

# On The Frontier

“For the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

## Religion and Christianity

by Linus A. Mathis III

Christianity is not a religion. Though, you will find a good deal of religion in it. This, however, was never God's intent. This is man's doing, not God's. These ideas are at first shocking to most people. Sadly for God, Christianity has been labeled as religion for a long, long time. Again, this is man's doing. Christianity is not what man does. Christianity is what God has done and will do. You see, Christianity is what God wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead. Look at this prayer:

Ephesians 1:15-23

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Christianity is God's doing, not man's. It is what He did in Christ and what He does in man when man believes on Christ. Look at that last verse again.

Verse 23:

Which is his body [the Church is Christ's body], the fulness of him [God] that filleth all in all [He fills each of us with His spirit].

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's doing. The new birth is God's doing. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church because God gave him that position. What we see in the modern Church are men conferring titles and positions upon each other. In reality, the only one in the Body of Christ with a title is Jesus Christ. This he has because God gave it to him. You and I become part of that Body because God fills us with His fulness. All God's doing, not man's. The only man involved in the doing is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

I Timothy 2:5,6

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

This is not to say that the Church today should not have structure. Nor am I inferring that there is no order to things. There is. But, that too is God ordained.

Romans 13:1

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Ephesians 4:8,11,12

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Furthermore, those who are appointed to these positions have serious responsibilities for which they are accountable to God. They serve at the Master's pleasure, not man's. So, once again there can be no fleshly presumption. When there is, there may be severe consequences. In other words, these are not things

that you take upon yourself. And thus, should NEVER be taken lightly.

Hebrews 5:1-5

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as *was* Aaron.

So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

But men do take these things upon themselves at times and the outcome is not of God, to be sure. That would be the product of religion which is always man made and presumptuous. The concept of Christianity is God's, He is the Author of salvation. The execution of God's plan and the credit for it is Jesus Christ's. He, is the Agent of salvation. As for the rest of us . . . well:

Romans 3:10&23

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Of course there is Adam. He has the dubious distinction of opening the door to sin and death.

Romans 5:12

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

You could say that Adam developed the NEED for salvation. But, if I were him, I wouldn't be too quick to seek that recognition. Would you? The credit belongs to Jesus Christ who flawlessly executed God's plan, redeeming us from death and destruction.

Romans 5:15-19

But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift *is* of many offences unto justification.

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

For as by one man's disobedience

many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Simply put, Christianity is the loving relationship of the Father and His family. God is our Father and we are His children. As in any family, the children were not consulted regarding their conception. Who do you know that played an active part in the planning of his own birth? There's no pilot counsel for such things.

Ephesians 3:14,15

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

I Peter 1:23

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

John 5:24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

What God wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead is what constitutes Christianity. It's a spiritual reality brought into being by an All-knowing, All-loving,

Almighty God. When you and I believe on what He, God, has done for us through His Son (Romans 10:9,10) then another spiritual reality is brought into being. We, through His doing and not ours, receive salvation and become part of the family of God. Members in particular of the Body of Christ, filled with His presence. Born again, saved, redeemed, sons of God with power, Christians, call it what you will, it's fabulous. Hallelujah!!! Glory to God for His mighty works which He has done!!!

I John 5:10-12

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

The witness that we have in ourselves is holy spirit. The gift of God, Christ in you! What a magnificent reality! This is what He has done, not what we have done. This is why we are called Christians. Because we have Christ in us! Maybe you didn't know this but the original use of the term Christian was intended to be derogatory (Acts 11:26). The excited disciples spoke exuberantly regarding having Christ in them. As a result, they were maligned as those "Christ-in's." They did have Christ in them, just as you and I do. Again, this is all God's doing. How else could we have "Christ in us, the hope of glory?"

As noted earlier, there is only one God and only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. However, there are many religions. I've been told that there are better than 4,000 of them. That's to the exclusion of the Big Four (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jew). There are those who will say five, as they include Christianity. But, as we have seen, that is not the case. Religion is man made which is why there are so many of them. God has nothing to do with religion. Therefore, Christianity is NOT one of the world's religions. I will concede, however, that there's a great deal of religion in Christianity and far too many religious Christians. But, that does not make Christianity a religion. That would not be God's doing, it would be man's. Significant also is that of all the "holy men" of all time only one has been raised from the dead to the end that he still lives. Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, all dead. God rest their souls! But, Jesus Christ is alive and at the right hand of God at this very moment.

Hebrews 7:22-25

By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

And they truly were many priests [you must replace the dead ones with live ones], because they were not suffered [able] to continue by reason of death:

But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Religion is an external act consisting of ceremonies and sacrifices. Since Jesus Christ fulfilled all the Mosaic law we are no longer subject to ceremony and sacrifice. He is the sin offering for all mankind and the payment for sin and its consequence. Religion can only address the outside, but God took care of the inside. We are made spiritually clean from the inside out and not from the outside in.

Harshness and cruelty are the earmarks of religion. Quite the opposite is true for Christianity. It is the gentleness of God that leads to repentance but religion forces its will upon others. Why? Because religion is the brain child of the Devil. He never honors free will and loves to take captive whoever he may at his own will.

II Timothy 2:24-26

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient,

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

God never violates a man's free choice. The Adversary is glad to, that's why the condition of those vexed with devil spirits is called possession. At that point in that person's life free will is no longer an option. The devil spirit has usurped that aspect of the man. He, the man, is being used. God will never use you. You are never used of the Lord as

some would say. Nor are you an instrument of His desire. You must by your own free will choose to be subject to Him. That's why the faithful are called disciples. They have disciplined themselves to be obedient. Religion always seeks to force its will upon others. Combine this tactic with a condescending judgement of others and you have a world class operation. Consider this passage:

Colossians 2:13-17

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*:

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

There are those who, under the guise of godliness, demand that others sign a creed or statement of beliefs so as to "belong." Failure to do so will deny them acceptance. Some go so far as to refuse entry or participation altogether. The adage, "my way or the highway," seems to be the maxim in many so-called Christian circles. All the while looking down their noses at others for their lack of

spirituality. What a travesty! You can rest assured that any and all actions like that are disdained by our Heavenly Father. He hates religion and violation of free will combined with legalism and judgment are religion of the highest (lowest) order. I'm certain that you've had some experience with this sort of thing. And for that I am sorry. But, you need never repeat such distasteful dealings. Should you ever be confronted with such things, walk away. Shake the dust off and move on. To stay would be to entertain bitterness and none of us can afford that. We want to do those things that our Father finds pleasing and getting caught up in the gall of religion is not one of them. Perhaps you remember the old soap opera "Peyton Place." That's what religion exemplifies today. Tattlers and busybodies contaminate religious circles preventing those who truly hunger for God's Word from receiving it. Contemplate the following individuals:

Luke 18:10-14

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

A wonderful example of humility and its merits set in juxtaposition to self righteousness! How tragic that religion has transformed it into a hollow man made prayer. Jesus Christ is the ONLY way to salvation and Christianity is NOT what men do, it IS what God did and will do.

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## The Counselor's Corner

With Rev. Linus A. Mathis III

### A Merry Heart

A long time ago, a man said to me, "People take life too seriously and God not seriously enough." While this is not the best structured statement I've ever heard, the truth in it is sobering. The fact is, most of us are too busy with the temporal to give much thought to the eternal. We get so caught up in the everyday demands of the work week we rarely take time to stop and "smell the roses." When children are factored into the "daily grind" they, like God, are not taken seriously and often over looked. Herein lies a great paradox. How can I pay attention to my children and be involved in their lives if I don't take life seriously? Harry Chapin (a premier folk singer from my era) summed it up beautifully in his ballad "Cat's in the Cradle." - "My child arrived just the other day, he came into the world in the usual way. But there were planes to catch and bills to pay. He learned to walk while I was away." - If you are familiar with this song then you

know the boy grew up to be just like his dad. Dad was too busy providing to be there and when dad got old, the boy was too busy doing the same. What's the answer? Priorities! Part of "smelling the roses" is spending time with your family. Life is short and we need to savor every minute. What better way than to laugh and play with your own family?

We want our kids to be sober minded and responsible, but not at the expense of living life. Sure work is important. However, the Lord Jesus Christ taught (Matthew 6:25) that life is more important than food and clothing. Food and clothing are two of the main reasons we work. Right? What Jesus Christ taught was to trust in and rely upon God. We are not to get anxious about the things we must have to sustain life. If we spend all our time focused upon the procurement of money and the things it will get us, life will surely pass us by. We will not enjoy the beauty of God's Divine Presence nor our children and the excitement of their childhood.

Today, as in times past, there's a great push to succeed. Be it scholastics, athletics or business, those who reach the top are revered. I've seen many a child pushed in this fashion and forced into premature adulthood. You're only a child once and childhood is important. What a shame to skip it or cut it short! My only concern is that my children grow up to fear God. I don't care what occupation they choose as long as they love God.

**Psalms 84:10**

For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of

wickedness.

A child is naturally light hearted and happy. There's so much to explore. So much fun to have. Solemnity was never meant to replace merriment. There's a time to be serious but certainly not ALL the time. By the way, we shouldn't spend all our time having fun either. There's a balance to things, a time and place for every thing.

**Ecclesiastes 3:1**

To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

It's also important to know that being light hearted is not the same as being foolish. A light hearted attitude expresses inner happiness. Whereas, foolishness demonstrates careless mental and physical habits. A fool is undisciplined but having fun represents effort. Most people like to dance, that's work. Isn't it?

**II Samuel 6:14a**

And David danced before the LORD with all *his* might;

Apparently it's okay with God to dance. They tell me it's fun too.

Has your child ever told you that he/she didn't want to become an adult? "Being an adult is too boring and no fun," is what they say. Have you asked yourself why? Maybe we communicate this. Why not show them you appreciate a good laugh? Humor is healthy.

**Proverbs 17:22**

A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

With all the deadly seriousness in

our world, humor is at a premium. Let's help our kids laugh by laughing with them.

Have you heard this one? A painter was painting a church steeple and decided to skimp on the job to make more money. So, he kept thinning the paint. When he finished and climbed down he looked up to see that his excessive use of thinner had made for a very shoddy job. "So what," he thought, "they'll never know the difference." Just then there was a loud thunder clap and a voice boomed from the clouds above, "REPAINT AND THIN NO MORE!"

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