

THE PREFIX CHRISTIAN

By Ron Woolsey

Beware of becoming a Prefix Christian! What exactly do I mean by coining the phrase “Prefix Christian?”

“Prefix:” An affix placed before a word...*to modify a term’s meaning.*

“Christian:” 1) of, pertaining to, or derived from Jesus Christ or His teachings. 2) exhibiting a spirit proper to a follower of Jesus Christ: Christlike. 3) a person who exemplifies in his life the teachings of Christ.

The teachings of Christ are only made known by the study of the Word of God, and by being led by the Holy Spirit through that study, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)

In the early Christian movement, prefixes were not necessary, for to be a “Christian” meant simply and clearly to be a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ, one who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, his Savior *from* sin, one who patterned his life after the Example, Jesus Christ.

However, very early on the concept of “Prefix Christians” began to emerge upon the scene, and the apostle Paul addressed the issue thusly: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, ...that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? ...He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:10-13,31)

During the Protestant Reformation prefixes began appearing as little windows of the light of truth were opened upon the dark world of religion. As the great Reformers became popular and then died off, followers formed

creeds around the established, yet incomplete, array of doctrines taught by their mentors. Therefore, denominations began to form, such as Lutheran Christians, Baptist, Calvinist (Presbyterian), Methodist, etc. Actually, the very fact that these “Prefixes” were used was a clear indication that the establishment of fundamental beliefs was an incomplete process. We might say of the Lutherans, they were followers of the teachings of Martin Luther who was just beginning to understand the light of truth through his personal study. Much, much more light was to flood the Christian world as the Reformation progressed. But when the Reformer passed, the adherents to his teachings embraced what he had taught and closed the door, generally speaking, on more advancing light.

Today, because so many “Prefixes” are used to identify the hundreds of Christian denominations now in existence, it is incumbent upon one to actually use a prefix to identify the form of Christianity to which he adheres.

To add a prefix to the word “Christian” is to qualify the meaning of the word “Christian” by either attempting to clarify the meaning, or by altering, or modifying the meaning.

Adding Clarity

A “Methodist Christian” would therefore be an adherent to the teachings of Jesus Christ as spelled out through all the accepted doctrines, or statements of belief, of the Methodist denomination. The same would be true of the “Baptist Christian” and the “Seventh-day Adventist Christian.”

In all these and similar cases the prefix is adding clarity to the understanding of the meaning of “an adherent to the teachings of Jesus Christ.” In other words, the prefix explains the understanding of what it means to be a “Christian” through the understanding of biblical doctrine.

Altering, or Modifying the Meaning

Other prefixes used actually, though perhaps unintentionally, might even alter the very meaning of the word “Christian.” For example: “Social Christian,” “Non-denominational Christian,” “Contemporary Christian,” “Liberal Christian,” “Conservative Christian.” (Descriptions reserved for another day)

The “professed Christian” is one who does take the name of Jesus Christ as his Lord, Master, and Savior, but may or may not actually incorporate the meanings of “Lord,” “Master,” and “Savior” into his daily life and behavior.

Let me quickly state that although all Christians are “professed Christians,” the “true and faithful ones” are Christians known only to God, for He alone knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. Jesus referred to Nathaniel as “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” Obviously, Jesus makes a distinction between “professed Christians,” (in name only), and true ones.

A Disturbing Trend

The concern of this study is the ever-increasing use of these modifying prefixes in conjunction with Christianity today, actually altering the true meaning of this profession, especially regarding one particular issue that I find to be very disturbing.

Over the past few years, and in light of numerous judicial rulings around our country and the recent Supreme Court ruling, homosexuality is being embraced as an “acceptable alternative lifestyle.” Many gays who have grown up in a Christian culture are wanting to remain within that culture, but without denouncing their homosexuality. In other words, they wish to continue with their “profession” of being Christian, but also to identify as gay. Hence the term “gay Christian.” They may profess to be living celibate lives, suppressing their homosexuality, but by clinging to the prefix, do they truly have a change of heart? *Sins of the heart precede sins of overt behavior.*

When I became a Christian 24 years ago I chose to turn my back on a number of vices in addition to homosexuality: alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, dancing, lust, just to name a few. As a Christian, from that time forward it never crossed my mind to attach those vices to my Christianity by self-identifying as a “lusting Christian,” a “pothead Christian,” a “smoking Christian,” and certainly not a “gay Christian!” As a new child of God, accepting Jesus as my Savior *from* all those vices, renouncing those behaviors, entering into His school of discipleship, and patterning my new life after His life, I did not want to identify with the sins of my past from

which I was turning, no matter how strong the temptations to indulge once more. I worked to starve and bury the old while feeding the new.

Yet today there is an ever-increasing push to incorporate prefixes into Christian identity, especially when it comes to homosexuality. But in all fairness, if we can accept the terms “gay Christian,” and “bi-sexual Christian,” then why not other oxy-morons? Such as: “lusting Christian,” “adulterous Christian,” “polygamous Christian,” “pedophile Christian,” “masturbating Christian,” or “polyamorous Christian.”

One outspoken “Prefix Christian,” a gay activist graduate from Andrews University claiming to be a bi-sexual Seventh-day Adventist Christian, has worked to organize straight/gay alliances on many Adventist university campuses, alliances that work aggressively to prevent the message of salvation *from* homosexuality from being presented on campus. He has recently called upon Christians to stop using certain words and phrases in order to communicate with the LGBT community. This call in and of itself implies that the Christian community and the LGBT community are two opposing and incompatible entities, therefore inadvertently conceding the term “gay Christian” to be an oxymoron.

He attempts to muzzle Christians by suggesting as unacceptable such Christian phrases as, “Love the sinner but hate the sin,” “The Bible clearly says,” “Homosexuality is a sin,” “Jesus can change you,” and “Go, and sin no more.” He is basically saying, “To communicate with us you must not disagree, but rather agree with us. You must not offend us with your biblical difference of opinion, for we view that as rejection. You must use our terms, for we find them preferable to the words of God.”

It pains me to see Christians kowtowing to such demands of the gay agenda, when instead they should be offering a compassionate message of hope, of healing, of transformation into the image of Christ, of victory in Jesus.

In a recent sermon from the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University the following statements were made:

“There are those among us who self-identify as gay or lesbian who follow Jesus with all their hearts, but struggle with the celibacy He is calling them to embrace. It can be a desperate struggle, which is why the church,

community of Jesus, the family of God, must be a place of refuge, safety, *healing* for heterosexual and homosexual, a place of compassionate confidentiality.”

Now, this “healing” seems to me to be a healing of *hurts*, but not necessarily a healing of *hearts*, not a healing that leads to transformation of mind as well as behavior, for the pastor goes on to quote from a newly voted statement from the Andrews University Seminary:

“...Non-practicing gay persons should be welcomed into membership and church office. All should receive spiritual care from the church (Gal. 6:1).”

The pastor then inserts, ***“It doesn’t matter how you identify yourself. You are welcome, in membership and in leadership...! That’s what they are saying.”***

He then continues with the Seminary statement, “We stand against any antipathy or hostility toward homosexuals as well as any cultural biases that fuel a lack of Christ-like love for them... *We strongly affirm that homosexual persons have a place in the Seventh-day Adventist church.*”

In spite of all the statements in the seminary document that suggest gay Christians must resist temptations just as any other Christian, when it goes on to state, “*We strongly affirm that homosexual persons have a place in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,*” I can assure you, having been there myself, this is an opening door to compromise with the gay agenda. This statement allows for the “Prefix Christian” to assume membership and leadership alongside those who are accepting a *new* identity in Christ. It offers them equal voice, equal vote, and equal opportunity.

At the same time, those who have dropped the identity of homosexuality and are walking in newness of life are often viewed as unrealistic, dogmatic, and presenting a damaging message. But friends, the gospel of salvation *from* sin, in thought, word, and action is not a damaging message. It testifies of our God as omnipotent, rather than impotent.

This leads me to another line of questioning: If a gay Christian is practicing celibacy, then he must know that homosexuality is sin, right? And if he, as a Christian, is accepting Jesus as his Savior *from* sin, then why carry the label of that sin as an identity? If homosexuals are not to enter the

kingdom of God, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, then why would one want to self-identify as a “gay Christian,” labeling himself as a Christian who will not enter the kingdom of God? To be a celibate “gay Christian” is to suppress the homosexual behavior, but what about the lust of the heart? What about starving the old, and feeding the new? Can one truly overcome the sin with which he chooses to continue wearing as an identity?

Let us not forget the warning of Jesus, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 7:21)

Jesus also said, “If the Son, therefore set you free, ye are free indeed!”

Do we not believe these powerful words of Jesus? Himself our Savior *from* sin, even the sin of homosexuality?

A true Christian is one who should “Bring every thought into captivity,” “presenting his body a living sacrifice,” “letting this mind be in him which was also in Christ Jesus,” “being transformed by the renewing of the mind,” so it can be said of him, “Such *were* some of you.” (2 Cor. 10:5; Ro. 12:1,2; Phil. 2:5; 1 Cor. 6:11)

For as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) And this is where 2 Corinthians 5:17 comes into play: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [a new creation by the hand of the omnipotent Creator]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” To which Ellen White comments, “The new birth consists in having new motives, new tastes, & new tendencies.” And, “A genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong.” (RH 04/12/1892; Letter 105, 1893) *Do we believe these words...?*

Orientation & Re-orientation

The new seminary statement goes on to say: “In this statement we differentiate between homosexuality as an orientation...and homosexual practice... Our nature is marred and corrupted by sin from birth; it is damaged with inherited and cultivated tendencies toward sexual (and other kinds of) lust in both either heterosexual or homosexual persons. Yet, because of the atoning blood of Christ, those redeemed are not condemned and can receive victory over those tendencies and inclinations... While homosexuality is a distortion of the Edenic ideal, “there is no condemnation”

for homosexually oriented persons as long as they “are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) and do not harbor or act upon their orientation and propensities. It should be emphasized, however, that the biblical materials condemn homosexual practice, but there is no castigation of innate homosexual orientation per se.”

This statement treats homosexual orientation as though it were fixed when a dictionary definition speaks of orientation as a direction of choice. As a former pilot, I never allowed the headwinds, crosswinds, tailwinds or the violent storm to determine my orientation. On the contrary, I made every correction necessary to maintain the orientation of my choice in order to assure my safe arrival at my chosen destination. For the past 24 years, having been gay myself, but having chosen a new orientation and destination for my life, and now being married for 23 years, I have practiced, by God’s grace, not allowing the crosswinds of Satan to determine my orientation, nor my destination. Re-orientation is a viable choice every Christian can and must make.

In closing, I contend that the “Prefix Christian” who attaches sin to his identity is not truly living up to his Christian potential, but is rather living with a “patchwork character.” And,

“Christ gives man no encouragement to think that He will accept a patchwork character, made up mostly of self, with a little of Christ... Soon it is all of self and none of Christ... Christ looks with pitying tenderness on all who have combination characters... The patchwork religion is not of the least value with God. He requires *the whole heart*. No part of it is to be reserved for the development of hereditary or cultivated tendencies to evil.” (Letter 105, 1983; Letter 31aa, 1894)

The word “Christian” really needs no modifying prefix. As a disciple of Christ one is either allowing Jesus to be Mentor, patterning his own life after the discipline of Christ, without reservation, or he is not really a disciple at all.

“Through all ages and in every nation those that believe that Jesus can and will save them personally *from* sin, [in thought as well as in word and behavior], are the elect and chosen of God; they are his peculiar treasure. They obey His call, and come out of the world and separate themselves *from every unclean thought and unholy practice.*” (RH 08/01/1893) **Amen!**