



Lesson 2

WHO ARE THE CHRISTADELPHIANS?

Reading John 15

The intention of this Bible course is to direct your attention to the Scriptures. However, you may wonder who the Christadelphians are, so we will tell you a little about ourselves.

The Christadelphians are a world-wide community of men and women who read the whole of the Bible and accept it as the inspired Word of God. They believe in the Old and New Testament promises concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the future of the world. They are waiting for the return of Jesus from heaven to set up God's kingdom on the earth.

The name Christadelphian comes from two Greek words which mean Brethren in Christ.

Where do Christadelphians live?

There are Christadelphians in over 50 countries. They are to be found in Britain and many parts of Europe; in more than a dozen countries in Africa; in the Far East from India to Indonesia; in Australasia and the Pacific Islands; in North and South America from Canada down to Argentina, and in the islands of the Caribbean. The community includes men and women of many colours and cultures.

What do they believe?

Christadelphians base their faith on the things which were believed and taught by Jesus and his disciples nearly 2000 years ago. The true message of Christianity has not changed. Unfortunately, throughout the centuries many "Christian" churches have left the truth and have turned to doctrines which had their origins in pagan beliefs. On the other hand, there have always been small groups who have held to the true faith. For instance, in Europe over 400 years ago there were many people who learned the true gospel by reading the Bible for themselves when it was printed in their own language. These men and women called themselves "Brethren in Christ". Sadly, many of them were cruelly treated or put to death for their faith. Many had to leave their homes, but they took the Gospel all over Europe and across the seas. It was not long, however, before the truth again became mixed with false teaching. (There is a lesson here - the truth is only preserved when men read and study God's Word for themselves.)

How did the Christadelphian community begin?

In 1832 an English doctor named John Thomas, who had been a church preacher, took ship bound for New York because his father wanted to settle in America. The ship ran aground in a violent storm and Dr. Thomas thought he was going to die. He realised that he knew very little about the future, and he vowed that if he got to land he would not rest until he had found the truth about life after death. Well, he did reach New York, and he was as good as his word. He spent the next 15 years studying the Bible very carefully and examining the claims of many "Christian" sects. When he was sure that he fully understood the things written in the Old and New Testaments concerning Jesus Christ and the coming kingdom of God on earth he arranged to be baptized, by full immersion. He continued to do much public preaching in America and Britain and produced religious magazines and books.

Among those who believed the same teachings and joined John Thomas in his work was a Scotsman named Robert Roberts. He helped to organise the growing number of followers into ecclesias. "Ecclesia" is a Bible word which means "an assembly of people who have been called". Christadelphians prefer to use this word, rather than "church" - which sometimes conveys the idea of a building rather than a special group of people.

At first the name may sound a little strange

The name Christadelphian was first used in 1864 when the believers asked the American Government for exemption from military activity at the time of the American Civil War. Needing a name to identify the members as a separate community, John Thomas remembered the "Brethren in Christ" 300 years before, and so he used the name 'Christadelphian', which is the Greek form of that title. These 19th Century Christadelphians were great travellers and they preached in many parts of the world, so that by the end of the century there were groups of believers in many lands.

How do Christadelphians organise themselves?

There are various committees for organising missionary work and for looking after the sick, the old, and the lonely, and we have offices in a few countries for publishing magazines and books. But we have no paid ministers and no central organisation. Financial needs are met by voluntary offerings from the members. We have no priests.

But you may ask: if there is no central body to link all the members together, how do Christadelphians organise themselves? The answer is that our common faith and our common practices provide the essential link which binds the members together.

Each local group is self-contained and appoints its own "elders", usually by voting once a year. Those who are appointed serve the ecclesia in various duties such as secretary, treasurer, steward or as chairmen of meetings. They are not paid for their work. They are not "priests", because we believe that Jesus, now in heaven, is the only Priest- to whom baptized members of his Church can confess their sins in prayer. Christadelphians do not build enormous, elaborate church buildings. Of course, there are some places where ecclesias are able to own their own hall or room for meeting and preaching. Elsewhere they meet in rented schoolrooms, community halls or in houses.

The same beliefs

Christadelphians, in whatever part of the world they live, have read and studied their Bibles and have come to the same essential beliefs. For over 100 years we have had a Statement of Faith (a summary of Bible doctrines) which every member accepts as the basis of fellowship with other members. Before anyone is baptized and becomes a Christadelphian he (or she) must satisfy himself that he understands the important teachings of the Bible and that he is in full agreement with our Bible-based beliefs and practices. This is what binds Christadelphians together.

"One body . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-5)

This makes it possible for Christadelphians, wherever they live, to share a happy and rewarding fellowship with each other.

The kind of people we try to be

We all need God's help. So we believe it is very important to pray. One thing we try to do every day is to read the Bible. That is as important as having regular food. Once a week we meet to eat a little piece of bread and drink a sip of wine in memory of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find that Christadelphians are very happy people because they have a sure and practical faith. But we are very serious about the way we live. Because Jesus is coming back very soon we wish to be ready for his coming. That means leading clean and honest lives. It means avoiding heavy drinking, gambling and other evil habits. Christadelphians are law-abiding citizens of their country. They try to do all the good they can, but they do not take part in politics, nor do they fight or take people to court. It means having only one wife, and not having sex before or outside marriage. (We realise that some may already have more than one wife, and this matter is discussed in Lesson 33.)

The Christadelphian Bible Mission

The CBM, as we call it, is for preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God all over the world. The CBM advertises study courses, prints literature and helps people to understand the Bible. The CBM is staffed by unpaid Christadelphian volunteers who do this work as well as their normal employment. Its aim is to help men and women to learn the Gospel, to encourage them to repent and be baptized, and to follow the example of Jesus and the apostles.

We want to share right beliefs, hope and joy with you

Christadelphians sincerely believe that their faith represents the true Gospel as found in the whole of the Bible. We hope that you, too, will enjoy discovering The Truth. It not only satisfies because it is right; it also brings hope, joy and love to your life. May God bless you in your seeking.

Some important Bible teachings are printed on the next page.

Verses to read Psalm 119:130; Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:3.

Learn by heart John 15:13-14

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. "

SOME IMPORTANT BIBLE TEACHINGS

- The Bible is the only true message from God.
- There is only One God, the Creator, who is in control of world affairs.
- Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born of Mary. He was a sinless man. He died on the cross to save those who believe in him. He was raised from the grave and is now in heaven.
- Jesus will soon return from heaven. He will establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. He will rule as King and his capital will be Jerusalem in the land of Israel.
- The Jews are God's witnesses to His purpose, even though many of them do not realise it. God made promises to Abraham and David which will be fulfilled when Jesus comes back.
- Death is the punishment for sin and all men are sinners. The only hope of life after death is bodily resurrection from the grave at the return of Jesus.
- There will be a judgement. Those who are faithful followers of Jesus will be given everlasting life and they will help him to solve the problems of the world and bring peace and blessing to all nations.
- We must believe the Gospel, repent from our sins and be baptized. If we keep trying hard to obey God's commands, and pray for forgiveness when we fail, then we shall be saved.
- The Bible prophecies about past and present world events have all come true. The signs show that the return of Jesus Christ to the earth is very near. That is why you should study your Bible