

11 Unsettling Signs You're a Functional Atheist

Although the definition of an atheist is one who denies the existence of God, in this article, I use the word to depict those identifying as Christians who live as though there is no God to which they are accountable. Unfortunately, in my estimation, there is a very large percentage of Christians who live as functional atheists.

The following are 11 signs that you are a functional atheist:

1. You makes important decisions about your career without consulting Scripture or praying.

I can't tell you how many Christians I know who choose a career or job solely on the basis of how much money they will make. They do not take into consideration how God internally wired them, how it will impact their ability to mature as a believer in the context of a local church or how it will affect their key relationships. When a person does this, they are behaving like a functional atheist.

2. You 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 truly 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 totally 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 whom God has placed in their life to be their spiritual

parent (1 Cor.4:15).

3. You choose a mate based solely on mutual attraction.

Based on my pastoral observation, I have seen countless Christians marry a person merely because of an emotional or physical attraction. Although God can work through any marital situation (Rom. 8:28), making a decision like this is no different than an atheist who will also choose a mate merely on emotional and physical attraction. I believe God uses the way He has wired us emotionally, physically and spiritually, for example, I would never council a person to marry a person to which they were not physically attracted. However, at the end of the day, God has a specific spouse who 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 you are saved, much more is required of you regarding decision-making.

4. You 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 does not go with us, do not bring us up from here" (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 continually fill their lives with activities bereft of seeking Him behave like functional atheists.

5. Scripture does not inform your worldview.

Every election season it amazes me the unbiblical policies and candidates some believers support. It is obvious to me that they are primarily informed by secular humanism and don't understand how to integrate their private faith with public policy. Those who are not informed by Scripture regarding

their world and life views 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 who hates discord among His people (Prov. 6:19; Eph. 4:29-31). Slanderers and gossipers in the church live like functional atheists.

7. You determine how many children you will have.

One of the original commands God gave humankind was to bear fruit and multiply, which means to have children (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 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.

8. You choose to divorce your spouse for unbiblical reasons.

I have known of 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; 19:1-10). Those whose primary plumb line for divorce is happiness break covenant with God and their spouses and act like functional atheists. Of course, if a believer chooses to divorce, 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 only requires a minimal sacrifice live as functional atheists.

10. You live independent 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 or live without being in covenant or accountability with spiritual leadership live as functional atheists. I have learned through studying the New Testament 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 lives floundering in a stagnant spiritual state. Before a geographical move that impacts a life-giving church connection, I would 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 to which you sense a connection and make sure you do not burn any bridges in case you make a mistake and have to return. Those who superficially make a huge geographical move act as functional atheists.
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