

# The internet and preaching\*

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*The internet is a comparatively new form of communication. Whilst there are some potential disadvantages, if used rightly the internet provides a potentially useful way of preaching the gospel.*

“1995 IS THE YEAR in which people have become increasingly aware of the Internet . . . a term known to most people but not understood by many”.<sup>1</sup> These were the first words written in an article in the *Testimony* about the internet. It was revealed to Daniel that at the time of the end “knowledge shall be increased” (12:4), and this has been a characteristic of recent years, not least due to the internet. But how should we view the internet as a preaching tool?

In 1872 an entry in the *Christadelphian* magazine noted that “We have received permission here . . . to place on file in the public library, for the use of the public, one copy of the *Christadelphian*”.<sup>2</sup> In 1897 fifty copies of *Christendom Astray* had been placed in public libraries in the Australian state of Victoria,<sup>3</sup> while in 1906 the librarian of Erith Public Library actually requested copies of *Elpis Israel* on account of the interest generated by a series of lectures recently undertaken.<sup>4</sup>

Why did our brothers and sisters of earlier days put our books in libraries? “Seeing a line on the weekly ecclesial handbill referring to works in the public library, Nicodemus goes there by night, and . . . discovers that this is indeed the truth. Then he waxes bolder, and comes out; and at last is found a partaker with those who are ‘crucified with Christ’”.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps there is a parallel with today’s internet here. In God’s good grace, people come across the Truth in a variety of ways. Some, like Nicodemus, are perhaps seeking after that same Truth, but do not feel inclined to attend a formal place of worship to start with. In the UK, at least, society has lost something of our sense of community and become more individualistic and self-sufficient. Public meetings, once popular for election hustings, have become much less well-attended. Because of the despicable activities of various cults, the way of Truth has been evil spoken of, and many are wary of what they might consider ‘a peculiar people’! In all these cases, the internet can provide a useful point of first contact.

What if someone who has heard our distinctive name wants to find out more about us? Searching for ‘christadelphian’ on the web yields 59,000 entries. This article can only refer to a few of these as representing

a host of others.

Some, of course, are not created by Christadelphians. The BBC Religion and Ethics site ([www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/christadelphians\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/christadelphians_1.shtml)) features a 500-word article covering our history, beliefs and the way we worship. While not covering all our key beliefs, and with one or two inaccuracies, it is reasonably rounded and free from apparent bias. It even has a link to an online version of *Elpis Israel*!

Sites created by Christadelphians to preach the Truth fall into three main categories: those established by organisations in the Brotherhood, those by ecclesias, and those by individuals or small groups.

A link from the BBC site takes us to [www.christadelphian.org](http://www.christadelphian.org). This is the ALS site, also available at [www.godsaves.co.uk](http://www.godsaves.co.uk). This allows users to enter their postcode to display a list of the nearest five meetings, with location and meeting times. A link to the ecclesial website is provided if one exists. The site also allows ordering of free literature, and even downloads of ALS videos.

Some of these features are also available on the CBM’s very useful preaching site at [www.thisisyourbible.com](http://www.thisisyourbible.com).

[www.gladtidingsmagazine.com](http://www.gladtidingsmagazine.com) enables downloads of current and previous editions of the magazine.

[www.thechristadelphians.org](http://www.thechristadelphians.org) is a vast information repository, aimed both at those inside and those outside the household of faith.

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\* For a list of Christadelphian Internet resources see [p. 208](#).

1. Benson, T., “Publishing Editor’s column”, *Testimony*, Oct. 1995, p. xix.
2. *Christadelphian*, 1872, vol. 9, p. 133.
3. *Ibid.*, 1897, vol. 34, p. 125.
4. *Ibid.*, 1906, vol. 43, p. 181.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

Since 1996 the *Testimony* has published online versions of its “Basic Bible Principles” preaching leaflets, now at [www.testimony-magazine.org](http://www.testimony-magazine.org).

Many ecclesias now have their own website. These usually give a brief summary of our beliefs, forthcoming subjects, the meeting location and contact information. Some offer downloads of booklets, and increasingly it is possible to download audio versions of recent talks. Some of our key beliefs and a directory with links to over 200 other Christadelphian sites are to be found at [www.christadelphian.org.uk](http://www.christadelphian.org.uk).

The CBM website referred to above also allows readers to undertake a Bible study course. Several sites allow users to sign up for the “Learn to Read the Bible Effectively” distance learning course, with the lessons being sent by email. Online versions of “The Evidence—you decide” booklets ([www.theevidence.org.uk](http://www.theevidence.org.uk)) are a useful complement to the presentations.

Very attractively presented, [www.one-gospel.org](http://www.one-gospel.org) takes an unusual approach. Its topics cover key beliefs and our way of life. Intriguingly, links to other subjects are presented as questions that might arise from what has just been read.

Finally, [www.biblequizzes.com](http://www.biblequizzes.com) takes a unique approach, offering word searches, quizzes, crosswords and more.

While all this is positive, there are implications to the fact that anyone can publish anything (certain obvious legal constraints excepted): “no one controls the Internet, nor can it be control-

led”.<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia is perhaps one of the best-known examples of this, and a recent *Testimony* article drew attention to the care that must be taken in using information sources of this type.<sup>6</sup> This has resulted in a variety of sites reflecting the different shades of opinion amongst Christadelphians. A lengthy article on Wikipedia describes our history and beliefs but then goes on to describe various fellowships and the differences between them in some detail.<sup>7</sup> This could cause confusion for anyone encountering this information for the first time without a proper context.

A warning note needs to be sounded for another reason as well. There are summaries of our beliefs on many of our sites. Rightly these always feature the work of the Lord Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God prominently. But these key elements of the gospel, preached to Abraham, are the core of the Hope of Israel (Gal. 3:8; Acts 28:20,23). The Israelitish nature of our beliefs has always marked us out as a community. Given that the Jews are God’s witnesses today, and that the nation of Israel will play a key role in God’s Kingdom, it is surprising that this element of our faith often seems to be missing. Perhaps those with a responsibility to maintain websites could be encouraged to give this some thought.

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6. Carr, R., “[The reliability of information sources](#)”, *Testimony*, Dec. 2008, p. 337.

7. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christadelphian>.

Within twelve days of his return home, the Doctor was off again on a tour that took in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi. This involved a journey of 3,000 miles, and was accomplished in three weeks, during which the Doctor spoke twenty-six times. He arrived home suffering from a severe headache and a disordered stomach, to face another journey in Virginia three weeks later. On this seven weeks were occupied, during which he spoke for a total of eighty-four hours. The year 1858 saw another tour in Canada, commencing on July 9th and lasting for a month. From this Dr. Thomas returned, as he expressed it, with weariness that affected his physique. In the month he spoke twenty-four times, and then, weary as he was, he had to prepare for a journey to Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky, which occupied five weeks, covering a distance of nearly 3,000 miles . . .

. . . In his theological arguments in opposition to contemporary religious views he was generally incisive and hard-hitting, and these occupied so large a space in his records that it is possible to form an entirely mistaken estimate of his character. In the account of his 1859 tour two preachers travelled with him to a certain spot, where one of them left to reach another place. The one who remained invited the Doctor to accompany him, and although it added some sixty miles to the journey, he agreed to do so. The man who invited him was much older and was rather infirm. He was known to fellow passengers as Father Woodbridge. Dr. Thomas allowed him to do most of the talking, and bore with him until they parted. It was a kindly act, and is recalled for that reason.

Robert Roberts, *Dr Thomas: His Life and Work*, p. 200