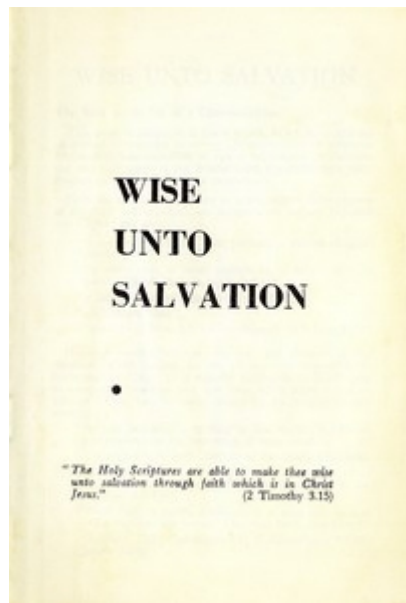


# WISE UNTO SALVATION



## The Bible in the life of a Christadelphian

This essay is designed, in plain words, to set down matters of critical importance to every Christadelphian or potential Christadelphian, regardless of age or experience. It discusses the very title deeds of our Brotherhood, the elementary justification of our existence as a community.

First, let us remind ourselves in a few simple Bible-phrases of the high calling which we accept when we are baptized into Christ. We are:

*"a people for Christ's own possession, zealous of good works";* (Titus 3:14)

*"an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession"* (1 Peter 2:9)

*"a temple of the living God"* (2 Corinthians 6:16)

*"children of God"* (1 John 3:1-2)

However much, therefore, we may fall short of a full response to this calling—as we all do—it is impossible to doubt our privilege. It is equally impossible in faithfulness to accept the privilege and live lives which leave it out of account. That, too, is readily shown by the Scriptures' own words:

*"Be not fashioned according to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Romans 12:2)

*"I beseech you to work worthily of the calling wherewith ye were*

*called*”(Ephesians

4:1)

*“Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58)

*“What doth it profit, brethren, if a man say he has faith, but has not works? Can that faith save him?”* (James 1:14)

No doubt this life of faithful working covers every department of our living, but at the basis of it all lies the Book from which all these quotations are taken: the Bible itself. It needs only another handful of passages from the Scriptures to show the claims which the Book makes on our attention:

*“Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law does he meditate day and night”* (Psalm 1:1-2)

*“Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee”* (Psalm 119:11)

*“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope”* (Romans 15:4)

*“We have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place.”* (2 Peter 1:19)

This and much more makes it entirely plain that regular Bible-reading on the part of all for whom it is possible is an indispensable mark of the saint in training.

### **Daily Bible Reading**

An earlier edition of The Bible Companion contained the words: “The mind . . . cannot be brought at once to the divine likeness. This can only be achieved by the industrious application of the individual to ... the Scriptures of truth”, and the tables in this companion were put together to help us accept the discipline of regular and systematic Bible Reading. We are all, no doubt, familiar with its plan: a first portion drawn from the first half of the Old Testament (Genesis to Job); a second portion from the second half (Psalms to Malachi); and a third portion from the New Testament which, because it is so much shorter than the Old, is read twice to the latter’s once over the period of a year.

It is possible to read the whole Bible, the New Testament twice, quite clearly and deliberately, in around 100 hours.

At the rate, that is, of 16 minutes a day. Allow a little extra for getting out Bibles, settling down, a prayer perhaps, and a short discussion or meditation, and half an hour could readily pass. Now let us put together a few statistics:

<b>Occupation 24-hour days</b>	<b>24 - hour days</b>	<b>% of year</b>
Sleeping (8 hours a day)	112	33
Working 40 hours a week, 48 weeks	80	22
Eating ( 2 hours a day)	30	8
Travelling to work (7 hours a week)	15	4
Time not occupied as above	118	33
<b>OF WHICH</b>		
- Attending three meetings weekly (8 hours)	17	5
- Daily Bible-reading (30 minutes a day)	8	2

The figures relate, of course, to a fictional average man, and cannot in any case be stated so simply for the even-more fictional average woman. Nor is it suggested that the ‘unoccupied time’, amounting to about one third of our year, is empty of important things to be done. All that is suggested, in fact, is that for the case considered, not more than 2% of our year, 3 % of our waking time, or 6% of our ‘unoccupied time’ is claimed by The Bible Companion for systematic reading of the Scriptures.

This, no matter how busy our own time may be, no matter how busy, indeed, with occupations good or innocent in themselves, seems no unreasonable tribute to pay to the God who gave us the Book, and no excessive price if we would by that Word be made wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Our spokesmen proclaim before others that we are happy to pay this price. We invite our friends to take a copy of The Bible Companion, with the aid of which Christadelphians read the Old Testament twice and the New Testament once, each year. Yet each of us needs to ask whether the spokesman could have said what he did, if I, or my family, had been the example he had in mind.

So each of us must ask himself, how far is daily reading is the Bible truly a Christadelphian practice today? To what extent is that 2% of our lives actually given over to the Word of God?

### **O, how love I Thy law?**

If we would judge from the hymns we sing, the reading of the Bible is the dear delight of us all:

“O, how love I Thy law; it is my study all the day”; (Hymn 22)

“O, may these heavenly pages be my ever dear delight”; (Hymn 118, ‘Father of Mercies’)

“And now Thine oracles we read, with earnest prayer and strong desire more richly on Thy words to feed “; (Hymn 120)

“But when our eyes behold Thy Word, we read Thy name in fairer lines”.  
(Hymn 124 ‘The heavens declare thy glory Lord’)

All this and more we affirm when we sing hymns 22, 118, 120, and 124 in the 1964 Christadelphian hymn book, and other hymns beside. Our hymns are prayers, pleas, and promises and, unless we should perjure ourselves, the words we sing must be fulfilled in actions: each time we sing such words we promise our attention to the Scriptures for the future, and repent our inattentions of the past.

In the words of the first of these hymns: “Thy word is to my feet a lamp, and to my path a light; I promised have, and will perform, to keep Thy judgements right.” That promise, both in means and end, must be kept.

### **The Bible Companion**

Is this the best of all imaginable Bible-reading systems? No doubt it is not. But it is a system which the Brotherhood has used for many decades with incalculable profit. By its disciplines we read the whole Bible, and not just those parts we are moved to read. By its wise emphasis we read the fulfilment twice to the promises once, and let the actual life, teaching, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus take that proper precedence over the anticipation of them which is their due. We see from the lives of sinful men enough of the depths to which our human nature can sink to know how desperate our need; we see from the righteous, if painful, judgements of God with what displeasure He views our wilful sinning; we see, from His compassion revealed in the prophets, how deep the sorrow in the heart even of the Creator when His creatures go astray, and with what forbearance He rises up early to leave undone nothing which might bring about their reform. And in all that He did for the world through His Son, and yet will do, we see how that compassion triumphs in the repentant and obedient saint, and will yet triumph in a conquered and then regenerate world.

All this, if we use the Bible Companion to help us, we shall see, and learn, and increasingly, year by year, come to know better and to value more. More than this: if we do not use this system, it is unlikely that we shall devise another for ourselves; not to read all the Bible through in this way is likely to mean that we do not read it through at all. It is a rare person who discards The Bible Companion because he has acquired another plan, no less comprehensive, which serves him better. But even in that rare case the change would be ill-advised.

For The Bible Companion is a bond of fellowship among brethren and sisters throughout the world. All who use it are, within the space of twenty-four hours, reading the same words, guided into the same channels of holy thought, moved in ways which can find expression in related prayers, made strong before the throne of grace because they speak as one.

How better can we fulfil the spirit of:

*“These words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up”?* (Deuteronomy 6:7)

If Moses could bid the people of Israel — all of them, leaders and layfolk alike — make that part of the Word of God which they possessed their constant topic of conversation, in their homes and as like-minded people walking together, morning and night, can it be less our pleasure, as they that fear the Lord, to speak one to another of the things most surely believed? And can there be any better preparation for this than daily reading in our homes of the same Scriptures?

### **Our daily bread**

*“Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”* (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)

Thus the Lord repelled the temptation in the wilderness. This Israel should have learned from the daily provision from heaven of manna in their desert. And we, who are taught to pray that God will grant us day by day our natural food, are provided with daily bread to strengthen us in our spiritual pilgrimage through the world’s desert : in the Scriptures, if only we will use them so. When the multitude who had fed of the multiplied loaves came back next day for more, they were taught to “labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life” (John 6:27); and this food is offered to us in the Word of God. To this we must have regular recourse if we would reap the blessing: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

But this food should not only be the subject of a family meal. It is the right diet for our guests also. In how many Christadelphian homes is it still the practice for the host to say to the casual Christadelphian visitor, or the week-end speaker, “Have you had your readings to-day?”, and for the guest to answer truthfully, “ Not yet, but if I had it would be a pleasure to repeat them. Let us have them together.” There are still some such homes, but there are not enough.

We could do with being thoroughly old-fashioned about this. When we meet in one another’s homes the Bibles should be out, the readings read aloud, and (for why should our praises be limited to the public meetings) why not hymns sung once again round the piano? It would be good for our singing, and good for our spiritual health. Mechanical sources of news, music, and entertainment may have their acceptable place in our lives (though they may also have their grave abuses), but none of them should be allowed to compete with the overriding claims of the Word of God.

In many other religious communities the religious duties are discharged by ministers or clergy. Little is expected of the layfolk beyond such attendance at services as they care to offer: but this must never be the case among us. Already there is a dangerous disposition to accept a division into those who speak and those who are spoken to, and a kind of unpaid professionalism has arisen in which there are experts who can

preach, and debate, and convert, and there is a large and growing silent majority who let them, with or without their own passive support.

### **The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!**

What do we do, each of us, if “a man asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15)? Do we say, “I will bring you a leaflet about that”? Do we say, “I should like you to meet Brother Dot or Sister Dash, who know a lot more about this than I do”? Do we simply change the subject? Or do we tell them?

Of course it is good to know the best printed matter to offer for our friends to read for themselves. And of course it is good to bow before the experience of Brother Dot and Sister Dash. It is true, too, that some people are readier of speech than others, and that, of the many members in the one Body there are eyes and ears, hands and feet (1 Corinthians 12:13-20). There is nothing to be ashamed of in being genuinely slow of speech, and inexpert in the cut and thrust of debate. But there would be much to be ashamed of if, on the pretext of such small abilities, we were to wrap our pound of ability in a napkin, or bury our one talent in the ground (Luke 19:19; Matthew 25:18), on the ground that our Lord as a hard man who asks too much of us; and therefore we will not exert ourselves to know more of His ways, that at least under God’s hand we may bear our own small witness to the Lord who saved us from our sins.

If the truth could be told, in any case, we might well find that the number of those brought to the faith by the supposedly unlearned and ignorant men whose simple zeal for the Word bears testimony that they have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13) vastly exceeds that of those converted by the labours of the ones we look upon as learned. And “they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

In any case, Brother Dot and Sister Dash, if the Lord’s coming is not soon, will one day lie sleeping. And if we have not all been training from the Word, that some of us, at least, may be their successors, what will the Brotherhood do then?

The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! God reveals, and man must pass on the message. “Let him that heareth say, Come!” (Revelation 22:17). None of us should look upon himself or herself as a blind alley in the progress of the purpose of God.” Freely ye have received, freely give,” in all ways open to us, is the exhortation of the Lord (Matthew 10:8).

### **Clean house to let for seven demons?**

It is a dangerous folly to allow our lives, just once at the time of our baptism, to be cleansed from our former sinful ways, and then, the ‘examination’ passed, lapse passively into the assumption that, since we shall never officially be asked such questions again, there is no need to keep our knowledge of the Scriptures alive, still less to cause it to grow. Into such lives worse evils enter: sloth and complacency; inability to meet the subtleties of those who would deny the authority of the Scriptures, even that of our Lord, can expose us to the invasion of the seeds of doubt. Our empty lodgings can be opened to the tempting rentals of half-belief, or even to the violent entry and unpaying squatting of total loss of faith.



## **Is it wrong to read mechanically?**

“There is no virtue,” so it is said, “in reading merely for reading’s sake. Doing the readings can tempt us to a self-righteousness which is unbecoming and unhealthy. It were better not to read at all than read without the understanding.” The argument is tempting and subtle. The part which deals with self-righteousness is even correct. But the rest is wrong, and dangerously wrong.

What we ought to say is this: there is less profit in reading mechanically than in reading intelligently and with full understanding. But even the former, imperfect though it is, is better than not reading at all. Every child of a Christadelphian family who has ever sat down reluctantly at parental behest, and done the readings in just such a mechanical manner, has been able at some later time to confess: “I learned much in those days, without knowing that I was doing so. What now lies in my armoury consists in large measure of the spiritual sleep-learning of those days. Such ability as I now have to find my way around the Scriptures is due to a great extent to what found its way into my mind then and, adhering, provided an anchoring point for the next piece of knowledge, and the next, and the next ad infinitum.” Many a brother or sister coming to the faith from the outer world has found good reason to covet that inbuilt familiarity with much of the Scripture that comes almost as second nature to the one who has, even unwillingly, read the Scriptures regularly over many years.

So: let our readings be as unmechanical and as leisurely as may be. But if we find ourselves reading hastily from force of circumstances, or even with a tired mind, let us read nevertheless. It is far better thus than not to read at all.

One more temptation to be dealt with. Our busy brethren and sisters, but particularly brethren, are tempted to say, “I have much special studying to do, for lectures, exhortations, and Bible Class. I cannot do both this and the daily readings, and the former is the more important. The daily readings will have to go.”

The writer is a convert from this way of thinking. For it is wrong, and dangerously wrong again. It is a bad example to the family, and takes away a source of spiritual fellowship, isolating the cleric from the layman both in the home and in the ecclesia. It is a bad example to our fellow-brethren, as though one should say, “Daily readings are all right for you who study not, but I have risen above this.” It introduces dangerous specialization into our study of the Word of God, and effectively blots out those parts we have no wish or present need to study. So, no matter what extra burden the preacher’s vocation may place on his shoulders, he should read the Bible as a whole like the rest of us.

## **The Bible in the Ecclesia**

If diligence in daily reading needs special exhortation, so does diligence in our communal study of the Word of God. It is a long-standing but growing scandal that ecclesial Bible Classes are the Cinderellas of our weekly round. The ecclesia where as many as half the membership are present to share in the exposition of the Scriptures is rare indeed. The statistics given on page 2, which assume attendance at three meetings weekly, are in all probability over-estimated in the light of what has just been said.

Even when all allowances are made, this and other much lower proportions represent a regrettable state of affairs. “O, how I love Thy law” (Psalm 119:97) rings a little hollow against this background. What can the reasons be? That the quality of the exposition is often poor? That we study to better purpose alone at our desks? That small groups meeting informally enjoy a livelier and more instructive discussion? That our consciousness of our privilege is less than it should be, and our sense of proportion is wrong as to which things matter most in our lives?

As to the first, the quality of our Bible Classes is self-augmenting. With the encouragement of large attendance and enthusiastic participation, speakers will prepare more diligently and speak more cogently. As to the second, no doubt study at one’s desk is more efficient, but if it is left there it is also more selfish: such knowledge is there to be shared, and the Bible Class is a good place to do it. As to the third, this is often perfectly true, and such groups can be put to excellent use in witnessing to the gospel among our friends, too. But if we restrict our discussion to such groups we are in danger of undermining the unity of the ecclesia; we are penalising those to whom such a group is inaccessible; and we are running the risk of subversion should such groups fall into partisan or unbalanced hands. Let the groups exist by all means, but let this not be at the cost of our ecclesia’s united Bible study. And as to the last, it needs only to be mentioned for the remedy to be obvious: if our sense of proportion is wrong, the thing to do is to put it right.

Ecclesial Bible Classes might be more profitable than they are, too, if we took a little desk study of the subject on hand with us. They would be better informed if more of us got the very portable India-paper edition of Young’s Concordance and took it with us. Even as they are, those who attend such classes regularly find deep enjoyment and satisfaction in that fellowship around the Word of God which they provide, and would need a lot of persuasion to keep away.

Much of what has been said in this section applies also to our preaching occasions, the rather forbiddingly - called ‘lectures.’ For there it is the ecclesia, not the speaker, who is bearing witness. It is not one man on a platform talking to ‘brethren and sisters and friends’ but the brethren and sisters bearing witness to the friends through him as their representative. Here, too, interest is self-generating, and a virtuous spiral of waxing enthusiasm is the result of speaker responding to an audience which wills him on, and an audience blessed by the words of a speaker desiring only to serve them well.

The recipe of the following words provides all that we need to fulfil the spirit of this exhortation. The ingredients are: (1) the ever-present love and grace of our Lord as our priest before the throne of grace; (2) a true heart and fullness of faith in every one brought to the Lord through the cleansing of baptism; (3) mutual provocation in good things, that love and good works may multiply and expand; (4) assembly together on all occasions possible, exhorting and being exhorted, that the day approaching may find us watching, united, and prepared:

*“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the Blood of Jesus, . . . and having a great Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water; let us hold fast*



*the confession of our hope that it waver not; for He is faithful that promised : and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of our selves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day drawing nigh.” (Hebrews 10:19-25)*

### **A time for prayer**

What we have written has called attention, however imperfectly, to opportunities and needs affecting us all in our relation to the Scriptures. That the imperfections might be purged, and the message itself stand out for the glad acceptance of us all, unhindered by the complicated emotions which arise in our minds when we are exhorted to amend our ways, is the earnest desire of those promoting this publication.

Nothing is better calculated to achieve this, perhaps, than to conclude with prayers commended to us in Scripture by holy men of God, that we might make these prayers our own, and be heard and blessed by the One to Whom they are addressed: “I will meditate in Thy precepts, and have respect unto Thy ways. I will delight myself to Thy statutes: I will not forget Thy word.” Deal bountifully with Thy servant that I may live; so will I observe Thy word. Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.” (Psalm 119:15-18)

Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. The opening of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. I opened wide my mouth and panted; for I longed for Thy commandments. Turn Thou unto me, and have mercy upon me, as is Thy wont unto those that love Thy name. Order my footsteps in Thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.” (Psalm 119:129-133)

*A.D. NORRIS*

Aletheia Books (A previous version of this booklet was called “Take Heed”).

(Quotations are substantially from the Revised Version. Here and there very slight modifications of the wording into a more modern style have been made for the sake of clarity.)