

## Aim of lesson

To enable the young people to understand that there can be no human mediator to come between us and God with power to forgive, or to punish, sins.

## Bible background

1Timothy 3:1-13; John 20:22-23

## Preparation required

If you would like the young people to look up New Testament references to priests, you will need to have enough concordances for them to do so.

## Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the young people of last week's topic; briefly mention the Old Testament priests and ask who in the New Testament replaced them. It will make this lesson rather easier if they answer 'Jesus'!

Now ask them what they know about the priests in the mainstream churches, and what their role is. Get them to look at the quotations in their notes, and to summarise the main points that emerge. They should note something like:

- The priests are thought to be empowered to forgive (or not) sins.
- They are regarded as being in the place of the Lord Jesus.
- They administer the bread and the wine.
- In the Anglican church priests can be women as well as men.
- Ask them what else they know, and they may add points such as:
- They lead the services.
- They advise the people, and expect to be the principle source of teaching in the church.
- They conduct weddings, funerals and baptisms.
- Some priests specifically hear confession. In many Roman Catholic churches, and some Anglican ones, there are wooden confessionals where people go to confess their sins and be forgiven.
- They are paid.

## **Priests in the New Testament**

Get the young people to look at some New Testament references, in particular 1 Peter 2:3,9; Revelation 1:5-6; Revelation 5:9-10. These passages are all talking about the church as a whole - there are no passages which speak of priests as specifically appointed members of the church.

### **Bishops**

The closest the scriptures come to describing modern-day priests is in references to bishops, and you may like to look at Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; and Titus 1:7 with the young people. The Greek word simply means 'someone who visits', as in visiting the sick. The New International Version translates the word 'overseer', meaning someone who looks after the members of the church.

The point of all this is not whether the elders of the church are called deacons, bishops, or priests, or anything else, but whether there should be anyone in a position to be a human mediator between God and the members of the congregation. There is nothing to suggest that was the case for bishops.

Neither should anyone take the place of the scriptures as our source of understanding and guidance. You may like to discuss how we can balance the welcome advice of a god-fearing friend with this principle.

Although there is some scriptural basis for using the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, there is no basis for relating these roles to that of a priest in terms of sacrifice or mediation.

### **Whose sins thou dost forgive ...**

Matthew 16:17-19; 18:18 and John 20:22-23 appear to give the apostles power to forgive sins. This does not mean that it was they rather than the Almighty who in reality forgave, but that the holy spirit would guide them to speak for God (see the link in the passage in John). There is no evidence that it was ever envisaged that this authority would be passed down through the ages, so that modern priests would claim the same right.

Discuss the points in the students' notes and help them to see:

- Because Jesus is our access to God, no men can have special powers to bring us to God or forgive sins.
- We all have a responsibility to work in whatever way we can to help our brothers and sisters to worship.

### **Ministers?**

The question is sometimes asked, "Should the Christadelphian community have 'full-time' ministers?"

Every baptised believer has been commissioned to a full-time ministry in that our lives should be devoted to serving our Lord. '... whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31) and there are many ways in which this can be done (Nehemiah 2:1-8). This ministry does not pay a direct salary.

Whether the community should pay for a 'full-time' ministry is a debatable question (1 Corinthians 9:8), but there is good reason to follow the example of Paul (1 Corinthians 9:12).

## **Relevance to our lives**

The Bible teaches us that younger brethren and sisters should be submissive towards their elders (1 Peter 5:5, Hebrews 13:7). But it is important that no human being should be in a position of such power in ecclesial life that they are able to dominate the lives of others. This is what has happened in the Roman Catholic church, to the detriment of both priests and laity.

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you that we can come directly to you in prayer, and that you are always willing to hear us. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, whom you have sent to be our mediator, Amen.

## **Other suggestions for activities**

You may be able to pick up a leaflet in a local church which could form the basis for further discussion.