

## WHY I LEFT THE CHRISTADELPHIANS A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

by Allon Maxwell

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*It is not my desire to offend any Christadelphians who may read this. I acknowledge a very deep debt of gratitude, for the many good things they taught me about the Bible. Nor do I want to claim any spiritual superiority or greatness. I am merely a prodigal son who once did not place a proper value on the riches of my inheritance as a child of God. Now, by the grace of God, and by that grace alone, I have been welcomed home to my Father's house. My main desire here is to speak to the hearts of the many others amongst them who are currently experiencing the same inner turmoil, that was once mine, for the same reasons. Perhaps through reading of my own desperate search for peace with God, ..... and its success ..... other prodigals can be encouraged to begin their own search for the way back.*

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I thank God for the Christadelphians.

I lived amongst them for nearly 40 years.

God gave me my very wonderful wife from amongst them and our six beautiful and much-loved daughters were born while we were still a part of the Christadelphian community.

There are many treasured memories of friends and events which God used to mould us and to shape our destiny. Most important of all, it was amongst them that I was taught to respect and value and trust the Scriptures which eventually led me to Jesus as Saviour and Lord of my life.

In a very unique way, I owe them even my life. Directly as a result of their conversion to Christadelphianism, from a very nominal Anglican background, my parents decided that it was time to settle down and start a family. I was born about a year later. (For the curious, that was in 1932.)

I cannot remember a time in my life when I did not know that I was born to serve God and that there is no higher priority in life. That knowledge was my parent's greatest gift to me.

God was in our home, the centre of conversation and life. I heard about Him from the cradle, in my parents' conversations, in the regular daily Bible readings that were a feature of our family life, and from the constant stream of visitors who came to study the Bible with my father.

But I also grew up accepting without question, the Christadelphian claims that they alone possessed "THE TRUTH" and that all other churches are outside the pale of salvation because of their theological errors.

In the Churches which I attended, there was much more emphasis on academic Bible knowledge, correct theology, and study of prophecy, than on holy living. Wrong doctrine was reckoned to be as much a sin as immorality and in some places was dealt with in the same way. It was tacitly accepted that "Status" came through intellectual superiority in absorbing and teaching complicated theological concepts. Over the years, I heard many of

the less academic members express their feelings that they felt somehow "inferior" because of their lack of academic ability and consequent lack of "learning".

A further major problem, resulting from an unbalanced emphasis on the Kingdom of the future age as the main content of the Gospel, was that there was little real understanding of the relevance of Jesus to simple daily living. This left many of us dis-satisfied with our religion, defeated in life, and without peace, purpose, or hope. In our own defeated state, we had no Good News to offer this situation, no assurance of salvation, no promise of victory over sin, no power to make it real. We had no answers for the desperate heart needs of the outcasts, the thieves, the harlots, the blind, the deaf, the lame and the mentally and emotionally broken men and women, to whom Jesus turned with compassion and love and power, at every opportunity.

There were many who had simply (and secretly) given up, too afraid or embarrassed to admit it, forced to remain in the system by family and peer group pressures, not knowing where to go or what to do if they did leave.

Admission to membership of the church is by adult baptism, which follows a thorough public examination and assent to correct Christadelphian doctrine. (In my time amongst them, there were some places where the nature of this examination was so demanding that it even included questions about the names of the Old Testament kings of Israel!)

However, in spite of this strongly unbalanced academic emphasis, there was teaching about sin and righteousness and judgement and at the age of 15 I came under deep conviction of sin.

I came to Jesus to accept Him as the Saviour who died to save me from the penalty justly deserved for my sins. [Romans 4:25](#), [Romans 5:6-9](#). I surrendered myself to Him as Lord of my future. [Philippians 2:10-11](#). Before God I made a covenant to die to my sin and live in newness of life. [Romans 6:4](#), [Romans 6:22](#). My heart appealed to God for a clear conscience [1 Peter 3:21](#), and in obedience to the Son of God, I was baptised for remission of my sins. [Acts 2:38](#).

I know it was real. I was dealing with Jesus .... not the Christadelphians. Jesus met me that night. The joy of that moment is still a very precious memory.

So is the deep, deep peace which came into my heart as my sins were washed away and my guilt was healed. At that moment my sins were gone, as far as the East is from the West, and I knew that it was true!

It all went well at first, but after a while I began to fall back. The world began to look more attractive than my Christadelphian religion. Things I saw and wanted to possess; my career; my desire for acceptance by my fellow workers; were all in direct competition with God's claims on me.

I can't really blame the Christadelphians for that. The blame is mine alone. But they certainly didn't help.

My church peer group was anything but spiritual. Our most important activities centred around proving again and again (to ourselves) that we alone had "THE TRUTH". And throughout Australia, the church was divided into factions, at war with one another. There was nothing attractive enough in it to compete with the temptations I was experiencing.

I became a Prodigal Son ..... a secret Prodigal Son.

I didn't leave the church. Instead, I made the fearful mistake of trying to serve two masters. Week after week, year after year, I went through the motions of church life and church politics. As a speaker, Sunday School teacher, member of the church management

committee, and delegate to inter-church committees, I was highly visible and energetic, substituting external activity for heart obedience. But all the while, inside, where no one but God could see, I was guilty and hopeless and powerless to do anything about it.

Eventually, guilt and frustration made me sick. Chronic asthma became a living Hell for years.

I know now that my Heavenly Father was chastening me, in love, trying to direct me to my real need. I was living in the situation experienced by those members of the Corinthian Church who were sick because they were eating and drinking the communion feast unworthily.

I didn't know that at the time and since that was also an unfamiliar area of Scripture for the rest of the church, there was no-one else around who knew enough to tell me what the problem was. Even if I had been told, I wasn't ready to listen. It was a hard lesson, but now, looking back, I am eternally grateful for the love that took me there, chastened me by it and eventually made me see my need.

Gradually I lost hope, and my religion became less and less relevant. I came to the point where I could no longer believe that Jesus had actually risen from the dead. That was rock bottom.

I guess it had to happen that way for me. For someone as dedicated to Christadelphianism as I had been, there was no other way for God to show me just how empty it really was. I learnt, the hard way, that it didn't have the answers to my desperate need.

When I did hit the bottom, God was at last able to begin the slow process of calling me gently back to Himself. Underneath all the guilt and emptiness, a hunger for reality had been created. Something within me began to cry out for help that I hardly dared believe existed and didn't even know how to put into words.

The first step in the way back came when I heard a Christadelphian speaker from England, one of the few (in that community) with the rare, God-given gift of teaching. This was God's moment for me. By the time he had finished speaking something had happened to me. I left the meetings with a joy in my heart that I had not known for many years. I believed again that Jesus was alive.

Slowly and cautiously, I began to search for the meaning of that to me.

It was a long search and a confusing one. There were so many claims from so many people, and I have to tell you that a lot of the "mainstream" church which professes to be Christian, doesn't have the answers either.

I think God made me look at nearly all of them before showing me the real answer, so that I would never again go down any road but that of love for Jesus, and obedience to His teaching about the way of life that is eternal.

Almost universally, the people I met were more interested in changing my theology, especially about the Trinity. They seemed to think that this is the basic problem with "the cults" (which is the label they apply to churches like the Christadelphians). If I got that right, they told me, everything else would fall into place.

Others told me, variously, that I needed things like a different form of worship; a church with the right name; a new water baptism with the right words said over me; a church without an organ; to speak in tongues; or this or that other uniquely different thing, which distinguished their church from all the others. There seemed no end to the variety, but one thing was obvious. They could not all be right; and they could not all be telling me the truth.

I also found that most of them, Trinitarians and "cults" alike, shared the most dangerous FALSE GOSPEL of all, offering a false hope of salvation and a false sense of security. It was in general, a very CHEAP GRACE which failed to understand the real nature of repentance and denied the true meaning of obedience to the words of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount especially, was neither taught nor obeyed. Instead, it was either dismissed and ignored as "legalism", or else deviously explained away as impractical, or impossible, or not meaning what it said.

I had learned, the hard way, that what I really needed was a change of heart. I wasn't ready to accept anything that offered less. It wasn't hard to see that if what they were trying to give me hadn't changed their hearts in a real way, then it wasn't likely to do much for me either.

What it did do, was convince me that the real answer is not found in any of those diverse things they tried to tell me.

Nor was it found with the theologians who invent them but are unable to agree about them! (Indeed, I observed that many of them reject each other and fight just like pagans about some of those things!)

When I came to the end of that theological road; when there was no man to help; it was between me and God alone, which of course was what He had wanted all along. I went back to His Word and asked Him to lead me to the truth.

And He did! ..... He gave me my heart's desire ..... He led me to His Son.

God opened my eyes to see that my real need was a personal relationship with Jesus; His gift of a new life and a new heart; the Spirit of God living within, to write God's laws in my mind and heart; and a love for God and men which is fruit of a proper vision of the cross and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

After nearly 20 years I was back at the starting point where I had met Jesus in that teenage baptism. Jesus gave me a renewed vision of Himself on the cross, reaching out to me in Divine love, taking my guilt and my judgement upon Himself and revealing the longing of God's heart to save me from my sins.

In that outpouring of Divine love, the cross achieved its purpose for me. God created within me a love for Him that can never die, and He gave me the answer which changed my life. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 14:15*

It was going to mean a costly repentance, in thought, in actions and in direction of life.

And although I didn't know it then, ultimately, it would also cost me my career, a change in the city where I lived, and the companionship of the friends of a lifetime.

It would even cost me my church.

Even if I had known all those things it would not have altered the choice. There was no other choice possible. My surrender was total.

Then it happened. Like the Prodigal Son in the story, I was ready to come home and cast myself on my Father's mercy.

It happened just as the parable said. God saw me a great way off and ran to meet me and fold me in his arms, as like the prodigal, I made my repentance.

"Father I have sinned against Heaven ..... forgive me ..... make me your servant ....."

And my heart was turned to Jesus as Lord of all life. "By your grace I am yours, all that I am and all that I will ever be. I will follow where you lead, go where you send me, and from this time on there is nothing you may not ask of me."

The Spirit of God came within. Peace returned, the same peace I had known on the night of my baptism, all those years ago. This time, however, there was something more. There could never again be a second master to draw me away.

Something else happened. As peace continued to grow, MY ASTHMA WAS HEALED!

Putting it simply, perhaps too simply, that experience with Jesus is the main reason why I am no longer a Christadelphian.

It didn't happen overnight. It took several years for God to prepare me for that. Step by step, the Spirit of God within began to open my eyes to many new things about Jesus. These were plainly written in the Gospels, and I had paid lip service to them for the first century but had never dared believe them possible for the 20th.

The meaning of the resurrection came alive. Just as He promised, I was not left desolate. The living Christ came to me and made His home with me. [John 14:21,31](#)

The emphasis of my preaching changed from Christadelphian theology to the Christ revealed in the Gospels; to Himself, as real today as he was two thousand years ago; to his insistent call to repentance and to the way of life which He calls eternal; to His unchanging willingness to meet the desperate at their point of deepest need, when they put their trust in Him; and to Him as THE WAY to the personal relationship with God that is the whole purpose of life.

These things were far, far, beyond my former Christadelphian experience and expectation. Except for a rare few, the subject of Jesus was mainly a theological obstacle course. Few had met Him as the Son of God who loved us and suffered the penalty of our sins. (Indeed, THAT was regarded as heresy!)

The Christadelphian Christ has been the centre of great controversy and division.

At one extreme is a Christ who died to save himself from a defiled and sin-prone nature (and potential sin). The more moderate view is that He was personally redeemed from mortality and death by His own blood and that His death was "for Himself, that it might be for us", showing in a representative way that "as members of the race, we are rightly related to death". It was "for us and NOT instead of us". For many it is a subject carefully avoided lest it cause further contention. Few of them really understand the complicated reasoning to which they must pay lip service, and few know the assurance of forgiveness or the power of living with Jesus as Lord of life.

On this one point I had never been truly Christadelphian. I was born into one of the few Christadelphian homes where the reality of the Christ who died instead of me, was an accepted part of life. Our family was always regarded as not quite "orthodox". In one church, on several occasions, my father was officially called to account for his belief. They never quite got around to dis-fellowshipping him, but his presence was an embarrassment to them, and he lived amongst them in an uneasy "truce".

Later, in another church, both he and I had managed to have it recorded officially, (and very reluctantly), in the minutes of a formal meeting of the church, that we did not accept their teaching on this point. Alas, for me, at that time it was only head knowledge.

When it became a heart's experience instead of head knowledge it also became inevitable that one day I would be called to make a confession before men and a public choice between the Christ who had saved me and the one defined by the Christadelphian creed.

Slowly but surely God began to move to bring that to pass.

First, He took the career. The company for which I worked, was forced to close.

Second, He sent me to live in a new city. At first, I was determined to stay where I was (in Newcastle NSW at that time) and I did actually find a short-term position which allowed us to do that for another three years.

As that temporary appointment was coming to an end and my wife and I prayed about another permanent position which would keep us in Newcastle, God called us clearly and unmistakably to a position in Melbourne. We made the move in 1971, leaving behind the "dream home" which we had built and the friends we had grown up amongst. We learned at first hand, just a very little, how Abraham must have felt when God called him into a strange land.

In Melbourne God took our church from us. We knew when we obeyed the call to Melbourne that the church here was vastly different to that in Newcastle and that we would not find it easy here. Christadelphians in this city were far stricter in requiring conformity to their doctrinal standards, than their more liberal brethren in Newcastle. Our reputation for "unorthodoxy" followed us and a concerted campaign for our removal was initiated by some "guardians of the faith". Within about six months of our arrival my wife and I and our eldest daughter, then aged 17, were disfellowshipped for our inability to assent to their teaching on the Atonement.

I can now honestly say that I have learned the necessary lessons in Divine love; that I hold no bitterness; and that I have no regret for the loss of things I had held to be very precious, (although I confess freely, that was not always easy at first).

I cannot really blame them for their decision that I had to go. They were being predictably true to their constitution and their beliefs, which required them to guard a communion table closed to all but those who assent to Christadelphian doctrine. Although church government is theoretically congregational and locally autonomous, there are also strong obligations to other churches, and the community as a whole. They believed that they had to purify the church of heresy, in order to protect their own relationship with the rest of the community in Australia and around the world.

It was a traumatic experience, a time of upheaval and testing and refining. I had been brought up in a closed community to believe that Christadelphianism is the only way to God and that all others are lost. Even after that meeting with Jesus, I had continued to find security in belonging to the "right" church. My life had been totally centred around church activities and friendships within Christadelphian circles.

The Christadelphian communion table was now forbidden to me, literally all over the world.

The many preaching and teaching opportunities which I had enjoyed, were no longer open.

Many friends found it convenient to turn away. Those who did remain faithful paid their own high price for their faithfulness.

Tragedy? Disaster?

I was tempted to think so at first, but I knew deep down that it was not; and that God was working for good. ([Romans 8:28](#)) The rain was falling; the floods had come, and the wind was blowing and beating on the house to test where the foundation really was. ([Matthew 7:24-27](#))

This was a refining fire, and in it I was being taught to find my faith and trust in God alone, without the man-made security of the church structure to which I could never return.

When I cried out in my prayers for the comfort of human fellowship, Jesus spoke to my heart, "I, alone, must be enough for all your need". And, praise God, I found that He was!

There, in the secret place where the presence of God is all that is left, I found true eternal security.

We did pray about finding another suitable church to join, and we did visit several, without finding anything which seemed "comfortable". We have never felt "free" to join any of them. Somehow the doors are never quite open when they discover that we cannot satisfy their theological expectations, especially about the Trinity.

I confess that if anyone wants to catch me out on that subject, you certainly can.

And there are also other theological issues, about which some of you will almost certainly take offence, and perhaps reject me.

But you cannot take from me what Jesus has given me. I am His for ever!

However, the theological issues are not the only reason why we have not joined another church.

We believe that God has called us to be where we are, in an independent setting, outside the mainstream.

Eventually, as we prayed and waited, God spoke to our hearts in a way which radically altered our whole direction.

"You have been searching to receive my love from others. Now, instead, you must seek to give it to others. Wait for me where you are, and I will bring you some who need to find my love."

It was no audible voice, but we were sure that this was the will of God for us.

God did bring us people who needed to find His love. A "house church" was born, which has grown up around us as an extended family, over the years since then. There are others, including many Christadelphians, in Australia and across the seas, with whom I have been privileged to share in some part, what Jesus has given me. I have seen God continue to honour His word, reveal His power, and glorify His Son.

I choose not to write about this in detail, for there are many individual and very personal stories of those who have found Jesus, that are not mine to tell. Although I could not know it at the time, it is for these children of God that I was rejected by the Christadelphians.

With that I am content.

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I will remain eternally grateful for my Christadelphian origins and for the many good things I received from God through them. But they opened the door to so much more when they sent me away.

If there is any further testimony to give, it is simply this. - *"By the grace of God I am what I am."* [1 Corinthians 15:10](#)

With that also, I am content.

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**FOOTNOTE** , January 1998

The original version of this paper was written in 1991. More than 25 years have now elapsed since the events described here. It seems appropriate to add this footnote.

This paper appears to provoke different responses from different people!

- \* We have been asked by a number of Christadelphian friends, to "tone it down" a little, since it does not accurately represent their own personal position.
- \* On the other hand, many have written to say that they have found it helpful in dealing with their own inner conflicts.
- \* Others have told us that in their individual churches, and in this generation, our beliefs would be considered quite acceptable, and no longer a barrier to fellowship.
- \* A few have even suggested that it is possible to read the creed with a little "elasticity", give verbal assent to it, and then ignore its existence for ever after! However, in the interest of letting our "Yea" mean "Yea", HONESTY FORBIDS THAT LAST COURSE!
- \* The overall impression seems to be that some think that the "winds of change" may be blowing, in some places at least. But alas, not all our correspondents are happy with that suggestion.
- \* Some say it is NOT changing, because it was NEVER like that in THEIR Churches to begin with! (We do believe that about some!)
- \* But the more traditional amongst them are still as adamant as ever, that there is NO CHANGE to the official position, that our beliefs do not fall within the orbit of "orthodoxy", and that we would still be disfellowshipped.
- \* In deference to all those good friends, we have PRAYERFULLY considered modifying this article slightly, rewriting it completely, or even removing it from the Web Site!
- \* For all who have remained friends, and in intellectual fellowship (without extending formal public fellowship at the Lord's Table) this footnote expresses our friendly acknowledgment of their concerns. We are certainly aware that some Christadelphians are quite different to others, and we are VERY glad for that! (and for the friendship they express).
- \* Nevertheless it is still true that their "Official" Statement of Faith, and "Basis of Fellowship" in Australia, contains things to which we cannot give honest assent. We know that there are still many in positions of "authority", who would consider those things to be a barrier to any possibility of reconciliation between us and the Christadelphians.
- \* From personal contacts with many Christadelphians, and from responses to this article, it is also still true that there are many who are desperately searching for the same peace with God that I found.
- \* For any Christadelphians who may feel "unfairly treated", or even aggrieved, by this article, we simply ask that you bear with us while we attempt to speak to the hearts of others who are experiencing the same inner turmoil that was mine, for the same reasons.
- \* Perhaps you might even be just a little glad for any who are encouraged to believe that they can find their way back to peace with God, through reading about my own search, and its success ..... and its consequences.

You would not deny them that ..... would you?

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*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me."*

(Revelation 3:20 RSV)

**Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you loved us and gave yourself for us!**

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