

The Introduction: One Accord or Discord... Time for the Church to Choose A Fresh Look At Why People Are Turning Away From The Church

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A current major concern of many churches today is dwindling attendance. Yes, the Covid-19 "Pandemic" is a major contributing factor, but there are other serious factors concerning the church itself that are doctrinal or dogmatic in nature. In my opinion, these issues are the real root causes of the issue. Following the event I am about to share, I couldn't help but wonder how many people have been turned away from God by well meaning Christians, who in their quest to lead people to the Lord, had accomplished the opposite. Could well meaning Christians be leading people away from salvation, rather than towards salvation, by unwittingly using what we now call "Cancel Culture" tactics within the church itself, tactics so prevalent in modern society? 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 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 study on "How to be a Tactful Witness." I am not sure if that was the exact title as it was over forty-five years ago, but that was the gist of the study and it is what I gleaned from it.

This was 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. This study focused on sensitivity when presenting the Gospel, rather than manipulation as taught by many. 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 myself. However, it is in my opinion 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, would be to engage in general conversation with someone, and plant seeds of thought with the goal of inspiring a person to ask questions relating to the topic of conversation. This gives the person you are talking to the opportunity to express their opinions, thereby giving you an opportunity to give 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 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 subject, so as not to make people defensive, but rather "inspire" conversation.

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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 that he was carefully considering what I was saying 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 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; another lesson learned in that adult study. Sometimes it would be days before we would be able to talk again. One of the ways I learned to steer a conversation towards God was to simply make a statement about how God was working in my own life. Most people do not have a problem with your beliefs, unless they feel you are trying to force those beliefs on them; this is something to which most of us can relate. Another concept I learned was to simply make general statements about an issue in the news, and then give *my* opinion from a *Biblical World View Perspective* once a conversation is established. 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 openness concerning the topic. At the very least, it gave me a opportunity to plant those 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 once again, someone who avoided the subject of God and the Bible. This happened all because of another Christian! I had to step out of the room for a few minutes during the original writing of this story, because even to this day, what this other person did is so upsetting to me. As I was talking to Julio this person (A Christian I remind you) 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 used this translation often when witnessing because it was easier for the average person to understand, not because I had anything against the King James Version, but simply because we do not use “Old English” anymore in general conversation! My Christian friend went on to say 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 that I was working for the Devil if I wasn't using the King James Bible!

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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 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 community if so many of us spend more time and effort debating doctrine and tradition 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 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 affect the *Basic Gospel Message* concerning salvation? After this episode with Julio, I sent the other Christian 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 him. 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 "Spiritual Roundup."

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People wonder 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." In other words, there is nothing attractive about Christianity if all of the different churches are bad-mouthing each other, 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 have to agree to. We will go over those "Basics" as this series progresses.

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 individual churches even amongst the members. How on earth, do we expect to attract people to Christianity with this taking place! One Accord or Discord, Time for the Church to Choose! Just as that other Christian destroyed my witness to Julio, we are destroying our 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 brings believers together it does not divide them, the spirit of the "Anti-Christ" is the one that ***always*** tries to divide the Church and silence the Gospel Message... which is at work within you and your church?