

11 Signs You Are a Functional Atheist

Although the definition of an atheist is one that denies the existence of God, in this article, I use the word to depict those identified as Christians who live as though there is no God that they are accountable to.

Unfortunately, in my estimation, a considerable percentage of Christians live as functional atheists.

The following are eleven signs that you are a functional atheist:

1. You make important decisions about your career without consulting Scripture or praying. I can't tell you how many Christians I know choose a career based on how much money they will make. They do not consider how God internally wired them, how it would impact their ability to mature as a believer in the context of a local church and how it will affect their key relationships; when a person does this, they behave like a functional atheist.

choose a church solely on emotional connections. As a pastor since 1984, I have seen more people leave a church because their friends left than because they genuinely heard from God. Consequently, people are led by their emotions more than by the Holy Spirit when it comes to this all-important matter regarding their church family.

That being said, it is normal for a person to come to Christ and attend a church because a friend invited them. However, once they mature in the faith, God expects them to go from carnal reasoning to a spiritually informed process regarding the choice of a church, among other things. A mature believer will choose a church based on the will of God, where they are growing spiritually and who God has placed in their life to be

their spiritual parent (1 Cor. 4:15).

3. You choose a mate solely on mutual attraction. Based on my pastoral observation, I have seen countless numbers of Christians marry a person merely because of an emotional or physical attraction. Although God can work through any marital situation, deciding this is no different than an atheist who will also choose a mate merely on emotional and physical attraction (Rom. 8:28).

I believe God uses the way He has wired us emotionally, physically and spiritually (I would never counsel a person to marry a person they were not physically attracted to). At the end of the day, God has a specific spouse that matches your calling and destiny, which comes from being led by the Spirit and hearing from God. (To be fair, I have seen many married couples come to Christ whom God brought together even though they were not believers, but after they are saved, much more is required regarding decision making.)

have no consistent communion with God. Any believer who does not seek the Lord regularly, aiming to be in continual communion with Him, is living like a functional atheist. Moses said to the Lord, "If your presence doesn't go with us, then don't send us" (Ex. 33:15). Being in communion with the Spirit and being led by Him continually is a staple of normal Christianity (Rom. 8:14; Eph. 5:15-18). Believers who constantly fill their lives with activities bereft of seeking Him, behave like functional atheists.

does not inform your worldview. Every election season, it amazes me the unbiblical policies and candidates some believers support. Obviously, they are primarily informed by secular humanism, and don't understand how to integrate their personal faith with public policy. Those who are not informed by Scripture regarding their world and life view are functional atheists in this area.

6. You casually speak negatively about churches and spiritual leaders. The Bible teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). When a person casually speaks evil of other people, especially Christian leaders and churches, it demonstrates that they lack the fear of the Lord. The Lord hates discord among His people (Prov. 6:19; Eph. 4:29-31). Slanderers and gossips in the church live like functional atheists.

7. You determine how many children you will have. One of God's original commands was to bear fruit and multiply (which means to have children in Gen. 1:28). Biological children are a heritage from the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5). Having children is one of our primary callings because we partner with God to expand His eternal family. (Those who cannot have children or are called to be single should focus on having spiritual children.) With something as important as this, married couples should pray over Genesis 1:28 and ask God how many children He wants them to have. Those who determine family planning without God act like functional atheists.

choose to divorce your spouse for unbiblical reasons. I have known spiritual leaders who glibly divorce their spouses merely because they do not get along. Jesus did not make divorce that easy (Matt. 5:31-32 and 19:1-10). Those whose primary plumb line for divorce is happiness, break the covenant with God and their spouse, and act like functional atheists. (Of course, if a believer chooses to divorce their spouse, the other person in the marriage is not responsible or in bondage, 1 Cor. 7:15.)

9. Your walk with God is based on blessing and convenience. Those who only serve God when it is convenient or require a minimal sacrifice live as functional atheists.

10. You live independently of His body. Once we come to Christ, He places us in His Body (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Conversely, lone rangers who continually church hop and live

without being in covenant or accountability with spiritual leadership live as functional atheists. Through studying the New Testament, I have learned that I cannot walk out my calling apart from a local church.

11. You make a geographical move without hearing from God. I am amazed at how many Christians I have known since my conversion in 1978 who have moved away from the church God planted them in, only to waste years of their life floundering in a stagnant spiritual state. Before a geographical move impacts a life-giving church connection, I suggest you do the following: make sure you have heard from God in conjunction with the independent witness of other mature believers. Consult with your spiritual leaders. Make sure you are not being driven merely by money or convenience. Make sure there is another church in that new community that you have visited and sense a connection to. Make sure you do not burn any bridges if you make a mistake and must return—those who superficially make a huge geographical move act as a functional atheist. {eoa}

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