

Aim of lesson

To foster awareness of the sincerely held views of other groups, while encouraging the class to compare their beliefs with the teaching of scripture.

Bible background

Psalms 146:3-4, Ecclesiastes 9:5, Daniel 12:2, Micah 4:7-8, Zechariah 14:9, Acts 1:11, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Preparation required

If you have a copy of 'Wrested Scriptures' by brother Ron Abel, the section on Luke 17:20-21, beginning on page 91, is helpful.

Read through the students' notes and work out how you want to use them. There is probably more material than you can use in one lesson, so you need to decide whether to spend more than one week on the topic or whether to be selective. A recommended approach would be to deal with the first part of the lesson in some detail, then to talk about the table which follows as something which the young people can use as reference.

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduction

Ask the young people what they think other people believe about the kingdom of God. They will probably not have come across any particularly clearly expressed view. Some important lessons, however, emerge from a careful consideration of the Bible teaching that establishment of the kingdom is a future event whose citizens are being prepared now. There are present aspects to the Bible teaching, as well as future.

Two examples

Look at Matthew 13:31-32 and Luke 17:20-21 with the young people. These scriptures are frequently misunderstood. Although the view of the kingdom of God as something which progressively fills the earth has lost most of its credibility, it is still found (for example, in the NIV Study Bible comment on Luke 17:21).

At the same time we need to remember that these are the words of Christ recorded in Scripture. They are not passages that we can ignore because some misunderstand them; they are not without meaning.

God's kingdom established in the future to save a doomed world

Matthew 24:21-31 and Daniel 2:44 illustrate the points that:

- The coming of the kingdom of God will save a world that would otherwise destroy itself
- It will come suddenly, not gradually
- It will be imposed on kingdoms which will resist it.

It is worth noting in passing that the phrase 'set up', used of God's kingdom, is exactly the same as is used, also in Daniel, of the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up (Daniel 3). It means 'caused to stand'. God's kingdom is being prepared now; in the future he will cause it to stand.

The kingdom of God - being prepared now

The aim of this section is not to spiritualise the kingdom of God or to diminish in any way its future applicability. But we have to take seriously the many passages, in addition to those referred to in the students' notes, that speak of the kingdom as having a present relevance, such as the parables of Matthew 13; Matthew 23:13; 25:45-46; Mark 12:34; Luke 17:21; Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 1:27.

As brother Abel writes: 'Those who cite these verses usually attempt to squeeze the Christadelphian into an "either - or" situation. Either the kingdom of God is spiritual or it is political. This dichotomy is unscriptural.'

Other denominations' beliefs

Explore with the class what they already know about the faith of other denominations regarding the situation when we die.

The students' notes include some quotations that summarise the beliefs of Roman Catholics and Mormons. Get the young people to read these and then to discuss:

- Where the quotation agrees with scripture, and where it disagrees.
- What they would say to someone who believed what the quotation says.

You could ask the young people to write their own summary of what the Bible teaches, imagining that it was intended for their own web site. Some suggested references are:

Acts 1:11; Zechariah 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:20,23; Ecclesiastes 9:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Micah 4:7,8; Daniel 12:2; Psalms 146:3-4.

Finally, the students' notes include some 'difficult' passages that you may like to discuss.

Relevance to our lives

Christadelphians are sometimes accused of believing what we are told to, so it is important that we understand why other people believe as they do and can support our beliefs from the Bible.

Prayer

We may wish to pray for the integrity to accept whatever the Bible clearly teaches, however uncomfortable. And we can pray for those who have yet to learn the truth of Bible teaching, and who are presently taking comfort in a misunderstanding.

Other suggestions for activities

Some classes may prefer a more active approach in which a member argues the case for the orthodox understanding while the others present the Christadelphian case. This needs to be carefully monitored because people can become committed to a particular view by the mere act of arguing for it, and the class must be helped to understand that Bible truth is not dependent upon the cleverness of the person presenting the argument, but emerges with wide, careful and prayerful reading of Scripture.