## WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?



We have come to the end of the Letter to the Romans but not, of course, to the end of learning to understand the Bible for ourselves. Using the tools you now have at your disposal, there are another 65 books to explore, and as you continue to read and understand things more fully your appreciation of what God has revealed for our learning will grow and grow. It's one of the wonderful things about God's Word that it never becomes dull or repetitive; there are new things to learn and re-learn all the time.

### **❖** Bible Reading

Daily Bible reading is a structured way to absorb Bible teaching. Some people prefer to read a book at a time, considering that approach to give them better continuity and letting them follow through the inspired writer's argument. Another way is to read systematically by taking readings every day from different parts of the Bible – starting with the beginning and middle of the Old Testament and the start of the New. That allows for another of Scripture's wonders to work; for one part of Scripture often throws light on another part. We have seen in Romans that the apostle often referred to what had been written earlier, for example about Abraham, and then interpreted that statement or promise in the light of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture does that sort of thing all the time.

Appended to this lesson, is a table of daily Bible readings which Christadelphians have been using for nearly 150 years. Using it every day you will read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice each year.

#### Belief and Baptism

If you have been satisfied with the explanations offered in this course, and the help you have been getting from your Tutor, you may have been persuaded that baptism is an important next step for you. We now need to consider some of the practicalities of that.

Baptism into Christ is a straightforward matter and is nothing to be worried about; but because it begins the new life of a believer it is important that it is done properly. That means being sure that your faith is soundly based and that you understand true Bible teaching. Remember that Jesus commanded his disciples to go and teach the gospel in all nations, adding "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

To make sure that your belief is such that your baptism would be right with God, you first need to check through the things you now believe and see if they are in line with what the Bible teaches. The next lesson of this course will summarise Bible teaching, highlighting the things that you would be expected to know about. It also mentions some of the things that have been wrongly introduced into the gospel message by others: things you should now recognise as *not* part of the original gospel. Work through those and you will have a good idea whether or not your beliefs are the same as those held by Christadelphians.

You may well have some problem areas: things you would like to discuss in detail with your Tutor. It often takes time to adjust to different ideas, especially if you have believed things for a long time, perhaps since childhood. If that is the case there are different options available.

### \* Attending a Christadelphian Meeting

You may live near to a group of believers, in which case you would be best advised to make contact and go to meet them. You will be sure of a warm welcome and nobody will put you under any pressure. In our meetings we aim to present the gospel as it is taught in the Bible. Procedures vary a little from place to place, as there are Christadelphian meetings all over the world, but the general pattern is that one meeting is held for baptized believers, usually called the "Breaking of Bread", during which bread and wine is shared in remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ and in accordance with his commandments. Only baptized believers who are Christadelphians are able to take the bread and wine, but you would be very welcome to attend the service even so. Often there is a separate Bible talk at which the gospel is preached and that is for everyone to attend. No collection will be taken at that meeting.

Just making contact will start you on your way and if you go with a list of questions and queries you are likely to get some helpful answers. Christadelphians love talking about the Scriptures, as it is the thing that sustains and encourages them in their faith. They read the Bible all the time. Sometimes there are Seminars or Bible Classes being held and these could also be of real help, especially if you still want things sorted out or need to know more about the background and general teaching of the Bible. But nobody is expected to know everything about the Bible when they first ask to be baptized. You are not going to be asked to list the kings of Israel or to give the names of the twelve disciples of Jesus! The aim is to help you be sure that you believe what the Bible teaches.

#### Correspondence or the Internet

If you are not living near any other Christadelphians at present, and you still have queries or questions which have not been answered as the course progressed, now is the time to raise them with your Tutor. That's no problem: we are keen to help in any way possible.

- You can ask for free literature on a specific topic or topics; or just list your questions, ask for someone to answer them, and we will do our best. We have a monthly Bible magazine called "Glad Tidings" which might help and there is a book you might want to read which looks at Bible teaching book-by-book. These can give you a solid grounding in parts of the Bible we haven't examined at all.
- If you have children that you would like to be taught about the Bible, we can arrange for them to have Sunday School lessons.
- **Y** If you have access to the Internet, log on at <a href="www.thisisyourbible.com">www.thisisyourbible.com</a> and you will find a lot of assistance there.

#### **❖** Lifestyle Issues

It may be that your concerns are not about Bible teaching as such. Perhaps you have read this book and found yourself agreeing with everything. It may even be that these are things you had already come to believe from your own reading. That has happened quite often in the past. But you may be concerned that your present lifestyle is not in harmony with Bible teaching, and perhaps you feel that little can be done about it. Yet most things can be changed for the better, given goodwill on all sides and the Lord's help. Remember what we learned from Romans about the help that God gives to those who seek Him:

"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

It is certain that some changes will have to be made in your life if you are engaged in practices which are wrong according to the commandments of Christ. Perhaps you will have to change your companions or change your habits. That might be hard at first, but as your beliefs and desires change, so will your interests and feelings towards things and people. The apostle Paul once wrote to believers in a city which had a worldwide reputation for loose living and immoral behaviour. He warned them that such conduct would lead to destruction, not to salvation, and then he added a comment which showed how powerfully the gospel had changed the lives of the believers in Corinth:

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practise homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

That's the remarkable difference the gospel can make in a person's life. But the change has to start before baptism. There can be no question of our carrying on with such practices and then expecting God to go on forgiving us for wrong behaviour. Paul was very clear about that in Romans:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! **How can** we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:1-3).

Baptism is a death to sin, but we must first be willing to die to self – to put to death those things that are wrong in God's sight. You may not feel able to do that straight away, in which case you need to think about what we have been learning together and make it a matter of earnest prayer. Perhaps you will need some help or advice about certain aspects, in which case that is something to be thinking about at this stage. Remember that what God offers is eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, a real and living hope, fellowship with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ and fullness of being. These are things that should not be set aside lightly even though it may be difficult at first to change your present lifestyle and develop another.

This is the reason why baptism is often coupled in Scripture with another word – "Repent!" It means that we have to turn around and go a different way. Renouncing the past, we have to resolve with God's help to leave it behind and strike out in a new and better direction. One New Testament writer was about to list a host of people in ancient times who made huge personal sacrifices for the sake of what they believed, but before doing so he offered these words of encouragement:

"You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ... But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls" (Hebrews 10:36-39).

Nothing worthwhile was ever accomplished without effort. There have often been difficult times in the past when people wanted to follow Jesus. The apostle Paul knew all about that. He would eventually get to Rome, but not in the way he had hoped when he wrote the letter. He arrived as a prisoner, because of his Jewish enemies who were plotting to kill him. He was in the city for two years, always under guard, before being released, then later imprisoned once more, and then executed. He thus became one of many faithful people who have died for their faith. They died full of faith that this life is nothing by comparison with the life that is to come in God's Kingdom, when Jesus returns to the earth.

## Relationships

There might, of course, be some complications in your life that need attention. It is almost the normal custom in some countries for people to live together although they are not married and there could well be children in the family and other dependants. What should be done then?

Marriage is a state that God has instituted and it comes about when two people make promises to one another about their life-long relationship as man and wife. Nowadays those promises should be registered officially with the state, so the marriage is properly recognised in the sight of all. The best course of action is for a person who is not legally married to discuss the matter with their partner, explain that their views have changed, and arrange to be married before being baptized. This may not be possible, perhaps because the other partner does not want to get married, or because of other complications. Then the situation will need to be talked through or corresponded about, to decide the best course of action and the one that best meets the commandments of Christ.

Being a follower of the Lord Jesus does not mean abandoning all previous responsibilities and just walking away from them. Those who follow the law of love will be more caring and considerate than ever. A solution will need to be found which meets the needs of all concerned and which upholds the requirements of a holy life in the sight of God.

#### **❖** What Then?

Once preliminary issues like these have been sorted out, and that could take a little while in certain cases, the next step is to talk through with someone what you have come to understand and believe. This stage of the process is a safeguard for you, for baptism is the greatest decision you will ever make and it is important that you have really thought it through beforehand. Remember that Jesus commanded the sequence of events in the words: "Whoever (1) believes and (2) is baptized will be saved".

Straightforward questions will be asked to guide you through a confession of faith, and any necessary help and further instruction can be given at that time. For example, you might be asked this sort of thing about Jesus:

- ✓ What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God?
- ✓ How was he born?
- ✓ When did he come into existence?
- ✓ What do we know about Mary, the mother of Jesus?
- ✓ Was Jesus tempted in just the same way that we are?

This would not be an examination, but a friendly chat to guide you through your understanding and to make sure that you are happy about what you now believe. The summary of beliefs in the next chapter will act as a reminder of the various things we have thought about as this book has progressed. You could work through those topics and check on how satisfied you are yourself about your own views. You could also explore any of those areas further if you feel the need to do so, using the Scripture references by each point.

Bear in mind that you will not stop learning when you are baptized. If you continue reading the Bible and thinking about its teaching your knowledge will steadily increase and lots of things that may seem a bit disjointed at present will slot into place. Baptism is the beginning of your journey not the end of the road!

#### Baptism

Once you have given a good confession of your faith and have sorted out any concerns you might have about lifestyle issues, baptism itself will be straightforward. Baptism is a burial in water and is best done as a public act, though that is not always possible or advisable. If there is a Christadelphian meeting room nearby it may have a facility for baptisms and a simple service would be held in the company of other people who share your faith. People being baptized usually bring other members

of their family along to witness the event. It's an excellent way of introducing them to the meeting and they too will be warmly welcomed.

In the absence of a local meeting, suitable arrangements will be made for a baptism. Sometimes a river, the sea, public baths, or a bath in a hotel room or a private house, might be used. Where the act takes place is not important; the act itself is what matters. Sitting or standing in the water you will be asked:

"Do you believe the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ?"

When you answer "I do", the baptizing brother will say something like:

"Then, upon your confession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins".

Having said that, he will gently lower and immerse you for a moment, and bring you safely up again. That's baptism! It's that straightforward to obey the commandment to "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). And what a difference it then makes in life, as we saw in detail when we were studying Romans.

## **❖ What Happens Then?**

As a baptized believer you will become a member of the family of God and a Christadelphian as well. That means if there are Christadelphians in your locality you would meet with them week-by-week to remember the work of Jesus and to share bread and wine in remembrance of all he has done. You would also join with them in the various other activities in which the meeting is engaged, including sharing the gospel with others and studying the Bible together.

The ecclesia exists to help believers prepare for the coming of the Lord, whatever that might require, and to worship God. All believers are part of a holy congregation which seeks to worship God in an acceptable way. There is no paid ministry but all members share the various duties. Brothers (the male members) will help with Bible readings, other brothers will pray and another will give a few words of explanation and encouragement from God's Word. Everything is very Bible-based and concentrates on developing the understanding of the congregation and of giving God thanks and praise.

You may not be near any other believers, at least not until you have had opportunity to share your faith and to encourage others to learn to understand the Bible for themselves. But you will still be part of a worldwide congregation or brotherhood. When people are visiting your locality they will come and meet you, and you can then break bread together. Otherwise you will need to break bread just by yourself, week by week, for it is a commandment of Jesus that we should remember him in this way. We will give some guidance about the best way of doing that and arrangements can be put in place which will provide a regular supply of material to help you with that remembrance.

#### **❖** Preparing for the Kingdom

We are now nearing the end of human government and the beginning of God's coming kingdom when all faithful, baptized believers can expect to be together with the Lord, working with him in the development of the world and enjoying the gift of eternal life. That will be a wonderful time, full of fellowship and with everything directed towards the praise and worship of Almighty God.

The apostle Paul looked forward to that time when everything would at last be made right and good. He had a sense of urgency which drove him on, for he lived a life which was beset with many dangers. He could have died at any time, so it is no wonder that he said this with such force:

"Besides this you know the time, that **the hour has come for you to wake from sleep**. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires**" (Romans 13:11-14).

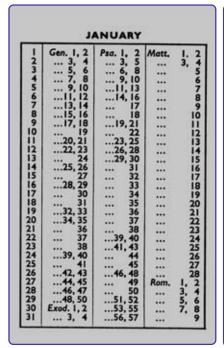
There is nothing more urgent in life.

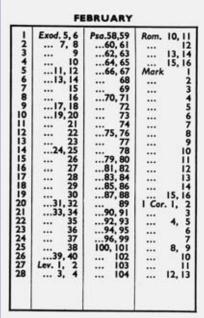
# Bible Reading Tables

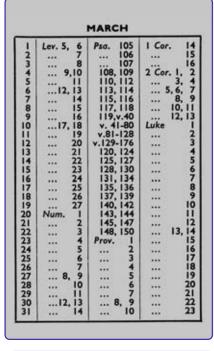
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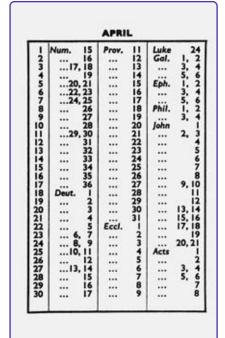
Read God's Word every day and grow

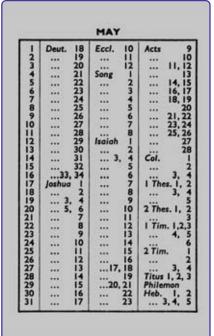












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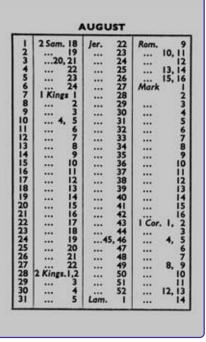
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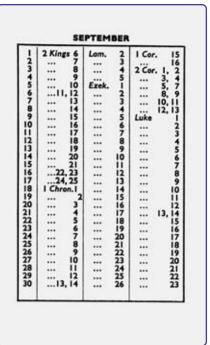
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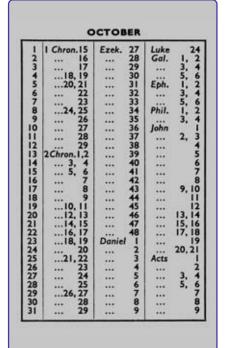
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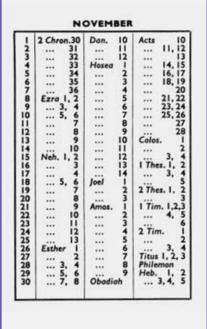


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