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Frankly Speaking...

By Ed Smithson

CHRISTIANITY OR RELIGION?

I was speaking with my youngest son the other night and a certain person was being discussed. He made the statement that they “had religion but not Christianity.” It is so simple I don’t know why it did not occur to me before. He is absolutely right!

There are a lot of people that think they have Christianity but they only have religion. Quite often the statement is heard, and has been for many years, that someone “found religion” or “got religion.” What most folks don’t realize is that if you “found” something you can also “lose” it. And most of those who “found” religion wind up losing it before long, because it is not what they thought it to be.

Those who “find” religion usually just find a segment of Christianity. There are a lot of things entailed in a Christian life, truth telling, prayer, worship, living a quiet life, etc., and many others. But people who “find” religion just “latch on” to one of the things that suit them.

This happens in the church more times than we are willing to admit. An individual will learn just enough to obey the gospel. He then becomes a part of the church and becomes centered on a few things or just one. His light burns so brightly that he soon burns out.

Generally speaking this happens when one comes to the church as a result of trouble. Many of us have seen it happen time and again. A person will get in trouble, marriage or trouble with the law or something else just as serious. They finally come to think if they get their lives straight with God, it will solve their problems. At first they want to “join the church” and when they find out that is not possible perhaps they even educate themselves and obey the gospel and are baptized.

Then they latch on to a certain thing. Perhaps it is church attendance, it could also be prayer and they depend on those things almost exclusively. They think by the use of these characteristics it will solve their problems. Sometimes they become so intense in these areas they often offend even their brethren by insisting they have “found the way.”

It seldom works out. In a rather short time they began to be discouraged and disheartened because all their problems have not been solved. Then they become disengaged and may even fall away altogether. It is not the fault of the characteristic they have been following. It is because they “found religion” instead of being converted to Christianity.

Christianity is a way of life. To be a Christian one must understand more than just a segment of the Bible. What is in the Bible is there for a purpose. While one is not expected to learn everything about the Bible right away, he is expected by God to read and study it and mold his life after the principles and truths taught in the book.

Christianity is not something to last for a period of time and be cast aside. It is every day, twenty-four hours a day, from the time one decided to dedicate his life to God until he is claimed by the grave.

Is Christianity religion? Certainly! If you describe religion as something spiritual that helps a person keep his equilibrium, maintain a certain balance and keep him close to God. But we must understand that God expects us to be in it “for the long haul,” not just when we need help.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Amthura". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Many years ago when in college at Lipscomb, Batsell Barrett Baxter was my school counselor and became my friend. I attended many of his classes. In so doing I also followed many of his suggestions. One of those was that we make a list of GREAT CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE and preach on them. I did that and over the years developed and preached many sermons on that list. During this coming year, I plan to rework those chapter sermons and publish them in this column, hoping it will be used to the benefit of younger preachers and the churches for which they preach. Although there are some 66 of these chapters I have listed, hopefully I will be able to make presentations on all of this during this calendar year.