verse 1. Pass the test of the Holy Ghost. Does our zeal, if we have any zeal, does it pass the test of the Holy Ghost? Or is our zeal, young people, something that comes out on a Sunday? Is it something that comes out at the prayer meeting, brethren? Is it something that comes out when the suit comes out? Are our tears, if we do shed tears, are our tears merely crocodile tears? Listen, my prayer this morning is this.

Oh, that I would get there and to be like Paul, who was ultimately like Christ. What a love he had for the law. That he was willing to pass under the judgment of God to see their salvation.

Oh, that we would lay our lives down for the law. That we would find hardships. That we would find poverty, perhaps distance from our family, perhaps pain, pressures, suffering for souls, for winning souls.

Paul, can I ask you this morning, do you love souls? I'm not asking do you go to church, do you support the church, do you do a work in the church. I'm not asking you that. I'm asking you, do you have a real love for souls? Someone has said that a love for souls is like the thermometer of our Christian life.

If that were so this morning, what temperature would you be? Spurgeon said if you don't have a love for souls, he doubted if you were even saved at all. Listen, do you have a love for souls? If we really had a love for souls, young people, you would be at the prayer meeting. If we had a love for souls, the prayer meeting before the gospel meeting would be full.

Paul, if we had a love for souls, we would bring people with us to the gospel meeting on a Sunday evening. We would go to the outreach team. Because Paul had a love for souls so much that he could go as far as to say that he would long to be cursed for Christ.

If I had a love for souls, do you know something? I would be up out of my bed and I would be on my knees pleading to God for the souls of sinners, for the souls of the children. I would be fasting before God, waiting before God for those in my family who know not Christ. But do you know what the truth is? I am

content to sit in my salvation and watch as they go to hell.

I'll tell you something this morning. Some of the petty annoyances that we have, some of the bickering that goes on, it would all stop when we had a love for souls. Do you know why? Because the only sorrow and the only pain, the only annoyance that would be in our breasts would be like Paul's.

Because people are going to a lost eternity. William Boo, the founder of the Salvation Army, said these words, listen, some like to live within the sound of church or chapel bell, but I'd rather run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. But before we think of this, do you know what we need to be? Before we can be winners of souls, we need to be weepers of souls like Murray McShane.

When a tourist, an American tourist came to his church many years after he died, he came to the Saxton, who was the Saxton there when McShane was alive, and he said to him in his Yankee twang, he said, what was the secret of McShane's ministry? That now old man brought him down the church to the vestry. He led him through the door, he brought him to a table and a chair, and there was a big old Bible on the table, and he plunked it down, and he opened it. He said, sit at the table.

And that American sat at the table, and he said, now, put your elbow on either side of that Bible, and he said, weep for souls for army. That was the secret of his ministry. He weeped for souls.

And before we can win souls, young people, we've got to have a heart of weeping. Now listen, McShane weeped for souls, but 89% of Christians have never ever given out a gospel tract. Let that sink in.

McShane weeped for souls, but 95% of Christians, 95% have never led a soul to Christ. Yet Paul could say, I could almost wish that I could be accursed for Christ. David Braynard, the missionary to the American Indians, could say, I care not where I live, or what hardships I go through, so that I can put day and souls to Christ.

He said, while I am asleep, I dream of these things. As soon as I awake, the first thing that is on my mind is this great work. All my desire is a conversion of sinners, and all my hope is in God.

George Whitfield, the great evangelist of the 1700s, echoed the word of Paul when he said, Oh Lord, give me souls, or take my own soul. Henry Martin, a young missionary kneeling in India's Coral Strands, cried out to the Lord, Here, let me burn out for God. John Mackenzie prayed a prayer of a young missionary candidate, and said, Oh Lord, send me to the darkest spot on earth.

Praying Hyde, missionary to India, said, Father, give me these souls, or I die. John Hunt, missionary to Fiji Islands, on his death bed, prayed, Lord, save Fiji, save Fiji, save these people. Oh Lord, have mercy upon Fiji, save Fiji.

And he passed into the presence of his Lord. Oh, to have the spirit, and the zeal, and the love for souls that the apostle Paul did as he echoed Christ. That man I mentioned, William Booth.

For over 30 years, the Salvation Army, and William Booth in particular, were subject to some of the most vile persecution that Christians have ever suffered in modern times. But the General lived to see the day that he was issued an invitation to Buckingham Palace to see his King. His own King, King Edward VII, invited him to Buckingham Palace, and as he walked in, in 1904, the King said these words to him, You are doing a great work, a good work, General Booth.

Inviting him to write in his visitor's album. That old man, now 75 years of age, took a pen, and bent over his back, and wrote these words in this book, and listen to these young people. Your Majesty, some men's ambition is art, some men's ambition is fame, some men's ambition is gold, but my ambition is the souls of men.

Young people, you've the rest of your life ahead of you. Some of us are older. Some haven't much of life left.

But whatever you have ahead of you, let me ask you this morning in closing, listen. What is your ambition? What is your desire? Is it to get a good job? Is it to earn money? Is it to get a good education? And don't get me wrong, education is extremely important, but listen. What is all important in these days is this fact.

That men will only be saved in hell in time when we are here. And the reason why the Lord didn't rapture us when he saved us was because he wanted us to seek the souls of men. May we be able to say today like Paul, in chapter 10 and verse 1. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

Or put it in our context, Lord, my heart's desire and prayer for a poor to die in hell, that they might be saved. We trust you've been blessed and challenged by the message you've just heard. Why not pass it on to a friend or colleague? If you have access to the internet, you may want to visit our website which is updated weekly at [PreachTheWord.com](http://PreachTheWord.com) There you'll find our audio sermon archives and transcripts of Pastor Legge's messages.

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