

One Accord or Discord... Time for the Church to choose!

The introduction Revised 2024

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A major concern of many churches today is dwindling attendance. Yes, the Covid-19 “Pandemic” *was* a major contributing factor in the recent past, however, there are other more serious factors concerning the church itself that are doctrinal or dogmatic in nature thereby amplifying the problem. Concerning the topic of this series, perhaps the most serious problem concerning church attendance is the fact that few churches give adequate instruction in “Christian Witnessing,” which will become more evident as we progress through this topic. The majority of churches in many areas give their congregations a steady diet of “Spiritual Milk,” nothing more than shallow sermons that do not relate to ones Christian walk in our modern society. I have not heard a sermon series on evangelism in decades! In my opinion, this is the real root cause of declining church attendance. The bottom line is that many Christians do not spread the Gospel simply because they do not know how! As a result, they do more harm rather than good when it comes to spreading the gospel.

The following event I am about to share, causes me to wonder how many people have been turned away from God by well meaning Christians simply for lack of training as to how to present the Gospel as I just mentioned. There are times when in their quest to lead people to the Lord, people have inadvertently turned people away from God and the Church! Consider the following real life scenario: I recall a time when I was witnessing to a friend and co-worker, his name was Julio... he was very curious about God, the Bible, and people professing Christianity.

To set the stage, when I first became a Christian, I was blessed to have attended a church that was focused on how to witness or to talk to people about God and the Bible. It was there at Jacksonville Chapel in Lincoln Park, New Jersey that I attended an adult Sunday school study on how to be a “Tactful Witness;” one of the most important studies I had ever participated in throughout my Christian experience. One I would refer back to my entire life when sharing the Gospel. The study focused on being sensitive to people’s reactions when presenting the Gospel, rather than manipulation as is taught to many Christians. It also focused on conversation as opposed to confrontation.

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First, let me explain what I mean by “manipulation.” Many people are taught to engage people with a series of questions related to Bible verses in an effort to “steer the conversation” towards a presentation of the Gospel message. There *is* a time and place for this type of interaction, as I have used this approach many times myself in the past. However, this approach is very impersonal, and those on the receiving end often perceive it as a “Sales Pitch,” which more often than not, fosters a negative response. A different approach, one I learned in the study I referred to above, would be to engage in general conversation with someone, and plant seeds of thought, from a Biblical Perspective, with the goal of inspiring a person to ask questions relating to the topic of conversation as it relates to God’s Word. This gives the person you are talking to the opportunity to express their opinions, thereby giving you an opportunity to express yours. The result in most cases is civil conversation rather than a reactionary debate of opposing viewpoints. Both forms of interaction have their place depending on the situation and more importantly, the reactions of the people involved. This being said; I will continue with my story concerning my friend named Julio.

Recalling what I had learned, as I conversed with Julio, 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 and “controversial” subject. This serves so as not to make people defensive, but rather to “inspire” conversation. The indicators I was seeing in Julio 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. I could perceive by watching his reactions that he was carefully considering what I was saying, especially by the way that he was wording his responses in that they contained more questions about what I was saying, rather than reactionary responses or personal opinions. Julio and I were in the same department (Electronics Maintenance) however, we had different areas of responsibility, so I tried to make the most of every conversation we engaged in, steering the conversation towards things of God whenever I could. One of the ways I learned to steer a conversation towards God

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was to make a simple statement about how God was working in my own life. Most people do not have a problem with your personal beliefs, unless they feel you are trying to force those beliefs on them. This is something to which most of us can relate. Another witnessing concept I had learned was to simply make general statement about a recent issue, perhaps something in the news, and then give *my* opinion from a “*Biblical World View Perspective*,” perhaps how it might relate to prophecy as an example. From there I could solicit their opinion on the topic, thereby revealing their World View Perspective to guide my own responses. This gave me invaluable insight as to their mindset and their openness concerning the topic. At the very least, it gave me an opportunity to plant seeds of thought in their minds for future conversations.

Over time, the conversations with Julio were beginning to be fruitful; he was asking deeper and deeper questions, and it seemed as though he might be on the verge of making a decision to accept Jesus as his savior very soon. I was getting excited, I had invested a lot of time with Julio and I could tell it was getting close to “decision time.” However, all the excitement and anticipation came to a screeching halt in a matter of seconds; Julio went from a person interested in learning more about God and being on the verge of accepting Jesus, to becoming apprehensive, someone who began to avoid the subject of God and the Bible. This happened all because of another Christian who was more concerned about doctrinal issues rather than people’s salvation! As I was talking to Julio that day, this person (Also Christian) happened to come close enough to overhear our conversation. I had my Bible out and was going over a passage with Julio when the other Christian interrupted and began chastising me in front of Julio, why... because I was not using a “King James Bible” at the time, but rather the New International Version (NIV)! I had nothing against the King James Version, but preferred it when witnessing simply because we do not use “Old English” anymore in general conversation and it is easier for people not familiar with the Bible to understand! My Christian friend went on to state in condescending fashion, “The King James Bible was the “ONLY Bible” and everything in the NIV or *any* other translation is worthless, and shouldn't be taken as being the word of God!” He pretty much said it was of the Devil and

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that I was working for the Devil if I was not using the King James Bible!

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 told Julio about Jesus because I was using a translation Julio could easily understand, even despite Julio's Spanish accent. 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 whatsoever in any other translation? If so, what about all the different denominations and religions out there, what about the *different versions* of the "venerated" King James Bible? (No disrespect intended towards anyone.) This is what I want to address in this writing with the hope of pulling the Christian Church together and focusing on the *True Gospel Message*, rather than focusing on the differences within the church or the various denominations. Consider the Following passages:

1 John 4:2-3 (NKJV)

² By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

2 Timothy 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Remind *them* of these things, charging *them* before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.

2 Corinthians 11:3 (NKJV)

³ But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

There is a serious problem within the Christian church when so many of us spend more time and effort debating doctrine and tradition, rather than winning souls for Christ! Jesus instructed us to "Make Disciples," not debaters! We talk more about which Bible we should use, rather than what the Bible says! I am

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not ignoring the fact that there are some serious concerns with *some* translations of the Bible; but the important thing to consider is what those concerns are, and do they actually affect the *Basic Gospel Message* concerning salvation? I was led to the Lord with the help of "The Way" translation, which is a paraphrased translation!

After this episode with Julio, I sent my Christian friend an e-mail thanking him for the best performance of "Devil's Advocate" I had ever seen, as he did a superb job of leading Julio away from Christ... just as the Devil himself tried so hard to do the whole time I was witnessing to Julio. My Christian friend replied with an apology, but with the damage already done, I never had another opportunity to get into the Bible with Julio ever again due to a massive layoff, which took place soon after this particular episode. In the process, I lost all contact with Julio. I pray that someone else eventually watered the seeds I planted in Julio, and I pray that he eventually came to the Lord, but this I do not know. Seeds have a hard time sprouting when constantly being sprayed with what amounts to, "Spiritual Roundup."

Counter Productive Focus

I have made the following statement many times over the years, "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 there is a fight already going on." After all, there is nothing attractive about a Church or Christianity in general if all of the participants are bad-mouthing, and fighting against each other. This is happening now, more than ever with the help of YouTube, and the Internet. While we as "Christians" are indeed, instructed to expose "False Teachers, and False Doctrines," this does not mean there cannot be differences of opinion concerning various *non-essential issues*. It is bad enough there are so many Non-Christian religions and Cults out there, but If you call yourself a "True Christian," no matter where you go to church, there are certain things in the Bible (regardless of what translation of the Bible you read) that you *must* agree upon. We will expose those "Basics" as this series progresses.

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Galatians 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Not only are different denominations within the Christian faith fighting each other, but also, there are countless fights taking place within certain churches even amongst the members. How on earth, do we expect to attract people to Christianity with these things taking place? This is what influenced the title of this series... “One Accord or Discord, Time for the Church to Choose!”

Just as that other Christian in the previous story destroyed my witness to Julio, we are destroying the churches collective witness to the world if we keep fighting each other! By doing this, we *are* in fact doing the Devils work... not God's work. The Holy Spirit ***Always*** – ***Always*** brings true believers together, He does not divide them! The spirit of the “Anti-Christ” is the one that ***always*** attempts to divide the Church and keep the Gospel Message from spreading! Which spirit is at work within you and your church?

In this series I will attempt to expose the various destructive debates within the Christian Church; debates that are causing more harm than good as far as building the Body of Christ. I will attempt to present the different points of view and interpretation, which many opposing sides constantly debate. Ironically, many opposing sides use the same passages of Scripture to support their opposing opinions! You will find that most debates are doctrinal or religious in nature and do not affect the most important issue... the Salvation of souls! The first topic we will address is “The Bible Debate.” It is my prayer that people reading this series will also gain valuable insight as to how to be a better witness for Jesus Christ and keep conversations from turning into meaningless debates over non-essential issues rather than the spreading of the Good News we have to offer. Remember, we are called by God to make disciples, not debaters! That cannot happen if we continue to focus on our differences, especially when someone’s eternal destiny may be at stake.