

THE CHRISTADELPHIANS

Who are the Christadelphians, and what do they believe?

The Christadelphians originated in the USA through the labours of John Thomas about "1848. The name "Christadelphians" means "Christ's brothers", and if you think about that, you do not expect that they would accept the divinity of Jesus Christ. Of course Christ is our brother, as a genuine human being; but He is much more than that! If you think about that further, you can expect that they would not accept that Jesus' sacrifice was a fully valid ransom for the sin of the world, but His chief value to us is an example, to show us how to earn eternal life, by keeping commandments and following His example. The name "Christadelphians", however, was not adopted until the American Civil War, when they were compelled to justify their religious objections to war. At first John Thomas identified himself with the Disciples, an offshoot from the liberal Congregationalists, who denied the supernatural character of the Bible. This may suggest a reason for their claim that many religions set up a "mystery" about the Bible. Later Thomas separated from them in part, because he was an anti-Trinitarian. He also held a conditional immortality and a coarse millenarianism. He contended that historic Christendom had fallen away from the truth. Their autonomous local congregations, called *ecclesiae*, are governed by "ruling", or "serving", "brethren." They elect "serving brethren", who are unpaid.

On their doctrine of God, they are, technically, dynamic Monarchians or Modalists. To put it crudely, the "persons" are different manifestations of the Father, who alone is God. Christ is "divine" in the sense that the Father was the deity in Him. The Son did not exist from all eternity. They state: "There is but one God, the Father. The Spirit is the effluence, or power of God, the spirit of God in official manifestation." Jesus is "not the Second Person, but the manifestation of the one eternal Creator. By His spirit effluence the Father begot Jesus, who therefore during the days of His weakness had two sides: Deity and humanity. The man was the Son, whose existence dates from the birth of Jesus; the Deity dwelling in Him was the Father" (*A Declaration*, p.19-22). . There is special reason, therefore, to beware of their promise that those who attend their seminar will learn "What the title 'Christ' means, and loads of other definitions to make Bible reading easier."

The central idea in Christadelphian theology seems to be the theory of conditional immortality. The premise of this theory is that human beings have only bodies, not bodies and souls. Christadelphians think that the words, "soul" and "spirit" are merely designations "expressing a variety of aspects in which a living creature can be contemplated." So all their emphasis on Bible reading would seem to be a mask to give a good appearance to doctrines that would only be introduced later on.

They say that because of sin the total human being is mortal, not only his body in distinction from his soul. They reject the doctrine of the immortality of the soul as a pagan fiction. They say that immortality is attainable only "in connection with, and as a result of, the resurrection, or the change, of the body."

They say that Christ's work was "not to die and appease the wrath of an offended Deity." but "to acquire immortality by His resurrection."

Do they hold justification through faith in Christ? They say, "The righteousness of God is declared in the death of every sinner, but stops short at the grave. The object in the case of Christ was to go beyond the grave to abolish death." Immortality is said to be a "quality brought within reach by Christ in the Gospel, and will be attained on condition of believing the Gospel and obeying the divine commandments."

Christadelphians teach that the wicked "will be put out of existence by divine judgment with the attendant circumstances of shame and suffering." The condemn "the theory of hell and eternal torments."

Unlike some other annihilationists, they teach that the "unfaithful" will be resurrected to be destroyed at Christ's second coming, but that the "irresponsible of mankind, those who never heard the Gospel... will pass away in death and never see the light of resurrection."

They say that the devil is no more than "the Scriptural personification of sin in the flesh." (*A Declaration* p. 24ff, 29, 38, 24, 42; *Bible Finger Posts* p. 100-104, 241; Jannaway, *Satan 's Biography*.)

The Christadelphians believe that the kingdom to be established at Christ's Second Coming "will be a divine political dominion on the earth, established on the ruins of all existing kingdoms." This kingdom will be the kingdom of Israel restored, with Jerusalem as the residence of the Lord Jesus, who, as the promised Son of David, will be the supreme Ruler. There is special reason for any who attend the seminar to beware of their promise that those who attend will learn "who the Jews are and why they are so important in the Bible." They say this kingdom will last one thousand years. Sin and death will continue among mankind, though in a milder form, until Christ surrenders His supremacy to the Father. Then a second judgment will take place, resulting in the consignment of the rejected to destruction and in the immortalisation of the approved, who will inhabit the

earth for ever (*A Declaration*. 4-17). This view is much like the theory advocated by Jehovah' s Witnesses. Admission to fellowship with the Christadelphians depends on a profession of faith in these doctrines and on baptism by immersion as an act of obedience.