

Introducing *the* Christadelphians



The Christadelphians

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Walking down the streets of your town, you may have noticed a hall with “CHRISTADELPHIANS” on the sign outside. Who, you may wonder, are these people, and what do they stand for?

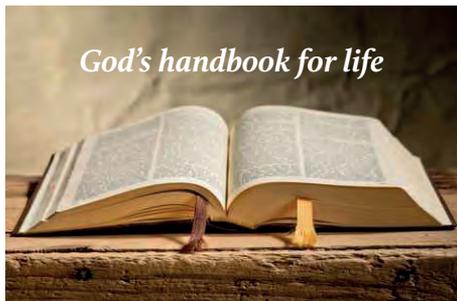
Christadelphians are found in most countries of the world. We believe the Bible is God’s handbook for life, and read it daily for comfort and advice. We model our beliefs and practices as closely as we can on the first century church, which makes us different to most other Christian groups. For example, we have no paid priests or pastors, because there were none in the time of the apostles. We do not feel bound to tithe our income, or keep Sabbaths, or burn incense, because these practices were left behind with the Law of Moses, and not repeated in the New Testament. We call each other ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. We practise only adult baptism. Like the early Christians, we expect Jesus

to return from heaven to be a king on the earth, bringing justice and peace. As this could be any time, we try to live as pilgrims, ready to leave and be with him. If we die, we hope to be raised back to life when Jesus comes. We believe the Jews are still God’s people, and will be restored to him. And we follow these simple rules – love God, love each other, love your neighbours, and remember Jesus in bread and wine. If this sounds interesting, please read on to find out more about us!

THE NAME

“Christadelphians” is a bit of a mouthful. Literally it means “brothers in Christ”. There is a New Testament precedent – Jesus called his followers his brothers, and the Apostles addressed their letters to “the brothers”.¹ The members of Christadelphian congregations call each other ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. We treat one another as ‘family’, with practical help, sympathy, kindness and love.

¹ Matthew 12:49 (Matthew chapter 12 verse 49), Colossians 1:2, James 1:2



HOW CHRISTADELPHIANS ARE ORGANISED

Christadelphians often refer to their congregations as 'ecclesias'. The New Testament word translated as 'church' in most Bibles is the Greek word 'ekklesia'. This means an assembly or gathering of people. 'Church' could be mistaken for a building with a steeple, but 'ecclesia' emphasises the congregation and not the building.

The organisation, lifestyle and practices of the Christadelphians follow as closely as possible the way the Christian community was formed in the first century. We do not have a hierarchy of rulers. Each member is equal in the sight of God, and there is no source of authority other than the Bible.

Christadelphian ecclesias can be found all over the world. Each group is responsible for its own decisions and organises its own affairs. There is no central authority. The only link between ecclesias is a common belief in an agreed list of essential teachings. Most ecclesias will have a group of non-paid elders (often termed 'arranging brethren') appointed by the congregation. Their role is to ensure the smooth running of the group, including preaching the gospel, caring for the elderly and sick, and teaching the young. The elders do not rule over the congregation, but give advice and guidance, as the apostle Peter instructs:

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of

the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3)².

WHAT TO EXPECT AT A CHRISTADELPHIAN ECCLESIA

Christadelphians meet in a variety of buildings. Some ecclesias have their own building; some rent village halls or schools. Others hold their meetings in the homes of members of the congregation. There is nothing ostentatious about a Christadelphian meeting place. The focus is not on the place of worship, but the members.

The ecclesia looks after all its members, and this is reflected in the weekly schedule. A typical week might run like this:

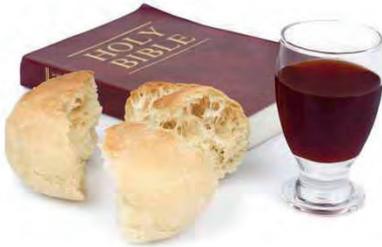
Sunday – a memorial service to remember the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; a school for young people and children; and a public Bible Hour when a talk on an aspect of Bible teaching is given.

Mid-week – a Bible study class to study and learn from a section of the Bible; a mother and toddler group; a young people's youth group; and a meeting of the elders to discuss the affairs of the ecclesia.

Saturday – a 'fraternal' (brotherly meeting) where brothers and sisters

² Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

from the locality are invited to listen to Bible talks and enjoy worship and praise and a meal together. Saturday is also a convenient day for committee meetings. The Christadelphian community has many activities which involve many ecclesias.



So, for example, there are committees for editing magazines, running residential homes, preparing literature, and organising preaching work overseas. Each ecclesia adjusts its activities to the needs of its members and the local population. There will be cultural differences, for example, in the programmes of overseas ecclesias.

THE MEMORIAL SERVICE

The focal point for a Christadelphian is the Sunday memorial meeting. The apostle Paul left these instructions:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same manner he also took the cup after supper,

saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

We remember Jesus every week by sharing bread and wine

In the quietness of the meeting room, the baptised believers take a small amount of bread and drink a sip of wine to remember Jesus until he comes again. They each review their own conduct and attitude, comparing themselves with the Lord Jesus.

Why is Sunday the usual day for the memorial service? In Bible reckoning, Sunday was the first day of the week, and in the first century that was the day for this gathering:

“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7).

What do the bread and cup symbolise? Paul answers:

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16,17).

The cup is filled with wine and it represents the blood of Christ, a clear reference to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19).

"And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:27-29).

The bread reminds us that Jesus was crucified. Again, the words of Jesus are clear:

"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (Luke 22:19).

The believers are all part of the body of Christ and make up one symbolic loaf of bread, the body of Jesus.

Note that the bread and cup of wine are only symbols. They are not literally the blood and body of Jesus. When he said to the apostles "This is my body", Jesus had not yet died on the cross.

1 Corinthians 16:2 also tells us that on the first day of each week there was a collection made for the poor believers. Most Christadelphian ecclesias take up Sunday collections to cover the costs of the ecclesia, the Christadelphian care homes and preaching work in the UK and overseas.

THE BIBLE HOUR

When you visit a Christadelphian Bible Hour you will be welcomed by the door-keeper, and provided with a Bible if you have not brought one with you. The service will generally last an hour. There will probably be a hymn, a prayer, a Bible reading, and then the Bible talk. This will have been prepared by one of the members, or by a visitor from another ecclesia. None of our speakers claim to possess the Holy

Spirit. Their thoughts are based entirely on their study of the Bible. Afterwards there may be a discussion. The brothers and sisters will often stay around for a while after the service is





finished for a chat. Some ecclesias opt to have Bible seminars, either on Sunday or mid-week. Seminars are less formal mutual learning sessions with discussion and questions throughout.

WORSHIP

Music is important in our worship, as it was in the first century church. Some Christadelphian hymn books are traditional, others are in a modern style. Accompaniment may be by piano, organ or other instruments. Singing classes and choral groups practise to give concerts, for example Handel's 'Messiah', which are always well attended. Some ecclesias stand for prayers, others remain seated.

BACKGROUND TO THE CHRISTADELPHIAN COMMUNITY

There are many Christian groups who claim to be based on the Bible and yet have contrasting views and beliefs. Why do Christadelphians deserve your attention?

Over 150 years ago a medical doctor called John Thomas came to understand that the beliefs and teachings of mainstream Christianity did not always agree with the plain teaching of the Bible.

A keen scholar of Greek and Hebrew, he set about searching the Bible for its true meaning. He never claimed to have received a direct revelation from God, or to be inspired. Indeed, John Thomas was not afraid to revise some of the details as his knowledge increased.

John Thomas' sound reasoning from the Bible, passed on through public talks, books and magazines, convinced many people that his conclusions were based upon the true teaching of the Bible. Christadelphians today do not consider his writings sacred, but we value his example. Like him, we do not accept anything that cannot be firmly supported by the Bible.

The Christadelphian Magazine has been published on a monthly basis since 1864. We also print specialist literature for Sunday schools and youth groups, for Bible study, and for preaching, both in English and in other languages for use overseas.

OUR CORE BELIEFS:

The Bible says:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

God

There is only one God who is both immortal and invisible:

"The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

"the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Daniel 4:32).

Man and woman

The Bible tells us that the first man and woman broke God's rules. They sinned, and God's judgement was that they should return to dust:

"dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

Jesus Christ

Before Jesus' birth God's angel said to his mother Mary:

"You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. Therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31,35).

The Holy Spirit

The Bible says God created life on the earth, and keeps in touch with His creation, through His unique power, the Holy Spirit:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).

The Devil and Satan

Jesus says the source of evil deeds is the human heart, not a supernatural evil being:

"From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, ... All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mark 7:21-23).

The Nation of Israel in God's Plan

God said if they disobeyed His laws:

"The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other" (Deuteronomy 28:64).

But:

"He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock" (Jeremiah 31:10).

In 1948 Israel became a nation once again in the land promised to Abraham, exactly as God had said would happen.

The Return of Jesus

At Jesus' ascension into Heaven the angels promised:

"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10,11).

Christadelphians believe that Jesus' return could be very soon, because the Jews are back in their land. That is a great sign that the end time is near.

The Kingdom of God

Jesus is going to reign over the Kingdom of God, here on earth:

"Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7).