

## **Christadelphians: Institution, Club or Truth?**

### **The Church - OUR GAINS AND LOSSES**

This discussion is only an attempt to be better equipped to manage the losses that grieve us.

#### ***OUR LOSSES***

The subject of the losses in our church worries many of the members. The thought of it sometimes overwhelms us, and we wonder in fear how long it will take before the demise of our Christadelphian religion. However we can ask ourselves some questions in that anguish.

Is it our name, or what we stand for, that is important?

Although, according to statistics, Christadelphians are not replenishing ourselves in the Western world, we can take comfort that those in the less fortunate countries are being baptised in great numbers, not into Christadelphia, but into the great truths that we espouse, in the name of Christ. So, on the mission fields we may be making more Christadelphians.

#### ***BAPTISED INTO WHAT NAME?***

Then that brings us to wondering whether the name Christadelphian is the important thing, or, when the worship or preaching is taking place, whether “the Truth as it is in Jesus” is more important. Of course we all want our family members to worship with us, and may not like any absence, but if that has occurred, we need to think whether the name of Christadelphian is important to God, or is the earnest desire to know Him, and to worship Him, anywhere, with those of like mind, in any fellowship, or under another named church, more important? We need to remember that we are baptised into Christ, and then we join the Christadelphians whose faith we espouse.

#### ***SADNESS OVER LOSSES***

There are so many of us have heartache, lifeache really, over the “leavings” of our children, and the “never joined” ones. We put time and effort and, yes, even everything we have, and there is no response, or even later, a rejection, of that which we thought was such a treasure. That causes parents to mourn those losses.

Parents need not feel unable to cope, and embarrassed about a child not fitting in with the Christadelphians. In some quarters, the resulting condemnation of the parents’ peers over rides everything else and it seems the parents cannot realistically help the child, because the peers’ reactions colour all the points of discussion with the child, in things like what he wore, his hair, his needs and his education. These are topics which some members often discuss, and issues that we know can bring important restrictions for many Christadelphians believers. Because of these restrictions young people will go to lengthy extremes to disassociate from us, burning their precious book collections, or changing their surname. In those extremes it is a wise parent who desperately hangs on, and loves the child to bits and pieces, until they are calmer, and can see a different sense, and can even consider a stay, or a return to us.

#### ***WHAT IS IMPORTANT?***

So what is important?

We need to think what is important to us. Is it the accepting of the traditional policies and practices of the Christadelphian meetings, or the accepting of God and how He wants us to live? If we can have both we are indeed blessed, but some of us cannot have both. There may be

a restriction on the variety of meetings available, or some may not being able to cope with the distress caused by not conforming, or there may be many other reasons to cause a retreat.

The institution, or club, or meeting that makes isolated numbers into an organised group, has many benefits. There are so many great things that do not exist if one is on one's own. One can play cricket with others, but it is hard to play by oneself. But along with the organised group comes responsibilities to the group, and some negatives, because people are people, and Godly things are not always present.

Because we are a communion of believers, or a Christadelphian meeting, we strive to do better in our "club", with our relationships with one another, but sometimes the negatives for some people, outweigh the positives. We might be blessed not to have experienced hurts ourselves, and so we do not have that personal experience of evil, but there is no doubt that everyone knows people who have. So, is just to know about, or hear about such things, enough? All our young people baptised or not, know about these negatives. It is a matter of whether the positives outweigh the negatives, and in some minds those positives cannot do so.

Please do not consider that there is devaluing of the Christadelphians here in this discussion, there is no chance of that. We can be ever grateful for the opportunities that we have. There is a further comment about this in the concluding thoughts, because it is important that we do not devalue our own. In valuing our own, though, we may do better if we do not denigrate those who leave us, but rather try to repair what does the harm.

### ***NO SUBMISSION TO EVIL***

Some insist that we must submit to our elders, and others say we must submit to restrictions. Hebrews 13:7 is often quoted, and that if we do not submit, then we sin. But to obey and submit to an evil control that continues in a meeting is not a command. We do not have to submit, we are not bound to that. We should give due consideration, yes, and should endeavour again and again, to reconcile, or change an attitude, but not stay in submission to an unbending control which causes grief. We are not bound to those who, it would seem, are not true elders.

We know many people now who will not submit, and do not, and need not. For too long we have bowed to people who bully because we thought it was necessary, but now we know we do not need to. So people, in all these relationships, (marriage, employment and meetings) do not have to keep on in submission, if there is a better way, or when God indicates that it is better to leave that association. God does not want us to submit to an authority or control, where those who rule over us do not "watch over our souls, with joy". We can change to another meeting, which may bring sadness, or as some do, go to another church, which for us, is a worse result, as we lose their company.

Maybe there are unwise elders in our church, (and we have such unwise elders recorded for us, in Scripture). If there is "grief" over evil, then that is "unprofitable" for us. We are not bound in submission to the non scriptural rules made by elders. We cannot be required to "do this for me". There comes a time when we must do "this" for our own convictions, and not "this" for the sake of others. Certainly we are each to "submit" to the other, Ephesians 5:21, but if there is no understanding both ways, no realization of difficulties or convictions on both sides, we can go from them. God will still care for us, and we are still in His truth, His way and His life.

We also need to remember that anger does not make relationships joyful. It makes grief, and so we are not bound to those who are angry, either, and we may retreat. God advises us, and He is our guide in these matters. So Hebrews 13:6 is valuable here. Consideration of one another in all things is what God asks of us, not blind submission to one side, where we may be disadvantaged in His service. He is “the God of peace”, who makes us “perfect in every good work to do His will”, to do “which is well pleasing in his sight”.

### ***WE ARE FREE***

We can say when members are adventurous, and new initiatives are present, because of our autonomous and independent strengths, “We, in our meeting, will arrange our meeting with new initiatives, if we so decide”. That need not be to the disadvantage of Christadelphians.

We can do many and diverse things this way, each meeting autonomous.

But some like their rules and regulations to be imposed on all of us, and that does cause angst, especially when some will not accept such impositions and leave us. When that happens, some others are pleased at that outcome. They are taken at their word, like “who will rid us of this troublesome priest” and with that exodus, they are rid of him/her and what they perceive as trouble. They sigh with relief that there is no more conflict, (until next time). So many want a holy huddle, not a hospital for the wounded, where we care for one another. Those of us who have had caring relationships in the meetings are indeed blessed. But how can we achieve that for everyone? Or how can we teach people to be caring, and tolerant and understanding? Time and circumstance, caring for employees, and so on, with encouragements on how to run outside agencies, has had a good effect when those strategies are brought into our meetings. And added to that, laws are now enforced laws for good behaviour. To think of those who have left us because of mismanagement in the past, brings us to how we can manage their absence now.

### ***HOW TO RESPOND***

How can we respond to those who retreat from us? They are people who decide not to “submit” and “obey” for some reason, and among them are many young people, more than ever before. It may be that they are resentful of us, and put up barriers. Is it up to us to help remove those harmful barriers?

Even our own children, who may not seem to us religious now, may have inner thoughts about God, and how they will worship Him, without us helping, or even knowing. We think of the materialistic prodigal son here, and know that his father ever kept the door open. He knew that the son’s conflicting thoughts would often turn to home, and what he had learned there. And so the father waited patiently. If we can engineer discussions with these who are tenuous attenders, or those who are non members now, we will find amazing diversity that we in our day never considered. We often say of ourselves how much we have changed from our baptismal days. Is it because other valuable values are now encouraged, and we think and talk, more freely about relationships and especially our relationship with God?

If we are more accepting of the needs for diversity we will be rewarded, and those young people will also be amazed at our acceptance of their differences, to what they assumed were our confirmed and intractable choices. When different approaches to meetings with different worshipping practices catch those who are drifting, we can be grateful and express our joy. We can see our children there with joy, when the joy in the conservative meeting was not there

before. There has to be joy in going to meeting. We have come a long way with the different issues, for sisters especially, and we can be grateful for that.

For instance, we do not condone the breaking of a marriage relationship, but we understand there has to be a way out of an evil relationship. We can walk with God even in that process. He will show us the way, and so it may not always be, to submit to an evil in marriage. That God can even be in that process, when we feel such despair, can be a joy. It is the least expected answer to prayer, once again. That also can be His way, and glaringly obvious, though we struggled hard against it.

We can be less predictable of ill, and less anticipatory of evil, and not disappointed, and not so full of doom for the future, if we know that God can be there for us, in the ill and evil, and disappointments and the doom day, and will help to free us. We can actually fine tune our psychological immune systems better, if we remember that. If we do not, we can fall into a full scale depression. That may be, in the case under discussion, a depression over the “lost children”.

### ***DO WE UNDERSTAND WHAT ARE GAINS AND WHAT ARE LOSSES***

Change is not a fast enough pace for some of us, especially the young ones. So we go back to the original question. Can we then better understand those who leave us, and can we indeed still consider them “in the Truth”? We have blurred our Christadelphian name with “in the Truth”, and that is inept. Many of our peers will die in a terrible disappointment when they consider judgment will come, and their children will be outside the pale. All of us should be able to comfort those who are in that situation, that it may not be so, for God decides. It is no one’s fault, not ours, certainly, for we have done the best we were able, and not the fault either of those who have rejected us, or gone from us. It is a circumstance known only to God. He will take care of that puzzle, and we do not need to make judgments, or die in disappointment.

Leah, Jacob’s wife in the Patriarchal Family lived with disappointment all her life, and as she turned further and further to walk with God, she left, in her death, in His care, the troubles that had beset her, in her married life, and her other numerous unresolved issues. She did not hear Jacob’s prophetic blessings at his near death bedside, when he proclaimed Leah’s son, Judah, as the one, to lead the family in the covenant and future blessings. So Leah had a blessing long after her death and never knew of the great Jewish nation named after her son, Judah.

We do not receive a blessing from God to help our comfort and ease, if the time is not ripe for God to answer our petition for our dearest wish. He waits His will and purpose, and that may be long after our death. Fallen or lost “children” are not ours for they were given to us as a treasure from God for a time. When God’s treasure which we cared for is grown to make decisions, then they are not ours. They are God’s treasures. So we must not despair for that child may come back into His arms, when we are long dead and gone. They may just be in a far country for a time. The lesson is to never give up on those lost ones of ours. Nor must we give up on children worshipping in other places, that child “may be just as acceptable to God now, as that child was before”. We just do not know.

### ***WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?***

What can we do about it?

We can use every chink in any discussion to be loving, kind and give blessings, even if you may thoroughly disapprove of the lifestyle - think of the parents of homosexuals who are need to

accept that choice. It does no good to be resentful and exclusive of them from the family. You do not know how God is working in their minds. And what if God is working a good and you are not helping? One can say, "Perhaps I need to worship in isolation, for I can no longer be a part of that which brings me angst. I am more peaceful alone". Perhaps that will be right for a time. "Two or three gathered in my name" might be better, but that can be later suggested. But one can also be quite safe alone, if God is there. We know the benefits of belonging to the group, but we also know also the disappointments with the group that he/she so keenly feels.

### ***IT IS GOD'S TREASURE***

Ours is not our rejected treasure to mourn over, it is God's treasure. He will mourn or not, or accept it or not. If there is worship still, and the understanding of Bible truths is still the same, then God is in charge, not us. If one of His is on a strange path, then He is still in charge. It is not those who espouse the name of Christadelphian or who decide on fellowship with the Father, for it is the Father's treasure, not ours. Nor will it be those who want to exclude others, and not those who say, "We have the truth, and no one else". The Christadelphians may decide who meets with the Christadelphians, but they may not decide who is in God's truth. We, all of those who have accepted Him, in Truth, are all on a journey and different routes all lead there, and some of us or not, may accept the rules of joining the Christadelphians.

If we can stay with the Christadelphians, and find a place with them, and enjoy the benefits, and try hard to change the negatives, then we will be truly blessed. But some are not so blessed.

We cannot change others who are intractable, who are different from us. We cannot always encourage them to see reason. And we cannot bring change just to suit our sensibilities, nor are we often able to change what our peers think of us, that our children "have left the Christadelphians". It may be that they have not "left the Truth". They will just take another route to the kingdom. But that is a hard concept for some others to accept. If we remember that "the Truth" was here before the Christadelphians were, that may help.

Those who need to take another route may be blessed also. Sometimes when another fellowship is found, or another church, the same humanity problems are found to be there also. We all learn by experience. They will go, or stay there as God guides them. If they are only with one or two others, or just by themselves, He is there in the midst of them. So that is OK as well. Or if they are not in outward worship, then we can leave that with God also.

We may sometimes see a brother or a sister who has left us long ago. This different thinking may help us approach him/her easier and better, for although still a brother/sister, a disappointed one, and now a non church goer and drawn into himself/herself, he/she may still walk with God. We cannot tell, nor judge. If we think of those with loving care, we can be grateful for the fresh opportunities given us to show our love and care and compassion.

### ***RAISE US ALL UP TOGETHER***

There is no intention to devalue the Christadelphians. However the intention is to raise up those others who have gone from us. We can raise them up with us, and not devalue them. If they are still thinking "in the Truth", and we cannot tell that, they will still be "at one" with us, though not espousing our name, Christadelphian. That is not equivocating, just a reason for care and kindness. If disfellowship has been mentioned then that is a reason for extra care and kindness and attention to help in reconciliation.

I think God may like us to be more generous. We do not ever “have the truth” exclusively for really “it” has us. For Christ is the Truth. If we can turn our thinking around, and together with the “never give up”, our relationships with those “outside” might be more enriched. If we can think this way, will it help to get over the mourning of our losses?

*Beverley Russell - February 2004*