

The Christadelphians

(Brothers and Sisters in Christ)

Introducing a
Bible-based Community

by **Rob Hyndman**

Cover illustrations: Christadelphians in India,
the Caribbean, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

The Christadelphians are a small religious body who have attempted to get back to the faith and character of the early Christian church in New Testament times.

The name ‘Christadelphians’ has been in use for nearly 150 years. It comes from two Greek words and means ‘Brothers and Sisters in Christ’.

(see Matthew 23:8 Colossians 1:2 and Hebrews 2:11)

We are located in over 120 countries throughout the world with large groups of Christadelphians in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, North America, India, Asia and Africa. Like the early Christians, we meet in homes, rented rooms and, in some cases, our own halls.

(see Acts 1:13-14, 2:46-47, 18:7, 19:9, 28:30)

We are a lay community patterned after first century Christianity. Each congregation is called an ‘ecclesia’ (the Greek New Testament word for church). We have no paid clergy or church hierarchy. Members of each congregation are addressed as ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, and all are involved in organising our activities. All members contribute their time, resources and energy voluntarily in service to God. A strong common belief binds our brotherhood together.

(see Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-27; Galatians 3:28)

We accept the Bible as our only guide and believe it to be the inspired word of God. Membership is open to those with similar beliefs after being baptised (fully immersed in water).

A BRIEF HISTORY

Many believers since the apostles have held the same faith as the Christadelphians. There have been countless independent communities around the world who have eagerly studied the Bible and accepted its simple teachings.

The beliefs and practices of the Christadelphians can be traced from the New Testament to the earliest Christians of the 1st and 2nd Centuries in documents such as the Epistle of Clement, The Didache and The Apostles’ Creed.

With the advent of religious freedom in Europe in the 16th Century Reformation, the same beliefs and practices resurfaced in Bible-minded groups such as the Swiss Anabaptists and Polish Socinians. The early English Baptists held similar beliefs (although these beliefs are not held by Baptists today). In the 18th Century many leading

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figures in the Enlightenment such as Sir Isaac Newton and William Whiston held these beliefs.

The modern Christadelphian movement has its origin in the 1830s, an age of revival and reform in America and England. In America a medical doctor, John Thomas, published the *Herald of the Kingdom*, which set out Bible teaching on the resurrection and the Kingdom of God. In Britain a journalist named Robert Roberts took up the same cause in the *Ambassador of the Coming Age*. Thomas and Roberts made no claims to any vision or personal revelations - only to try to be honest students of the Bible.

When the American Civil War broke out in 1861 those Christian groups who did not fight were required to register with the Union government. Sam Coffman and other brothers in Ogle County, Illinois, registered themselves as “Brethren in Christ, or in a word Christadelphian”. This name was soon adopted by many like-minded groups of believers in America and Britain. Since then, independent Christadelphian groups have been established in countries all over the world.

The next sections of this booklet introduce:

1. Our Beliefs
2. Our Way of Life
3. Our Fellowship, Worship and Witness

1. OUR BELIEFS

THE BIBLE

We believe that the Bible is God’s only revealed message to mankind, given to bring individuals to faith in God and His Son. It is our only authority and should be read prayerfully and with care at every opportunity.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Acts 17:11; Ephesians 2:20; Romans 16:26)

GOD

There is only one eternal, immortal God. Jesus Christ is his only begotten son, and the Holy Spirit is his power.

(Deuteronomy 6:4; Luke 1:35; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 1:17, 2:5, 6:16)

MAN

Man is mortal and a sinner before God. His whole being is prone to sin and the punishment for sin is death - the end of all life.

(Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 3:23; James 1:13-15; Romans 6:23; Ecclesiastes 9:5,10; Psalm 115:17, 146:4)

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HOPE

The only hope of life after death is the resurrection of the body and everlasting life in God's kingdom on earth.

(Psalms 49:12-20; John 11:25-26; Acts 24:15; Romans 8:22-39; 1 Corinthians 15:12; Revelation 5:10, 20:4)

THE PROMISES

The Gospel is inseparable from the promises which God made to Abraham and David in Old Testament times. These promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

(Acts 13:32; Genesis 13:14-17, 22:15-18; 2 Samuel 7:12,16; Luke 1:31-33; Galatians 3:6-9,16,26-29)

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD..

In his love, God sent his son, the man Jesus, into the world to save men from their sins. Those who believe in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

(Matthew 1:20-21, 3:17; Luke 1:35; John 3:16)

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

Jesus was sinless. He died to show God's righteousness and to redeem those who receive this sacrifice by faith. God raised him from the dead, gave him immortality, granted him all authority in heaven and on earth, and set him as the mediator between God and man.

(Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 1:19-23; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 4:14-16)

THE RETURN OF JESUS

Jesus will return to the earth soon. Then he will raise many of the dead, judge them with the living, and give to the faithful everlasting life in the kingdom of God.

(Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:31-34; Luke 21:20-32; John 5:28-29; Acts 1:11; 2 Tim 4:1; Revelation 22:12)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God will be established on earth. Jesus will be king in Jerusalem; his rule will be worldwide and his government will bring eternal righteousness and peace.

(Psalms 72; Isaiah 2:2-4, 9:6-7, 11:1-9, 61:1-11; Jeremiah 3:17; Daniel 2:44, 7:14,27; Acts 3:21)

THE WAY OF SALVATION

The way to enter the kingdom of God is by faith. This involves belief in the Bible and obedience to its requirements that men and women confess their sins, repent, be baptised and follow Jesus faithfully.

(Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 16:16; John 3:3-5; Acts 2:37-38, 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 11:6)

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SOME IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES

Often we are asked; “How are you different from other Christian groups?” Apart from our distinctive organisation (with no clergy or hierarchy), some of our doctrines are quite different from most churches:

We reject the doctrine of the Trinity, which developed after Jesus’ death and resurrection as a result of disputes within the church (Council of Nicea 325AD). The Bible teaches that Jesus was the Son of God and not that he ‘pre-existed’ in heaven as ‘God the Son’.

The Trinity diminishes the work of Christ by denying both his humanity and the reality of his death. For if he was God he was not tempted, and could not die.

(1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Hebrews 5:8)

We also reject the popular idea of an ‘immortal soul’ that goes to heaven at death. The Bible teaches that the only hope for eternal life is resurrection when Jesus returns and life forever with him in God’s kingdom,.

(John 3:13; Acts 2:34; 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

We believe that baptism is essential and is for adults only. Sprinkling of babies is not baptism.

(John 3:5, Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21)

We also believe that the Bible uses the ‘devil’ as a symbol of sinful human nature, and so we reject the doctrine of a supernatural tempter.

(Isaiah 45:7; Mark 8:33; John 6:70; Hebrews 1:14)

2. OUR WAY OF LIFE

THE BIBLE - GUIDEBOOK FOR LIFE

The Bible is the authority on which our lives should be based. A widespread custom among Christadelphians is to read the Bible every day using a reading plan which enables us to systematically read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice each year. Many read much more widely than this.

(Romans 15:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:22; 2 Timothy 2:15)

PRAYER

Following New Testament example, and Christ’s instruction, we pray to God, our Father in heaven, in the name of His Son, Jesus - rather than praying to Jesus. This does not prevent us having a personal relationship with Jesus, who knows our weaknesses.

(John 15:16,16:26; Hebrews 2:15)

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WORK

Following the teaching and example of the Apostle Paul all Christadelphians aim to support themselves and their family by honest work. Certain professions (politics, the military, the police, criminal law) are avoided.

(1 Timothy 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

FAMILY LIFE

The relationship between husband and wife is parallel to the relationship between Christ and his church. Therefore marriage must be treated with utmost sanctity. Children are brought up in a knowledge of God, attending Sunday School and in daily Bible readings with their parents. The elderly are cared for both by their families and by the brotherhood.

(Ephesians 5:22-33, 6:4; 1 Timothy 5:4)

GIVING

Christadelphians are, both individually and in groups, involved in charitable work and giving. However we try not to “do our works to be seen of men”, and also do not mix charity with preaching to avoid people coming to Christ for the wrong reasons.

(Galatians 6:10; James 1:27, 2:15-16; Matthew 6:1-4; John 6:26)

We do not tithe (give 10% of our income to the church) because in the Old Testament tithes were to provide for the (Levitical) priesthood - which has now been abolished.

(Numbers 18:24; Hebrews 7:1-28)

FLESH AND SPIRIT

Baptism must be followed by an effort to change our lives, to live by the Spirit and not by the Flesh. By this we do not mean supernatural Spirit powers, any more than we believe that the Flesh (or ‘Devil’) is a supernatural power, but we do recognise that God is active in our lives both by His word, and by His providential care.

(Romans 6:1-4; Mark 14:38, Galatians 5:22-25)

FAITH AND GRACE

We try to rely fully upon God and develop a faith which is active in prayer and good works. At the same time, however, we recognise that salvation is by grace.

(Ephesians 2:8)

With God’s help, we seek to please and obey him every day, trying to imitate Christ who faithfully obeyed his Father. We therefore endeavour to be enthusiastic in work, loyal in marriage, generous in giving, dedicated in preaching, and happy in our God.

3. OUR FELLOWSHIP, WORSHIP AND WITNESS

MEETINGS

Once a week we meet to worship God, and remember the sacrifice of His Son Jesus by breaking bread and drinking wine. All baptised members take bread and wine.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 12:13; Matthew 26:26-30)

Apart from the bread and wine this meeting consists of prayers, the reading of two or three chapters from the Bible, several hymns, and an ‘exhortation’ (word of encouragement) based on the Bible. A different brother will speak every week.

(Ephesians 5:19, 1 Timothy 4:13, Hebrews 3:13)

Participation in this meeting is the focus of our religious life. In most countries this meeting is held on Sunday, though it may be on another day (e.g. Saturday in Nepal and Friday in Bangladesh) where Sunday is not a public holiday. Children learn about the Bible in Sunday School.

(Acts 2:42, 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2)

Most local groups also hold one or more evening Bible classes during the week as well as Youth Group activities.

BIBLE SCHOOLS

Christadelphians do not have theological schools or seminaries, instead Bible Schools exist for all members. Every year many Christadelphians spend a week or some weekends at a Bible School or Bible Study Camps which are held at facilities rented from colleges or other churches.

At such schools there will usually be two or three speakers, each taking a different book from the Bible as their topic.

ORGANISATION

Each ‘ecclesia’ is self-governing. There is no national, or international ‘leadership’ or ‘central office’. But Christadelphians do share a fellowship worldwide based on a common faith. In this way the relations between assemblies are more like a family than in many traditional churches. This is the New Testament model.

(Ephesians 3:15, 4:1-6, 1 John 1:6-7)

The original Jerusalem church had twelve elders responsible for “the ministry of the word” (preaching and teaching), and seven deacons responsible for “the ministry of tables” (welfare). Likewise the church in Ephesus had several overseers (literally “bishops”), meaning elders. This rules against a modern assembly having one man as a paid pastor.

(Matthew 23:8-11, Acts 1:23-26, 6:1-6, 20:28)

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PREACHING

Each ecclesia tries to preach the Good News of the Kingdom and teach the name of Jesus Christ in their local area.

(Acts 8:12, 28:31; 2 Timothy 4:2)

Some members travel overseas to preach and assist the local brothers and sisters. Like preaching brothers at home, these volunteers are unpaid.

(Acts 20:33-34; 1 Thessalonians 2:9)

Christadelphians run series of Bible Seminars, and Bible Camps in many countries, and distribute free Bible literature and magazines. Like Paul we aim to “preach the Gospel free of charge”.

(1 Corinthians 9:18)

AN INVITATION

The Christadelphians are a close-knit community working in God’s service in whatever ways we can. If you would like more information please contact the address on the back cover.

Rob Hyndman

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CHRISTADELPHIANS:

OR CONTACT:

Southern India (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa)
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