

“One Accord, or Discord, It is Time for the Church to Choose!”

Time to put aside our differences and get to work for the Lord.

By Wayne Vasilenko

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Have you ever wondered how many people may have been turned away from God by well meaning Christians because of Legalism or Dogmatic viewpoints concerning Christianity? Years ago as I was witnessing to a friend who was a co-worker and was **expressing** curiosity about God and Christianity. One day we were interrupted by a man whom I knew, and was confident, he was a Christian. However, he was from this same sort of background. (Legalistic and Dogmatic) Early in my Christian walk, I had been lucky to attend a church that focused on teaching people how to talk to others about God. It was there at Jacksonville Chapel in Lincoln Park, New Jersey that I had attended an adult study on "How to be a Tactful Witness." I am not sure if that was the title as it was over forty years ago, but that was the gist of the study and it is what I gleaned from it. This was in my opinion, one of the most important studies I had ever participated in throughout my Christian experience, one I would refer back to my entire life. As I conversed with my co-worker, as I had learned in that class, I paid close attention to his reactions to what I was saying. I had learned that expressions and "body language" are important to observe when talking about such an important subject. The indicators I was seeing told me that he was seriously interested and receptive to what I was sharing with him about my own experiences and more importantly, the passages of the Bible I was sharing with him. One of the "tricks" I learned over the years about steering a conversation towards God was to simply make a statement about how God or the Bible was working in my own life. Most people don't have a problem with your beliefs, unless you try to force those beliefs on them; this is something most of us can relate to. Another thing I learned to do is to simply ask questions about an issue, and then give my personal opinion from a Christian perspective once the conversation is established.

Over time, my conversations with my friend were beginning to be fruitful; he was asking questions, and it seemed as though he might be on the verge of making a decision to accept Jesus as his savior!

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I was getting excited as I had invested a lot of time in witnessing to this person, and I could tell it was getting close to “harvest time.” However, all the excitement and anticipation came to a screeching halt in a matter of seconds! This happened all because of another Christian! As I was talking to my friend, this other person happened to overhear our conversation; I had my Bible out and was pointing out verses when this other Christian interrupted and began chastising me in front of my friend because I wasn't using a “King James Bible” but rather the NIV! He went on to say, “The King James Bible was the ONLY Bible, and everything in the NIV, *or any other bible* is worthless, and should not be considered as being the word of God.” He pretty much said all other translations were of the Devil! So there I was, on the verge of leading someone to Jesus and this other *Christian* was tearing my witness to pieces, destroying the credibility of everything I had been sharing with my friend for months! To this day, I ask the question, “Why?” Did this other person really believe that God can only work through the King James Bible and there is no value in any other translation?

This story is an illustration of a serious problem within the Christian community. Many of us spend more time and effort debating doctrine and tradition than winning souls for Christ! We talk more about which Bible we should use, rather than what the Bible says!

Afterwards, I sent this other Christian an e-mail thanking him for the best performance of Devil's Advocate I had ever seen. He indeed did a superb job of leading a person away from Christ... just as the Devil himself does. He sent me an apology, but the damage was already done! I never had another opportunity to get into the Bible with that particular friend I had been witnessing to ever again due to a massive layoff, which took place soon after this episode. I pray that someone else eventually watered the seeds I planted in my friend, and I pray that he eventually came to the Lord, but this I do not know... I haven't seen him since. Seeds have a hard time sprouting when sprayed with “Spiritual Roundup” by well meaning, but Dogmatic Christians, sterilizing what was perhaps fertile soil.

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This is but one of the many reasons why so many churches are having problems reaching people for the Lord. I have made the following statement many times, "Nobody wants to go to a Bar where there's already a fight going on." I know... someone is already writing me a nasty letter for referring to a Bar, so let me rephrase it... "Nobody wants to go to a Church where a fight is already going on."

There is nothing attractive about Christianity if all of the different churches are putting each other down. Moreover, if we Christians are constantly fighting against each other, how is that attractive to the unsaved? It is bad enough there are so many Non-Christian religions out there! If you call yourself a True Christian, no matter where you go to church, there are certain basic issues in the Bible (regardless of what version of the Bible you read, or what denomination you are) that we have to agree on. We will touch on these "Basics" as this series progresses. Not only are different denominations within the Christian faith fighting against one another, but also there are countless fights taking place between believers within individual churches, amongst members of the same church! How on earth, do we expect to attract people to Christianity with this taking place? “One Accord, or Discord, It is Time for the Church to Choose!” In the same way my witness was virtually destroyed by the Dogmatic intervention of a person who wasn’t even involved in the conversation I was having with my friend. The Church is destroying its collective witness to the world as we fight against each other with Legalism, and Doctrinal issues. By doing this, we are doing the Devils work, *Not* God's work! Jesus instructed His followers to go out and make disciples, not argue doctrine amongst ourselves! He also told us to spread the Gospel. The word Gospel is translated, “Good News.” Christians fighting amongst themselves does not equate to Good News. Quarreling usually ends up as bad news.

1 Corinthians 1:10 (Geneva Bible) (F.Y.I. This Predates the King James Version)

¹⁰ Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak one thing, and that there be no dissensions among you: but be ye knit together in one mind, and in one judgment.

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Although the following is out of context, the principle is the same for the Church...

Luke 11:17 (KJV)

¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth.

If people see Christians fighting amongst themselves, there will be no attraction of unbelievers to the Church! It is time for all of us who claim to be followers of Jesus, to put aside our differences and concentrate on leading the unsaved back to God. I recently had a conversation with a dear friend who was telling me some of the reasons why he left a church recently. One of the reasons he stated was that the preacher did not wear a tie! I understand that many people have been brought up with the teaching and expectation to wear their “Sunday Best” to church (to show respect) and the same goes for preachers, but to be honest, that statement about the tie kept me up that night. I asked the Lord, “Bow Tie, or Long Tie... Stripped or Solid?” Seriously, it really bothered me, wondering if there were certain ties required over others! The only thing I heard in the Spirit in reply was, “Don’t Know... Never Wore One!” I am not making fun of my friend who brought this up; I am simply trying to point out some of the things that we Christians make issues of that divide the Church. When I was in the Military, we were issued three types of uniforms. There was the Work Uniform called Fatigues, and there were two types of Class A or Dress Uniforms. There was Kakis, which would compare to business or casual attire, and then there was Dress Greens, which compared to a suit and tie, or Formal. It didn’t matter which uniform the commander wore, his authority and the respect due that authority, was the same. His words carried just as much weight with all who heard them. If a preacher is proclaiming the Gospel and leading people towards Christ, does it really matter what they are wearing. What did the disciples wear? I believe you will find they wore the same cloths they walked in, worked in, slept in, and probably died in.

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