

What Does it means to be Christ's Brother?

Dear Friends

We ask this question as there are many who claim to call themselves Brethren of Christ – by the Greek – Christadelphians, and there are many who call anyone who claims to be a Christian as Brother, using this term so loosely, so as to cause much confusion, and so bring a reproach upon the very name of Jesus Christ.

Let us take a step back – What is a Christian?

The term 'Christian', means essentially a follower of Christ. The followers of Jesus were described as disciples. They disciplined themselves in his way of life. They followed him around physically. They supported him. They listened to his words. They copied what he did. Paul the Apostle explains that all who would be Christians should do the same. He said in 1 Cor 11:1. *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

Christ asked nothing of his followers except to believe, be baptized and to keep his commandments.

What were his commandments? All he asked is quite simple: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* True Christians do not just distinguish themselves from other religions by what they believe but by how they behave. Many claim to be Christians, but fail at these most simple commandments. It is no good saying we are a good Catholic, or a Baptist, Christadelphian or a born again Christian, or a member of the Original Christians, the Apostolic Ecclesia, if we fail at the very first hurdle, and give no

attention to our behaviour and conduct. We are simply wasting our time, and being a hypocrite. The term Christian has become a catch all phrase for anyone who considers themselves a Believer, even if they have never read the Bible! Indeed, both sides in the Ukraine Russian war claim to be Christians! Even though Jesus said that *all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword*. It was because of war that the name Christadelphian was first coined, to differentiate Bible believers who maintained the Truth as it is in Jesus, from many other Christians who were quite ready to take up arms and fight during the American Civil war. Just as the term Christian has become vague, and meaningless, so also has the term Christadelphian.

With 50,000 members, the organisation which today claims the name, bears little resemblance to those early Pioneers who upheld the position of the Original Christians the Ecclesias of the Apostles. Instead they hide behind glib phrases such as Once a Brother always a Brother, and you must not judge. Or Jesus will sort out everything when he returns. They call many without even knowing the background their brother in Christ. So that the term Brother becomes meaningless and empty just a another social trend.

Everyone understands the natural bonds and family ties that exist between siblings. Loyalty, often shared history, and experiences, shared memories of childhood, often lay down a foundation of cooperation and togetherness. Families featured very strongly in ancient peoples, where collaboration and support within the family unit was required for survival in often hostile surroundings, and when physical labour was needed for the basic necessities of life, everyone worked together. In scripture of course the nation of Israel were divided into tribes, and within the tribes there were heads of families. People were encouraged to keep their genealogies to

enable them to receive the inheritance and in turn pass it onto the next generation. The concept of the powerful family bond was forged on mutual trust and loyalty was very strong.

The Lord Jesus Christ as a Jewish boy was brought up in this environment. He was expected to follow the family tradition. When it was evident that he had taken a different path he was criticised

Matthew 13: 54. *And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?. And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?* Jesus understood very much what family was all about, the very foundation of society. Jesus had at least four brethren, and sisters at least two! Quite why the Roman Catholic Church worship Mary as the queen of heaven the eternal virgin, we do not know, especially seeing as she went on to have a large family with Joseph as this passage clearly shows. But natural family ties and loyalties have their limits. His family his brothers and sisters undermined him, and did not understand him. Even though they had grown up with him. They had seen his sincerity, his urgency to be about His Fathers business. They knew he was different, Mary would have told them. Yet they did not understand, and in John 7: 5 we can read *neither did his brethren believe in him*. They did not believe him, they did not believe in him either.

Is this the way the brothers of Christ should behave? Doubters, Critical, Detractors? Unbelieving? Maybe there was a hint of jealousy there. We see in another place, that those who were close to him went to lay hold on him, saying he was beside himself. Often

they would stand outside, and try and talk and reason with him. Indeed the Messianic Psalm seems to sum up Jesus mind towards his brethren: Psalm 69:8 *I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.*

This is the way natural relationships can end up. We have seen that blood is not always thicker than water, as the modern sages would have us believe. In Genesis 4, the record is there for us to read, and remind us of the way envy gets out of control amongst brothers: *And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? 10. And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. Am I my brother's keeper? This is very often the natural reaction, the cry of denial that man has any responsibility toward his brother. This is the grand sum of brothers in the natural sense. It doesn't amount to that much.*

So when once again Jesus mother and his brethren were lining up outside while Jesus was preaching to the people, members of the audience told him Matthew 12: 46. *While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and*

who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. Mark in his gospel records the same words, and Luke also we can read ch 8:19. *Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press.. And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.*

Here then is the clear teaching of Jesus, how he takes the long established foundation of society – the family, and shows that there is a superior family, a higher form of relationships, based on higher standards, greater responsibilities. Where loyalty and cooperation is not compromised. Where the question Am I my brothers keeper? Is never asked, because the Head of Jesus family was His Father – not Joseph. The family Jesus treasured was a Heavenly family, whose values were not worldly, but eternal. God was the Head of His family.

This is then the true definition of a brother or sister of Christ. It is about doing. Whosoever shall do the will of my Father. Without the doing, we cannot claim to be a Christian or a Brother or Sister of Christ. This is what it means to be a brother of Christ, in His words. Doing the Will of God. Obviously we have to know what the will of God is first before we can do it. This knowledge is gained by learning about the Bible, and understanding the Gospel, and obeying it. This is Jesus definition of someone who He regards as His brother. It follows that if the word is not heard, and the will is not done, then the relationship is broken and the term no longer applies. Of course it follows! or else it makes a nonsense of what Jesus just said. So, to

say Once a brother always a brother is not the case. It is no different to saying Once saved always saved that the Pentecostals claim. But then there is not much difference between Christadelphians and Pentecostals these days. Maybe more Pentecostals believe in the Creation and not evolution.

We see then the basis of this family, this brotherhood is spiritual, and not natural. The spiritual relationship is far superior to that of the natural. It means that the spiritual brother then has far more obligations and responsibilities than merely that of the natural.

Being a brother of Christ means being part of the Divine family. It is equivalent to be called child of God. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

Coming away from the worldly family, from the natural way of doing things, and instead doing things in the spiritual way, that is the will of God, means a complete change. Paul to the Ephesians and chapter 2 compares this to a man leaving his father and mother, and taking a wife, and they become one flesh, a new family, but he says *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

The Apostles explain it another way to become a son or daughter of God, and thus a brother or sister of Christ is by being born again.

This being born again, is a process whereby an individual makes a new start in life, and is becomes a new person in Christ, by believing and being persuaded by the Gospel, by being baptised, and by living in the Spirit of Christ. This is a process, quite simple, with no

mysterious clouds of spirit coming upon you, no hidden forces or miraculous power entering your body. It is a process which starts with the power of the Word, God's words, having an effect upon the consciousness of an individual. The effect is an awakening, a realisation that his natural character is in need of a great deal of improvement, of the realisation of the purity of the character of God. - Of the Supreme and wonderful example of Jesus Christ. It is a process which includes the desire to want to be like that man Christ Jesus, to be His follower, his disciple. To speak his words, and do his works. We realise that naturally we can have no part in that spiritual purity, because we have inherited a nature which is sinful, and corrupt.

However just as in the process used by the family courts today, the Bible teaches us of the process of adoption, whereby we can join the Divine family. We can put off our past life, we can forget about it, and instead put on a new surname, and join a new household, with true protection, a true guardian, with new brothers and sisters, the elder of which is Jesus Christ, and a new Father, even the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.* This being born again of water, is described frequently in the New Testament, and is a commandment to be baptised. For as many of you have been baptised into Christ ye have put on Christ. Baptism represents the death of the old former way of life, and a rising again to a new, like being born again, but being born into a new family. It is necessary to also be born of the Spirit. This is firstly the awakening of the conscience through the power of the Word. The Spirit grows within us as we feed the new man, the spiritual man with the reading of the Word, and thinking and talking about it.

It is that Spirit which strengthens us, and helps us to withstand sin, to overcome it, to resist it. That Spirit is called by Paul the Apostle in his letter to the Romans as the Spirit of Christ. He writes about it, and it is worth following these words: Romans 8:13-19 *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify (or kill) the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* This is simple words. Do we understand this? It is exactly the same as Jesus waving at his disciples and saying these are my brothers, they do the will of God! Here the Apostle says if allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit of God,- then we are His Sons. Remember the Spirit of God in this context is equivalent to His Words. It is not some mysterious force from outer space. It is the Word of God. Then the Apostle continues v15 : *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear;* that is Gods 'Word is not about placing restrictions or tying you down to yet more regulations, but is instead making you free, from the greatest chains of all, our sins, *instead he says v15 ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.* Again this is a further aspect underlying what it means to be a brother of Christ. Thus once part of the Divine family, as sons of God, the family possessions, also becomes something we can share in.

This means also the inheritance. As a joint heir with Christ, we are promised a share in the same future. Jesus was promised by his Father that he would rule in His Fathers Kingdom. His brethren are promised that they too will inherit eternal life, and will rule with him.

The bonds of the spiritual family are on altogether a higher plane than that of a natural family. The bonds of a natural family are based on a shared history perhaps, protectiveness, loyalty, affection, fondness, trust, familiarity... However, those who are brethren of Christ, are tied far closer. *There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother* says the Proverbs 18:24. The Brotherhood of Christ is based on ties, described as the bond of peace by Paul to the Ephesians, that they have far more in common than just sharing the same parents. Paul speaks to the brethren of Christ: Ephesians 4:2. *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

We see that brothers of Christ are united. If true brethren, there can be no occasion of envy and hatred that Cain showed towards his brother Abel, or that Esau showed towards his brother Jacob, or the murderous intent the brothers showed towards their younger brother Joseph, or the mistrust David's older brothers showed towards him. Instead, unity exists between brothers of Christ. If there is not, then the errant brothers had beware. The bond of peace existing between the brothers of Christ is that which is held in high esteem. They hold the same shared belief –one body, one spirit, one hope, one lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, One Father. *One Father which is through all and in you all.* It is the shared character of the Father then which is common. Because of the influence of His Word, the brother of Christ, allow themselves to be changed, to be converted, transformed into new men and

women, so that they think the same, speak the same, and do the same. This is love. *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;* says Paul to the Romans. This love of the brethren or “Philadelphia” as the Greek word is, and some of us maybe remember. But here Paul is hinting of something even deeper. He says in honour preferring one another. With natural brothers you see a great deal of competitiveness, we call it sibling rivalry. It is very common. It is envy. Yet with brothers of Christ, this rivalry simply does not exist. Instead the opposite should happen. Thinking of others before ourselves, preferring one another. In our earlier reference, Paul spoke of forbearing one another in love. With human beings it is inevitable that we are offended, or cause offence, it is the way we are, our feathers are easily ruffled, but with the brethren of Christ, it is the willingness and speed to forgive, and let the issue pass. Paul in his letter to the ecclesia at Colosse wrote about this, and we can read chapter 3:12-15. *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, ...a phrase we would understand today as tender feelings, or compassion, but the rest is straight forward enough.. kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.* This is what it means to be a brother of Christ. It is living The LIFE.

The life of Christ. The willingness to sacrifice our own personal interests for the greater good of our brothers and sisters, and for the will of God. Paul describes charity *as the bond of perfectness*. This is the bond which joints the members of the ecclesia together as one

body. This is difference between the natural and the spiritual. It is a superior family tie, a heavenly. Charity. Not popping a bit of change into an envelope, or donating some old clothes to the local Oxfam shop. The Greek word we remind ourselves is Agape. It really means a godly love, a sacrificial love. God demonstrated this at the highest level through his Dear Son. *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* Jesus taught his disciples, and still teaches his followers, words we can read in John 15:12-14. *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* There we have it, we cannot have it clearer than that. This is the challenge. If we would be a true Christian, if we would be a brother of Christ, then we must be prepared to lay down our life for the friends of Christ. This is sacrificial love – Agape. It is the exact opposite of human nature me-first thinking. We may think, Oh yes I would be prepared to do that. We imagine a scenario where we would have to step forward to save the lives of our brethren and sisters.

Easy to imagine that, because human nature likes to bask in glory, but it doesn't just mean that. It means giving up of our time for one another. Helping out where needed, being willing to assist when required. Not ignoring the appeals of others, but sharing resource and time, regularly with those likeminded who share the love of Christ. Interesting that Jesus teaches that laying down one's life includes assisting in the basic things in Life. He mentioned this to his disciples. Showing that Brothers of Christ, must treat one another how they would treat the Lord Jesus. Matt 25:32.... *And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he*

shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Self sacrifice – agape in action. Another phrase which has been hijacked by people who claim to be brothers in Christ. An organisation which does a lot of work for the least of these, but does not pay much attention to ensuring the purity of the Word of God is followed as much as doing good deeds. Being a brother in Christ is being responsible for spiritual support as well as natural. It is feeding the spiritually hungry as well as natural. Ensuring the Truth is preached. When members of the Ecclesia are naked – in an unrepentant state, it is to talk and show compassion and pray with and for them that they might be covered and so on. The principled way that Jesus conducted himself was without bias and prejudice, and was balanced between practical and spiritual. Being permitted

to join His family has been an gift of great love towards men and women.

1 John 3:1-3: *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.* Yes, in a deep characteristic show of compassion, God found a way for men and women to be reconciled and be part of the Divine family, but through hope of the inheritance – of being like God – is the motivation for purity.

We spoke of the way in which the family is the foundation of society, family which God created from the beginning. One man one woman for life, creating a stable loving environment for the next generation. As family duties in the domestic situation cannot be ducked out of, so responsibilities within the ecclesia cannot just be foisted on others, when it suits, or when there seems something more interesting to do. It is a way of life. As in a natural family compassion and understanding is shown towards the children by the parents, so elders must be towards the novices. How often Jesus referred to his followers as little children. *Except ye be as this little child ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven.* We see how Jesus looked upon his own people as sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion upon them. This is to be the mind of the brothers of Christ. A true Christian is ready to show compassion as a father or mother Even as we receive grace mercy, and forgiveness, and compassion from The Father in heaven, so brothers and sisters of Christ are to be ready to show the same.

Under the law the people were commanded to have the laws of God always to hand, and to teach them to their children Deuteronomy 6:7 *And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when thou rise up.* You can see it is an everyday thing, a way of life. Living the Life. Not just hastily tacking it on at the end of the day or whenever we remember. Outside of the natural family which should be a training ground for the spiritual, brothers and sisters of Christ are required to carry out many other duties. This is an obligation. They volunteered to become adopted into the household of Christ, and as such they must obey the house rules. They cannot choose to shirk and leave the work to others under the excuse that it is all voluntary. There is plenty of work to do.

We spoke earlier of the need to maintain purity within the Divine family, that is the House rules. It is not possible to change the definition of the spiritual family. People today have had a jolly good go at redefining the natural family, completely undermining and breaking society in the process. But the spiritual family, emembedrs have ben commanded to come out and be separate. So it is that some do not like the house rules. That is why the sect known as Christadelphians are unrecognisable from the position of the early founding pioneers, and gone away from the Apostolic Ecclesia.

Disciples of Chjrist must exercise discipline within the Household. 2 Thessalonians 3:13 -15: *But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* It is important that compassion is used to clothe the naked. But if bad behaviour or false

doctrine, and teachings which Jesus and the Apostles reject are maintained further action is required:

1 Corinthians 5v11 says *But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no not to eat.*

Being called a brother or sister of Christ, does not mean we are one. The definition Jesus said are those who hear the Word, and do the will of My Father in heaven. It is not difficult to determine who and who is not doing that. When we wilfully disobey Christ we put ourselves out of fellowship and outside of the brotherhood. It is not the place of brothers and sisters of Christ to judge the world. Jesus will do that upon His return. The Apostle Paul continues to say: *For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not you judge them that are within? But them that are without God judges. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

This is what it means to be a brother of Christ. It does not sound easy. It is not easy. Yet we are not expected to change overnight. Nor do we have to do all this by ourselves. Our Father is merciful, slow to anger, full of compassion. It is how we should be.

Remember. Remember the words which Jesus spake. *And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

Brother Terry