

The Christadelphians, to whom my family belong, are a group of sincere, Bible-believing people, who do their best in their personal lives to follow the example set by Jesus Christ and in their churches to follow the pattern of the churches of the first century. Not much wrong with that, you might think. But unfortunately, Christadelphianism is a demonstration of how you can be sincere but sincerely wrong, of the inadequacy of reading the Bible without the Holy Spirit to interpret it, and of the way in which an attempt to earn peace with God through good works cannot succeed.

All Christian groups, be they evangelical or liberal, are equally condemned by the Christadelphians as failing to believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. I grew up to believe that the only true Christians were the Christadelphians. However, in my late teens I began to reject my parents' religion and the God of the Bible as I then understood Him.

I never really doubted the existence of God, but I was determined to find a different pathway to Him than the way I had been told was in the Bible, that is baptism followed by a life-time of obedience to Christ. Away at university my search led me to dabble with drugs and with religions of the East. It also brought me a great deal of unhappiness, because deep down I knew that I was not right with God and that my lifestyle was all wrong. I was keeping in touch with young Christadelphian students and attending their meetings on Sundays. Yet it was a double life I was leading. Respectability on Sundays, but a life of self-centredness of which the highlights were rock music and parties whenever studies allowed during the week. My own hypocrisy sickened me, yet I felt powerless to do anything about it.

After a few months I decided that this could not go on. I decided that I wanted to go God's way. I remember trying to strike a bargain with God. I promised to be baptised if He would help me out of my present mess. And so it was that towards the end of my first year at university, to the great relief of my family, I was baptised and joined the Christadelphian "ecclesia" or "meeting" in Reading. For a while everything went happily. I followed the Christadelphian Bible reading plan (3 long portions daily), attended all the meetings and even led the mid-week Bible Study from time to time. But after only a few months a sense of dissatisfaction began to creep in. My relationship with God somehow seemed distant, lacking warmth and vitality. The worldly activities of my student friends still had an irresistible attraction. I could feel myself beginning to slide and began to feel guilty that I was not such a good Christadelphian as the others.

It was about this time that I first became aware that there were other people around who also believed the Bible, but drew different conclusions from it. What was more, there was a joy and a "realness" about these people's relationships with God which my relationship with Him lacked. I was simultaneously threatened and fascinated by this discovery. To ward off the threat, I studiously applied myself to Christadelphian doctrines and argued against these Christian students whenever the opportunity arose. However I still found myself drawn towards them.

When it came to a choice between an "Arthur Blessit" rally and a Christadelphian meeting, I chose Arthur Blessit. I was holding my own in the intellectual arguments over doctrine, but I was deeply jealous of the joy and freedom from guilt which these Christians knew. I still understood God in terms of someone who might in the end accept me if I tried my best. My guilt stemmed from

the knowledge that the best I could manage was just not good enough.

About twelve months after my baptism, a friend came to see me after a Christian Union meeting one evening. His eyes shone excitedly as he recounted the talk that he had just heard. I remember very little of what he said apart from one verse from the Bible: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the spirit" {Galatians 5:25}. After my friend left, that verse remained with me and disturbed me deeply. I knew that it was addressed to Christians, to people who already "live in the Spirit", and I was forced to face up to the fact that I knew nothing about living in the Spirit, let alone walking in the Spirit. I was endeavouring to please God through my own attempts at leading a good religious life, and I was not succeeding.

My stomach felt tied up in knots. I cried out to God, confessing that I was not good enough for Him. I felt desperately confused and depressed by my failure. Moments later a feeling of deep relief swept over me. My heart found peace as I realised that God did love me. For the first time I experienced Him as a person with whom I could have a relationship, rather than as a rather impersonal being whom I could never seem to please. When I had reached the end of the road as far as pleasing God through my efforts was concerned, He showed me that I was accepted through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His life had been pleasing to God in a way that mine could never be. In His death He had paid for my failures.

Life took on a different meaning. The Holy Spirit had filled me replacing guilt with real peace and joy. The sense of freedom was exciting; prayer was exciting, like a conversation with a new friend. I knew the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ with me throughout the day. The Bible which I had previously read regularly out of a sense of duty, became like a book I was reading for the first time, as I heard God speaking to me personally through verse after verse.

Christadelphians have no assurance of forgiveness or eternal life. They concentrate more on speculation about Christ's Second Coming than on the achievements of His first. They deny the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and cannot know the joy that comes from living and walking with Christ day by day. Two and a half years after I joined the Christadelphians I realised that I could no longer share fellowship with them. My experience of God and my expectations of worship were so different from theirs. I felt that my baptism prior to my conversion was of no value, and wanted to demonstrate publicly that by the grace of Jesus Christ, not through any good works on my part, my old life had ended and I had received new life. I left the Christadelphians and was baptised again — this time a real believer's baptism.

(Mrs Ellen Call)