

we trusted them and we feel that they failed us. When we remember that God forgives us the many times when we fail Him then it will help us to forgive our brothers and sisters.

Sometimes we may find it especially difficult to agree with a particular brother or sister. Our natural instinct is to walk away, to have nothing to do with him or her and only to mix with those who are our 'friends'. This is wrong, we must remember that we are given to each other by God and that living in fellowship with every brother and sister is part of the way God develops our characters. We have to learn to be tolerant, to accept others and their points of view as brothers and sisters in Christ. God has called us to live and work together in this way. He chose each one of us; we are all precious to him.

Living in Isolation

There are people who believe and have been baptised but who do not have other brothers and sisters living near them with whom they can have regular fellowship. However, because they are members of God's family, they are *never* really alone because they share the things of their new life with God and His Son and they will feel the presence of the Lord Jesus in their lives.

There are some practical things which will help believers who live isolated lives like this.

It is important both to pray and to read the Bible every day, even if this is done alone. Every Sunday, preferably at the same time each week, they should carefully set out the bread and wine to break bread and drink wine in

remembrance of the Lord Jesus. If it is difficult to do this on Sunday then another day of the week can be chosen.

Brothers and sisters in their own country and overseas will not forget their isolated brothers and sisters but will write to them and try to visit them

They can receive letters and Bible teaching from other brothers and sisters to help them remember that even though they are isolated from them, they are still part of God's special family.

Please tell us if you would like to know more about Bible teaching and the beliefs of Christadelphians. Would you like:

- Other leaflets in this series?
- A booklet, 'Who are the Christadelphians?'
- A postal correspondence course?

Ask your nearest Christadelphians or write to:

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE MISSION
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Christadelphian Bible Mission

BASIC BIBLE TRUTHS

The Meaning of Fellowship

When you have read this leaflet you will know the answers to these questions

1. The nature of fellowship in the family of God.
2. What fellowship means in our daily lives
3. How we should care for other people.

What is fellowship?

A dictionary tells us that the word 'fellowship' means 'sharing together'. It describes a group of people who come together because they have a common interest. It is an important word in the Bible and is used to describe the way disciples join together when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They become part of a new spiritual family and so call each other brother or sister.

Fellowship in the New Testament

When the apostles preached the Gospel, after the resurrection of Jesus, many people were baptised and we read about their new lives in Acts chapter 2.

"So those who received his word were baptized..."

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."
(Act 2:41-42)

The order of words here is important. First of all people were baptised into the saving name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then they listened carefully to the teaching of the apostles and part of what they learned was that they now had a new relationship together. They met together in groups as brothers and sisters in a new family, the family of God – this was their fellowship. They met regularly, in worship, to share bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus as he had commanded them and they prayed together. This idea of living and worshipping 'together' is a key part of fellowship

Joining a new family

This principle of being part of a new family is there in the name 'Christadelphian'. It means 'brothers in Christ' and it is taken from the opening words of the Letter to the Colossians.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father."
(Colossians 1:1-2)

When new members join disciples of Jesus, after their baptism, they are welcomed with a formal handshake which the Bible calls "the right hand of fellowship". We use this handshake to show our welcome of a new brother or sister into the group of people who are in fellowship with other disciples because they share the same beliefs in Jesus as their saviour and in the coming Kingdom of God. In this way they are received into a spiritual family of brothers

and sisters becoming part of a family which has the Lord Jesus Christ as its head.

We also learn that the converts "devoted" themselves to this fellowship. It was so important to them that it became the centre of their lives.

In the New Testament, true disciples of Jesus who live in this way are called 'the ecclesia of God' (Acts 20:28). 'Ecclesia' is a Greek word and in the English Bible it is translated as 'church'. It means 'those called out'. True disciples have been called out of their former lives to belong to God's family and to have fellowship with Him and with each other.

We have to make a choice; we cannot have fellowship (share our lives) with the world and pretend to have fellowship with God and His Son. When we are baptised our standards should become quite different to those of unbelievers. The things which become important to us will not be important to them and we will be unable to have fellowship with them. However we shall find that we do have things in common with our new brethren and sisters because we share an interest in the Bible and share a common belief in the Gospel with them. This will help us to build new relationships and have fellowship with them.

It is very important to understand that **all** fellowship, including our relationships with each other, is based on a believer's relationship with God.

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."
(1John 1:3)

Fellowship in our everyday lives

Fellowship is a way of life. It does not mean just sharing worship together on Sundays and forgetting about each other on weekdays. In our natural families we love and care for each other, supporting our brothers and sisters and enjoying their company. It is the same in our new, spiritual family. Jesus left a very important commandment with his disciples before he went to the cross. He said:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
(John 13:34-35)

Just as we care for our natural brothers and sisters and love them, baptised people are commanded to love and care for their brothers and sisters in Christ. They share the joy and happiness of knowing that they belong together in God's family.

Fellowship therefore involves loving and caring for each other. It means spending time with each other, reading the Bible together and sharing its message. It means trusting each other so that we can seek help when we have problems.

Fellowship is hard work. We have to learn to be part of a new family – and not only to live with them but to love and care for people who may have been strangers to us before our baptism. We are brought together by God so that we can help each other in our discipleship. We should trust our brothers and sisters with our feelings and thoughts. We should open up our hearts to them even though that will make us very vulnerable to them. If they let us down or reject us we may feel hurt and angry with them because