

Aim of lesson

That the students will learn that it is important to look at what people believe in comparison to what the Bible teaches.

Bible background

Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38.

Preparation required

It might be helpful to ask some non-Christadelphian friends what their ideas about baptism are as opinions do vary in the established churches. Encouraging the students to do the same will help them to compare this understanding with what God instructed the first century believers to do.

The students will already have looked at what baptism means so you don't need to repeat this unnecessarily.

Suggested outline of lesson

If you ask the students whether or not their friends have been baptised, you are sure to get at least three different answers, maybe more. These are likely to be: yes, when I was a baby; no, not at all; or, yes, only a short while ago. These responses are likely to be the basis for the lesson with a few added details here and there. You can take a look at each response as a specific part of the lesson. Get the young people to fill in the page in the students' notes as each point is clear in their minds.

Christening

Infant sprinkling is not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. Christening, or infant baptism, was only accepted as a practice of the Roman Catholics in approx. 250 AD. The act of sprinkling instead of immersion had already been accepted in 150 AD. This already proves that it wasn't what Christ or his disciples preached, since they were all either dead or very old by then.

Mark 10:14 and Matthew 18:4. Jesus is clearly showing the child-like qualities adults should have as in 1 Corinthians 14:20 and 1 Peter 2:1-2. Otherwise only baptised infants would be saved Mark 10:15. In verse 24 Jesus refers to his disciples as children.

It may be worth looking at the occasion of the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch and other New Testament baptisms and asking the students how infant sprinkling differs in method from what happened in Acts 8; Mark 1:5, 9-10 and John 3:23.

- It can be seen that baptism requires complete immersion in water. There was always plenty of water about at the location where baptisms took place. The baptiser stood in it and the person to be baptised came down into the water and came up out again.
- Now ask the young people to list the principles of baptism as discussed in the last lesson and compare infant sprinkling to these. It is clear that a baby cannot repent of any sins when it has not yet committed any. It cannot have faith or understand the association with the death and resurrection of their Saviour and it cannot change direction in life and determined to follow Jesus.

Confirmation

Within the Christian church confirmation is the admittance of a baptised person into full membership of that church. In the early church and amongst Christadelphians today, it is administered immediately after baptism - the right hand of fellowship - to signify that the newly baptised brother or sister is welcomed into our fellowship. In the Roman Catholic Church from about 1600 through the 20th century, confirmation was delayed from two to seven years after the infant was christened. Since Vatican Council II it is usually further delayed until early adolescence. The Church of England has no specific age rule, but the rite is usually administered between the ages of 14 and 16; in the Lutheran church the rite is administered at about the same age.

Confirmation goes some way to acknowledging the importance of faith as an understanding adult, but wouldn't

it be better to follow the pattern of obedience set down in Scripture?

Baptism for the Dead

The Mormons place great importance on 1 Corinthians 15:29. They spend enormous amounts of time in tracing the genealogies. Some have been baptised by proxy more than fifty times for the benefit of their “Gentile” ancestors. (Mormons baptise by immersion in water. Although infant baptism is rejected, they consider the age of accountability to be eight years old.)

As the act of baptism has to be preceded by a confession by the believer, you cannot be baptised on behalf of someone else. The Mormon doctrine of proxy baptism rests on one passage in the entire Bible. Any doctrine which rests on only one verse must be suspect. Much more so when the interpretation given to the verse violates the teaching of Scripture that after death comes either judgment or annihilation.

Young people often want to know what Paul actually did mean by being baptised for the dead. You may like to discuss this, but the answer is not clear. One explanation¹ is that if there is no resurrection then Christ is still dead, so what is the point in being baptised into his name? So the verse would read: ‘What shall they do who are baptised for the dead (meaning Jesus) if the dead rise not at all?’ Alternatively it could refer to a current custom with which Paul does not necessarily agree.

Relevance to our lives

Try to draw out through the lesson that it is important to compare everything which people say we should do, to what God says we should. If we put our lives against the Bible we will see where we are going wrong. It is important to encourage the young people to know clearly what the Bible says so that they can simply put this view forward when needing to, rather than be critical of others’ beliefs without being positive.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for showing us so clearly how you want us to show our allegiance to you. Help us in our decisions in life that we may always want to do things your way. Help us also to be gentle with our friends when they are confronted with other beliefs but also be firm in what you have shown us to be true.

Other suggestions for activities

- If the young people have come across people who quote Romans 10: 9 and say that baptism isn’t necessary you may like to discuss this. The apostle Paul’s statement in itself is sound enough but a believer must then wish to please God as Paul himself writes so powerfully earlier in Romans (6:3-5).
- If the young people have friends who attend other churches they may like to make a survey about what different denominations believe about baptism and what they practise.
- The students’ notes contain some general information about the Mormons. You may like to have a general discussion about this.

1 This is dealt with in rather more detail in ‘Wrested Scriptures’ by Ron Abel