

Aim of lesson

To provide the Biblical background to an important doctrine and describe its first century practice.

Bible background

Matthew 3; Romans 6

Preparation required

Read through the notes and the questions in the students' notes so that you are sure of the issues, bearing in mind the young people in your group, and what knowledge they already have on this subject. Be aware of the next two lessons. Although you need to answer questions as they arise it is a pity to give muddled answers when a clear explanation is at hand.

Suggested outline of lesson

Background

Water played a vital part in the salvation of many Old Testament characters e.g. Noah from the Flood, Moses and Israel from Egypt, Naaman. Some of these incidents are used in the New Testament to describe the importance of baptism and to be an example to us. I Corinthians 10:1-6. I Peter 3:18-22.

The Greek word 'baptiso' meaning "dipping" or "washing by immersion" is used in Mark 7:2-4 as the thorough "washing" conducted by the Jews.

Principles. Baptism is ...

A public act of repentance for the remission of sins.

Luke 3:3. John's baptism was based on this principle, but this did not provide any lasting benefit for the repentant sinner. Baptism into Christ provides an everlasting association with one who will forgive.

A public act of faith in an association with the death and resurrection of Jesus

Romans 6:1-4. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of Christian doctrine. Believers are "buried with him" and raised with him to a "new life". Baptism demonstrates the disciple's belief in the resurrection as well as associating him with Jesus in a new life.

A rebirth

John 3:1-5. All members of Adam's family have died or are going to die. In Christ's family immortal life is the inheritance. To be reborn into Christ's family is not only a burial in water but also a burial in the Spirit - a renewing of the mind, a change of direction, of motives being replaced by the fruits of the Spirit. The rebirth is real - a disciple is born into a new family now directly related through Jesus with the Father in heaven.

The answer, or pledge, of a good conscience towards God

1 Peter 3:18-22. Christ died once for all. Our sins are forgiven, blotted out, removed "as far as the east is from the west" and we should believe that through Christ this has been done and will be done.

Practice

The apostles baptised

Acts 2:37-41. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles there are records of people hearing the Gospel message and responding to this message by being baptised. This passage is a good one to think of the principles mentioned above and see how they apply.

Jesus was baptised

Matthew 3:13-17. The one who knew no sin insisted on being baptised "to fulfil all righteousness". Note the

heavenly declaration at this time - the first recorded in the New Testament "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased". Is there any further need of examples to show why baptism is so important?

Relevance to our lives

We hope that one day these young people will all be baptised so it is important for them to understand the principles behind what may seem a strange way of showing allegiance to Christ. To be really associated with Christ means to follow his example. Baptism is a step but a most important step in following him. It demonstrates a recognition of the need for forgiveness, faith in the Resurrection and a desire to be associated with Christ in a new life.

Prayer

Lord God in heaven, you were pleased to see your son Jesus being baptised and committing his life to you. Help us to please you in our lives - in our thoughts, our actions and in our service for others. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

Think about the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus recorded in John 3.