

Truth Matters! 7

For Evangelistic Purposes, How Far Would You Go?

It was my first day back at Multnomah Bible College after being away for three years. I was early for my collegiate ministry lab so, because the room I was scheduled to use was still occupied, I decided to slip into an empty classroom. A few minutes later a student came in and began sharing about his “Christian Ministry” assignment. Robert shared how he worked with the skinheads in the area. He stated he had come out of a similar group less than a year ago and wanted to attend a Bible college. Although being denied admission by many Bible schools (this was his report), Multnomah accepted him.

After listening to Robert tell religious stories from Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Europe—Robert really knew his stuff!—I asked him what he found to be the best way to go about witnessing to occult, new age and other spiritual seekers. To my surprise, he gave an immediate answer, almost as if he was prepared for such a question. This is what he told me.

Two things. If Christians want to reach these wiccans, mother earth goddess followers, etc., they have to do two things: 1) We have to be willing to listen to them—let them tell their stories; and, 2) In order to gain a hearing, we must heed what they say—we must not only listen to them but actually be willing to do what they were suggesting. I wasn’t sure I was understanding Robert correctly at this juncture so I asked for clarification. In his response, Robert actually was indeed calling for the two prerequisites above in order to earn the right to talk to these people about Jesus Christ. He was totally serious. Robert was suggesting that we take friendship evangelism a step further than simply allowing them to ~~preach their message~~ — I mean talk. (I can’t tell you how often I hear from the *seeker group* that we need to listen to the opinions and stories of those with whom we’re sharing in order to build credibility *in unbelievers’ eyes*.) But Robert went on to say we have to do more than politely listen to them. He went on to say that we should follow what they suggest. At this juncture I began approaching Robert differently—as a possible non-Christian who was still deceived by the group he continues to frequent. We don’t compromise Truth nor sit under false teaching for evangelistic purposes.

As I recall the entire encounter, I remember Robert telling me about how many Christians he converted away from Christ as a result of simply telling religious stories that were counter to Biblical Truth. He said it was easy (to lead them astray) given the current popular approach to sharing with an unbeliever—let them tell their story. I cannot explain the conflicting messages that I was hearing from Robert (e.g., “heed” what they tell you while at the same time confessing that the simple sharing of his stories led many astray), but I can say this is what was indeed being suggested. I also found it interesting that there were other signs that Robert was not a sincere follower of Jesus Christ, but the emphasis of this true encounter must not be lost:

We live in a society that is demanding we go to unbiblical extents to try to evangelize. Many of our seeker sensitive churches are worldly and host influential voices that are contrary to the full

counsel of the Word of God. Have we lost our balance once again? The cost of welcoming the world into the church of our holy and just God is too great, biblically speaking. **God does not ask for compromise of righteousness for the sake of sharing the Gospel.** May God's people open their eyes and discern the day! II Timothy teaches that **we** are the ones to preach, not those in opposition to our Lord—and today we are the ones who listen, even to our peril. Our Lord Jesus brought the message; He did not ask members of his society to preach to Him. We, His sincere followers, must do likewise.

Lest I be misunderstood and charged with calling for something I am not, corrective balance sometimes calls for extreme measures, especially if the imbalance (sin) is great. While a listening ear is a crucial part in the relationship process, we must be willing to stop if the opposition is asking us to compromise. Let's be real—there's a huge community completely committed to opposing Jesus Christ and His obedient followers. In addition to suggesting the book, *Persecution*, by David Limbaugh, please read the prophetic Scriptures that clearly predict great **deception** and **persecution** prior to the return of Jesus Christ. They're here, today!

But let me get back to the story of Robert, for there is a *second chapter* to the above account. On the final day of Multnomah Bible College's Student Ministries' plenary gathering for the Fall Term—before a group of hundreds of students—one student announced he was leaving the school. Sensing a frustration concerning some of the faulty worldview expressed by some of the outspoken students during his experience there, could the following true testimonial from Robert be an example of what contributed, in part, to this other student's leaving? Here's the scoop.

About eight students gave testimony that Tuesday morning. Robert made the following contribution:

As many of you know, I work with a very different group of people (Skinheads, etc.) for my student ministry assignment. I want to encourage you [the Multnomah student body] to learn to listen to these folks. Allow them to share their story, for they too are made in the image of God and have a lot to offer us. We need to be humble enough to accept the wisdom they have—in addition to simply offering them ours. [Not a direct quote but one communicating Robert's intended message.]

I was not surprised to hear what I did given my earlier encounter with Robert. One thing, though, that I did find quite shocking was the strong response he received from the student body. Of all the ovations given in response to each testimony, his was one of the strongest, by far. That surprised me.

Some of you are very familiar with the commitment of Multnomah Bible College: *If it's Bible you want, you want Multnomah.* Does this institution still promote this foundation? If so, great. Yet, there are a growing number of students who are so committed to a Postmodern paradigmatic expression of *their* Christianity—cultural Christianity, if you would—that I see imbalance to a dangerous degree. In fairness of report, I was not able to talk with this other student who said he was leaving the school (in order to confirm my suspicion that this growing outspokenness in favor of a walk with God *of a different kind* was part of his cause of his leaving). Given what he said, though, it sure seemed that it was at least a part of the reason for his departure.

Why do I bother communicating this true story? It's tied to essential aspects of our walk with God! Like the campus story above, I hear similar things in churches on a growing frequency. Our churches, given the philosophy of ministry that encourages non-believers to feel welcome in our worship and fellowship gatherings, do have a growing number of unbelievers in attendance.

Can I ask a fair question: What impact is this having upon our gatherings? This is a God-honoring question. I'd like to challenge you to do some observing over the next year. Watch for how the presence of non-Christians in our midst affects the way in which we go about the time of gathering. I think you'll find that there is a difference. Some friends of mine have left some of our (imbalanced) seeker-sensitive churches for churches that focus on worship of holy God by His Body. They share with me that the difference between the two gatherings is remarkable. And what about the principle that fellowship among true Christians (in Christ) is different than outreach interaction with unbelievers (those who have not yet embraced Jesus Christ)?

Truth Matters, on many issues. Thanks be to God that He has graciously given us His precious revelation whereby we have a clear standard—with sweet liberty if we stay within the parameter of His life-counsel. May we be faithful to His Commission by heeding His Word, the **BIBLE** — accurately described by the following acrostic: **B**asic **I**nstructions **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth. May we walk in His balance, not that of our culture's definition of balance.

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