



The Way of Life

Part 3

Study Class Leader's Notes

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Introduction

Dear Study Group Leader,

This is the final part of a series intended to help young people aged 15-17 to decide the path they wish to follow in their lives. The notes in the Introduction to Part 1 summarised the purpose and content of the lessons, and discussed some of the practical issues involved in preparing and teaching them. In Part 2 we considered the planning of a syllabus for your young people, and the importance of listening at the same time as you are teaching. If you haven't read these already, please do so; they apply equally to the topics in this final part. For now, there are some other things to think about.

Dealing with awkward topics

If you have looked at the contents list for this book you will have noticed that we have not avoided difficult subjects - in fact you may feel that we have gone for them in a big way. Some topics are simply hard to understand, and may be even harder to explain to young people without seeming academic and abstract. Some are the subject of great debate in the world at large, and we all, adult as well as young, will have had to think about what the scripture teaches. Others, sadly, are at times sources of contention within our own community. Why are we thinking about them here?

If you are a parent you will have been confronted with the perennial quandary: how much should you shield your child from life? Surely it would be best to keep little ones cocooned, protected from the harsh realities of life, unaware of the evils that surround us. All of us must have grieved to see, even in the youngest children, how much they are exposed to the less desirable aspects of our society.

To some extent, of course we should shield them, keep a close watch on the television programmes that they watch, influence their choice of friends, choose carefully the school they will attend. In the end, however, they will see it all, be exposed to all the temptations you experience, and maybe more. The aim, in the end, has to be not to hide them away but to train them to choose what is right; not to keep them at home but to teach them to walk the Way of Life.

So it is with young people in their teens. The subjects in this book are there because it is likely that unless our Lord returns soon, they will be confronted by them all at some point in their lives - in fact, you may feel that some of them should have been discussed earlier in these notes. The big benefit of thinking about them now, of course, is two-fold. Firstly, it is good to discuss these topics before they confront us, and our judgment becomes clouded by emotion; secondly, there is an opportunity to present the scriptures in a balanced way, without trying to argue one point of view or another; in this way we may be able to increase the unity of our community in the one faith that we share.

The approach we have tried to adopt is a straightforward one. To stick to what we know the scripture to say, and to avoid going any further; to use scriptural language wherever possible; and to keep it simple. We would like to ask you to do the same.

By now they are almost adult

If the notes were intended for young people aged 15-17, and if you have worked through the first two parts, the young people in your group are almost of an age at which most people would regard them as adult.

Keeping them coming to 'Sunday School' may be hard, even if you call it something else, and it is important that you should be aware of their sensitivities. They may be away so often at the weekends that you rarely see them. You may have only a few weeks left in which to teach them.

So pick the topics that are most important for their moral and spiritual development. Do not slavishly deal with the next topic in the book simply because it is there. It is important that you keep track of what has been covered, of course - that's what the Leader's Log is for - but even more important that the things you are teaching are what they need.

Try to vary the approach

The students' notes nearly all include space for them to write notes - summaries of what scripture says, or of how its words should affect our lives. The spaces are there because the discipline of writing is a valuable one - it encourages the young people to think coherently and to crystallise their thoughts. However, you should not feel that because the spaces are there they have to be filled. There may be a variety of different approaches that the young people would appreciate - use a flip-chart or white board, for instance. Maybe on occasions you could write, and they could tell you what to put.

On other occasions you may spend the lesson without writing a word. Do whatever is best for the young people - you know them better than we do.

And finally ...

At the risk of repeating ourselves, please let us know how you got on with these lessons. The CSSU committee meets five times a year, and considers any correspondence it receives. So you should not fear that your comments will not be taken seriously. At least we will write and thank you; if necessary we will change the notes.

May God bless you, and the young in your care.

With love in Christ,

The Christadelphian Sunday School Union Committee

Leader's log

About your young people

It's not easy to remember what everyone is doing - when they take exams, what courses they are studying or where they work. So here, if you find it useful, is an aide memoire.

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Date of Birth</i> | <i>Notes</i> |
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Teaching Record

This table is intended as a simple way for you to keep track of which topics you have covered, and where you have got to. It should be especially relevant if you are teaching in a rota.

| Topic | Date | Initials | Comments? |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
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| Topic | Date | Initials | Comments? |
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| 22 | | | |
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| 33 | | | |

For your comments - The Way of Life, Part 3

We would find it very helpful if, at the end of this course, you could let us know how you got on. Please return this page, or a photocopy, to the CSSU Secretary (address in ALS diary)

From:

Name.....Ecclesia.....

Address.....

.....Date.....

Summary

Overall, how helpful were these notes, to you as leader, and to the young people? How long did it take you to get through them?

Individual Topics

Were there any topics that you had problems with or which went exceptionally well?



Suggestions for improvement, or any other comments?

If these notes come to be reprinted, are there any changes that you would like us to make? Do you have any other suggestions, or information to give us? How many young people did you have? Did one person lead the class every week, or did you have a rota? When and where did you meet? Any other points?

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to realise the truth of the Bible by highlighting some of the many understated links which demonstrate its truthfulness and internal harmony.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

1 Thessalonians 2:13

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Familiarise yourself with the content of the students' notes so that you can help them work through the examples. If there are other examples on which you are particularly keen, use them instead - your enthusiasm will communicate itself to the young people.

There are probably too many examples in the notes for you to deal with properly in one lesson. Depending on the abilities and number of young people in your group, you may like to divide the examples between them; each student could research one or two and report back to the others. Two of the examples: "Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years' captivity" and "Healing on the Sabbath" are a little harder than the others and you may like to bear this in mind.

If you can have a map which shows Carchemish, the young people may be interested to know where it is.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

The key points are summarised here:

The generation gap between Isaac and Rebekah

Sarah's infertility followed by pregnancy in her old age would lead to a generation gap and make Isaac nearer Rebekah's age.

Spices in Egypt

By piecing together the narrative, we find there was a market in Egypt for the products the Ishmaelites were carrying. A large amount of spices was used in the burial of the Lord Jesus, illustrating that this would have been a significant trade.

Transporting the tabernacle

The objects Gershon had to carry were much lighter than the furniture Merari carried, so the Gershonites didn't need so many wagons and oxen.

Giants

The only Anakites not exterminated by Joshua lived in the area Goliath came from, years later. Three different authors - Moses, Joshua and Samuel - give us a harmony spanning some 400 years.

The section which follows, about Caleb's inheritance, is a little harder to work out. It demonstrates how Caleb was given land around Hebron, one of the cities where giants were found, and that this land was still known as Caleb's inheritance many years later. Without the account of Joshua, there would have been no connection between Caleb and this part of the country mentioned years later in David's time.

Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years' captivity

Jeremiah prophesied that the people of Israel would be captives in Babylon for 70 years, and wrote the exiles a letter promising that they would then return and the Babylonians would be overthrown.

Darius I and Cyrus were co-rulers. In Daniel we read of his prayer to God about the prophesied return, and in Ezra chapter 1 we hear of God's reply. We find harmony between the Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezra narratives which need to be put together to give the full story.

The two summary tables should read, give or take a year or two:

| | Date |
|--|-------------|
| Battle of Carchemish, Babylonians became ruling nation in the Middle East. | 605 BC |
| Babylonians defeated, and the Jews allowed to return to their land. | 537 BC |
| So Israel had served the Babylonians for how long? | 68 years |
| | |
| Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem and burned the temple. | 586 BC |
| The rebuilding of the temple completed | 516 BC |
| So the temple had been destroyed for how long? | 70 years |

Peter's wife

Two independent passages, written by different people, confirming Peter was married.

Healing on the Sabbath

Matthew chapter 8 does not tell us what day of the week it was or why the sick weren't brought to him until evening. The other narratives show us that they waited until the Sabbath was over so as not to break the law. The references to Peter's mother-in-law show that it was the same occasion. Don't forget Hebrew days run from sunset to sunset.

Striking Jesus

Matthew does not tell us Jesus was blindfolded. They were testing his prophetic powers by asking who struck him. The gospel records are completely harmonious.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

By putting together incidental snippets of information, the veracity of the Bible narrative shines through. The exercise of looking at some of them should help strengthen personal faith in the truth of the Bible and also give us confidence to talk about it to others.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, thank you for preserving your word. Help us to strengthen our faith and confidence in its truth by what we have discovered. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If the students have been excited by this lesson, encourage them to read J.J.Blunt's "Undesigned Coincidences", available from the Christadelphian Office. The language is a bit archaic but the information is fascinating. You may like to think of giving them a copy as a present or prize.

THE BIBLE - SCRIPTURAL CONTRADICTIONS?

2

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people appreciate how to approach scriptural passages which at first reading appear to contradict each other.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Malachi 3:6; Psalm 18:30-31, 119:86,89,144; 2 Timothy 3:16

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Read through the notes and questions, and decide how much detail you want to go into. If your class has no problems about apparent contradictions in the Bible, we don't want to give them any, so you may decide to omit this topic and deal with another.

Wrested Scriptures, by brother Ron Abel, is helpful in dealing with several apparent contradictions and taking us logically through them. If you can get hold of a copy, read the section entitled "Alleged Contradictions & Inaccuracies", the first part of which is included in the students' notes.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduction

The lesson begins by establishing the point that God does not change. His purpose, and the way in which he deals with people, are unchanging; so we would expect his book to be consistent and without contradictions. Emphasise the incredible accuracy of the scriptural texts, as witnessed by the Dead Sea scrolls (these were discussed in Part 2, so don't go to town).

Discuss Psalm 18:30-31; Psalm 119:86,89,144 and Malachi 3:6. What are the qualities of a rock?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and emphasise that all scripture is inspired, not just some parts of it. Try to work towards the conclusion that the word of God, like God himself, is consistent and its principles unchanging.

You cannot see my face

Passages such as Exodus 33:11: 'The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend' seem difficult to reconcile with others, like Exodus 33:20: 'You cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live'.

However, we already know from Exodus 23:21 that the Israelites were instructed to obey his angel, 'since my name is in him'. The principle of God-manifestation in angels is elaborated in Stephen's commentary in Acts 7. Note the shift from 'an angel' (verse 30), to 'the Lord's voice' (verse 31) and 'then the Lord said to him' (verse 33). Could this be a conundrum designed to force us to search the scriptures?

Did Samuel come to see Saul?

Another example is the apparent difficulty with 1 Samuel 15:35: 'Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again,' and 1 Samuel 19:24: '(Saul) ... prophesied in Samuel's presence ...'. Note that one passage (at least, in most translations including the AV, NIV and NKJV), says that Samuel came no more to see Saul. This is not the same as saying that Samuel never saw Saul again.

Missing generations

Another conundrum is the omission of three generations from the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:8. Joram was not the father of Uzziah. Is this a mistake or are there very good reasons why three kings (Ahaziah, Jehoash and Amaziah) are omitted from the record? Look at 2 Chronicles 22:2-9, 2 Chronicles 24:22 and 2 Chronicles 25:14-16 to see what particular sins they had been guilty of. They all died violent deaths, determined by God.

Most significantly, the genealogy in Matthew is tracing the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ by the kings of Judah. These three were all descended from Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab king of Israel. Is the main reason for their omission to be found in Exodus 20:5?

Two unique kings?

A careful reading of the text often resolves an apparent difficulty. For example, it is written of Hezekiah that 'There was no-one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him,' (2 Kings 18:5), and of Josiah: 'Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him', (2 Kings 23:25). Look more carefully and you will note that Hezekiah is commended because he

trusted, and Josiah because he turned to the Lord. The two kings are commended for different attributes, so the two statements are not contradictory.

The inscription on the cross

Divinely inspired historians are selective in the information they record, and they do not all select the same information. Take the gospel records of the inscription on the cross - they are all slightly different, but not contradictory. The inscription was written in three languages (Greek, Latin and Aramaic). Get the young people to discuss whether the quotations are really contradictory or not. They are different, but they do not actually contradict each other. Put all the accounts together and you get the complete picture. There are many other examples like this in the Gospels.

One possibility is that three of the Gospel writers may have quoted the inscription as it appeared in the language of the people they were writing for, whilst perhaps John combined them all.

John also adds another detail - 'of Nazareth', which has added significance in the light of Nathanael's comment in John 1:46.

Where different biblical texts disagree

If you have time you may like to look at these examples. Although they are not contradictions, they illustrate some similar difficulties in understanding the scriptures.

What have you learned about how to approach difficult passages?

Get the young people to think about the ways in which the passages above have been resolved.

The elements they identify should include the following points:

1. Read the passage, or passages, carefully, looking at each word.
2. Compare other passages of scripture that may throw light on the difficulty.
3. Compare different translations. The problem may arise from the fact that translators are not entirely clear about the meaning of a word.
4. If you still don't know the answer, don't worry. There is an explanation somewhere: it's just that we don't know what it is.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Does it really worry us that different writers record slightly differing accounts at times? Rather than raising doubts in our minds it should confirm to us that what we have are real accounts of real events. If everything were completely neat and tidy it would indeed give grounds for suspicion that these accounts were fabricated.

There are many Bible passages which are difficult to understand and to reconcile with each other. Sometimes man himself has put some stumbling blocks in our path. Sometimes we are just not reading the passage correctly. Sometimes God forces us to think hard by using parables and paradoxes. If, after much research, we really cannot arrive at the solution to our problem, we should have the patience and the humility to accept that 'now I know in part, then I shall know, even as I am fully known'. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, teach us to treat your word with honour and respect, and to recognise that your ways and thoughts are higher than ours. When we find it hard to understand, give us the humility to trust it still, and the patience to search out the truth that it contains. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. Ask the young people to write down two of the main points from this lesson, without comparing notes. They will inevitably write down different things. Consider whether or not they are contradictory.
2. Ask the young people what is the difference between an undesigned coincidence and an apparent contradiction? They both come about from comparing different records of related events, both may happen because different people are writing. In one case we understand the connection between the two accounts; in the other we do not, at least not immediately. But they both help us in our understanding.

THE BIBLE - OTHER PROMISES

3

AIM OF LESSON

We have already considered in these notes the promises made to Abraham, to Israel and to David. The aim of this lesson is to make the young people aware of other promises God has also made, which are also relevant to us today.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Romans 8:28; Matthew 28:20; Mark 10:28-31; Psalm 34:7; 2 Timothy 4:8

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Be prepared for the lesson to progress in one of two directions, depending on how the young people respond to your questions about the major Old Testament promises. If they have not dealt with this subject you may prefer to spend a week on the appropriate lesson from Part 1 of *The Way of Life*.

Read through these notes and those in the students' book so that you are familiar with the material.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Revise the main promises made by God to Eve, Abraham, and David. Try to emphasize that these are 'great and precious promises' not in an academic sense but are good news for us personally. Explain that scripture also includes more promises than these - many of which have a very personal bearing on the disciples of Christ.

Look at 2 Peter 1:1-5, and see the important points that are made there for our personal lives.

1. The promises are not just to the patriarchs but to us (v4). Think about the impact that the promises had on the lives of the likes of Abraham, and consider that we are meant to react in just the same way.
2. Think about the word 'promise'. When we make a promise we are committing ourselves to some action. That is what God's promises are too; he is not simply predicting what is going to happen but declaring his determination to make it happen.
3. The purpose of the promises is so that we 'might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust' (AV). So they should change the way we live our lives, and in the end make us like the God who made us.
4. The promises should commit us to personal effort, and a sincere attempt to grow in grace; 'make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge' (NIV).

Get the young people to read the comments by William Barclay. Don't get bogged down in the Greek words, but concentrate on what they mean. They add up to a public announcement of something that is freely offered to anyone, like the announcement of a ruler to hold a public games to which everyone was invited. The Almighty God, in turn, is making promises to his people, which anyone may receive - **if** (an important word) they wish.

There are five examples. For each one you could consider some or all of the following questions:

- What does the promise really mean in practice?
- Does it depend on us in any way, or is it true whatever we do?
- If it does depend on us, what can we do to ensure that the promise comes true?
- Is it likely to bring dramatic, obvious, immediate results in our lives, or would we expect God to work slowly over many years?

Examples

- 1 Romans 8:28. Try to get the young people to see that God works in our lives to improve us. This may not always be the way we would plan it and we have a responsibility to learn from everything that happens to us. The examples of many biblical characters show that the lives of believers are no easier than anyone else's. The difference lies in our perception of the hand of God and our faith in him.
- 2 Matthew 28:20. 'I am with you always'. This is an incredible promise especially when we think that Jesus is not with us to condemn. Why do we forget this promise the way we do? How can we encourage ourselves to remember it? Read the Bible more? Talk to each other more? Write it on a poster for the wall?
- 3 Mark 10:28-31 We may be called upon to stick up for what we know to be right. God will recognise this if it means losing someone dear to us. You may know examples of brethren or sisters who have been estranged from a family member but have gained a family in the meeting. Note that the list of things to be received includes persecutions.

- 4 Psalm 34:7. If you have time, look at 2 Kings 6:11-17, and get the young people to realise that we may often be in the same situation as the young man, unaware of the presence of God's angels. How far should we trust the Lord to deliver us? Consider the reaction of the Lord Jesus when he was tempted (Matthew 4:5-7). If we truly fear God, we won't test him by putting ourselves in stupid situations. He may also not give us miraculous solutions but he would always help us to cope.
- 5 2 Timothy 4:8. The crown of righteousness. Consider Paul's situation when he wrote this - about to be put to death for his faith. Note the condition - "those who long for his appearing". Do we really think things will be better when Jesus returns? Thinking of the problems of this world, for us and others, helps us to 'long for his appearing'.

Finally, look at the second excerpt from William Barclay's notes, and at the references he gives.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

The Bible is a book for today. The promises are not dry, academic things, but they should be real and vibrant. It is as though we had a ticket to the most important, most exciting, event we could imagine. What God asks of us is that he, and his word, should be most important in our lives, affecting everything else we do.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, you have given us so much and have promised us so much. We praise you and thank you for all this. Help us to understand these words you have written and then to live as your true children by faith. Amen

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

- 1 The young people might like to follow up this lesson by asking members of the ecclesia, or their family, which personal promise in the scriptures means most to them.
- 2 They could make a list of promises that would help them in times of doubt or difficulty.

AIM OF LESSON

To consider the purpose of miracles and discuss our conviction that they really did happen.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

John 9; Acts 2:22

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Decide how to approach this lesson. If you think the young people need a break from their notes you could follow the 'Other suggestions for activities' below.

If you have easy access to a copy, you may find C.S.Lewis's book 'Miracles' helpful, if at times rather academic.

Read through the notes bearing your own group in mind. Decide whether they need convincing themselves, or just encouragement to know how to talk to their friends. Pitch the discussion at their level.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***What are miracles for?***

Begin by asking the class what they think is the reason for the miracles in the Bible, and get them to think of examples. If they get stuck, suggest some examples to them and ask them why those miracles happened. Suggestions might be:

- To show the power of God (either directly, or to demonstrate that God was working through his prophets - ultimately through the Lord Jesus). For example, to show God's power to all nations (Exodus 7:5), to show the authority of Jesus (Acts 2:22), and to show that the apostles were speaking for God (Hebrews 2:3,4).
- To show God's care and love for his people by helping them in seemingly impossible situations (crossing the Red Sea, raising Lazarus). God said "I have indeed ... I have heard, ... and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them" (Exodus 3:7-8)
- To teach a lesson (Moses lifting up the bronze serpent, the signs recorded in the gospel of John - see especially John 20:30-31).

Get the young people to summarise these points on their worksheets.

Why do some people find it hard to believe in miracles?

Now ask why people sometimes find it difficult to believe that miracles happened.

You will probably get answers like:

- Because we have no evidence of things happening against the laws of nature today so how can we believe they ever did? We have to accept that for an unbeliever this is a logical answer.
- People don't want to believe in miracles because if they did they would have to admit that there is a God, with all the implications of his power in the world.
- We have become increasingly cynical, and tend to disbelieve anything that can't be proved to us. Partly this is a result of our education - and it is not entirely bad; in New Testament times the people of Berea were praised because they did not gullibly accept what Paul said, but checked for themselves. Similarly John exhorted his readers to 'believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world' (1 John 4:1). It is also, probably, because we hear so much inaccurate news.
- The Bible is not a fashionable thing to believe in. People are willing to believe in the supernatural when it comes to Tarot cards or horoscopes, but not in regard to the God of the Bible.

So why believe in miracles?

Try to help the young people, through discussion, to see that:

- Miracles do still happen. Not inexplicable events that clearly break the laws of nature, but clear witnesses to the power of God. The survival and return of the people of Israel is the clearest and most irrefutable example, but the dramatic problems facing the world - pollution, economic catastrophe, rising population, violence and immorality - are all witnesses to the truth of God's word and thus to his power in the world.
- A God who can create such a wonderful world (vastness of the universe, complexity of our bodies, minuteness of microbes, beauties of nature, characteristics of humour, love, etc) can surely do what he wants and control these things.
- There are still many things beyond our comprehension. We do not know, for example, what 'life' is. What makes the difference between a dead cell and a living foetus? 'As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.' (Ecclesiastes 11:5)
- The more we read the Bible the more we discover we can trust its truth. The fact that all other parts hold together perfectly, tells us that we must trust the Bible when we are told God shut the mouth of the lions when Daniel was thrown to them.

No-one can prove that any of the miracles didn't happen, especially the resurrection of Jesus, which men have tried unsuccessfully to disprove on many occasions.

You might like to discuss the fact that God may have often used nature to work miracles (it could have been a land-slide at Adam that dried up the water of Jordan for the people to cross in the time of Joshua) but all the miracles cannot be explained in this way and it doesn't weaken God's power for us to know how he did it.

The quotation from Josephus shows that it is not only the Bible that records the Miracles of Jesus.

Use a pendulum - a weight swinging on a string, which you grab and stop - to show that the laws of nature work until someone with more power steps in and stops them. So, saying that the laws of

nature can't be broken is correct, but they can be suspended for as long as the more powerful one wishes! During that suspension anything he wishes can happen. Then the laws of nature are reinstated.

The significance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

1 Corinthians 15 makes clear that this teaching is at the heart of the Christian faith. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then all the other miracles become easy to believe in, even if we do not understand exactly what happened (how did the water turn into wine?).

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Believing the resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to our faith. Seeing God's power in all things only increases our faith.

PRAYER

Lord God, we thank you for your wonderful creation, your power and your care for your creation and us. Please increase our faith and our conviction that you can do anything to help us.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. Produce a radio programme, or series of short newspaper articles, based on the events of Mark 5:1-20. Get the young people to read the story and make themselves familiar with it, then, depending on the size of the group, ask them to take the parts of:
 - Legion
 - Someone who had seen him before and after he was healed
 - A member of his family
 - A pig farmer
 - A news reporter
2. You could lead into the next series of topics by discussing with the young people situations where we might wish for miracles today - if a loved friend or relative is seriously ill, for instance. Think about the sort of prayer that we might offer in that situation.

THE HAND OF GOD - THE HOLY SPIRIT

5

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THIS SET OF TOPICS

This is an extremely important set of lessons. They are about the way in which God worked, and works, in the world. It is sad that this is a subject about which Christadelphians do not always

agree, so it is a key aim of these lessons that they should provide a unifying rather than a divisive influence.

It is extremely important in dealing with this subject to keep as closely as possible to the language of scripture, and to avoid phrases and expressions which confuse the subject. For example, the expression to 'have the holy spirit', in the sense of possession, is nowhere found in scripture; so to say that 'we do not have the holy spirit' is unhelpful: nobody ever did. The spirit is God's, and through it he works his will. Nobody else has ever owned or possessed it, though they may be possessed by it - a quite different idea.

The use of lower or upper case letters in 'spirit' or 'Spirit', 'holy' or 'Holy', also seems to be unhelpful. There is, after all 'one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling' (Ephesians 4:4). We have therefore in these lessons used lower case letters throughout. There are no capital letters in the Greek to make a distinction between the uses of the words, and any use of different cases must be to some extent a matter of personal judgment.

We have tried in preparing these lessons to avoid controversy and to let the words of scripture be a unifying influence that may, God willing, benefit our community. We trust that you will teach in the same spirit.

AIM OF LESSON

To enable the young people to have a balanced understanding of this subject. This lesson tries to lay a clear scriptural foundation that will enable the young people to avoid controversy in the future.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Genesis 1; Job 33; Psalm 147; Jeremiah 10; Luke 1; Ephesians 6.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Familiarise yourself with the subject and make sure that you are clear about what the scriptures teach. There is a useful chapter on the holy spirit in *'Christadelphians: What they believe and teach'* by brother Harry Tennant, and *'The Spirit of God'* by brother Alfred Nicholls provides a fuller treatment.

There is a lot of material in these lessons and you will need to plan quite carefully how you want to use the time, and whether you want, if necessary, to spend more time on the subject.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

If any of the young people use the Authorised Version, talk briefly about the fact that it tends to use the term 'ghost' rather than 'spirit'. It does not, of course, have any of the implications of 'seeing a ghost'.

What is the holy spirit?

Get the young people to look up the passages listed in their notes and fill in the missing words, noting the parallels between and within the verses.

Genesis 1:2-3 (AV) 'the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said ...'

Job 33:4 (NIV) 'The spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.'

Psalms 33:6 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.'

Psalms 147:15,18 'He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. ... He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow ...'

Jeremiah 10:12,13 (AV) 'He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens ...'

Luke 1:35 (AV) 'The holy spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest ...'

Ephesians 6:17 (AV) 'And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.'

From these passages the young people should glean the understanding that

1. The spirit of God, or the holy spirit, can be equated with his wisdom and understanding, will and purpose.
2. When the thoughts of God are turned into words - he speaks - those words are powerful and mighty, and his will is carried out. God has only to say 'Let there be light', and there is light. Sometimes the same effect is described as being the work of his wind or breath.
3. When the thoughts of God are recorded for mankind - his laws and decrees - then those words themselves become powerful to change the lives of people who read them.

Use a concordance to look up the words *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. Point out that both words have multiple meanings but that they share the same themes of breath, wind and spirit. (The students' notes contain some extracts from the OnLine Bible).

Some connecting thoughts.

- When we speak we are expressing our understanding. We refer to the spirit of a law or agreement to mean the idea that was in the mind of the people who made it.
- Laws and decrees are an expression of the wisdom of the one who makes them.
- When a ruler speaks, his words have power - people obey them.
- The wind is like words in that both are invisible yet both affect what they 'hit'.

All these thoughts come together in the holy spirit.

An important principle

Get the young people to read 1 Corinthians 12:1-12. This relates specifically to a first century situation when the gifts of the spirit were being freely given, but it makes two important points:

- The spirit is in God's hands - see also v 18 and 28.
- God uses his power as he wills, as is demanded by the situation and the people concerned.

We should expect therefore that throughout scripture the spirit of God would work continuously but in different ways, appropriate to each situation, and varying according to the individuals concerned.

There is also another distinction. There is a sense in which the spirit of God is active in the lives of all living creatures, man especially. It works in the lives of God's people in a general sense. Specifically, through the gifts of the spirit, and on special occasions, it is vividly seen in the words and work of the prophets and particularly through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The spirit of God works in the lives of all men

Without God there would be no life on this earth. God is everywhere through his spirit, sustaining life - and ending it. Get the young people to read Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4, Psalm 104:27-30. We see the hand of God not simply in the fact of life but in the means to sustain it. While you are in Psalm 104, look at the chapter as a whole and see how it describes the creation of the world (v 1-5), the flood (v 6-9), and then goes on to describe the hand of God in nature and particularly in providing food. Try to get the young people to wonder at the loving hand of the God who keeps all his creation alive.

Now turn to the New Testament and look at Acts 17:24-28, which confirms that this is not just an Old Testament view of the world, then at Matthew 5:45. This activity of God occurs irrespective of the faith, or lack of it, of the people concerned. It correspondingly has the least influence on the creatures sustained by it - it does not make people good or influence their minds. However, while providing us with the means to survive it should cause us also to wonder whether there is some benevolent hand behind it all.

Among God's people

Get the young people to read Isaiah 63:7-14, and see that God's hand worked in a special way in the lives of the people of Israel. God's special relationship with Israel caused him:

- To suffer with his people in Egypt and to bring them out (v9)
- To bring them through the Red Sea (v11-12)
- To guide and sustain them through the wilderness (v13-14)

Note, however, that although these events demonstrate God's grace in choosing and delivering Israel, they did not guarantee the salvation of individuals nor make them morally good; on the contrary the whole point of these verses is to stress that despite God's wonders the people did not obey him.

The holy spirit at work in special ways at particular times

A distinction is sometimes drawn between 'spirit' and 'Spirit'; between the spirit of God and the holy spirit. There is a tendency in scripture to use the term 'holy spirit' to refer to occasions when God's spirit works through selected individuals and in specific situations. You may like to discuss this, but be careful to avoid creating the impression that the spirit of God and the holy spirit are different things. It is clear from the passages referred to at the start that the distinction cannot be rigidly applied. 'There is one spirit'.

As an example of the way in which God's spirit has been used in specific ways you may like to look at Exodus 31:1-6, where Bezalel and Aholiab were given skills to build the tabernacle.

Prophecy

Numbers 12:6; 2 Samuel 23:1-3 and 2 Peter 1:21. Prophets were 'moved' or 'carried along' by the holy spirit. The young people may (or may not!) remember from Part 1, Lesson 1, that in Acts 27:17

the same word is used of Paul's ship in the storm. This is a vivid idea and it would be well worth reminding them of it.

God spoke to the prophets, who passed on both the words and the spirit of the words. Their words also had power because they came from God.

Miracles

Get the young people to reflect on the way in which prophets like Moses, Elijah and Elisha were enabled to work miracles as a demonstration of God's power.

The culmination of this came of course in the Lord Jesus. Look at John 3:34 and see how God gave the spirit 'without limit' (NIV) to the Lord Jesus.

Look at John 14:9-11 and see how Jesus attributes both his words and his works to his Father. Even he did not 'own' the spirit, in the sense of having power that was independent of his Father.

Speaking in tongues

Acts 2:1-11 and 5:12-15 speak of the coming of the holy spirit at the day of Pentecost, and of the power that the apostles were given to speak in tongues and to work miracles.

If a question is asked about exactly what 'speaking in tongues' meant, it may be helpful to be prepared. There are two Greek words used, both indicating that what the apostles were enabled to do was to speak in other languages, so that those who did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic could understand them. *Dialektos* means a language used by a nation or group of people - see Acts 2:6,8. It is also used in 21:40; 22:2; 26:14 of the normal use of Hebrew by Paul. *Glossa* means tongue - the thing we have in our mouths. Mark 7:33,35; James 3:5-8. It is used in Acts 2:3,4,11. The last indicates that here too it was an intelligible language that is being referred to. We will be thinking next week of this subject in more detail.

The time chart

For now, summarise by getting the young people to fill in the table at the end of their notes. The important points to make are that:

- For most of the time in Biblical times, no miraculous acts are recorded.
- Although there are exceptions - Abraham is described as a prophet, as were some of the Judges, for example - there are three main periods of activity: around the time of the Exodus, in the times of the Kings, and during the first century.
- In each case it can be seen that there was a clear purpose in God's mind. Either a great deliverance was being achieved or there was a threat to the spiritual and physical health of the nation.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

This is a subject that has occasionally provoked some extreme reactions. We all need to seek to understand the truth and to work for its unifying influence. 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling' (Ephesians 4:4).

The fact that there were long periods of biblical history in which there was no apparent miraculous activity means that we need not be concerned that there is none now. The flurries of activity clearly happened at set times and for particular purposes.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, who in the beginning brought light into a dark world, we pray for enlightenment that we may understand your truth and be led to understand the fullness of its beauty. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Read chapters 38-41 of Job, and marvel at how wide-ranging is God's work in the world.

AIM OF LESSON

The aim of this lesson is for the young people to appreciate that in our relationship with God, spiritual experience is not a substitute for understanding, and to be prepared to respond when meeting those who will place great emphasis on the apparent working of the gifts of the spirit.

It is important that we keep these aims clear in our mind. It is no part of our aim to try to limit what God may choose to do through his spirit, nor to give the impression that God no longer answers prayer, sometimes in miraculous ways.

Whenever dealing with others we do well to keep in the back of our minds the words of Gamaliel: 'If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.' (Acts 5:38-39). It is good to give the young people a clear understanding that the scriptures are our only authority, but try to avoid a suggestion that 'We are right about everything because we are Christadelphians, and everyone else is wrong about everything because they are not'. It is not we who are right, but the scriptures in which we believe.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

John 14, 15 and 16; 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

It is important that you prepare this subject for yourself, working through the notes and making sure that you understand the points that you want to make. There may be other points that are relevant to the group you are teaching, and you should think about these in addition to, or instead of, some of the contents of the notes.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

This lesson deals with three main topics:

1. The holy spirit as the third person of the trinity
2. The belief that the holy spirit has guided the church in the development of its doctrines.
3. The claims of many to experience gifts of the spirit, in particular speaking with tongues and healing.

The third person of the trinity?

Is it true that the holy spirit is described as a person?

English is an unusual language in that we do not have genders for inanimate objects; there is only one definite article – ‘the’, which is used for everything. We have the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’ to refer to people and some animals and things, but we use ‘it’ for everything else.

Other languages are different. In French, for example, all nouns are either masculine or feminine, whereas in German they may be masculine (*der Bahnhof* – the station), feminine (*die Kirche* – the church), or neuter (*das Fahrrad* – the bicycle).

The fact that the comforter in the gospel of John is a masculine noun should not therefore be used to argue that the holy spirit is a person, any more than a German railway station is. Even if this line of argument were to be valid, it would be confounded by the fact that *ruach* is feminine and *pneuma* neuter.

The sort of conclusion the young people should be coming to is that there is no scriptural basis for building the doctrine that the holy spirit is a third member of a trinity.

Has the holy spirit guided the church in the development of its doctrines?

This is a fairly straightforward section, and the answer is ‘no’. The Roman Catholic church claims to be guided by the spirit in its pronouncements on doctrine (see the examples in the students’ notes), but given that so much of its teaching is manifestly erroneous, this is simply untenable. If the most successful (numerically at least) Christian denomination can deceive itself and others in this way, we should be extremely cautious of the claims of anyone else.

The only safe way is to trust the scriptures God has given us, and to mistrust anything that is not clearly taught there.

An aside

1 Corinthians 13:8-12 is not referred to in the students’ notes, but is sometimes used, in particular by Jehovah’s Witnesses, to argue that the holy spirit gifts ceased in the first century.

Whilst it appears to be an observable fact that the miraculous gifts of the spirit did cease, it seems rather tenuous to use this passage in this way. The point that Paul is making is that the time will come, in the kingdom, when he would know and understand everything fully; for now, he had to be content with a partial understanding: even the holy spirit had not led him to comprehend everything.

Speaking in tongues

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:28-13:2, and make the point that even in the first century, when these things were so important in the establishment of the church, the value of speaking in tongues was kept in proportion. In Paul’s list of the spirit gifts, speaking in tongues comes last.

Now look at 1 Corinthians 14 and review the chapter as a whole.

It is not clear whether this chapter is referring to speaking other languages or speaking in sounds which could only be interpreted by one who had the gift of interpretation. If anything verse 10 and the use in verse 21 of the quotation from Isaiah 28:11-12, would suggest that real languages were being referred to. The main point is that if nobody understands what is being said all this communication is of no value.

It is clear from the letters to Corinth that speaking in tongues was no guarantee of doctrinal correctness. The church was full of serious doctrinal and moral problems, which Paul was at pains to address. So the important conclusion is reached that, as a spirit gift, it was not really relevant to their salvation or to their spiritual health.

That should be our attitude to the subject. Speaking in tongues does not prove that someone is right in their faith or teaching; nor (this is an important point to be clear on) does it of itself prove that they are wrong. It is to the scriptures that we should turn.

Speaking in tongues is not only a Christian phenomenon

This is simply an observable fact, and the quotation from the encyclopaedia illustrates it.

Healing

Can we still expect that God will answer prayers to heal the sick?

It is important that you discuss this point with the young people and bring to their minds such passages as those listed in their notes. We are not doubting for one moment that God's miraculous powers are still at his disposal, nor that he uses them when it is his will. The point is whether, as in the first century, God puts this power to some extent under the control of individuals who are able to determine how it will be used.

Do not be afraid of discussing with the young people the fact that there do seem to be individuals with powers that we perhaps cannot explain by entirely natural means. These powers are claimed by all cultures and societies, godless as well as religious. As with speaking in tongues, it is therefore not conclusive that the power of God is at work when people claim them as Christian. A good point of reference for this would be the magicians in Egypt, or the witch of Endor.

You may like to refer to passages like Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 39:29 and Joel 2:28-29, which speak of the spirit being poured out in the future on the restored people of Israel.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

We need to beware of two extremes. On the one hand we may come to think that God no longer works in the lives of his people, and may be like those of whom Paul warned Timothy, who had a form of godliness, but denied its power. On the other hand there is the danger is that we will delude ourselves into thinking that our own wishes and thoughts are the will of God.

In the middle is a balanced view which recognises that God will guide those who are willing to submit themselves to him, and who therefore make every effort to understand his will and to follow it. He takes us by the hand so that he can lead us, not we him.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, it is your wish, and it is ours, that we may be guided to understand your will and to follow it. Give us humility to accept your guidance, and wisdom to discern your will. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If any of the young people has met someone who claims to be guided directly by the holy spirit, or to have any of its gifts such as speaking in tongues, you may like to have a 'debate' about the merits of what they have to say.

Alternatively there may be someone in your ecclesia in this position, whom you could invite to discuss this point in more detail with the young people.

THE HAND OF GOD - GOD IN OUR LIVES

7

AIM OF LESSON

To enable the young people to be aware of the impact that the work of the Almighty, in all its forms, should have on our daily lives and on our hopes for the future. It is not an attempt to prescribe the various ways in which God works - 'the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth' - but to help us to live our lives in a way that is aware of the hand of God at work.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Genesis 28; Exodus 17; 2 Kings 6; Malachi 2; Luke 19

PREPARATION REQUIRED

It will be good if the young people can discuss their feelings and conclusions freely. Read through the notes and decide whether your group needs the biblical background to give them a basis for discussion or whether they need to air their views first, being prompted by your suggestions from the Bible.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduction

Start off by getting the young people to think about how God worked in Bible times, and whether people were aware of his hand or whether they put too much down to 'time and chance'. The following examples might help, though you will no doubt think of others:

1. Jacob at Bethel was not aware of the presence of God (Genesis 28:16). He had been asleep in more senses than one.
2. Elisha's servant in Dothan was not aware of the angels of God - (2 Kings 6:17).

3. Malachi 2:17 is instructive. The people were acting unjustly themselves, then blaming God for the injustice. We cannot expect God to act in our lives if we are not prepared ourselves to read what he has written for us and to act upon it. Ezekiel 9:9 is making the same point.
4. The Israelites (Exodus 17:7) doubted whether God was with them, and as a result they were condemned to die in the wilderness. This should be a sobering warning to us, since many parallels are drawn in scripture between the exodus and our lives.
5. The Jews did not recognise Jesus as the son of God (Luke 19:44). They were not irreligious - that was not the problem; but they did not realise that God could intervene in their lives in the way he did through the Lord Jesus.

God at work

This should largely be a discussion lesson, so ask the young people to think about the points in their notes.

- Think of ways in which God influences events in the earth and, potentially, in our lives.
- For each of the examples you have thought of above, how can we be aware of this influence?
- Do you think that you, and people in general, are as aware as they should be that God may be at work in unseen ways? If not, how we can become more aware? Again, think of each of the examples you have been considering.
- Can it happen that people wrongly imagine the hand of God in their lives? How can we be sure that we are not fooling ourselves?

It may be helpful, if you have a large enough class, to split the young people into two groups. The sorts of points they should be able to make are summarised below.

Through his word

Reading the Bible teaches us about God and his purpose, causes us to be aware of our sins, and shows us the way of salvation. We can see its effects in others around us, and can increase its influence in our own lives by prayerful meditation.

In the world at large

We see God at work in the nations of the world, particularly in the Middle East. We should always be on the lookout for events that relate to the scriptures.

Through angels

It is clear from scripture that the angels are active in the lives of God's people and in the world in general. We cannot expect to see angels in the same way as Jacob did at Mahanaim (Genesis 32:1-2); we can only try to be aware of the potential, as illustrated in Hebrews 13:2, for example.

In response to our prayers

God may act directly in response to our prayers for help and guidance. He will also act in unexpected and unasked-for ways to help those who turn to him. Often his hand is not seen, and we are surely often unaware. Consider which is more likely: that God will help us without our being aware of it; or that we will imagine he is helping us when he isn't. Which would be worse?

There is a danger of which we need to be aware. It is sometimes possible to think that God has spoken to us directly, and told us to act in a particular way, when he has not. Sometimes people - in particular schizophrenics - hear voices telling them to do terrible things. Situations can also arise where people on opposite sides of a conflict both act confidently asserting that God is 'on their side'.

It would be sad if our only reaction to this danger was to shut our ears. What we do need to do is to make sure that we are guided above all by the scriptures, and that we are reading them objectively, not looking for verses to support what we have already decided we want to do. Helpful guidance may be found, however, in the words of a prayerful speaker or the advice of a godly friend.

The battle between flesh and spirit

In several passages, such as John 6:63; Romans 8:5-13; Galatians 5:16-17; 6:8, we are presented with a conflict between the flesh (the carnal mind, the old man, the sinful nature), and the spirit (the mind of God, the new man). We are only too aware of this conflict going on inside us, and it is clear from passages like 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 that the influence of the spirit of God is the only thing that will change us from being carnal to spiritual beings. Just as we understand ourselves because we know 'what makes us tick', in order to understand the almighty God we need to understand how he thinks and acts.

The aim of all this is that our way of thinking will be influenced to become more and more like the way he thinks, and the way the Lord Jesus showed us. It may be summed up in passages like Ephesians 3:17 and Colossians 1:27; 3:16.

Seeing the invisible

Finally, to emphasise the importance of this subject, take the young people to Hebrews 11. The chapter is about many different aspects of faith. Faith is introduced as being:

Sure of what we hope for: Faith means being convinced that God's promises to us are real, and that he will do what he has said.

Certain of what we do not see: Faith means seeing beyond the immediate circumstances of our lives and seeing the hand of God at work.

What it meant to the examples in the chapter was:

- An awareness, or perception, of God and his hand in their lives.
- A willingness to act in the conviction that God was with them.

You could start them off by pointing out some of the early examples, then get them to look for themselves at the rest of the chapter, up to verse 27:

Verse

- 1 Faith is ... 'the evidence of things not seen' (NIV 'being ... certain of what we do not see'). Men and women of faith perceived things that were not ordinarily visible.
- 7 The flood was something 'not seen as yet', but Noah saw it and acted.
- 10 Abraham left one visible, real, city - Ur - to look for another one, invisible, and built by God.
- 13 All the patriarchs had seen the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.
- 14 They were seeking a country (also v 16).
- 22 Joseph talked about the time when the Israelites would leave Egypt. The Greek word

mnemoneuo - like mnemonic - means that he remembered this - as though it had already happened.

23 Moses' parents saw that he was no ordinary child.

26 Moses knew of, and was convinced of, the reward that God would give to his servants.

27 Moses 'saw' God, even though he is invisible.

We should not think that God is only helping us when times are good - the experiences of the men and women mentioned here, and especially of the Lord Jesus, would show us that this is not the case. But faith can see his hand in all sorts of situations.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

We need to be changed from the human natures with which we were born, and that will only happen by the hand of God, in one way or another. We need to do everything we can in order to allow his influence in our lives to be as great as possible, so that the predominance of our own desires may be overcome.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, we are grateful that you work in our lives to bring us out of darkness into the light of your salvation. May we submit our wills to yours, and allow you to influence us in every way that we can, so that we may serve you and become more like you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. A helpful analogy, which you may like to discuss with the young people, is that of a rose, grafted onto a natural briar. The aim is that the new rose, which will bear beautiful flowers, will flourish, using the physical support provided by the briar, but inheriting the more desirable nature of the graft - '... receive with meekness the engrafted word (NIV 'the word planted in you'), which is able to save your souls' (James 1:21). One of the aims of a gardener is to prevent the briar rose from producing shoots and suckers; if it does, then the strength of the plant will be devoted to 'the old man' rather than the new, and the flowers will be those of the briar. In just the same way we have to cut back the old man, our human desires, and to strengthen the new. If you have, or can borrow, a copy, *'The two natures in the child of God'* by E.W.Bullinger (the *Companion Bible* man) is helpful, and may contain other useful ideas. It is available from the Christadelphian Office.
2. Ask the young people if there are occasions when they feel God has already been at work in their lives.
3. The young people may like to read *'Ways of Providence'* by Robert Roberts.

IN THE BEGINNING - INTRODUCTORY NOTES

“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone - while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”

(Job 38:2-7, NIV)

Before you start on these lessons, it may be best to think about who would be the best person to teach them. If you can, it might be best to get someone with a scientific background either to lead the discussion, or to come along to help. This is not because the approach of the lessons is scientific; in fact, one of the main points they make is that we should not expect the Bible to be a scientific document. But scientific questions may arise, and if you do not feel confident enough it could be helpful to find someone who at least understands what the words mean.

Please do not be daunted by this thought, however. We have tried to put everything scientific in the students’ notes for them to read, so you should not have to feel that you have to ‘teach’ them the scientific aspects of the subject.

THE AIM OF THIS GROUP OF LESSONS

We live in a society where evolution is accepted as a fact. Populist television presenters, pretending scientific credentials, offer simplistic accounts of the origins of life as though there were no unanswered questions, and make assertions of breathtaking arrogance with the calmness of one discussing the weather. Meanwhile, in schools and universities, students, teachers and researchers are pressured into following the accepted view, knowing that to oppose it would threaten their careers.

The temptation is to compete: to pretend that it is, in fact, we who know all the answers; that we, being better scientists than the scientists, are in fact the true source of information about how life began. It is good to remember that, just like Job and the television presenter, we were not there when the Almighty laid the foundations of the earth.

The main message of this introduction, therefore, is that unless you are a scientist you should not pretend to be one. It is best to stick to what you know; and what we know is good enough. God has given us his account of how he created the heaven, the earth, and all that is in them, and for most of us that should suffice.

So how can we help the young people we are teaching? There are five main points that these lessons seek to communicate:

1. The early chapters of Genesis are fundamental to everything else in the Bible. Their essential truth, therefore, must underpin everything else.
2. God’s account of creation is not intended as a scientific treatise, as though he had to explain himself to some eminent and assorted group of ‘ologists’.
3. The early chapters of Genesis set out:

- to introduce us to a loving creator who has a purpose with his handiwork.
 - to provide an account of creation that is comprehensible to anyone.
 - to set out the basis for family life and the relationship between husband and wife.
 - to explain the origins of sin and death, so laying a foundation for God's plan of salvation.
4. The theory of evolution does not on its own provide an adequate explanation of the incredibly complexity and beauty of the life that teems around us.
 5. Belief in creation is not stupid. Even setting aside all the other reasons for believing in the Bible, it is the most rational possible response to the world around us.

Is this enough? Will it help the young to cope with the pressure of school? It will not - cannot - be enough to answer every question and refute every cynic, but it should help to answer at least some of the doubts that young people experience, and to enable them to stand up for their faith at school.

Do not go beyond what is written

When the apostle Paul wrote this instruction to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:6), it was to warn them of a cause of division: the tendency of people to teach ideas not backed up by scripture, and in so doing to feed their own pride, not the church. We need to make sure that we do not make the same mistake.

This is not to discourage us from seeking to come to a better understanding of these things, nor to criticise those with genuine scientific knowledge who endeavour to explain their conclusions to the rest of us; these lessons could not have been constructed without their help. It does explain why in these notes we have not tried to piece together science and the scriptures, but have encouraged you to present a simple account of a God 'who made the earth, the air, the sky, the sea; who gave the light its birth'; who 'careth for me', and for all the rest of his creation.

SOME INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GENESIS ACCOUNT

There are two purposes for this section. The first is to point out that of the many different ways of understanding creation, none provides a complete explanation which resolves all doubts and problems; and none can be asserted as authoritative.

The second is to provide you with some material that may be helpful in discussion. It is not reproduced in the students' notes because they may find it hard to cope with the uncertainty it could create in their minds.

It may seem a rather negative section, but it is well to be aware of the pitfalls of some attempts to understand the account of creation. It is not intended in any way as a criticism of any of the authors concerned, or of any who follow their understanding.

The following ideas are considered below:

1. A young earth, made in 144 hours?
2. The flood explains everything?
3. A pre-Adamic creation?
4. Very long days?
5. Six statements made in 6 days 'in the beginning'?
6. A vision given to Moses?
7. Theistic Evolution?

In each case we will look at some scriptural and scientific considerations.

We hope that you will conclude that while it may be helpful to discuss some or all of these ideas with the young people, none of them provides an explanation which solves all difficulties. It is clear from the first lesson in this group that the early chapters of Genesis are about 'creation' in the broadest sense of the word; about God's plan for the earth and for mankind, and its ultimate perfection. We are encouraged simply to accept Genesis 1 as God's account of what he did, and not become preoccupied with reconciling it with science.

1. A young earth, made in 144 hours?

Archbishop Ussher calculated from the time periods given in scripture that the earth was made around 6000 years ago, and to many this is the understanding which is most faithful to scripture.

Scriptural considerations

A plain man, coming to the Bible for the first time, and with no preconceptions, would simply accept that the Almighty made everything in 6 literal days. He would conclude that Adam walked on a world that was 5 days old, looked up at a sun, moon and stars that had existed a mere 48 hours, and gave names to animals that had been formed on the previous day. The 3 day-old trees were already bearing fruit.

Scientific considerations

God is perfectly capable of forming the universe in 144 hours - he is Lord of heaven and earth. The scientific difficulty arises from the fact that the earth, and the universe which surrounds it, appear to be very old. What is puzzling is the apparent deception involved in forming a creation where light appeared to be travelling from stars which never emitted it; in making an earth which while very young had all the appearance of great age; and in manufacturing the fossil remains of plants and animals which never lived.

2. The flood explains everything?

This is not really a theory of creation, but is relevant to a discussion of whether or not the earth is much younger than it appears. In 1961 John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris wrote 'The Genesis Flood'. Its main points are:

1. It argues to prove that the flood was literally a world-wide event.
2. It attempts to disprove the principle of uniformity, which underlies modern geology. This principle states that geological processes (sedimentation, volcanic eruptions, and so on) going on today are broadly similar to those which occurred long ago; it leads to the conclusion that different strata of rock are of different ages, and form a record of the development of life on earth.
3. It tries to demonstrate that the sedimentary rocks in the earth, of which there are vast quantities, with all the fossils in them, could only have been formed by a major catastrophe involving immense amounts of water swirling around the earth - in short, the biblical flood.

The book argues well against many of the assumptions of evolutionists, and from that point of view is a useful one to read. It also has a respect for the word of God, and attempts to take it literally wherever possible.

Scriptural considerations

The book argues that the world after the flood bore no resemblance to the one before it; that the land masses were completely different, with continents and oceans where there were none before.

It is hard however to reconcile this with what the Bible tells us of the earth before and after the flood. In the account of the rivers that flowed out of the garden of Eden we read of the Tigris and Euphrates, which exist with the same names today. The two other rivers flowed through the lands of Havilah and Cush, and the same regions still existed after the flood.

Again, the great majority of fossils are of aquatic creatures, especially corals and shellfish, whereas Genesis says that it was land-based creatures that died in the flood (Genesis 7:21-23).

Scientific considerations

While effectively demonstrating many of the weaknesses of the scientific support for evolution, the book does not adequately put anything in its place. To be true, for example, the theory would require that during the time of the flood (only one year) coral reefs were established and grew to enormous sizes; that there were major undersea volcanic eruptions without any sign of the lava coming into contact with water. Fossilised footprints of living animals would be difficult to explain during a flood that caused the death of all living creatures.

3. A pre-Adamic creation?

Brother John Thomas, in *Elpis Israel*, supported the idea that there had been another creation before that which is recorded in Genesis, and which was 'pre-existent for millions of ages before the Adamic era'. The fossils, according to this idea, are the remains of creatures which inhabited this earlier creation.

Fragments, however, of the wreck of this pre-Adamic world have been brought to light by geological research, to the records of which we refer the reader, for a detailed account of its discoveries. With this remark, that the organic remains, coal fields, and strata, belong to the ages before the formation of man, rather than to the era of the creation, or the Noachic flood. This view of the matter will remove a host of difficulties, which have hitherto disturbed the harmony between the conclusions of geologists and the Mosaic account of the physical constitution of our globe.

John Thomas, Elpis Israel, chapter 2

As part of this interpretation, the 'angels that sinned' in 2 Peter 2:4, are understood to be inhabitants of this pre-Adamic creation, and the intervening time period is covered in the time before God said 'let there be light'.

In the period between the wreck of the globe as the habitation of the rebel angels and the epoch of the first day, the earth was as described in Genesis 1:2, 'without form and void, and darkness upon the face of the deep' - a globe of mineral structure, submerged in water, and mantled in impenetrable night.

Elpis Israel again.

Scriptural considerations

This understanding of creation allows the events of Genesis 1 to fit into real 24-hour days without confronting the normal scientific view of the universe as almost infinitely vast and old. The phrase 'and God said' first occurs after the creation of the heaven and earth, and some see this as pointing to a passing of time, with the first day beginning only when God speaks. The Bible does not specifically mention an earlier creation, however, and there is no hint in Genesis of the catastrophe that would have wiped it out.

When introducing the sabbath law, God said to his people 'For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day' (Exodus 20:11). This would suggest that the formation of the earth and heavens were an integral part of the days of creation, not an earlier, and separate, event.

In the Authorised Version, the words of God to the newly formed mankind in Genesis 1:28 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and *replenish* the earth' support the view that the earth needed to be repopulated. This could be a good translation - God says the same to Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:1). The Hebrew word does not however mean 'replenish', but is simply the common word for 'fill' - which is the sense in which it is translated in Genesis 1:22 and nearly everywhere else in the Old Testament.

Scientific considerations

This interpretation of Genesis requires that a catastrophic event caused all life on earth to cease, and that the planet became 'mantled in impenetrable night'. Scientific evidence certainly supports the idea of past catastrophes, such as those that apparently wiped out dinosaurs, but there seem to be no traces of a global catastrophe which left the earth 'without form, and void'.

4. Very long days?

Many have attempted to resolve the apparent contradiction between the six days of creation recorded in Genesis and the appearance that the universe is very old. If it is the case that all creation was encompassed within six days, and if it is true that creation began many millions of years ago, it does not take much imagination to conceive that the six days may each represent very long periods of time. For partial parallels, see Hosea 6:2 and Luke 13:32.

Scriptural considerations

The Hebrew word for day does not necessarily represent a period of 24 hours. In Genesis 1:14, for example, the same word is used as the opposite of night, and in 2:4 the creation of Adam and Eve is 'in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens'. Elsewhere in scripture it is used to refer to 'the day of the Lord' or 'in that day', meaning 'at that time'. The phrase 'the evening and the morning were the -th day' does seem to tie it more closely to a period of 24 hours, but it has to be said that Genesis does not precisely state the length of the days. This is supported by the fact that the sun (which gives our periods of 24 hours) was not made until the fourth day. Some have supposed that the sun had existed from the beginning but was shrouded in mist for three days; however, the scripture says that God made it on the fourth, not that he caused the mist to clear.

Scientific considerations

The main scientific difficulty with this idea is that it matches part of evolutionary theory (the age of the earth), but not, particularly, the rest. If we are seeking to match the sequence of Genesis

- a) Light
- b) Heaven
- c) Dry land, plants and trees
- d) Sun, moon and stars
- e) Sea creatures and birds
- f) Land animals and man

with geological time charts such as the one below, it could be done with a lot of simplification if one were to ignore the early development of life in the sea - but it is difficult to see what is being achieved.

| ERA | PERIOD | EPOCH | DATES (millions of years ago) | AGE of ... | EVENTS |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Cenozoic | Quaternary | Holocene | 0-2 | Mammals | Humans |
| | | Pleistocene | | | |
| | Tertiary | Pliocene | 2-5 | | |
| | | Miocene | 5-24 | | |
| | | Oligocene | 24-37 | | |
| | | Eocene | 37-58 | | |
| Palaeocene | 58-66 | | Extinction of dinosaurs | | |
| Mesozoic | Cretaceous | 66-144 | Reptiles | Flowering plants | |
| | Jurassic | 144-208 | | 1st birds/mammals | |
| | Triassic | 208-245 | | First Dinosaurs | |
| Palaeozoic | Permian | 245-286 | Amphibians | End of trilobites | |
| | Carboniferous | 286-360 | | First reptiles | |
| | | | | Large primitive trees | |
| | Devonian | 360-408 | Fishes | First amphibians | |
| | Silurian | 408-438 | | First land plant fossils | |
| | Ordovician | 438-505 | Invertebrates | First Fish | |
| Cambrian | 505-570 | 1st shells, trilobites dominant | | | |
| Precambrian | | | 570-2,500 | | 1st multi-celled organisms |
| | | | 2,500-3,800 | | 1st one-celled organisms |
| | | | 3,800-4,600 | | Approx age of oldest rocks 3,800 |

From MODERN PHYSICAL GEOLOGY, Graham Thompson Ph.D., Jonathan Turk Ph.D., Saunders College Publishing

A literal reading of Genesis would lead us to the view that God made all trees on day 3, all birds on day 5, and so on; the evolutionary time chart assumes that many types of living thing are evolving simultaneously.

5. Six statements made in 6 days 'in the beginning'?

The idea is sometimes proposed that in the beginning God made, on successive days, six statements: 'Let there be light', 'Let there be a firmament ...' and so on. In the vast ages since that time he has worked out his plan and these statements have come true.

Scriptural considerations

Reading Genesis from this point of view would suggest that each section begins with a statement made 'in the beginning', follows on with a description of how over time this statement has been executed, and concludes with the Almighty's satisfaction at the completion of his plan.

Given the number of occasions on which God speaks of things he plans to do many years hence it is not hard to read the passage in this way. For example, 'for, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind' (Isaiah 65:17) can be seen as a parallel of one of the initial statements, still being worked out in God's purpose. Sometimes future events are actually spoken of in scripture in the past tense - Isaiah 53:4-9, for example; or Romans 4:17.

On the other hand, God says in Exodus 20:11 that everything was made (rather than begun) in six days.

Scientific considerations

This understanding allows creation to take a very long time. There is a scientific problem, though. In Genesis heaven and earth are already there 'in the beginning', before God spoke, and the normal scientific understanding or the origins of the universe would suggest that the sun and stars were formed before the earth. In Genesis, however, it is after the creation of the earth that God says 'let there be lights in the expanse of the sky'.

6. A vision given to Moses?

The idea is sometimes put forward that we have in Genesis 1 a series of visions, given to Moses on six successive days. This seems to resolve many difficulties, except that God tells us that he 'made' everything in 6 days, not 'told Moses'.

Another possibility is that Moses saw a vision of a creation which had been carried out in 6 days, and recorded what he saw. So Genesis 1 may describe a vision of the beginning, balancing the vision of the end recorded in Revelation.

Scriptural considerations

The difficulty with this idea is that it is not clear at what point the vision ends and the reality begins. The Lord Jesus and the apostles referred to Adam as an historical being, and since the teaching of scripture about sin and death depends on there being one man and woman from whom we are all descended, this seems a basic point.

So we would be left with a vision in chapter 1, followed by a real description in chapter 2 of the creation of Adam and Eve.

Scientific considerations

If Genesis 1 is a vision then it has no direct relationship to any scientific theory.

7. Theistic evolution?

The idea is sometimes promoted that God used evolution as a tool in his creation of the universe.

Scriptural considerations

If the term is used to mean that life on earth did evolve as is popularly argued - and, in particular, if man evolved from an ape-like species - then the first men and women would have evolved from dying creatures and would, we assume, be dying themselves. It then becomes difficult to understand the Bible teaching about the fall and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

If however 'theistic evolution' means that some changes in the forms of living creatures have occurred since creation, then few would argue. The process of natural selection is observed all around us as, for example, bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics, insects to insecticide and rats to poison. It does not however come close to explaining life on earth as we see it.

Scientific considerations

If evolution were unquestionably true, we should be pushed into a reluctant acceptance of theistic evolution. While it remains an unproved theory, we do well to reject it.

AIM OF LESSON

The key aim of this lesson is to help the young people to realise that the scriptural account of creation is about more than the formation of life.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Genesis 1-3.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Before you teach any of the lessons in this series, please read the introductory notes in the previous section. You may not agree with everything they say, but please give them your careful thought, in particular if you have an interpretation of Genesis that you would like to teach to the young people in your group.

If you are sharing the teaching of these lessons with others, you will need to liaise with them to pass on any points that need to be borne in mind for later.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Find out what they think

Begin by getting the young people to tell you what happens at school; what they are taught, and how they get on. Do they find it hard to stand up for what they believe? Are their teachers and friends sympathetic to anyone who believes the Bible? Do they themselves have a clear idea of what happened in the beginning?

Find out what their difficulties are. Is it that they themselves don't know what to make of the biblical account of creation? Do they know what they think, but find it hard to know what to say at school?

Explain to them that you are about to spend four weeks or so thinking about creation and evolution, and discuss with them what you should try, together, to achieve. Explain the structure of the four weeks of these lessons, and what each lesson tries to accomplish.

Without excuse

Look together at Romans 1:18-21, and discuss what it says. Its implications are profound:

- It is not that people do not know about God - rather, that they suppress the truth.
- The creation gives us clear evidence of God's power and divine nature. We can see these two characteristics of the Almighty when we look around us. His might can be seen in the power of nature - storms, lightning, earthquakes, volcanoes. We have all seen television pictures of buildings being lifted into the air by tornadoes, of mountains being blown apart, and we all know that mankind is powerless to resist. His divine nature is seen in the beauty and intricacy of

creation - the incredible complexity of plants and animals and the way in which they depend on each other.

- These things mean that we have no excuse for not believing in God as the creator. It is not we who should feel defensive about our faith but everyone who does not believe in God. The truth is clear to those who have eyes to see.

What is important?

Get the young people to open their Bibles to Genesis 1 and to look at what it has to say. You may like quickly to summarise what the Almighty did on each day, and then briefly remind them of the events of chapter 2 (not that they don't know already - just to get their minds set on the subject).

Ask the young people to say what they think are the most important things about these chapters. If they weren't included in the Bible, what information would we miss? They will probably come up with several answers like:

1. It tells us that God did everything
2. It tells us that we are made in the image of God
3. It tells us the sequence of events
4. It tells us that creation happened in 6 days

Ask them if there is any other way of finding out what are the most important aspects? Who else might have highlighted a few things from the accounts of creation as being particularly important? Try to lead them toward the idea that we can look in the New Testament, and see how the account of creation is referred to there.

Divide the passages between the young people; ask them to look up the New Testament verses, and to relate them back to the corresponding verses in Genesis. The aim in this exercise is to demonstrate that none of these points has anything to do with the things that cause tensions with some scientists. The prime purpose of the Genesis account, we can conclude, is not to provide a scientific record but to lay the foundation for the account of God's dealings with his creation.

God the creator and sustainer

God is not just the creator of the earth but the one who sustains it day by day, and wishes men and women to come to him.

Adam and Eve

Eve was formed from Adam's side, and the pattern of their relationship, that Eve was a help to Adam, is intended to be followed by men and women today.

Adam

We are all descended from Adam; so Adam in Genesis 2 must be the same as 'man' in Genesis 1.

Let there be light

Paul is lifting the statement in Genesis 1:3 'Let there be light' into a spiritual dimension, and getting us to think that Genesis is not just about a creative process that happened long ago - it is also a set of eternal statements of what the Almighty intends for his creation.

The Sabbath

The statement at the start of Genesis 2 that 'God rested' is confirmed in the New Testament; not only that, but the writer of the letter to the Hebrews interprets it to refer to the kingdom.

Let us make man in our image

There isn't a direct reference back to Genesis 1 in the New Testament verses, but a common theme indicating that God's statement in Genesis 'let us make man in our image and after our likeness' is another passage with a future application.

The dominion of the King

The statement about man having dominion is really a prophecy about the kingdom of God, when the Lord Jesus will have dominion over the world.

The tree of life and the curse

The description of the garden of Eden applies to God's purpose for the end of time as well as his actions in the past.

Summary

The point of all this is that Genesis is not simply intended to tell us what happened a long time ago; it has spiritual and prophetic meanings as well. We should not therefore read it in the same way as we would a textbook on evolutionary biology. These are not the words of a man, written to solve a twentieth century problem; they are God's revelation of himself and his purpose from the beginning.

The words God used to describe what he did

Do not feel that you have to go through all the words in the Students' notes. They are there simply to make three points:

1. There are many different words for what God did, and sometimes more than one word is used to describe the same thing. For example, God 'formed', 'made', and 'created' man. The most important thing is that whatever process was used, God was in control.
2. Nearly all the words are also used for things that we do, or for normal processes of growth. Some involve making one thing from another. So God may have used normal activities for at least some of his creation. He may have formed every species specially and instantaneously, but these words do not say that he did.
3. The list does not give us any basis for being dogmatic about how God created things, and confirms that this is not what Genesis is for.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Whether we were made or whether we arrived here by chance is the most fundamental question we could ask about ourselves and our reason for existing. It affects everything we are, and everything we do.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, your word is a wonderful revelation of yourself and of your purpose with mankind. Help us to understand it, and where we are uncertain please guide us into truth. Help us to be honest in the way we read it and not to seek to make it say what we would like. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

There are many other accounts of creation. The ancient Californian native Americans believed, for example, that the Great Spirit placed the land on the backs of seven turtle brothers, and that earthquakes were caused by the brothers fighting.

Two such accounts are included in the students' notes. They make amusing reading, but are not included for fun. The contrast with the Biblical account of creation is dramatic; yet both these accounts were written long after the book of Genesis. The simply beauty of Genesis 1 is evidence enough of the God who wrote it.

IN THE BEGINNING - EVOLUTION - THE FLAWS

9

AIM OF LESSON

To show the young people that the theory of evolution is a long way from an established fact, and to give them confidence in dealing with the subject at school. The aim is not to give them ammunition to argue with their teachers or friends, but to enable them to assert with assurance that they do believe the Bible account.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

2 Peter 3:3-10

PREPARATION REQUIRED

If you haven't done so already it may be helpful to read through the introductory notes which come before the preceding lesson. Read through the students' notes and familiarise yourself with what they say. They may be a bit technical for your young people, depending on their age and scientific ability. If they are likely to struggle, find, if you can, a way of explaining it to them in terms they can understand.

You may have some other useful material, in which case prepare to talk to the young people about it.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Look at 2 Peter 3:3-10 with the young people. Peter was not writing about the principle of uniformity - that geological processes operate in the same way now as they have always done. It does however make some important points:

- God has intervened miraculously in the world in the past, and will do so again

- We should not look at the apparent stability of the earth, and assume that it has always been that way, or will be so in the future.

What difference does evolution make?

Get the young people to think about these questions and to fill in the important points. The answers below are not 'correct'; just illustrations of the difference our understanding of our origins makes.

| | If there is no God, and we evolved | If God created us |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| What are we? | We are a chance collection of chemicals; at best, just very clever animals. | We are the handiwork of a great creator, so each of us is of inestimable worth. |
| Is there right or wrong? | Not in any absolute sense. Maybe we should encourage evolution by ensuring that only the fittest survive - Hitler's idea. | Right and wrong are determined by a greater power than us. |
| Is there any purpose in life? | Not really. The best any creature can hope for is to survive as comfortably, for as long, as possible. | If God has created the universe he did it for a reason, and he will make sure that his purpose is carried out. |

What are the arguments for evolution?

Ask the young people what arguments are normally used for evolution. They are likely to say something like:

- Fossils of simpler creatures are found in older rocks, more advanced creatures in younger rocks.
- Fossils show that creatures have developed over time to become more complex and sophisticated.
- Evolution depends on the survival of the fittest, and we can see that principle all around us.

Now look with the young people at the points in the students' notes.

Origins of Life

This section is about DNA, and makes two main points:

- DNA is of itself extremely complicated, and nobody really knows how the first life could have begun.
- The DNA in the cells of the simplest creatures is not necessarily less complex than that of mammals and humans. So there is a sense in which life has not got more advanced at all.

The difference between vertebrates and invertebrates

We cannot argue with the principles of genetic mutation or of the survival of the fittest, which are the planks used to support the theory of evolution - we see them in action all around us. The issue is whether these principles are able to explain the vast complexity of life, and there are many unanswered questions, like this one.

The evolution of the horse

This section indicates that the example of horse evolution, often quoted, does not prove that much, even assuming that it is accurate. Get the young people to look at the picture of the two horses -

the 'very first' one, and a modern one. The differences are relatively few, and apart from their size they look very similar.

The peppered moth

Again, this is a good example of evolution within a species, but that is all.

From a shrew to a whale?

Finally, the example of the whale. The extract from 'Life on Earth' acknowledges that it is difficult to believe that a small creature a bit like a squirrel could evolve into a whale, and admits that there is no evidence that it did. 'The logic of the deduction is undeniable' only because if we deny the existence of God there is no alternative.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

The point of all this is not to enable the young people to score points off their friends or their teachers. It is fundamentally to get them to realise that we are not fools to believe in divine creation.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, it is sad that people do not recognise your hand at work in creation, in the wonders that we see around us. Help us not to doubt you, and give us patience and courage to explain to others what we believe. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

There are many books available which you may find helpful and which you may be able to use in this lesson.

If you have planned this lesson well enough in advance you may like to suggest to the young people that if they have any school books which deal with evolution they could bring them with them, and you could then discuss the contents in the light of the points this lesson makes.

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to realise how inconceivable it is that chance evolution could bring about the world we live in.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Psalm 94:9

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Read through the lesson and familiarise yourself with the points that it makes. You may have some other materials about eyes and sight - or you may be able to get some from the library.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***What do you see?***

Get the young people (they've probably done it already) to look at the pictures and say what they see. In case you're not sure:

- Is this a young woman or a man playing the saxophone?
- Is this a man wearing glasses, or has someone written the word 'Liar'?
- Is there a triangle or not?
- *My wife and my mother-in-law*, published in 1915 by the cartoonist W.E.Hill.
- A duck or a rabbit?
- Are the diagonal lines parallel? (They are)
- How many legs has the elephant?

The point of this exercise, apart from being amusing, is that our sight is incredibly intelligent. It is not just that we see a sort of photograph of things around us, but that our sight - our eyes and brain working together - interprets what we see and tries to make sense of it.

It is worth making the point, in passing, that nearly all the time this is an enormous blessing, which we take for granted. We recognise someone we know a long way away just from a brief glance; we can pick out a word on a crowded page; we see out of the corner of our eye a ball about to hit us on the head, and instantly we duck. Sometimes however it causes us to 'see' things that aren't there - people imagine they have seen ghosts of dead people, for instance - and we need to be aware that our sight can be deceptive. This is relevant to our theme; we need to be sure, whether evolutionist or creationist, that we are seeing what is really there, not what we expect to see.

Ask the young people what they feel when they are looking at something that can be one of two images - the first picture, for example - and they try to 'see' the other one. It is quite hard to switch, but once we have 'seen' the other one it is equally hard to switch back. This illustrates how complex our sight is. Our brains are working hard to make what we see into something we can

understand, and once we think we have understood it, our brains try to shut out details that don't fit. A lesson about life as well as our sight.

Thinking about seeing - 25 amazing facts about our sight

Talk through some or all of the points in this list. There's no point in labouring through them all if you feel that the list has made its point; alternatively the young people may be interested enough to want to read the lot. You may find the following additional comments helpful:

1. This needs both tears and eyelids; without one the other would be no good.
2. So our eyes are constantly being washed and disinfected.
3. This may sound a silly question, but how does a hard bone know that it has to mould itself in order to permit a soft round thing to fit in a hole?
4. If our cornea distorted or clouded the image coming into our eye our sight would be useless. But how could this have evolved?
5. Try to imagine how the eye could have evolved a mechanism to overcome this.
6. Many people today have their sight damaged through the effect of sunlight; imagine what would happen without an iris.
7. Imagine if you were given some pieces of transparent elastic and told to make a lens!
8. These muscles have to rotate both eyes independently but get both to point to the same thing. This is a skill we learn as babies, but the accuracy of the mechanism is still amazing.
9. Yet all this happens without us thinking about it at all.
10. Imagine a mathematics question in which you were asked to calculate the speed of a ball from the rotation speed of an eye inside a moving head ...
11. ... when the ball is against a moving background!
12. We know that if we wear reversing spectacles, which turn the image upside down before it enters the eye, our brain corrects itself after a while. That makes it sound as though it were easy, but try to imagine what needs to be done to achieve it.
13. We don't often have to see in the dark, but in Bible times the world was lit only by the moon, stars and oil lamps for 12 hours a day.
14. For instance, the best way to see the tail of a comet at night is not to look directly at it, but to one side.
15. The rest of our vision is not particularly well-defined, and is largely in black and white. But our brain fills in the rest of the picture, and whenever we want to see something properly, our eyes rotate.
16. The numbers here are mind-boggling. It's not just that there are so many cells, but that the signals from them all are interpreted properly by our brains.
17. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about our sight is the way the eye and the brain interact. Our eyes, and a large part of our brains, would be no use without each other.
18. In general cameras are a pale imitation of what our eyes do. TV cameras are still extremely (compared with an eye) large, cumbersome things, which need a lot of electricity, but which still cannot do many of the things we do. They photograph things but don't interpret them at all.

19. This interaction between our eyes and brains is remarkable, and it means that we have an incredible ability to see things we are looking for. Finding a needle in a haystack is still not easy, but if the needle came into view the chances are that we would find it.
20. A video lead, by comparison, is just one wire carrying one signal.
21. How could this have evolved?
22. Darwin didn't know about this bit.
23. How could this have evolved. Imagine over one and a half million nerve fibres connecting up to random brain cells on two sides of our brain, and the poor brain trying to sort out the confusion.
24. It seems that during the formation of the embryo the fibres that make up the optic nerve grow from the eye to join up with our brains, which are some distance away. Every fibre has to link to the right part of the brain, and experiments with goldfish have shown that if one of the fibres is diverted it simply turns round and charts a new course to get to its correct destination. How does it know where to go?
25. Darwin's comment at the start of the students' notes still seems valid.

The example from the booklet by brother David Pearce is yet another illustration of the wonder of our eyes.

Evolution = purposelessness

Now get the class to consider these last quotations, leading up to the quotation from Psalm 94. If God had not given us eyes, we would not know what it meant that he can see us.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

We have considered this point before, but it is important for all of us to realise that we can really only have any purpose in life, or reason for existing, if there is something beyond our 'threescore years and ten'.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, thank you for the gift of sight, and for the realisation it gives us that you can see. We know that you see everything that we do and pray that in turn we may learn to see you, and to be aware of your presence. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. Get the young people to ponder the fact that we have two eyes, and that each of them sees a slightly different image. Our brain merges the two, with the result that we can see perspective - a depth of vision. In the same way, when we come to consider the greater truths of life, and in particular the word of God, we sometimes see differing points of view expressed, which may apparently conflict. We should realise that we are meant to find understanding so that we can put these things into perspective and resolve them into a single truth which has greater depth.

2. The young people may be able to suggest their own 'Wonders of Creation' that are very complex and could not have evolved. You may like to consider bees, or an ant colony, or the way in which animals and plants are dependent on each other.

IN THE BEGINNING - STICKING UP FOR YOUR FAITH

11

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to cope with the pressure of school, where they are probably expected by teachers and by their peers to say that they believe in evolution and not in creation. This is something that many young people find very hard, especially if they are shy and not very assertive.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

1 Peter 3:12-18, Matthew 10:29-34

PREPARATION REQUIRED

This is largely a discussion lesson so it will depend a lot on how you are able to guide the young people to talk. If you are not in regular contact with the young people, or involved in school, you may like to talk the lesson over with someone else who is, and get their advice about how to handle it. Remember that this is ultimately something that the young people will have to work out for themselves, so it's not enough that you should tell them what to do - they need to have thought through what it means for them, and feel happy with what they have decided.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Why should we stick up for our beliefs?

Ask the young people to think about this. Why not just go along with everyone else, and pretend that we think the same as they do even if we don't? If we keep quiet about our beliefs it becomes harder as time goes on. This increases the temptation to hide things, lie to friends, and compromise. It's really not possible to think one thing and say something else all the time. The danger is that if we fool other people about what we believe, we end up fooling ourselves as well.

We know and understand things that many others don't. They may laugh at us, but ultimately we know that they will have to learn that there is a God, and that he really did make this universe. So we have a responsibility to say so.

Why is it hard?

It's no good pretending that it's always easy to stand up for what we believe, particularly in a school environment where 'Bible bashers' can be the subject of ridicule and bullying. Get the young people to think about when it is difficult, and why.

You may like to consider the examples of men and women in Bible times who found it hard to stick up for their faith: Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, ...

Reactions of their peers

- feeling inadequate
- being afraid of bullying
- worrying that they may lose their friends
- being embarrassed about the image of Christianity
- being unsure of your own beliefs
- being unsure that you could defend your own beliefs

Reactions of teachers

If a teacher believes in evolution and expects you to learn from him (or her), it is a challenge to their authority if we say that we don't believe what they are saying. How might they react:

- in class?
- when marking exams?

What might be the result of their marking? Get the young people to think this through. For instance, they might do less well in a science exam than otherwise. What could be the result of that? Is it all bad? For example, if they are led away from a career in a science subject that required them to believe in evolution, is that altogether a bad thing?

Illustrating the problem

Get the young people to script a dialogue to illustrate one or two of the problems they have identified.

What can we do about these problems?

Get the young people to look at the passage from 1 Peter 3. Is this describing the sort of situation we have been thinking about?

What to say in difficult situations

What does it say about the sort of answers we should give in difficult situations? Be ready, prepared. Is that always possible?

Think about Peter at Caiaphas' house, when he denied his Lord. How did he cope in a difficult situation? Do you think this might have been in the back of his mind when he wrote this? What could he have done that was different?

What can we do to be as prepared as we can?

Illustrating a better way

Now think through the problem dialogue(s) they have written, and consider what could be done in that situation to make it better. Rewrite the dialogue and act it out, or simply read it.

So we have just done what Peter tells us to do. Maybe we can do the same thing for other situations that might arise.

How to say it

What does Peter say about this? (speak with meekness and fear, or (NIV) gentleness and respect). You may also like to refer to 2 Timothy 2: 24-26.

Why should we do this?

- Because we don't know everything, so we should act and speak with humility.
- Because there is no point in putting other people's backs up.
- Because we are speaking for a God whose ways are far above ours.

What else? We should speak with confidence. If we are unsure of ourselves, our uncertainty communicates to other people and they are far more likely to laugh at us.

What makes this hard? If we ourselves are not clear about what we believe. So what can we do about that? Read the Bible, read other helpful books, pray for help.

What can we do (as opposed to say)?

The young people should think of answers such as:

- Choose your friends carefully.
- Bring them to CYC or whatever, so that at school you have got someone else who understands your point of view.
- Talk over beliefs or doubts with other young people so that you know where you stand.
- Go to helpful youth weekends, Bible talks, and so on.
- Realise that what the Bible has to offer is a thousand times better than anything your friends have got - so why not be a bit more confident?

What else?

What does Peter say in verse 12? Is that true of us as individuals? Does verse 13 mean what it says? Remember that Peter knew that he was going to be killed for his faith, and that many of God's people have been persecuted. So what does it mean?

Look at the passage from Matthew 10, and bring out the lessons that God knows about us, and that he understands that we find these things difficult. He also expects us to witness for what we believe.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

The way we deal with situations like this at school can set the pattern for the rest of our lives. We either learn to be open about our faith or we can become increasingly withdrawn and secretive. In the end it may determine whether we have a faith at all.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, help us to remember that if we are trying to please you, you will be with us and protect us. Help us, wherever we go, to be true to you and not to let you down. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

You may like to turn the 'problem dialogue' into a play, or short series of sketches, dealing with some of the issues from this lesson and perhaps others as well.

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD - INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The manifestation of God is an important subject which forms one of the great themes of scripture. The timeless words 'I am who I am', whether written in the present tense or the future, express from the beginning to the end of God's purpose his intention of revealing himself in his creation, and in particular in man, made in his image. It is also at times a rather neglected subject, and one that needs to be presented in a balanced way.

We do not accept the doctrine of the trinity. It is the result of political infighting within the church which, over many years of acrimonious debate, reached its pinnacle in the machinations of Constantine and the confusion of the Athanasian creed. It is a doctrine which is little understood but vehemently held, and which is used as the touchstone to determine whether or not one is in the mainstream of the Christian faith. It teaches that there are three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - co-equal and co-eternal, none of which is greater than the other, none dependent on the other, none derived from the other. This is not what the scriptures teach, and we should be careful to make sure that our young people understand why it is unscriptural and why it matters.

We should not however be so keen to disprove the trinity that we neglect the fullness of the truth. The scriptures do not teach that the Lord Jesus Christ was a mere man, or even simply a perfect man filled with the holy spirit. He was, and is, the only begotten Son of God; Immanuel - God with us.

The teaching of scripture is not always easy for us to comprehend, and it is helpful if we can be clear about our position. It is not that most of Christendom believes in the doctrine of the trinity and we believe in an alternative which we have also evolved over the centuries. We have not developed a doctrine of our own, which we have to defend. We have simply the scriptures in all their beauty and complexity, with passages which express different aspects of the wonder of God's truth. There are, as Peter wrote, 'some things hard to be understood', and it should come as no surprise if we find ourselves echoing his words when we think about this subject. So we should not feel defensive if there are a few verses which we do not fully comprehend. Would we really expect to?

The greatness of the truth led brother Thomas to write words which today would surprise us, but of which we should not be afraid. If you can, you should read the appropriate section in *Eureka* (Volume 1, pages 87-111). Some extracts are printed below in case you are unable to read the full text.

Some extracts from Eureka, Volume 1, Pages 87-111

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS APOCALYPSED IN SYMBOL

The Apocalypse being a revelation of the mystery hidden in the prophetic writings, it is to be presumed that it would certainly not omit to exhibit that cardinal element thereof, styled by Paul “the mystery of godliness,” which he says is “great.” We find it, therefore introduced to the attention of the reader in such terms and phrases as God, Jesus Christ, “He who is, and who was, and who is coming,” “the Seven Spirits which are before his throne,” “the Father of Jesus Christ,” “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending, the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is coming, the Almighty,” “I am the First and the Last, and the living one, and was dead, and behold I am living for the Aions of the Aions.” These are very remarkable, and, apart from revelation, very mysterious and impenetrable, sayings. There is One who speaks of himself in them as “I;” and he saith of this “I” that he was “the First,” “the Alpha,” “the Beginning,” “the Lord the Almighty.” This is intelligible enough, and we readily comprehend that the Deity, the self existing and first cause of all things, is meant. We also recognize in the terms the epithets bestowed by the Deity upon himself in the prophets, and with a claim to them as his exclusively.

But when we come to read the Apocalypse, we find the same terms applied to one who saith, “I am the First who was dead.” This would very naturally suggest the inquiries, “Did the Deity, who is the creator and upholder of the universe, ever die? And while he was dead, how was that universe sustained? And, seeing that death is an utter destitution of all power, how was life restored to the dead creator of all things?” ...

There is then a mystery in the premises, which as the apostle saith, “without controversy is great.” By “mystery” is meant a secret - a secret which the Deity only could reveal. He has made it known, yet the revealed secret continues to be styled a mystery, in reference to what it was originally. Paul terms it “the Mystery of Godliness.” ... “Deity manifested in flesh, perfected in spirit, seen of messengers, preached unto the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” 1 Tim. iii, 16. ...

Of Deity before Manifestation in Flesh

The apostle who had the honor of receiving the Apocalypse for transmission to the servants of the Deity, has called our attention to the consideration of the fountain and origin of life and power in what is commonly called the gospel according to John. He there points us to a certain commencement, and saith, ... “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” ...

Though John introduces two words into the text, he is careful to inform us that they are not representative of two Gods contemporary with the beginning, but of one only; for he expressly says that “Theos was the Logos.” ...

Deity Manifested in Flesh

... Thus, “the Logos became flesh, and dwelt among us,” says John, “and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth;” for “the law was given through Moses; the grace and the truth came through Jesus Anointed” - John 1:14, 17. Now, “Theos was the Logos,” says John; that is, Deity was the Word; and this Word became flesh in the manner testified. Was the product, therefore, not Deity? Did the union of spirit with flesh annihilate that spirit, and leave only flesh? Was the holy thing born a mere son of Adam? or “the fellow” and “equal” of the Deity? - Zechariah 13:7; John 5:18; Philippians 2:2. The latter unquestionably.

After this manner, then, the ETERNAL POWER, or Yahweh, became flesh; and commenced the initiation of his purpose, that He would be to Israel for Elohim. ...

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to understand how God has chosen to reveal himself to mankind through the ages. To demonstrate that in the same way as God is in the angels, in the prophets and apostles, and ultimately in the Lord Jesus, so God will live in us if we let him.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Exodus 19:16-25; Genesis 18; Exodus 3; Hebrews 1:1-5.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

If you have not done so already, look at the Introductory notes which precede this lesson. Look through the students' notes and familiarise yourself with the points that each section makes. Depending on the size and abilities of the young people in your group, you will need to decide whether to cover all the examples given, whether to divide them among the young people, and so on.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***A reminder***

If the young people have just completed the series on Creation they will probably have thought about God's great statement in Genesis 1: 'Let us make man in our image' in the context of his eternal purpose. Ask them about this and remind them of what the passage means.

The nature of God

You may like to ask the young people about some people they know, whose personality is expressed in things they make or do. It could be someone who designs and makes things, where one can see in the things they make an echo of the sort of person they are: a blunt, honest person who makes solid, strong, plain things; a fussy person who makes little, delicate objects and so on. Alternatively you may think of someone's home, or car: a nervous person who worries about her health who is concerned that nobody should dirty the carpet; a brash, outgoing person who drives a bright red car. There should be no shortage of examples: the point is that we can learn about people from things they do or own, and especially from things they make.

Begin by asking the young people what we know about God and his character. Make sure that the points mentioned below are discussed, even if the young people don't turn to the passages.

Job 36:26: God is great and beyond our understanding.

Isaiah 55:8-9: His ways and thoughts are above ours.

1 Timothy 6:16: God is immortal and lives in unapproachable light; no-one can see him.

Psalm 139:7-8: God is everywhere.

Take the young people to Exodus 19:16-25, and try to get them to imagine the scene. The people of Israel had to keep away from the mountain because of the presence of God; not only that, but (Exodus 20:18-19) they were terrified and pleaded with Moses to act as a go-between.

Manifestation

To introduce the subject take the young people to 1 Timothy 3:16, which reads in the Authorised Version 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory'. Look at some other translations to see how the verse is expressed.

Even if you are using a modern version which does not use the word, it may be appropriate to think about the term 'manifestation'. When something is manifest it is 'obvious, or clearly seen'. Its most common usage these days is probably in the manifestos of political parties, which may not live up to their name!

In the AV, 'manifest' is a translation of the Greek word *phanerosis*, and its meaning is not quite grasped by words like 'revealed'. The point about 'God manifestation' is that the invisible God, whom we cannot fully understand, has made himself 'obvious, or clearly seen' to us by revealing himself in various ways, and in particular through angels and prophets, and ultimately in the Lord Jesus. In the end he will be revealed in all his creation. That is the theme of this lesson.

If you have a large enough group you may like at some point to share the following sections among them. It is probably best to consider the first three points with the whole class.

God the Creator

In creation we see God revealed as the almighty designer and creator, causing his words to be put into effect as part of an overall design. In Genesis 1:26 'us' refers no doubt to the angels, maybe represented as Elohim or 'mighty ones' - a multitude united together with God and with a common purpose. God was in them, and they in him, to fulfil his purpose.

In the plains of Mamre

As you go through the following sections, get the young people to complete the sections in their notes.

Trace the account of the occasion when the LORD appeared to Abraham when he was 99 years old and living at Mamre - the area around Hebron.

Genesis 18:1 The account is introduced with the statement that it is the LORD appearing to Abraham.

verse 2 What Abraham sees is three men, who rest under the tree and eat a meal with him.

verse 20 The LORD says that he will go to Sodom.

verse 22 The men leave to go to Sodom, but Abraham remains standing 'before the LORD', and there follows the dialogue about whether or not Sodom will be destroyed.

verse 33 The LORD goes on his way.

Genesis 19:1 Two angels arrive at Sodom.

So, who was it that Abraham met? It was at the same time the LORD, three angels, and three men. We have to understand how it was that the Lord God walked on the earth, ate and drank with Abraham, and spoke to him about the imminent destruction of Sodom. This was not the Almighty in all his glory, but an angel, appearing as a man, with whom God was identified, and who represented him. Nonetheless the scriptures tell us that Abraham was speaking with the LORD.

Jacob the wrestler

Genesis 32:24-30: Jacob wrestled with a man, and with God, and 'saw the face of God'

Hosea 12:3-5: Hosea tells us that Jacob wrestled with God, with the angel, and spoke with the LORD God Almighty.

Again, the Almighty God appears as a man.

God revealed to Moses

In the same way God appeared to Moses in Exodus 3:1-16. Through the miracle of the burning bush God caused Moses to re-direct his ways towards carrying out God's will. Compare the descriptions of the being who spoke with Moses.

- Exodus 3:2 The **angel of the LORD** appears
- verse 4-6 **God** calls to Moses out of the bush and says 'I am the God of your father ...'
- verse 7 And the **LORD** said
- verse 13 Moses asks **God** what his name is, and in reply is given the memorial name
- verse 16 Moses is instructed to tell the elders of Israel that '**The LORD God**' had appeared to him.

Once more, it is clear that an angel appeared to Moses, but that the angel concerned bore the name of God. When he spoke, it was the Almighty God speaking, and what Moses saw was a revelation of God.

Spend a few moments discussing with the young people the memorial name of God. It is in Exodus 3:15 that the name 'Yahweh' appears. Yahweh means 'He who is' (and who will always be). Note that it is 'Yahweh' that is the name of God, not 'Yahweh Elohim' - see Exodus 6:3, Isaiah 42:8. God's words to Moses are translated in the Revised Version and in all modern translations as 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham ...'.

God does not say that at some remote time in the distant future He will become something He currently is not: rather, He promises that He will continue to be indefinitely what He already is, the ever faithful God of the Fathers, and now the protector of Moses and His people.

Brother Alfred Norris, 'What is his name', Aletheia Books

The angel of God's presence

Exodus 13:21: God goes before his people and is revealed in a pillar of fire - a defence to his people as well as a guide.

Exodus 14:19: It is an angel who is in the pillar and who leads the people

Exodus 23:20-23: The angel bore God's name and was therefore to be obeyed. He was able to pardon (or not) their transgressions.

Exodus 33:14: God promises that 'his presence' will go with them

Deuteronomy 32:10-12: The LORD God led them through the wilderness

Psalms 106:9: [The LORD] led them through the depths

Isaiah 63:9: The angel of his presence saved them

The captain of the army of the Lord

Joshua 5:13 - 6:2: Joshua sees a man, who is the captain of the host of the LORD, and who (6:2) speaks for God.

The prophets

2 Chronicles 36:12: Zedekiah 'humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD'. There was no difference between Jeremiah speaking and the Lord God himself.

Jeremiah 2:2-3: Jeremiah was speaking the words, but he was speaking for God. Get the young people to imagine that they were standing in the market place listening to Jeremiah. It would be as though God was there himself speaking to them.

In these last days ...

Now take the young people to Hebrews 1:1-5, and use this passage to place the Lord Jesus in his proper place in the pattern of God's revelation of himself. What this meant is the subject of the next topic. Suffice it to say that in the same sense as God ate with Abraham at Mamre and spoke with Moses at the bush, God revealed himself as a carpenter in Nazareth and washed the feet of his disciples. This is not trinitarian language; the trinity teaches that there are - always have been - three Gods in heaven and that one of them came down to earth as the Lord Jesus.

We shall be like him

Remind the young people that God said in the beginning, 'Let us make man in our image'.

Now look with them at 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-4 and 1 John 3:2, maybe sharing the passages between them and then comparing what they say. They speak of the present and the future; of a gradual transformation now which will be completed, in God's mercy, at the return of our Lord.

Maybe it is all summed up in 1 Corinthians 15:28 'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all'.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Although God is all-powerful and beyond our imagination, he has revealed himself to us in many ways. In understanding God's character we begin to appreciate more and more what God wants us to do and the importance of living lives which show some of his character through our actions. This

helps us to examine our actions carefully and avoid doing things which clearly do not manifest God in our lives.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, we thank you that you have revealed so much of yourself to us in practical ways through the angels, in your prophets and in the Lord Jesus. Please help us to live our lives in a way that will please you and will allow some of your character to shine out to those around us. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

- 1 Ask the students to consider a list of the typical activities which they engage in during the week and to then discuss the list in terms of how they could manifest God in their actions. Are there any activities which do not give us the opportunity to manifest God?
- 2 Act out a typical daily activity at school, university or at work in a way which does not manifest God and then in a way which does.

AIM OF LESSON

For the young people to understand in a balanced way the relationship between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

For the sake of continuity this lesson concentrates on passages from the gospel of John, in particular chapters 1 and 14.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

This may be a rather abstract lesson for some young people, and if you feel that those in your group will not be able fully to grasp the meaning of this lesson you may like to consider an alternative approach, as suggested at the end of this lesson.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Remind the young people of the essence of the previous topic - the revelation of the Almighty God, in the lives of man and of angels, so that the scriptures speak of Abraham, Moses, and others, talking, eating - even wrestling - with God.

God with us

In the light of the last lesson it is not difficult for us to see the Lord Jesus as a manifestation of God - not someone who was like God, but a revelation of the Almighty himself. Jesus did not say 'He that hath seen me should be able to work out what God is like'.

Explain this concept to the young people. The person who was walking on the earth was not one person of the Deity come down to earth but the Father, the one and only God, revealed in human form (in the same way as he had been to Abraham), and talking to his people, (as he had to Moses).

This understanding takes away most of the difficulties of passages which speak of Christ as God, and you should be able to talk about them without feeling defensive.

It can be helpful to consider the way in which human children are often like their parents, but like all analogies it has its limitations, and the relationship between the Lord Jesus and his Father went beyond mere resemblance.

The quotation below is not one to use in isolation, and needs to be understood in the context of the book from which it comes, but in the light of scripture we can appreciate why brother Thomas wrote it.

There are not three Gods in the Godhead; nor are there but three in manifestation; nevertheless, the Father is God, and Jesus is God; and we may add, so are all the brethren of Jesus gods; and “a multitude which no man can number.”

Brother John Thomas, Phanerosis, page 39

John 1

Verses 1-5

Turn to John 1:1-5, and see the echoes of creation there. Remind the young people of the lesson about the holy spirit, which found that the holy spirit is God's word, power, mind, and breath. God speaks and it is done, as in creation. God's word carries his power and authority; and 'runs swiftly' (Psalm 147:15).

You may need to explain to the young people that, especially in modern versions, the translators have reflected their belief in the trinity in the way they have written these verses. So the 'Word' tends to be referred to as 'he', even though the Greek just not convey the idea of a person (as we have already discussed in the lesson on the holy spirit). Logos is masculine, but that does not mean that it is a person any more than 'le mot' in French is a man.

Get the young people to see how many echoes of Genesis 1 they can find. Their list should look something like:

| Genesis | John |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| In the beginning | In the beginning |
| and God said | was the Word |
| God made everything | All things were made by him |
| let there be light | ... and the life was the light of men |
| darkness was upon the face of the deep | the light shines in the darkness |

Ask the young people why they think there are so many reminders of Genesis. John is trying to get us to understand the might and power of God that, in verse 14, were 'made flesh', and to think of the Lord Jesus as the start of a new creation.

Verses 14-18

Ask the young people what verse 14 means and try to emphasise the following lessons.

Here we have the coming together of the two parts of the nature of Christ

- the word, the spirit of God, given 'without limit' (John 3:34, NIV).
- the flesh - our human nature, 'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity' (Hebrews 2:14).

How these two opposing forces fought within the Lord we can only imagine, but the conflict is not beyond our comprehension, because to some extent they fight within us as well. For him, of course, the battle was to be much more intense; we are not tempted to turn stones into bread, or to rule the world.

So in Christ the word of God was embodied - became flesh. The same verb is used again when the water was turned into wine in chapter 2:9. It is not inaccurate to speak of incarnation, but the term might be misunderstood.

Like his Father, the Lord Jesus spoke and it happened. God had entrusted the fullness of the spirit to his Son.

The second part of the verse tells us that in Christ men saw the glory of God, full of grace and truth. The glory was manifested in his miracles and signs, as at Cana (2:11) or in raising Lazarus (11:4,40). John goes on in verses 16-17 of chapter 1 to emphasise the grace and truth that were revealed in him.

And verse 18 sums it all up. The word 'declared' (AV), or 'made him known' (NIV) means 'to lead something, or someone, out', as one might bring out a new car for people to see. In the same way, the Lord Jesus brought his Father into public view.

John 14

Now take the young people on three years, to the end of the Lord's life on earth, and get them to read verses 6-11. There are really two points to bring out.

- To see Jesus was to see God. When Jesus said 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father', he meant it. Not 'anyone who has seen me can work out what God is like'.
- The words Jesus spoke and the things he did were the words and actions of his Father. It is not that he was merely a bit like God, nor that he was imitating his Father; but when he spoke or acted it was God speaking and acting through his Son.

Other New Testament passages

Depending on how many young people are in the group, you could share out some or all of these references and ask them to read them:

Hebrews 1:1-3

Last week we saw how God had worked in Old Testament times; now we see how he revealed himself 'in these last days' through his Son, who was (NIV) the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

2 Corinthians 5:19

'God was in Christ' emphasises what we read in John 14:10 - that Jesus' words and actions were those of his Father.

Colossians 1:19; 2:8-9

The same root word for 'fullness' is used in Mark 6:43, after the feeding of the 5,000, when twelve baskets were filled with fragments. Imagine a basket so full of bread that it won't take any more; that is how God was in Christ - all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).

John 5:17-22

There is no distinction between the work of God and of his Son, except that Jesus is dependent on his Father (v19).

Difficulties become clear

Appreciating this perspective makes some 'difficult' passages clear. Depending on the experience (and stamina) of the young people in your group you may like to look at some of these.

Bread from heaven - John 6:35-38,51

Jesus is comparing himself with the manna. The manna did not itself, of course, descend from heaven, nor was it ever in heaven, but it was the hand of God which placed it on the earth. In the same way, Jesus came from his Father; God sent his spirit to dwell in, and work in, his Son.

Before Abraham was - John 8:58

Compare this with the words of the angel to Moses at the bush: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'. We would not have wondered at the angel saying 'Before Abraham was, I am', and would have understood that it was God speaking - so neither should we be puzzled when Jesus uses these words.

I and my Father are one - John 10:30

If anything, this argues against the trinity, in which God the Father and God the Son are separate beings. Simply, of course, it means what we have already seen - that God was in Christ, and that to see the Son was to see the Father. In the context (see verses 28-29) the Lord Jesus and his Father are one shepherd, one hand.

They shall look on me

There is a remarkable passage in Zechariah 12:10. Nearly every English translation (and the Septuagint) carries the phrase 'they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him ...'. The RSV translates it 'look on him', but a footnote - in some editions at least - acknowledges the Hebrew 'me'.

So in the crucifixion, God was pierced. Just as Abraham and Isaac walked together to the hill in the land of Moriah, so Father and Son walked together to Golgotha. It was his son's blood, but the Father, too, felt the pain - as, in passing, did the mother, 'a sword will pierce your own soul too', Simeon had said to Mary (Luke 2:35).

Truly, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

It should be to us a source of constant wonder that the Almighty God, to whom 'the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust' (Isaiah 40:15) should reveal himself in a man - not just any man, but one who 'humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross'. And the thought that this same God wants to live and work in us in the same way should change our lives.

So finally, get the young people to look at John 14:21,23. 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' When asked by Judas for an explanation, Jesus went on 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him'.

PRAYER

Almighty Lord God, we have come to wonder at the way in which you revealed yourself in a man who lived as a carpenter, who looked like anyone else, but who in his life, and especially in his death, showed us the depth of your love. May your spirit dwell in us also, so that we may become like you in the way we live our lives, and may look for the day when we may be fit for you to dwell with us for ever. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If you want to make this lesson more down to earth, get the young people to make a list of the characteristics of God, then go through them and consider how many of them applied to the Lord Jesus. Some do not apply - Jesus had a human mother; he was visible, and could be approached. These differences make some important points about why he came. In other cases, get the young people to think of examples and explain in each case how Jesus revealed what God is like.

AIM OF LESSON

To enable the young people to understand the difference between the doctrine of the trinity and Bible teaching, and why it matters.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The key passages are perhaps from the gospel of John - 5:19; 7:16; 10:34-36; 12:49; 14:7-9; 20:17. Colossians 1:15-19 is a passage you may like to spend some time considering in detail by way of preparation.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

If you have any material of your own about the doctrine of the trinity or the way it developed, look through it and consider whether to use it in the lesson.

Read through the lesson and consider which parts the young people will find most useful. There is plenty of material there and unless you have a lot of time you will need to summarise some sections.

It is always difficult in a lesson which is based upon misunderstandings of the scripture to keep positive and to avoid sounding defensive. It is important to have a balance in the way you allocate time, and to make sure that you are able to end on a positive note.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

The lesson deals with four main points.

1. The doctrine of the trinity is not taught in the Bible; it was developed gradually, over several centuries of argument.
2. The doctrine teaches that the Lord Jesus existed as a separate person before his birth, and that he is, and always has been, a part of a triune Godhead. (The subject of the holy spirit has been already discussed, so that aspect of trinitarian teaching is not covered further here.)
3. The lesson then goes on to look at some of the passages which are used to justify the doctrine of the trinity to see whether they do.
4. Finally it considers the impact that the doctrine has on other aspects of Bible teaching.

The doctrine of the trinity - the great divide

Explain to the young people what this lesson is about and ask them what they understand of the doctrine of the trinity.

Talk with the young people about this doctrine. You will no doubt have personal experience of people telling you that because you do not believe in the trinity you are 'beyond the pale' so far as

salvation is concerned. The Athanasian creed begins by saying that anyone who does not believe it will 'perish everlastingly', and the Catholic Encyclopaedia says that it is the central doctrine of the Christian religion (see the quotations in the students' notes).

The development of the teaching

Get the young people to look at the quotations from The New Encyclopaedia Britannica and the New Catholic Encyclopaedia. They sum up the essence of the first part of this lesson: that the doctrine of the trinity is not taught in the Bible, but evolved over many years.

Then look at the text of the creeds which follow. In each case ask the young people to read through the text on their own or in small groups, highlighting what they think are the main points.

The Apostles' Creed

Get the group to read this and tell you what they think of it. In general it is a faithful summary of the gospel. There is no doubt much that we might like to add to it, but so far as it goes it is something to which we would assent.

The Nicene Creed

This has the same basic structure as the Apostles' Creed: a statement about God, one about the Lord Jesus, and a third about the holy spirit. There is however, no teaching of the trinity as such. Ask the young people what they think of it, and if there are any points they want to make. Some obvious points are:

- Much of it is scriptural, and is carried forward from the Apostles' Creed.
- It has several additional clauses, several of which contain language that has no obvious meaning, such as 'God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God'; 'of one substance with the Father', and so on.
- Although it does not include the holy spirit in a trinity, it does speak of it as a person - 'the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets'.

You will want to spend some time on passages which demonstrate that these teachings are false, but it is best to wait until you have spent some time on the Athanasian Creed.

It is interesting to note that the council of Nicaea also prohibited the keeping of Jewish feasts, such as the passover, and made Easter (named after Ishtar - a Babylonian goddess) obligatory. The church was taking deliberate steps away from the Jewish roots of the gospel. The Jewishness of Jesus was inconvenient, and the doctrine of the trinity places all the emphasis on the fatherhood of God rather than on the humanity Jesus inherited from his Jewish mother. The later doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary takes this one step further, in even denying the true humanity of Mary.

The Athanasian Creed

This appears to have been produced by a number of authors in the late 4th century or first half of the 5th century AD. Get the young people to appreciate that:

- It doesn't make sense. The church explains this by saying that it is all a profound mystery. In a sense of course, they are right: the Almighty God is beyond our comprehension, and the day we pretend otherwise we are in trouble; but that is no excuse for this sort of gobbledegook.

- It contradicts itself, repeatedly following one statement with another which denies it.
- It teaches that there are three gods, even though it says it does not.
- It says that the Son was begotten, which must imply a beginning, but that he is eternal.
- It teaches that 'none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another', even though Jesus made it clear that he could do nothing except what his Father wanted him to do.

It is almost unnecessary to use scripture to demonstrate that this is no statement of truth, but you may like to use a few references simply to point out that:

There is one and only one God

A passage such as 1 Timothy 2:5 should suffice to illustrate the point.

The Lord Jesus could do nothing without his Father

John 8:28, for instance, demonstrates that Jesus was taught by his Father and did not act or speak on his own behalf.

The holy spirit is God's power

The relationship with the Father and the Lord Jesus is well explained in Acts 10:38, which demonstrates that the spirit is the power of God, which is subservient to him. Similarly, John 20:22 demonstrates a similar relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Passages of scripture that are used to support the teaching

This set of passages has been used not because it is complete but because it comes from a non-Christadelphian source, so the young people will not feel that we have chosen verses that are easy to explain.

Get the young people to look at some or all of these passages, maybe in pairs, and to make notes about how they think they should be read. You will no doubt need to help them.

| Reference | Notes |
|--------------------|--|
| Matthew 28:19 | It is through Christ that we are saved, and through his Spirit that God works. So these words express a simple truth. |
| Luke 3:21,22 | This says nothing of three eternal persons. |
| 2 Peter 1:17 | God is the Father, of course. |
| John 1:1-3,14 | These verses lie at the root of the problem of the doctrine of the trinity, and the confusion arises because it sounds as though the word, the logos, is a separate person. In fact the Greek word translated 'him' (<i>autos</i>) can mean he, she, or it. The word often applies to God in other places - John 4:24 for example. |
| John 8:24,58 | This was discussed in the previous lesson. |
| Colossians 1:15-19 | Verse 15 is no doubt explained by verse 18: Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. Verse 16 suggests that it was Jesus who made all things. However, the passage is demonstrating his pre-eminence, and perhaps a better translation would be 'for', or 'in' 'him were all things created'. |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Titus 2:13 | Jesus was a revelation of God when he first came - no doubt even greater when he returns. It is worth noting that the Greek is ambiguous - compare the AV and NIV translations to see how. |
| Acts 13:2 | These passages all record the holy spirit speaking, but there is no suggestion that a person was present. They are explained by the third passage. Just as, by his spirit, God inspired the prophets in the Old Testament, he is now speaking by his spirit to the apostles. |
| Acts 10:19,20 | |
| Hebrews 3:7-11 | |
| Acts 5:3,4 | |
| Hebrews 9:14 | The spirit comes from the eternal God, and is therefore eternal, as he is. |

Some helpful passages

This is where you can end on a positive note. If you have time, look at them with the young people; if you cannot do this, you can at least refer to them and turn to one or two examples. Your class may like to read the rest as homework.

So why does it matter?

The young people will probably have little understanding of why the doctrine of the trinity might have a damaging effect on other aspects of our faith, but if you have time it is worth talking it over with them.

The scriptures emphasise very strongly that there is one God who is responsible for all things in the universe. Other religions have constantly invented a pantheon of Gods, with different characteristics, which have laid the ground for all sorts of false teachings. To have three gods may not seem a major step in that direction, but it must surely have contributed to the situation in the Roman church where a plethora of saints is worshipped, and prayers are offered to all sorts of individuals. The Almighty God becomes a shadowy figure in the background. It is important that we keep in our perspective the relationship between the one God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the mediator by whom we come to God.

Some specific impacts of the doctrine of the trinity are these:

- The sacrifice of Jesus and his victory over sin become much less meaningful if we believe that the Lord Jesus is God the Son, who had existed in the heavens since the beginning of time. It is hard to understand how his life on earth could have contained real temptations to which he could have succumbed, with the prospect of real death if he had. Could it be possible that one person in a triune Godhead could really perish because of his sin?
- Unless Jesus was truly human, and was in reality tempted just like us, he cannot be a sympathetic high priest, as is explained in Hebrews 2:17-18. Some protest that it is blasphemous to speak of Jesus being tempted to act violently or immorally, but we know that he must have been. God cannot be tempted, and it is hard to understand therefore how God the Son could have been.
- Mary has to have been a special person to have been the 'mother of God', and so a variety of other false teachings arise.

Postscript

One sometimes gets the feeling when speaking with those who say they believe in the trinity that what they really believe is much closer to the truth than the Athanasian Creed, and that they have been saddled with an incomprehensible form of words they would much rather be without.

We should be careful not to speak as though everyone in 'mainstream Christendom' believes what the Creed teaches, and in practice should take care to listen to what people really say before producing 'standard' responses.

You may like to discuss this with the young people and to see whether they have had practical experience of discussing this subject with others.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

This doctrine has considerable impact on our relationship with those in other denominations. We have many reasons for retaining a separate identity, and if we were asked to prioritise them we might put other topics higher than this. From the point of view of most other denominations, however, this is the reason why we are regarded as a 'sect' or a 'cult'.

PRAYER

Almighty Lord, we recognise that you are beyond our comprehension. It is sad that men have written of your teachings that are not right and that these became a source of division in your church. Help us in humility to seek to understand your nature and in gentleness to teach others the truth. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. You may like to discuss the belief of Jehovah's Witnesses. They believe that Jesus was made by God as the first of his creative acts (Colossians 1:15-17) and that he lived in glory in heaven throughout Old Testament times (John 8:23; 17:5). He is the archangel Michael, who appeared to Daniel (Daniel 10:13; 12:1) and who after his crucifixion fought against the devil in heaven (Revelation 12:7-12). They then go on to interpret the archangel in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 as referring to the Lord Jesus.
2. How would you cope with someone who says that you are not a Christian because you do not believe the trinity? What would you say?

AIM OF LESSON

To explore the foundation of love in the plan of salvation and the revelation of the nature of God.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Hosea

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Read through the notes and those in the students' book to familiarise yourself with the theme. Decide how you are going to tell the story of Hosea and how much you will expect them to read to ensure they appreciate the beauty of the book without getting bogged down by too much reading.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Besides these very helpful descriptive references about God, he has also ensured that we can understand a lot more about him and his purpose. He has done this by demonstrating various aspects of his character in many ways in our Bibles.

Many people present the God of the Old Testament as a stern, vengeful autocrat, with a different God in the New - a loving, forgiving Father. When we come to look at what the Bible really says, we find the fatherhood of God and his mercy revealed as much in the Old Testament as in the New.

A Father to Israel

God reveals himself in particular, though not exclusively, as a father to Israel:

Exodus 4:22 Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son.

Psalm 68:5 A father to the fatherless ... is God.

Psalm 89:26 Thou art my father, my God.

Psalm 89:27 I will make him my firstborn.

Jeremiah 3:19 Thou shalt call me, My father. The NIV 'I thought you would call me "Father"' is a poignant translation.

Jeremiah 31:9 I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Malachi 1:6 If then I be a father, where is mine honour?

The Old Testament presents God first as the all powerful creator, lawgiver and judge, and this may be seen as conflicting with his role as father. A father is expected to be able to provide, to teach, to impose discipline, but also to be ready to love, to help out of trouble, to make allowances and to forgive.

The stern judgement of God is seen at the beginning of the Bible with the account of the fall of man. God gave his command concerning the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and the sentence for disobedience was to be death; Adam and Eve chose to believe the serpent rather than God, and so they received the sentence of death. But in the same passage, the mercy of God is seen in his promise of the seed who would overcome sin for all. At this darkest of moments, the care and provision of God was manifest.

Hosea

In the prophecy of Hosea, God is presented as the long-suffering husband of an unfaithful wife and the father of a problem son.

In the early chapters, Hosea himself is the husband and father, with his errant wife a symbol of Israel worshipping pagan idols. After their first child, she bears children to her lovers rather than to her husband, and the long-suffering Hosea accepts them and brings them up as if his own, finally accepting back his wife when her lovers have tired of her and have exposed her to the ultimate degradation by selling her off in the slave market at half-price. She is then humiliated and unlovely, no longer remotely desirable, but Hosea buys her back to be his wife again (chapter 3), because he still loves her.

This is a parable of the love and patience of God toward his people. The quality of mercy and forgiveness displayed is far beyond anything which might be expected of a human husband. It is an Old Testament version of the Prodigal Son (note chapter 4:17 where Ephraim is joined to idols as the prodigal later joined himself to a citizen of that country), wherein the hurt imposed by the runaway seems even greater than that in the New Testament parable, and the forbearance of the deserted husband must be greater too.

Note the contrast between these two verses:

Hosea 1:5 Judgement at Jezreel

Hosea 1:11 Reconciliation at Jezreel

This is typical of this book. Every prophecy of doom is accompanied by one of hope, another pointer to the nature of the God who inspired it, and of his desire to show mercy to any who will repent.

Later in the book, the family grows up, and it is the children who give rise to anxiety. In Jeremiah 31:9 referred to above, Ephraim is God's firstborn son. (Ephraim was the dominant tribe in the northern kingdom of Israel, and Israel is sometimes called Ephraim in much the same way as the UK is sometimes called England, or the Netherlands Holland). In Chapter 5, Ephraim is in trouble, but instead of turning to his Heavenly Father for help, he goes to a human power (5:13). Chapter 6 describes how he and his siblings finally decide to return, prodigal-like, to their father, and in verse 4, God as father welcomes the change of heart, but he is realistic. He has seen it all before. It is one of those resolutions which is soon forgotten. He likens it to the morning dew which evaporates away as soon as the sun is up. He will return to this metaphor (chapter 14:5) and will promise to be a lasting dew to repentant Israel.

Ask the class what tone of voice God is using in chapter 6:4. Is he angry, or judgmental, or indulgent? Guide them towards the conclusion that he is pleading, like a father grieving over a headstrong child whose behaviour is leading to self-destruction. Can they hear the sorrow and frustration in his voice in chapter 13:9?

Chapter 6:6 repeats the message of Samuel to Saul at Gilgal. You may like to remind the young people of the events of 1 Samuel 15:15-23, where Saul excused his disobedience by saying that he had kept animals alive to offer them as a sacrifice. This is the mistake that Israel were still making, and that we can make too; to think that the appearance of religion is more important than humility and obedience towards God.

What is the picture evoked by chapter 11:1-4? Is not this a nostalgic father recalling with pleasure and pride the infancy of his offspring; little episodes like when the father was teaching the child how to walk are remembered with fondness. Now everything has changed. The child has spurned the father and deserves to be punished, but the loving father cannot bring himself to mete out such dire retribution (verses 8 and 9). They deserve to be treated like those cities which were wiped out with Sodom and Gomorrah, but he will plead a bit longer yet.

What is Ephraim's reply to God's pleading at this stage? Chapter 12:8 has Ephraim replying 'What does it matter so long as I am rich?'

God responds with the words of hope which always accompany despair in this book. He will restore them in spite of themselves.

There is great beauty in the closing chapter of Hosea. Ephraim responds to his Heavenly Father's pleading, and with fulsome joy and generosity, God promises full restoration. Ask the class to list the similes he uses for Israel restored:

- The lily
- The cedar of Lebanon
- The olive tree
- Corn
- The vine
- The fir tree

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

God has the same love for us that he showed to Israel through the parable of Hosea's experiences. We can draw comfort from the knowledge that however far we stray, he is like a loving and forgiving father, always ready to receive us back.

PRAYER

The Lord's prayer begins 'Our Father' - a phrase which contrasts wonderfully with 'in heaven'. Say the prayer together trying to concentrate on the fact that you are praying to a loving father, as well as to a mighty God in heaven.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

The young people might like to look at the parable of the prodigal son to pick out the characteristics of God as shown in the father in the parable.

AIM OF LESSON

To establish the Bible principles about sexual relationships and their place within marriage, and to prepare the young people to face the challenges involved in being different from their peers.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Genesis 2:18-24; Proverbs 5; Matthew 19:3-15; 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:7; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-8

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Think about your own relationships and marriage, including any difficulties and problems faced. It would be helpful to know whether any of the group are currently involved in 'serious' relationships, especially if these are with non-Christadelphians - in fact, the better you know the young people, the easier you will find this lesson, but there's not much you can do about that in a week.

You may well feel some apprehension about dealing with this subject, but try to be open and honest, recognising that we all have emotions and that problems in human relationships affect those with a Christian background as well as others. Emphasise that none of us is immune from difficulty and temptation, and that God understands our feelings better than we do ourselves.

It is of course essential that you should respect absolutely the confidentiality of anything the young people should tell you which they do not want to be widely known. If there is anything you think someone's parents should know, you can try to persuade the young person to tell them themselves, but you should never breach a confidence.

Decide whether you want the young people to write in their notes during the lesson. You may feel it more helpful to discuss the subject and encourage the young people to think on their own about the points in their notes.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***The origin and purpose of sex***

Because sex belongs in marriage, much of the Bible's guidance about sexual relationships is found in the context of teaching about marriage. Begin with Genesis 2:18,21-24 and explain that 'one flesh' is a scriptural euphemism for sexual intercourse. You may like to discuss, in passing, why it is that the phrase is used: having made two people from one, God then joins them together again - an indication that the relationship between a husband and wife is meant to be a union of mind and spirit as well as body.

Show the students that (i) sex, in the right place, is a good thing - God invented it! - (ii) that its place is in marriage, and nowhere else; (iii) marriage is first and foremost about companionship - not about

physical pleasure, childbearing, or social custom, though all of those things are involved at a secondary level.

Erotic love is something to be enjoyed and celebrated in the context of marriage - the Song of Solomon is a love song as well as an allegory, and see Proverbs 5:18-19. The New Testament principles are set out in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Notice how the apostle stresses the importance of sex within marriage; it is important to satisfy the needs of a husband or wife; Paul recognises the strength of our sexual desires and of the temptations that are around us, and it is in this context that he writes 'since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, ... come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control' (verses 2, 5 NIV).

The character of marriage

Marriage should be permanent - until death (Matthew 19:4-6; Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39) or until the kingdom comes (Matthew 22:30). Ask if the students have been to a Christadelphian wedding where words like 'until death parts us - or the Lord returns' were used. One benefit of marriage is that it provides a stable, loving environment in which to bring up children (Deuteronomy 5:16; 6:6-7; Proverbs 1:8-9 and all of chapter 4; Ephesians 6:4; Hebrews 12:9-11). Perhaps significantly, the passage that shows Jesus' love for children (Matthew 19:13-15) follows directly after his confirmation of the permanence of marriage.

Marriage should be characterised by self-giving, forgiving, unconditional love - like God's love for his children. Read Isaiah 54:5-8 and refer to the analogy of Hosea (Hosea chapters 1-3), or to passages such as Jeremiah 3 and Ezekiel 16.

The roles of husband and wife are complementary, not the same; God has made men and women to be different from each other both physically and mentally.

The young people may not have heard the nursery rhyme about Jack Sprat and his wife:

Jack Sprat would eat no fat,
His wife would eat no lean;
And so between the two of them
They licked the platter clean.

It sounds a trivial piece of doggerel, but it is making a serious point. Jack Sprat and his wife sound incompatible, but in fact their differences complemented each other and together they made a great partnership.

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-8. Yes, there is an irreconcilable conflict with current thinking - but the leadership role which is given to husbands does not mean that women are inferior in the sight of God (Galatians 3:28). Note the context of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and the awesome responsibility on husbands (Ephesians 5:25-28). There is a line in the song 'You needed me' which goes 'You put me high, upon a pedestal'; so should both husband and wife put each other.

For a believer, marriage and sexual union have a special significance, because they reflect the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Discuss the implications of Paul's words for believing (a) wives and (b) husbands.

Sex outside marriage

From the beginning, monogamy was the clear pattern laid down by God. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one' (Genesis 2:24).

In later Old Testament times customs such as polygamy, arranged marriages, and the taking of concubines were tolerated, and even regulated in the law, but in the New Testament, monogamy is confirmed to be the clear pattern that God wishes us to follow - see 1 Timothy 3:2,12 and Titus 1:6.

Refer to the condemnation of sexual relations outside marriage in the Old Testament (e.g. Deuteronomy 22:13-29; Proverbs 2:16-19, 5:3-13, 7:1-27) and the New Testament, where the sanctity of marriage is emphasised (e.g. Matthew 19:3-9 and parallel passages; Hebrews 13:4) and sexual immorality is among the sins contrasted with the way of life of the believer (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).

Homosexuality

Homosexual practices are clearly condemned (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Discuss the challenges, and the importance, of staying loyal to Bible teaching when many people view homosexual practices as legitimate.

For believers, their relationship with God gives a special reason to resist immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

Relationships with non-believers

This is an important section - give the young people time to think about and discuss it carefully. The New Testament principle is that believers are to marry believers (1 Corinthians 7:39; 9:5).

Singleness may be a positive choice (1 Corinthians 7:8-9) or a necessity (Matthew 19:10-12). In general, marriage is beneficial and everyone benefits, but this is not always the case. Not all marriages work, and it should not be assumed that marriage is the only, or a guaranteed, way to happiness.

Relate the requirement to marry believers to the principle that relationships with husbands/wives are secondary to a believer's relationship with the Lord (Luke 14:26), and to the requirement to avoid being 'unequally yoked' (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Since sexual union and marriage are primarily about companionship, the relationship will work best if the two people share the same principles of life, the same loyalty and the same goals. If a believer does not share the most important thing in life with his/her proposed partner, they do not have enough in common for the fullest commitment to one another. To pretend otherwise would be unfair to the believer, to the unbelieving partner (who is being asked to take second place to a Lord he/she does not acknowledge), to any children (who will be brought up in a household of divided loyalties) and above all, to the Lord Jesus.

The question of relationships with professing Christians of other persuasions may be raised. Treat this sensitively, but note the difficulties that a marriage between partners of different faiths may encounter. Indeed, some (for example on what to teach children) may be even more pronounced than in a marriage where only one partner has faith, because both may passionately believe different things.

Obviously, friendships with non-believers which stop short of commitment are entirely to be expected. But in fairness to all parties, the believer should be entirely open about his/her moral position - especially if the peer group environment is such that casual relationships are 'expected' to lead to physical sex.

The contrast with today's world

The contrasts between Bible teaching and contemporary morality are fairly obvious - marriage being seen as disposable, pre-marital and extra-marital sex as normal, and homosexual relationships as of equal legitimacy to heterosexual ones. Perhaps the fundamental error is that sex is seen as being

for personal gratification, with other people often reduced to a means to serve that end. We should never treat others merely as source of personal gratification.

At the heart of true marriage is self-giving love. Sexual union is a symbol and an expression of this love, made in the context of a commitment to one another before God.

Some useful guidelines about relationships

Use your discretion as to how blunt you should be with your students, but the following guidelines may be helpful to them.

- (i) Make your position clear at the start - be open about your faith early in a relationship. Don't ram your beliefs down a friend's throat, but don't apologise for them either.
- (ii) Don't expect to understand every last detail of why God commands what he does. Sometimes, it is difficult to see why commands that seem hard to obey are so important. But think. You will find it confusing just to work out your own emotions at times. It is just possible that God, who invented human love, who created your mind and designed you in the finest detail, may understand more than you do about the best way to live. If you don't understand it all, trust him, and follow his commands. Another thing to remember is that sleeping around brings its own problems, it isn't all fun.
- (iii) Beware the 'snowball effect' - the more you get emotionally involved with someone, the more difficult it is to stop. That's why countless people start by enjoying each other's company and spending time together, and almost without realising what's happening, go too far. Don't delude yourself that it will be easy to call a halt. Be forewarned and forearmed with a clear knowledge of Bible teaching and clear principles. To use a driving analogy, before you press the accelerator be sure you know when and where to find the brake.
- (iv) It helps if your social life involves, in large measure, people who share your convictions - but remember, even this is no guarantee against the 'snowball effect'.
- (v) Don't be deluded into thinking that sex is always a great success that brings pleasure to both parties. Sometimes - often - it is, but it can also be frustrating and upsetting.
- (vi) Don't be deluded, either, into thinking that sex can be the basis of a long-term relationship. It can't. Sex can enhance a close friendship, but it can never create one.
- (vii) There is a third delusion. Don't be fooled into thinking that everyone in the world is sexually active except you. Sex is vastly over-discussed, and even those who are sexually active will so very often regret it later and wish that they had had the presence of mind and strength of character to have waited until they were older.
- (viii) Remember there is a very effective drug for switching off your moral caution and making it vastly more likely that you will do something you later regret. It's called alcohol: beware.
- (ix) The best guideline of all, in virtually any situation, is to ask, "What would Jesus do?" - remember he was 'tempted in every way, just as we are' (Hebrews 4:15 - presumably including sexual temptation). And even if you do mess it up, he is still there, and still loves you.

None of this should make us killjoys. The Bible's morality does not mean going around with dismal faces and serious expressions, using Bibles rather like offensive weapons. It does mean keeping our wits about us, remembering whose we are and whom we serve, and refusing to compromise on fundamental principles.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Students may like to discuss ways in which it is necessary/possible to stand up for Bible principles in personal relationships. Some may like to relate the principles discussed to their own experience (though if there are current problems these might be best discussed privately, with a leader of the same sex, outside the class).

In certain countries, students' grandparents and great-grandparents may have made their stand for Christ, sometimes with great courage, on the issue of military service. Perhaps in this generation, the issue that divides young believers from their peers will not be service in war, but sexual relationships?

PRAYER

Ask that God, who created sex and human love, may help us to use his gifts according to his will, and within his laws. Ask for his guidance in our emotional difficulties, for his forgiveness when we get it wrong, and for the wisdom to support one another in trying to obey him amid emotional turmoil.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

- Discuss some 'problem situations' and how best to handle them. Alternatively, list some of the contrasts between the morality of the Bible and that of today's society.
- Tell the young people about the Song of Solomon, and suggest to them that they read it privately, using a version in which the different characters are indicated. The sensuality of the words, linked with the highest ideals of God's love for his people, make a beautiful combination.

FAMILY MATTERS - PARENTHOOD

17

AIM OF LESSON

To encourage the young people to think about the importance of bringing up children in a Christian home.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Proverbs 22:6

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Think through the lesson in relation to the young people in your group. If they are already committed to following Jesus themselves, you will be able to emphasize the importance of wanting their own

children to worship God as well. If they are still a little uncertain you can still assume they would wish their families to grow into well adjusted individuals and good citizens and we trust they will see that a Christian upbringing is the best they could get. You may also need to think whether the references to their own parents may cause any awkwardness. You may need to emphasize that parenting is a difficult job and no human parent gets it all right and that you are not condemning anyone. Also, they need to be able to trust you if they do want to say something they would rather wasn't published round the ecclesia.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

God has given us the principle in our dealings with children in that he first called us his children. He created families so that we should know how he feels towards us. This gives us a perfect example but also shows us what a responsibility parenthood is. Parents are to reflect God and the example they give should teach children what God is like. If your children don't obey you, how can they learn to obey God? If they can't trust you, how can they learn to trust God? If they can't talk to you or ask you for something, how can they learn to pray?

This may be the time to say that God knows we are frail and as parents we can only do our best and ask him to supply where we fail. It is important to God that we take the job of parenting seriously (1 Samuel 3:11-14) but that having done our best we do sometimes have to accept that things do not always work out the way we would like them. In 1 Samuel 8:1-3, Samuel does not seem to be condemned for his children's behaviour.

Bringing up

Get the young people to think what this expression means.

To 'bring' is an active thing to do; if you bring a book to school, then firstly it is you that is in charge; secondly you have to make the journey yourself. It's no good telling the book to go to school then going back to bed. In the same way, bringing up a child is an active thing, with the parents in charge - and they have to make the journey with their children, not expect them to travel on their own. Think of God in the wilderness, guiding the children of Israel.

Secondly it is to bring 'up'. It is not that children start off good and have to be left on their own. They have to be lifted up from, and out of, normal human behaviour, and brought to a higher way of life.

What sort of parent is God?

Ask the young people to answer the first question in the students' book. They may suggest God is patient, loving, consistent, trustworthy, forgiving, authoritative, compassionate, wanting their good, prepared to make sacrifices. Importantly, God is willing to deny his children what they would sometimes like (Deuteronomy 8:3): they don't always have to have the latest toy or football shirt. The list is endless. Just make sure they have understood the principle and have covered the main aspects.

Ask the class whether they would expect a 'good' human parent to exhibit these qualities. This may be a good time to look at the passage entitled 'Children learn what they live'.

What qualities would you like your children to develop?

Having thought about the basic qualities of a good parent, ask the class to answer the second question. They will probably say things like: honesty, respect for authority, love for God, love for others, trustworthiness, hard working. These are all good values. Ask them whether they would want their children to be clever, successful, influential, better than other children. The answer to these may be 'yes', so discuss the value of these things, the dangers that may accompany them and the importance of putting godly values first.

Does the Bible say the same?

Now ask the class to look up what the Bible says about parenting. There are not many specific instructions but it is clear that parental control is a constant feature. It is important to understand this in times when the world encourages children to 'do their own thing' and family life is deteriorating. If parents want their children to grow up with godly values it is they who must be in control - not teachers, not child minders, and certainly not the television.

Discipline

Ask the young people what they think discipline is. Commonly it is simply thought of as punishment, in particular corporal punishment. In fact, the word has the same English root as 'disciple', and it includes everything involved in teaching a child. First, and most important, it must include positive teaching.

Ask the young people how they would teach a dog to sit. It would involve:

- (i) Teaching the dog by saying 'sit' whenever you wanted it to do so.
- (ii) Demonstrating what the word meant, perhaps by pushing its back end down.
- (iii) Praising the dog, at every opportunity, whenever it obeyed.

Only when all this had been done many times, and you knew that the dog understood perfectly well, would you think of punishing it for not sitting. It would never occur to anyone in their right mind to begin with punishment. Yet that is often the approach adopted by parents with their children.

So what are the elements of discipline?

Teaching

In Psalm 94:12 the word 'chastening' (in the AV, 'discipline' in the NIV) is parallel to teaching. There is no substitute for quietly and calmly explaining to a child how he or she should behave, in the same way as the Lord God does for us in his word.

Praise

Leviticus 26:3-13 is just one example of how God blesses his people if they obey him. This was not God saying 'if you scratch my back I'll scratch yours'; it was intended to reinforce his teaching by showing the people that he was pleased with them when they obeyed him.

Correction

Even though it is commonly used to imply punishment, the word correction simply means 'to make correct'. Proverbs 12:1 in the AV speaks of 'instruction' and 'reproof', the NIV has 'discipline' and 'correction'. It means explaining to a child why what they have done is wrong, and teaching them what would have been the right way to behave.

Punishment

Punishment has its place in God's dealing with his people, and in a parent's bringing up of a child (Hebrews 12:8), but there are some things that punishment is not.

- It is not taking it out of a child because you are embarrassed at how he has behaved.
- It is not losing your temper.
- It is not getting your own back because he has broken your best vase.

The purpose of punishment is to make a child sorry that he has done something *he already knew to be wrong*. It may take several forms, and you should discuss them with the young people. A good parent will choose something appropriate to the child, to the wrong committed, and to the situation.

The punishment should hurt, and you should discuss with the young people the merits of smacking. On the one hand, appropriately administered, a smack can be an effective way of chastising a child; it is a quick punishment, and the pain is soon forgotten, though the lesson should be remembered. On the other hand, the line between a loving smack and an angry assault is not always clear, and in practice a smack should be regarded as a last resort. Being made to go without a treat, or some other form of punishment (contributing to the cost of a new vase!), is normally preferable.

The important ingredients of punishment are that

- The child should know why he is being punished, and it should come as no surprise.
- He should realise that he is being punished because he did wrong, not because you love him any less.
- It should lead him to be sorry for what he did and to decide not to do it again.

The use of the word 'he' above is not meant to imply that only boys break vases, or that girls should necessarily be treated differently; on the other hand, girls may sometimes be more susceptible to a stern word than boys, though this is not always true.

Practical Questions

Having established the principles it is worth thinking about how to put them into practice. The questions in the students' notes pose some practical problems. Sometimes the answers are obvious but worth thinking about because they are frequent pitfalls. Others may not have right and wrong answers but can teach us how important the principles are as a starting point in deciding what to do. It may also show that there are different ways of handling things and parents will differ depending on the child and their own strengths. You may prefer to substitute some questions of your own and it would also be a shame to curtail any useful discussion just to get through the set questions.

Some thoughts on these questions.

1. All good habits are started as early as possible. Example is very important. Get into the habit of doing the readings together and praying together as a matter of course before you have children.
2. Example again - show that you respect God. Don't moan about the meetings. Show that you enjoy the company of people that believe the same as you and give your children every opportunity to do the same.
3. It is the example of what you want him to do. He will soon find out that you are fallible anyway.
4. He will not come to you with his problems and will not have time for you when you need him.
5. He will learn to be self-centred and unable to make his own decisions.

6. Should you expect a child to know that you didn't want him to do something, without being told? Is it fair to punish him for clumsiness, or for being too young to cope with something? It may be difficult to decide whether forgetfulness or being uncaring counts as disobedience.
7. You must respect honesty. If he realises his fault there is no point in punishment. He should be encouraged to put things right.
8. Suggestions:
 - a) Agree together the boundaries beforehand;
 - b) When challenged, don't waver. If the boundaries are right you can be confident. A child soon learns when he can get round you;
 - c) Distinguish between wilful defiance and childish irresponsibility;
 - d) If you say you will punish, punish;
 - e) Reassure and teach after the confrontation;
 - f) Avoid impossible demands;
 - g) Let love be your guide.
9. The Bible does not think it is wrong. However there are other sanctions and children are very different. It is important to distinguish between smacking and hitting.
10. A child should be encouraged to make his own decisions as he becomes old enough but only then. He should learn that he can trust your advice and take the consequences of his actions.
11. Children should be able to tell you what they think about things and know that you respect their wishes, but it is foolish to let children have all their own way.
12. Be careful of arguments like 'He's got to decide for himself what the world is like'. It is usually a substitute for being strong or planning something else for him to do. The best way is to teach the child to choose for themselves what is right; you will not always be around.
13. It would depend on the situation. It is important that children respect their teachers and work conscientiously at school, but their faith is even more important; so, potentially, yes.
14. Enough to decide whether you have the same ideals.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

It really is important that children should be brought up in a good family environment in the love and fear of God especially in a time of family decline. Our young people should have a chance to think through the issues before being landed with a situation they can't handle.

It should however be said that bringing up children is a great joy (although it has its moments) so we should not be gloomy - just realistic.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord God, for being a perfect father. Help us truly to appreciate the way you care for us and accept your discipline. Help us also to understand what it means to be a parent so that if the time comes for us we may realise the importance of the task and also experience the real joys of being a mother or father.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Suggest that during the coming week the class listen for parent/child confrontations in the supermarket, bus etc., and discuss together who was in charge, how the situation could have been handled better, what might be the result of such decisions, why the parent responded the way they did, etc. Encourage them to record good confrontations as well as bad especially if the families are ones they know.

FAMILY MATTERS - BIRTH CONTROL? ABORTION?

18

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people understand the scriptural principles which relate to this subject, and to be prepared to apply them to their own lives.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Job 10:8-12; Psalm 127:3-5, 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Corinthians 7:14.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

There are many things in our lives where scripture does not tell us directly what to do. Increasingly, as medical science enables 'undesirable' conditions to be treated - even predicted before they occur - we are faced with decisions which would never have occurred to our ancestors, and on which there may be little direct guidance in scripture.

That does not mean that the scriptures are irrelevant however; simply that we may have to search prayerfully for guidance by looking at underlying principles. That is the approach which this lesson seeks to take. Think for yourself about the scriptural principles it considers, and any others which you feel to be relevant.

Think too about the young people whose thoughts you will be guiding, and their level of education and maturity. It is likely that they will be well aware of methods of contraception, and the medical issues involved, though they may be a little confused about the moral and ethical questions.

Especially on the subject of abortion the young people may have encountered the essentially emotional arguments of both sides. On the one hand it is argued that a foetus is part of a woman's body, and she has the right to do with it what she will; on the other that to end the life of an unborn child, at whatever age, is an act of murder.

The presentation of the lesson should be carefully pitched to take into account the familiarity or otherwise of the young people with methods of contraception and the sometimes emotive details of the subject.

Try to be aware of what other religious communities say about birth control and abortion, so that if the topic crops up, their views can be discussed dispassionately.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduction

Explain the topic of the lesson, and discuss with the young people the education they will have received at school.

Make clear that there is little direct scriptural teaching on this subject, and that what there is is related to the context of marriage. The young people may have been taught that if they are to have sexual relations before marriage, it is better to use a contraceptive; scriptural teaching, however, is that sex should not occur at all outside marriage.

Although birth control and abortion appear to be different topics, they meet in the middle. There are methods of birth control (such as inter-uterine devices) which are not strictly speaking 'contraception', but which rely on preventing a fertilised egg from being implanted. Similarly the 'morning-after pill', although considered to be contraceptive, is strictly speaking a way of bring about an extremely early abortion.

Who is in control?

'Take charge of your life'; 'be in control'; 'I did it my way'. It is generally assumed that it is desirable that we should determine our own fate at every opportunity. It is held to part of the 'freedom of the individual' that we should be able to take our own decisions about what happens to us, and that we should be provided with the information that we need to take those decisions in an informed way.

There is a contrasting attitude which is taught in scripture, of submitting to the will of God - as illustrated for example by Psalm 131:1-3.

Get the young people to read Psalm 32:8-11. The contrast is between someone who is willing to accept the guidance of God, and an obstinate animal which wants its own way. Our overall attitude in life should be that we will allow God to guide our lives, and that we will accept what he brings to us.

Having said that, it is clear that God expects us to act rightly in situations with which we are confronted, and that where he has provided us with guidance he expects us to follow it. So we do not simply accept everything that happens to us: if we have toothache we go to the dentist; if poor eyesight, we get some glasses.

So the first principle is that when we are faced with decisions we should take them prayerfully and scripturally. Matthew 6:25-34 emphasises that if our priority in life is to serve God then he will take care of the future.

Contraception

Get the young people to read the extract from *Casti Connubii*, the encyclical on christian marriage dating from 1930. This may seem a long time ago, but it remains the formal position of the Roman Catholic church, and is referred to several times in the later encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.. Discuss the two passages mentioned in the extract. God's instruction to man to fill the earth cannot reasonably be regarded as placing a personal responsibility on every married couple to have

children if they can, or even as defining that the purpose of marriage is the conception of children (this was dealt with in the first topic in this series). The second quotation, from 1 Timothy 5:14, does make a general statement about the important role a woman has to play in running a home and, especially when they are young, caring for children. What it does not say, however, is that women should bear as many children as possible, or even 'the more the merrier'. As 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 would suggest, for man and wife to give honour and pleasure to one another is a quite sufficient reason for sex, although the desire to conceive children will often be present. In passing, it is worth making the point that Catholic opposition to contraception has exacerbated the grave population problems in some parts of the world.

There is no direct scriptural description of contraception. Although Onan (Genesis 38:8-10) is condemned, his sin was to avoid producing offspring for his dead brother, not birth control as such.

Some believers make a distinction between different methods of contraception - those which prevent fertilisation, and those which prevent implantation of the fertilised ovum - and view the latter as equivalent to abortion.

Today, contraception is readily available to young people (though often poorly understood), and its use advocated as a precaution in the various sexual relationships in which it is assumed that teenagers will be involved. This lesson should remind the group that extra-marital sex is wrong, with or without precautions; and that contraception belongs, like sex, within marriage.

Abortion

Like birth control, several different actions could be classed as abortion, and you should begin by discussing these with the young people.

Abortions are permitted under law for the well-being of either the mother or the child. This could be in one of several situations, and although medically they all have something in common, morally they are completely different:

- The mother may face certain death, as in the case of an ectopic pregnancy (a fertilised egg lodged in a fallopian tube; this would not medically be classed as an abortion, but in theory at least one is still ending the life of a living foetus).
- There may be a severe risk to her mental or physical health.
- She may not want the inconvenience of looking after a child when she wants to carry on having fun.
- The parents may have wanted a boy, but conceived a girl (or vice versa). This is not a legal justification for abortion, but may, in some cases, be the motivation.
- The child may be known to suffer from a severe handicap, or a disease which would shorten its life, or it may have inherited a genetic abnormality.
- The mother may feel unable to look after it properly.

An unborn child

Describe the high view the Bible takes of human life - made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The human being is described as being formed by God in the womb (Job 10:8-12; Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5), a marvellous act of creation. Not surprisingly, murder is treated very gravely and was a capital offence in the Law. The fact that the child is known to God before birth is important, and refutes the argument that a foetus is simply part of its mother's body, for her to do with as she will.

Children are a valued gift from God (Psalm 127:3-5, 128:3-4). The responsibility of Christian parents is outlined in Ephesians 6:4, and believers should think carefully whether they are able to

bring up children 'in the training and instruction of the Lord' before they try to conceive a child. It follows that parenthood is not something to be undertaken lightly, and many see birth control methods as a helpful way of planning parenthood and avoiding unexpected pregnancy. The fact that contraception is also used to escape the possible consequences of illicit sex does not negate its value within marriage.

Get the young people to look at Exodus 21:22, using a variety of translations. It must be faced that it is not certain whether the passage is talking about a miscarriage or a premature, but otherwise healthy, birth. The relevant words, translated (for example) 'her fruit depart' (AV) or 'gives birth prematurely' (NIV) also both appear in Exodus 21:4 and refer to 'children' and a man 'going out' or 'going free'. The key word is the one translated in the AV as 'depart'; it is a word meaning 'to go or come out', and it refers to a normal birth in several places (for example Genesis 25:26; 38:28 and Job 3:11); in Numbers 12:12 it refers to a stillbirth. If it is a miscarriage that is being discussed, then a man who by violence causes a woman to miscarry was to be fined, but not subjected to capital punishment as a murderer - so the loss of the foetus is not murder - but we cannot be dogmatic about this interpretation.

Another passage which may be relevant is Deuteronomy 22:5-6, where a distinction is made between the death of an un-hatched chick and its mother, presumably because if an egg is taken the mother can have more, whereas if the mother is killed the eggs will die anyway. It is doubtful whether the lesson can be transferred to human life, but bear in mind that 1 Corinthians 9:9 applies to humans a verse that was written about oxen.

Nonetheless, abortion can be seen as rejection of a gift from God, and as preventing the birth of a person who in God's mercy may have had an opportunity to respond to the Gospel. While for the world at large this may be treated as a medical matter, for us it is a deeply spiritual one: we are thinking about the miraculous process by which God brings new life into the world. Moreover, the motivation for many abortions - social convenience, selfishness, 'a woman's right to choose', will rightly be seen as unacceptable to Bible believers. Women who have undergone abortions may experience terrible feelings of guilt afterwards.

In practice, most of those who seek to follow scripture will be unwilling to countenance abortion except in extreme circumstances such as a real danger to the mother's life, pregnancy as the result of rape, or certain and severe handicap. Some would view late abortions with particular abhorrence: modern medical technology means that babies can occasionally survive even when born so prematurely as to fall within the normal legal abortion limit.

The issue of whether to abort severely handicapped foetuses, and the question of screening or testing to detect handicap, should be discussed sensitively. There are genuine differences among believers, and where scripture is silent, our responsibility is to respect those differences and to offer support, prayer and practical help to those who may need it, within or outside the brotherhood.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

The young people will be familiar with an environment where pre-marital sex is the norm, contraception treated as a routine precaution in sexual encounters, and abortion a legitimate choice where it does not suit the woman to bear a child. This lesson should provide an opportunity to discuss difficult issues from a Christian viewpoint, and to apply scriptural principles even where there is no 'chapter and verse' to give a definitive answer. As such it should form a model for how to approach other subjects.

PRAYER

Ask that God, through the scriptures, will help us to understand and deal with difficult issues such as these, and to act wisely and faithfully in our relationships with others. Where loyalty to the Lord requires us to make choices that our contemporaries may ridicule or find objectionable, may we receive the strength to stand firm.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If it is possible to do so without breaching confidence, it might be a useful exercise to consider a specific example where parents have faced one of these decisions: how they decided what to do, and what were the results of their actions. If the people concerned are willing to join you there may be benefit in them talking to the young people about their experience, and what they have learned from it.

AIM OF LESSON

To encourage in the young people an attitude that marriage is for life and that therefore they should not rush into it, but that if they do marry they should have an absolute determination to make it work.

It is not the aim of this lesson to discuss how an ecclesia should respond to marital problems that may affect its members. If the young people raise the subject you should be prepared to discuss it, but remember the aim of the lesson is to help the young people to lay foundations for the future which will help their marriages.

The general principles involved in dealing with sin within an ecclesia are discussed in the section on Ecclesial Life.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Principles of marriage: Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4; Genesis 2:18-25; Proverbs 5:15-23; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

Divorce and remarriage: Malachi 2:14-16; 1 Corinthians 7:10-15, 39; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Bear in mind that there may be students in your group whose parents' marriages may be unhappy, or broken. They will all, probably, have been affected by difficulties in the marriages of a friend's parents.

Read through the notes and think carefully about what is helpful and appropriate for the students in your group. Think about what they may suggest and ask. Divorce and remarriage is a sensitive subject and there are different views held within the Christadelphian community. Try to avoid getting bogged down with discussions about the 'exceptive' clause in Matthew 5:32 (and the parallel passages). For your own information you may refer to reprints from *The Christadelphian* 'The Lord Hateth Putting Away', 'Reflections on Marriage and Divorce' and 'Marriage and Divorce' by brother John Carter. A generally helpful book is 'Family Life in the Lord' by Don and Ellen Styles.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***What makes a marriage fail?***

Ask the students why they think they should be discussing this subject. This is an opportunity to discuss the aims of the lesson.

Ask them what they consider to be the causes of divorce and the breakdown of marriage. Surveys have suggested that some of the main areas of confrontation within the home are: children, in-laws, jobs, hobbies, religion, money, and sex. Discuss how these common areas of confrontation can

lead to the breakdown of marriage? Why might some married couples seem able to cope with these difficulties? Is it that 'successful' marriages have no problems, or that the husband and wife deal with them in a godly way?

Bible Principles

What God has joined

Begin by getting the young people to look at Matthew 19:3-6, and bring out the points that

- The word 'cleave to' (AV), 'be united to' (NIV) comes from a Greek word meaning 'to glue together'.
- This joining is done by God. It is possible in all the fuss and palaver of a marriage to forget that behind the scenes God is taking two people and making one out of them. What right have we to undo something that God has done?

What makes a marriage work?

Ask the class about the principles which should be applied in a marriage. Read Ephesians 5:21-6:4 if they need help.

- Husbands and wives should submit to one another - this means each putting the other first, being genuinely concerned for each other's welfare, listening properly to each other, sharing good times and bad, being willing to talk about problems and difficulties.
- A wife should submit to and respect her husband, making him her head, and the head of the household.
- A husband should love his wife as Christ loves us. Think of a husband washing his wife's feet (or even the dishes), and in the end being willing to die for her.
- The husband should provide spiritual food in the household.
- Children should be taught to honour their parents.
- Parents should bring up children 'in the training and instruction of the Lord'.

Ask the young people whether *any* marriage would work if both partners behaved like this. The broad conclusion should be that it would - marriages break down where one partner, or both, fail to live up to these ideals. This is not to downplay the importance of romantic love: it can make all the good things above so much easier, though on its own it is no guarantee of a long term marriage.

Suggest that these may be summed up by mutual love and respect, conciliation and commitment to God and to each other. Compare these principles to reasons commonly cited in divorce courts: selfishness, violence, neglect, incompatibility, adultery and poor communication.

Marriage should be a spiritual, mental and physical union of one man and one woman, approved and recognised by God. Choosing a partner is a very important decision.

Is divorce acceptable?

This section is not really about divorce in the modern sense of the word. To make a comparison with a marriage: when a couple marry, the legal process of signing the register is merely the confirmation of the union that is being formed, and it is the marriage that ultimately matters, not the

legal document. In the same way it is not the divorce - the piece of paper - that is the real issue but the breakdown of the marriage.

It follows from what has already been said that any breakdown of a marriage is the result of wrong behaviour on the part of one or both parties. God's intention is that both should continue to care for each other through thick and thin, and in any marriage breakdown the partners in a marriage are falling short of this ideal. We should avoid simplistically labelling the parties in a broken marriage as 'innocent' and 'guilty'; things are never that straightforward.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word which modern versions translate 'divorce' literally means to 'send away', or 'put out'. An example is the occasion when Noah sent the raven and dove out of the ark.

In the New Testament there are two words translated 'divorce': one means 'to send away', as in Matthew 14:22, when Jesus sent the multitude away; the other means 'to leave', as in Matthew 4:20-22, when the disciples left their nets and ship.

Marriage Breakdown

In this section, therefore, the emphasis should be on the breakdown of the marriage, not the legal confirmation that it has happened.

Malachi 2:14-16 - God hates divorce - AV 'putting away'. This remains the fundamental position of the Almighty.

Jeremiah 3:6-14. Before you read this with the young people remind them that in the time of Jeremiah the northern kingdom of Israel had been exiled because of their idolatry (which God equates to prostitution and adultery), but the kingdom of Judah was still continuing in the south. Emphasise the following points:

- God had pleaded with Israel to return to him, despite her faithlessness - a model of the forgiveness which all husbands and wives should offer to each other (v 7).
- Because Israel had refused to return, God had put her away, literally; the people had been taken to Assyria (v 8).
- Even now, God was willing for Israel to return if she would repent (v 12,13).
- He still regarded Israel as his wife (v 14). For your own benefit, you may like in passing to note verse 1. Although the law forbade a wife to return to her first husband once he had divorced her and she had remarried (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), God was willing to have Israel back.

Divorce

There may be occasions where divorce, in the legal sense of the word, is little more than the formalisation of a situation which, de facto, already exists. In a situation where a husband and wife both agree that a marriage has terminally failed, the legal process of divorce may be seen as a necessary piece of tidying up, so that the two can in practice get on with their lives, living apart with separate finances. The law of Moses allowed, 'for the hardness of their hearts', that a 'Bill of Divorcement' be produced.

What has to be avoided is a situation where one party is using the law to hurt the other, or as a way of taking decisions that should be the result of discussion between them or the decision of the ecclesia. That is the subject of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

Is remarriage acceptable?

Matthew 19:3-9; (you may like to look at Matthew 5:31-32, which says the same). 'Fornication' (AV) or 'marital unfaithfulness' (NIV) is the only acceptable cause for divorce. The word (Greek *porneia*) means sexual sin in general. Where a married person is involved it includes adultery (compare Revelation 2:20-22, where the two terms 'fornication' and 'adultery' are used to describe the same sin).

Mark 10:4-12. The exception is not mentioned and God's ideal of the permanence of marriage is affirmed. This passage also confirms that the principles are the same for both husband and wife.

1 Corinthians 7:10-15. This passage emphasises the command that a believing husband and wife must not separate, but seems to say in verse 15 that a believer may remarry if deserted by an unbelieving spouse.

1 Corinthians 7:39. Remarriage 'in the Lord' is acceptable after the death of a partner.

What if it all goes wrong?

As mentioned in the 'Aim of Lesson' above, it is not part of this discussion to deal with the stance any ecclesia should take when cases of marriage breakdown have occurred. It is important, however, to deal with one point in all this: where an individual stands in relation to God when the worst has happened and divorce and remarriage have occurred.

Suffice it to say that there is always a road back. It involves:

- Confession - realising one's sin and confessing it to God.
- Repentance - as far as possible, putting things right. If there are things wrong in one's life that can be put right, they should be. In the case of a broken marriage it is rarely possible to put the pieces together again, but that does not mean that nothing can be done.
- Forgiveness - as God forgave David his sin, he will also forgive ours.

As in the case of David, however, things will never be the same again. We can't expect that at the same time as God forgives the guilt of our sin he will necessarily remove the consequences.

Problems often arise regarding divorce and remarriage. This lesson is not the time to discuss specific cases, but it may be worth pointing out that God's ideals are consistent and we don't usually disagree on these things. The problems arise when ecclesias have to decide what to do when the ideals are not lived up to.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Although you are unlikely to have any married students in your group, ask the young people in what way this subject is relevant to the way they live their lives now. The important thing is that these things feed back into the way we conduct our friendships now. So advice would be:

- Choose carefully in the first place.
- Recognise that the first commitment you make is before God. Marriage is not just an arrangement between the two of you.
- Realise that problems do arise in marriage but they can be overcome, and when you are thinking of marriage discuss the principles that should apply during a marriage.

- Build up a good relationship of love and trust and praying together, so that you are prepared to stand together.

PRAYER

Psalm 51 (after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba). Read the verses aloud together. 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.' Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

You may like to discuss with the young people how we should behave, as individuals, towards people with broken marriages. What lessons can we learn from the way God treated people in Bible times?

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to put wealth into a proper perspective and to go away with some sound principles which they can use in life.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Proverbs 30:7-9

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Familiarise yourself with the content of the lesson, and think of any personal experiences or knowledge you may have that you can add. There are some additional questions at the end of the students' notes, and you may like to think about how you will discuss them, or whether there are others that you would add.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

This lesson is broadly divided into two parts: firstly some general points about our attitude to these things, then a consideration of how they should work within a home.

Personal Wealth**How does God regard us?**

Exodus 30:15: We are all of equal worth, and the price of our salvation is the same, irrespective of our wealth.

Proverbs 22:2: God brings both poverty and riches.

Psalms 49:15-20: It is easy to be overawed by wealth, but it is of no lasting value.

Is it good to be rich or bad to be rich?

This group of passages tells a story: wealth comes from God, but its benefits are limited, and to seek to be rich is very dangerous; better to have just enough to live on, and best to simply accept whatever we have with thanks. You may like to share them among the young people and get them to put the story together. If you want to do this, the passages fall roughly into three groups:

- a) Ecclesiastes 5:18-6:3: Wealth, and the ability to enjoy them, are gifts from God.
Ecclesiastes 5:10-17: Money does not of itself bring happiness ('... can't buy me love').
Proverbs 28:6: Our way of life is more important than our wealth.
- b) 1 Timothy 6:7-11: The desire to be rich brings all sorts of temptations.
Matthew 19:23-26: It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Proverbs 11:4: In the day of judgment wealth will be worthless.

c) Luke 6:22-25: We have a choice between looking for satisfaction in this life or the next.

Matthew 6:22-34: Our priority should be the kingdom of God.

Philippians 4:11-13: Paul had learned to be content with what he had, in any circumstances.

You may at this point like to think about some Bible characters and to see what you can learn by comparing them: Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13:1-13); Ahab and Naboth (1 Kings 21); Zacchaeus (Luke 19) and the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-22).

Most importantly, you should now go on to think for a while about what these things mean in practice: how do they affect our attitude to exams; to the career we choose; the course we want to do?

Read Proverbs 30:7-9 with the young people. It is a good prayer for us to use throughout our lives.

Some instructions

Matthew 5:42: We should give to those in need.

James 2:2-4: We should not show preference to wealthy people.

Romans 12:13: We should share our wealth with other disciples ...

Matthew 6:2 ... without making a song and dance about it.

What are true riches?

a) Isaiah 55:1-2: Salvation comes from God and is free.

Jeremiah 9:23-24: The only thing of which we can boast is a knowledge of God.

b) James 2:5: People who live to follow Christ will be perceived as poor.

1 Timothy 6:17-19: Eternal life is the truest wealth.

Possessions and the family

Of course all these principles apply equally in family life, but it is worth spending some time thinking about how they should work.

Who owns things?

Talk about who in a marriage should 'own' things - in particular the money; not in the legal context of what happens in a divorce, but in the day-to-day running of the home. What are the alternatives? What happens in practice? The young people (or you) may suggest:

- The husband comes home from work and gives his pay packet to his wife; she gives him back some spending money. This hardly happens these days because few people are paid in cash, and the young people may be incredulous that it ever did; but it used to be quite common. There is a modern equivalent, however, in homes where the wife runs things and takes charge of the finances.
- The husband goes out to work and regards all the money he earns as his own; after all, he's the one who earned it. Meanwhile his wife is wearing her fingers to the bone looking after the children, cleaning the house and cooking, and doesn't earn a penny except what her husband chooses to give her.

- Both go out to work and keep what they earn, regarding it as 'their' money.
- Any money that comes into the home is shared, and the husband and wife will discuss things and agree before there is any significant expenditure.
- One person takes prime responsibility, but listens carefully to the views of the other before doing anything.

Talk through these alternatives - maybe there are others, and ask the young people which they think is best. More importantly, which is right? There is little direct scriptural teaching on the subject, but perhaps passages like 1 Peter 3:7 may be helpful. This would guide us toward a pattern of life in which the husband acts as a 'chairman' in discussions with his wife; they will discuss things between them and he will act lovingly in the best interests of the family.

What causes arguments?

Begin by pointing out that money is one of the main cause of arguments in the home - there may be a recent survey on the subject. Ask the young people why this should be. It is normally things like:

- There isn't enough money to pay the bills and one spouse blames the other.
- The husband, or wife (or both) is spending too much, or buying things that the other thinks are unnecessary.
- One thinks that the other is mean.

So how can these things be avoided?

Point out that the scriptural model is the best one. It is not just God's way, but the most practical one. It would be wonderful if both husband and wife always agreed on everything, but in practice there are bound to be differences of opinion. In some cases the husband may feel that this is a matter on which his wife should have the final say - maybe on something relating to the home; at other times he may decide himself. But complete democracy is not always the best solution, if it means neither party giving way until both agree completely.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

There are some practical questions in the students' notes which you may like to consider.

PRAYER

You could pray together the words of Proverbs 30:7.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Look out some newspaper advertisements that talk about ways to get rich, or invest, or gamble. Bring them along and ask the young people what they think. How would they rewrite them?

AIM OF LESSON

To give the young people an understanding of the terms 'righteousness', 'justification' and 'salvation', to help them to be aware of their personal need, and to teach that the only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Acts 4:12; Romans 3; Hebrews 9,10; Galatians 3.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Depending on the spiritual maturity of the young people this may be an easy or hard lesson to discuss with them. Think through how they will cope with the content and adapt it if necessary. Try to avoid teaching the subject in a detached way devoid of personal involvement. This is not an academic subject - it is, by the grace of God, our way to life.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***The Law of Moses***

Discuss the influence of law in the daily life of a Hebrew in the time of Moses. What was the law for? What benefits did it bring to the people?

The important point to make is that in God's eyes the law was a like a school teacher (Galatians 3:24-25). When a child is young its parents may give it a set of rules to obey, and it may do so without really appreciating the deeper values that lie behind the rules. Later in life, the child should come to realise these deeper things. In the same way the law provided a code of moral values for the people, but at the same time should have taught them deeper lessons about God and his salvation.

- It constantly reminded the Hebrew people that they were sinners - indeed, there was a sense in which the law made them 'worse' by making them aware of sins which they might otherwise have overlooked (Romans 7:7-11).
- Hence it demonstrate that everyone is in need of constant forgiveness (Romans 3:9-10,19-20, 23).
- By the sacrifices which it laid down it demonstrated that God was not only willing to forgive sins, but insisted on it!
- It showed that through these sacrifices, reconciliation with God was both limited and qualified. Sacrifice and sanctification were possible only through the priest, and involved personal and communal sacrifices - the latter only on one particular day and repeated every year (Hebrews 9:6-10; 10:3,11).

- Imperfect though it was, it pointed the way by which salvation would be achieved, and set out to lead faithful men and women to Jesus Christ. It was a shadow of future things, an indicator - a precursor of a new way (Galatians 3:24-29).

Those who learned these greater lessons came to understand the great grace of God and the way in which salvation would come through the Lord Jesus. So David could write 'Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered' (Psalm 32:1), and in Romans 4:6 Paul comments that David had seen how God 'credits righteousness apart from works'.

Now work through the students notes with them to clarify the process of salvation and some of the difficult words. Use a dictionary if you like or compare versions and try to draw the other answers from the young people from what you have just told them.

Six big words

Righteousness

Ask the young people (a) what they think 'righteousness' is, then (b) how we can be righteous.

Righteousness means 'being right with God, being just in the sight of God'. Anyone who could have completely obeyed the law could have regarded himself as a righteous man (Deuteronomy 6:25), as God described Job, and as, in his youth, the apostle Paul thought of himself (Philippians 3:6). However, in its fullness, the law could not be obeyed, and therefore the only way to become righteous is if God grants it as a gift.

Talk with the young people about what 'self-righteousness' means, and contrast it with what the word means in scripture.

Justification

Now ask them what being justified means. In common parlance it has more than one meaning:

- to stick up for oneself and one's actions - 'he tried to justify kicking the cat'
- to act correctly - 'he was justified in doing that'

In scripture it has a different meaning. Justification means 'being made righteous'. In both Hebrew and Greek 'justify' and 'righteousness' are basically the same word, except that one is a verb and the other a noun.

Again, there is the phrase 'self-justification', which in scriptural terms is impossible.

Faith

It is important that the young people should understand that although a correct understanding of doctrine is necessary for us to have faith, the two are not the same thing, neither are faith and belief the same.

Many of the meanings of the words above come together in Genesis 15:5-6. Abraham's faith was not simply that he understood what God was saying, or even that, in the abstract, he believed them to be true. The important thing is that he was prepared to have the whole of his life dominated by the absolute conviction that God would fulfil the promises that he had made to him.

In the same way the faith God asks of us is a personal thing. We should have the same conviction as Abraham, that God's promises are true, and that they apply to us; and this conviction should dominate our lives.

Impute

The word 'impute' is an accounting term, and it brings to mind someone keeping financial records. In our lives we may do good things which could be recorded on the 'credit' side of our account, or bad things on the 'debit'. What God does in his mercy is to erase the things on the debit side, and then to enter 'righteousness' on the credit side. If you look at Romans 4 the same Greek word is translated, in the Authorised Version, as 'count' (v 3,5), 'reckon' (v 4, 9, 10), 'impute' (v 6,8,11) and so on. Modern versions are less concerned about linguistic style: the New International Version, for example, translates the Greek word consistently as 'credit'.

Salvation

Now ask the young people what salvation means, and when it happens. It is important to recognise that there are two correct answers to the second question. There is a sense in which we are saved now (Ephesians 2:5,8). In our baptism we die to one life and rise to a new one; we 'pass from death to life' (John 5:24, 1John 3:14). In another sense we will not be saved until the Lord Jesus returns; 'he who stands firm to the end will be saved' (Mark 13:13). The reason why there are two 'salvations' is that in between we can turn our back on God and lose the faith by which we were at first saved.

A helpful analogy is of a drowning man who has been given a life-belt and who is being pulled in to the shore. He has been saved from death, but his salvation is not completed until he is on dry land.

Make sure that the young people appreciate these points.

Grace

Grace is commonly, and in general accurately, expressed as 'undeserved favour'. Ephesians 2:4-10 perhaps best sums up the meaning of the word. There is a distinction between grace and mercy; grace is being given something that we do not deserve; mercy is not being given something that we do.

Romans 3:20-24

Get the young people to read these verses from Romans 3 and to paraphrase them in their notes. Something like:

New International Version text

20 Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Comments

Not that the law was bad, but that nobody can do anything to make themselves righteous.

But now God has provided a way by which we can be made righteous.

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

It is given to those who believe in the Lord Jesus.

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Everyone needs this because everyone has sinned.

24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

But we are made righteous through the grace of God.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

If the young people in our care are one day to commit themselves to God, they need to understand the hopelessness of our lives (as demonstrated by the law of Moses) and the relative simplicity of accepting the grace of God.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God. Thank you for giving us a way to have our sins forgiven. Help us to believe totally in Jesus so that you may consider us righteous.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

- 1 You might like to think about the analogy of the Passover to help explain how the Israelites had to have faith in the grace of God and the blood of a lamb to give them salvation from death in Egypt. Their journey also illustrates their salvation. They were saved at the Red Sea, but their salvation was not complete until they reached the promised land.
- 2 Ask the young people to explain 2 Corinthians 5:19.

AIM OF LESSON

For the young people to understand what it means when we say that the Lord Jesus is our mediator, or high priest, and to appreciate how he has made it possible for us to come to God.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Leviticus 8:5-9, 21:17-23; Numbers 18; Hebrews 5:1-3.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Familiarise yourself with the lesson material so that the main points are clear in your mind. Try not to get so bogged down in symbols that the real lessons of the priesthood of Jesus are lost.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***Why do we need a mediator?***

The nation of Israel were told in no uncertain terms that they did not have direct access to God. At Sinai, Moses was told to prevent them from even touching the mountain (Exodus 19:12), and the people, terrified, asked Moses to act as a go-between for them. (This was mentioned in Lesson 12, so you could ask the young people whether they remember!).

In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu offer 'strange fire' to the Lord, and are slain. We do not know exactly what they did wrong, but we should take the lesson that we should not be casual in our approach to God, or take him for granted. God says 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured' (Leviticus 10:3). Approach to God must be on his terms.

All this happened to the Jews - God's chosen people. The Gentiles were even further away from God - 'excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world' (Ephesians 2:12).

So we learn from these passages that on our own we are cut off from God because of our sins - just as Adam and Eve were, literally, when they were excluded from the garden of Eden.

What we need is for someone to bring us to God, to change the fact that we are estranged from him.

The Priesthood of Aaron and his sons

The law of Moses provided priests who would do what the common people could not.

- Aaron and his descendants were appointed as priests, and only they were allowed to serve at the altar and inside the tabernacle. Anyone else who did would be put to death. (Numbers 18:7).

- No physical defect was allowed - they had to be physically perfect (Leviticus 21:17-23).
- The priests were invested with special clothes - 'for glory and for beauty', put on in a particular sequence (Leviticus 8:5-13). You may like to think with the young people of the significance of the way the priests were washed and then covered in white; finally the high priest was dressed in his fine robes.
- Despite these conditions, access to God was still strictly limited and controlled, and in this way the weakness of this dynastic order was exposed (Hebrews 7:23).

Look at Hebrews 5:1-3, and see the summary of their task:

1. They were to represent the people in matters related to God. So when the high priest carried out his duties, he was acting as a representative of the people. It may be helpful to draw a comparison with the way an elected politician, in theory at least, is supposed to represent the people who elected him.
2. They were to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. First they had to offer for themselves (as in Leviticus 16:6, for example); only then were they in a position to make an offering for the people (Leviticus 16:15).

The Priesthood of Jesus

Think with the young people about how the Lord Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of these characteristics of Aaron and his sons; like them, to be a true representative, he had to be human (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-15). However, there are some significant differences brought out in the book of Hebrews:

- The high priests died, so there was a need for a succession of priests; but 'because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.' (Hebrews 7:24-25).
- Because Aaron and his sons were sinners, they had to keep offering sacrifices for themselves, but the Lord Jesus has been made perfect for ever (Hebrews 7:25-28).
- Once a year, the high priest was able to enter the most holy place, but Jesus (Hebrews 9:12) 'entered the Most Holy Place [heaven itself] once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption'.
- The sacrifices under the law were able to some extent to bring forgiveness, but they did not make anything perfect - they did nothing about our human nature. The sacrifice of Jesus, however, is able to 'cleanse our consciences' (Hebrews 9:14).

So how does the priesthood of Jesus help us?

This is the real point of the discussion. Left to ourselves we are still cut off from God. The need for a mediator still exists. There is 'one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5) and so the role of Jesus as mediator is crucial to satisfy our needs and to secure our salvation.

- Ephesians 2:12-15. Jesus has broken down the 'dividing wall' so that those who wish to do so may come to God through him.

- The Lord Jesus 'brings us to God' (1 Peter 3:18). It is almost as though because Jesus is in God's presence, he is able to introduce us, so that we can speak to his Father.
- Through Jesus our sins are forgiven, so that the reason for our exclusion from God is removed (Hebrews 9:15).
- Hebrews 10:19-22. The veil has been taken away.
- The Lord Jesus is our 'advocate with the Father' (AV), 'one who speaks to the Father in our defence' (NIV) (1 John 2:1).

Some find comfort in the thought that Jesus acts as an intermediary when we pray, so that we do not pray directly to our Father, but that Jesus presents our prayers to his Father on our behalf. Others are confused by the idea that the Almighty needs in some way to be persuaded to listen to our prayers, or to have them explained.

The epistle to the Hebrews refers to Christ as the mediator of a new, or better, covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), meaning that he was instrumental in bringing about the change from the pattern of the law. He intercedes for us (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25) because it is by our association with him in his perfect sacrifice that we are enabled to come to God. In John 16:26-27 Jesus says '... I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God'.

The Greek word in 1 John 2:1 is *parakletos*, which is translated 'comforter' in the gospel. A related word, *paraklesis*, is usually translated 'consolation', 'exhortation' or 'comfort' in the AV. The Lord Jesus, therefore, by the work that he has accomplished, and by his presence in heaven on our behalf, brings us comfort and consolation.

In Greek literature *parakletos* itself often signified a friend 'called in' to support, or to testify on behalf of, a person involved in a law-suit or accused in a criminal court - an 'advocate' in the legal sense, though not necessarily having the formal, professional associations which the word has for us today. It would be wrong, in fact, to allow these legalistic associations to control too narrowly our understanding of the word as John uses it: otherwise we are in danger (as with the word 'propitiation') of regarding God as a judge who needs to be persuaded to be merciful to sinners. In the New Testament the Comforter-Advocate is rather one through whose help and encouragement, through whose power and influence upon *ourselves*, we are brought before God in a right relation with Him.

The Epistles of John, Neville Smart, available from the Christadelphian Office

What about before we are baptised?

To be accurate, we can only pray 'in the name of Jesus' once we have put on his name in baptism, but this lesson should not give the impression that unbaptised people cannot pray to God, or that their prayers are not heard. Cornelius prayed to God regularly, and his prayers came up 'as a memorial offering before God' (Acts 10:2-4). The Lord who said 'suffer little children to come unto me' was surely, as in everything else he said, speaking on behalf of his Father, to whom praise is perfected 'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings' (Matthew 21:16).

The difference the Lord Jesus makes is that through him our relationship with God is changed, and through our faith and baptism we are adopted as children of God, with the assurance that so long as we continue faithful, our salvation is assured.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Prayer is not easy for any of us but it should be if we really understand Jesus' role today.

We now stand in an even more privileged position than the High Priest under the law. This gives us a deeper appreciation of what Jesus has done (Hebrews 13:10).

PRAYER

Think about Hebrews 4:14-16 for a while and then get the young people to think about a prayer of their own asking for forgiveness.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If the young people would benefit from a consideration of the symbolism of the High Priest's clothes you could obtain a colour picture and discuss the meaning of them in greater detail, and their fulfilment in Christ.

SALVATION - OTHER PRIESTS?

23

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; 1Timothy 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.

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to get into the habit of turning to God regularly and readily, and to learn the balance between reverence and directness, humility and confidence.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Jeremiah 18:1-6; Matthew 6:9-13; Daniel 9.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Pray about the lesson! Try to think of some helpful examples of prayer from your own experience or that of others. Young people are often very prayerful, and you should not necessarily approach the subject with the attitude that this is a difficult subject.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

This lesson is essentially a practical one and the more you and the young people can talk openly about your attitudes and experiences, and learn together from scripture, the better. Don't feel that the pages in the students' notes must be completed. They are there only if the young people find them useful, and to help to structure the discussion.

Our Attitude

Before approaching God we should remember that he is:

- The sovereign Lord, almighty in all things.
- Aware of our hopes, needs, strengths and weaknesses before we speak.
- Our loving Father. 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' (Galatians 4:6).

Clay and Potter

A topic you may like to discuss is the respective roles of the potter and the clay applying the lesson to our attitude to God before we approach him. Get the young people to look at the passages listed in their notes, maybe sharing the verses among them.

In summarising these passages they should note the following points:

- We are like the clay in that we come from the earth like Adam did.
- God shapes us as he wants, and has the right to do with us what he wants.
- We have no right to argue with him, or to complain about what happens to us.

How to be good clay

The young people will probably have done some pottery at school. Ask them about the clay, and what it should be like in order to make a good pot.

- It needs to be pliable - it's not possible to work with hard, brittle, clay.
- It needs to be free of lumps or foreign bodies, and even in texture.
- It must not have any air bubbles in it, or else it will be difficult to mould and will explode in the kiln.

Ask the young people to think about these things in the context of our lives. We need to allow God to work in our lives, without any hard resistant parts, and free from the valueless things that can occupy much of our lives.

Pottery

Now get them to think about how the potter prepares the clay, and how these steps compare with the experience of our lives.

- He removes it from the earth - we are separated from mankind.
- He wets it - we are baptised.
- He kneads it, often very hard, to obtain a smooth, malleable texture - God uses the experiences of our lives, often unpleasant to us, in order to teach us.
- He shapes it into the form he wants - God moulds our personalities, in the ways we considered in the topic on 'God in our lives'.
- He fires it to be tough - he enables us to withstand temptation.
- He glazes it to be beautiful and long-lasting - he prepares us for eternity.

It is all summed up in the words 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time' (1 Peter 5:6).

Approach

Ask the young people to summarise what should be our frame of mind when we pray. Important thoughts are: humility, sincerity, recognising that God is all powerful and is able to do anything he wishes, trusting that God will act for our good, knowing that he is listening to what we are saying.

You could discuss the style of language we should use. Using Shakespearean English does not of itself add to a prayer, though it is important that we should use reverent language. On the other hand the 'buzz' words of the day may convey a spirit of familiarity which is inappropriate when approaching the Almighty.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the phrases that we use at the end of prayers, and thinking of their meaning.

'... in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord'

The only specific use of this phrase in the context of prayer is in Ephesians 5:20, though there is a similar passage in Colossians 3:17. What does it mean?

Acts 3:6; 5:40; 9:27-28 are just a few examples (of many) where the phrase is used of the words and actions of the apostles and of believers in general. The point is that the Lord Jesus was not there in person; his days of teaching and healing directly were over, until he returns. But in his place he had left disciples to continue his work and to speak and act on his behalf. So they spoke 'in the name of Jesus', as though they were him.

In the same way, we pray in his name. We do not come to God in our own name, as Darren, or Chloe, Neil or Rebekah, but bearing the name of Jesus. Hence the phrase in Acts 19:5, where the people of Ephesus were 'baptized in' (NIV 'into') the name of the Lord Jesus. 'All of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ' (Galatians 3:27, NIV).

'... for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord'

There is one New Testament passage which could relate to the way it is used at the end of a prayer: Ephesians 4:32 'And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you' (the NIV has 'in Christ God forgave you'). In other words, God has forgiven us not because we deserved it but because of what Jesus did in his life and death.

The content of our prayers

Consider the Lord's prayer, for example in Matthew 6:9-13. You may like to discuss:

- The elements of the prayer - praise, prayer for God's kingdom to come, requests for sustenance, forgiveness, commitment to forgive others (see v14-15), request for guidance and deliverance, praise. It is easy for our personal prayers to neglect the first two aspects of the Lord's prayer.
- The things God possesses - thy name, kingdom, will.
- The things we 'possess' - our Father, daily bread, sins.
- The requests - give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us.

Starting points

Discuss with the young people how we can get into the way of praying more readily, though be aware that young people often pray much more naturally than adults do. It may have something to do with the words of Jesus 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3).

It is good to get into the habit of praying every morning and night - in the morning the prayer can focus on the day ahead, and asking God for help and guidance; in the evening we can look back and give thanks for what has happened and ask him to forgive our sins and weaknesses.

It is helpful also to whisper a word of thanks to God for every pleasing detail of daily life - it is a recognition of his goodness and unfailing love. A silent plea to God for immediate help is illustrated in the example of Nehemiah, chapter 2:1-5.

Another model prayer

If you have time you may like to think about the prayer recorded in Daniel chapter 9. The recognition of God's character, sin and punishment, prophecy and petition are all involved and Daniel did not distance himself from the past or present sins of the people although he was not

personally involved. Although the sequence is different, many elements of the Lord's prayer are found here. Look in particular at verses 2,3,7,9,12,16, 17-18 and 19.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

We should be able to speak with God as would to a friend or a perfect parent, and should in doing so find 'grace to help in time of need'. In prayer we are not just asking God for things, but are offering our spirits to him, as incense was offered in the temple. Prayer can it itself change us, and put things in a new perspective.

PRAYER

You could say the Lord's prayer together.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. The Lord's prayer is used much less in schools than in the past, and the young people may not know it off by heart. If so, it would be worth suggesting that they learn it.
2. You may like to look at some of the Psalms, and see how in the course of his prayer the writer is changed. Psalm 73 is a good example; compare verse 3 and 12-13 with verses 16-17 and 27-28. Some other examples are Psalm 13, 22, 52, 56 and 57. Discuss with the young people how prayer can enable us to see our lives in the right perspective. Often we start praying in one way, and by the time we have finished we are praying about, or for, something else altogether.

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to appreciate the basis of the fellowship that believers share with the Almighty God, with the Lord Jesus and with each other, and to understand how that fellowship should show itself in practice.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Acts 2:42-47; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 1 John 1:3,6 ; Philemon 1:5-7; Romans 15:26-27

1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:10-14; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:5, 11-13; 1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 2:16-18

PREPARATION REQUIRED

How you present this lesson will vary considerably depending on the spiritual maturity of the young people in your group. If they appear to be a long way from a decision to be baptised, it may be best to leave the topic until later. Some may be baptised already, in which case it will be directly relevant. For those who are wavering, it can be a valuable opportunity to consider an important aspect of discipleship.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON***Fellowship means sharing***

Ask the young people what fellowship is. Get them to read Acts 2:42-47, and bring out the things that the members of the early church shared. Try to bring out the different aspects of their fellowship:

- Practical sharing and friendship: they shared possessions (v44), and each others' homes (v46).
- A common faith: they shared their beliefs, (v44) and opinions - they were of one mind, (v46).
- Fellowship with the Lord Jesus and with God: They worshipped together (v42, 47).

Although this was the pinnacle of the fellowship of the early church, the same elements are found throughout the New Testament.

Emphasise that fellowship is not something you are in or out of, it is something you do. It's not like belonging to an organisation - a swimming club, or chess club, say - it's like swimming or playing chess. In ecclesial life, fellowship is not (just) having your name on the address roll; it is an active relationship with God, the Lord Jesus, and your brothers and sisters.

The expression 'in fellowship' or 'out of' it, never occurs in scripture.

Fellowship with the Lord Jesus and with God

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 is a reminder that our fellowship is a sharing in Christ, and that the breaking of bread is a visible symbol of that.

1 John 1:3,6 emphasises this point, and adds to it the point that it is fellowship with God that comes first. Remind the young people that the word 'Christadelphian' means 'brothers in Christ'

How should members of an ecclesia show this sort of fellowship today?

The early churches met together to observe the Lord's commandment, 'Do this in remembrance of me'. It seems very soon to have become the custom to do this on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2). They ate bread and drank wine which was a corporate act of fellowship. They were told 'drink ye all of it' (you may need to explain that this was not a command to empty the cup). As the wine was shared by all, the blood was shed for all.

Our combined worship, especially in the singing of hymns and prayers, are special opportunities for us to show the wonder of the hope that we share.

A common faith

The members of the early church all believed the same things (Philemon 1:5-7). See how in this passage the ideas of preaching the word and a shared belief come together.

How should members of an ecclesia show this sort of fellowship today?

This comes about by sharing in teaching. So Sunday evenings where the gospel is preached are not a waste of time simply because nobody has walked in off the street - they can be valuable opportunities to reinforce the gospel message and our understanding of it.

It is important to have an opportunity for members of the ecclesia to discuss the word of God together. In this way we can raise, and get help with, doubts and questions, and we can learn from each other.

There is an individual and collective responsibility to ensure that our beliefs and actions are always based on an honest and prayerful consideration of scripture.

Practical sharing and friendship

The churches in Greece and Rome were collecting money to send to Jerusalem, where the members of the church were poor.

Romans 15:26-27: the words 'contribution' and 'share' (NIV) or 'partake' (AV) are both the Greek word for fellowship (koinonia).

How should members of an ecclesia show this sort of fellowship today?

We should give practical help when there is need, not just words or advice (James 2:15-16). This could involve visiting someone who is ill, giving someone a lift to the meeting or to the doctors; doing the shopping for somebody who can't get out. Although for the most part we do not suffer the same hardships as in the first century, we should also be ready to help each other out financially. This sharing extends to all our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Just as the church in Rome were taught to give money for their brethren in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26-27, for example), so we have an obligation to provide material help for others.

We should also provide for each other spiritually. This means trying to make sure that the faith of every member is strong. It also means helping people to apply scriptural teaching in practice in everyday situations, at home, at work, and so on. This can be done formally, in any of the regular meetings of the ecclesia, but it is important also to have informal contact in each others' homes, and to be able to spend time together discussing the word of God and how it applies in practice. Things like home Bible reading groups, coffee mornings, and sisters' classes can be valuable in achieving this.

In the first century, as today, our ecclesias are made up of people from all walks of life and of different social standing. There are very few other earthly institutions where the poor and rich meet in equality together and where those of high social standing are regularly and willingly led by much more lowly (in the world's eyes) brethren.

Dealing with sin and weakness

It is helpful to provide the young people with an understanding of the New Testament teaching about ecclesial discipline. In the first century there was a different situation in that the apostles were able to speak with the authority given to them by the miraculous guidance of the holy spirit. We should not ignore, however, the fact that ecclesial discipline took various forms, with the withholding of fellowship reserved for rebellious and unrepented sins.

Are some sins worse than others?

You may need to be prepared for a discussion about this. The truth lies in balancing different points of view.

On one hand, some sins are worse than others:

- because of their effects on the sinner and those who are hurt by the sin - think of the effect of David's sin on him and his family (2 Samuel 12:10-14).
- if they are premeditated - so the sin of Judas and Caiaphas was greater than that of Pilate (John 19:11); the Pharisees would receive a greater condemnation (Mark 12:40); and the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath was punished by death (Numbers 15:30-32).

On the other hand, all sins are the same. James makes no distinction between 'having respect of persons' and murder or adultery (James 2:9-11). God forgives all sins equally (1 John 1:9). The prodigal son shows the pattern for us all; we don't know what his precise sins were, and so far the parable is concerned, it doesn't matter.

How are we to balance these apparently conflicting truths? We must separate the sin from its effects, as God does. We should not think that a sin cannot be forgiven simply because its effects are terrible, or because they continue (Numbers 14:20-23). It may be harder to repent from a premeditated sin, but that does not make repentance impossible or mean that it is not genuine.

Positive teaching in specific situations

The New Testament is full of situations where the apostles gave specific instructions in situations where there were problems - for example, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, Acts 20:30-31

'Rebuke, admonish, command'

Timothy and Titus were instructed to give instructions to members of the ecclesia in cases of sin (1 Timothy 5:20); or wrong teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-4; Titus 1:10-14)

Avoiding the company of unruly members

Members of the church were instructed to keep away from those who were refusing to obey the apostles' teaching, as in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 (the word which the AV translates 'withdraw' means 'avoid', as in the NIV) and verses 11-15. Similar words apply to those who were causing divisions, in passages such as Titus 3:10-11 ('heretic' means 'a divisive person'), or Romans 16:17-18).

Withholding fellowship

Finally, there are situations where we have to withhold fellowship from someone, perhaps because of persistent and unrepented sins, as in 1 Corinthians 5:5, 11-13. This means that someone is not allowed to break bread (v7-8), and also that ordinary friendship should be withheld (v11, and 2 John 1:7-10). Again, however, the aim is to cause someone to repent (v5), and we should always make it clear that if they do repent and change their way of life then they will be restored to fellowship.

Another reason to withhold fellowship is when someone persists in destructive false teaching, like Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:16-18). Presumably this is the same problem as is referred to in 1 Timothy 1:19,20, where the same expression is used as in 1 Corinthians 5.

Summary

The chart in the students' notes contains a selection of the passages mentioned above. Get them to look up the verses and to complete the summary of what they say. The completed chart should look something like this:

| | What was the problem? | What should happen? | What was the motive? |
|---|--------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 Timothy 5:20 | Unspecified sin | Public rebuke. | 'so that the others may take warning' |
| Titus 1:10-14 | Wrong teaching | Rebuke. | 'so that they will be sound in the faith' |
| 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15 | Refusing to obey the scripture | Avoid them | 'so that he may feel ashamed' |
| Romans 16:17-18 | Causing divisions | Avoid them | to avoid divisions in the church. |
| 1 Corinthians 5:5-7, 11-13 | Serious and unrepented, sins | Withhold personal and ecclesial fellowship | to save the person concerned and to protect others. |
| 1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 2:16-18 | Destructive False Teaching | Withhold personal and ecclesial fellowship | 'that they may learn not to blaspheme' |

Some key lessons

Bring out some general points that come from these passages:

- There seem to have been several levels of action - a 'sliding scale', where individuals were taught, admonished, shunned, until finally fellowship was withheld.
- There was always a known and positive motive
- The sinner would have known what was going on and would have understood the motive

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

It is a characteristic of all human beings that we want to belong. At school we become friends with people in the same class, or those with whom we have something in common. As adults, mothers of young children become friends; people who work for the same company have, at least, something to talk about. The world is full of clubs of people who share an interest in classic cars, caravans, sports, and so on.

The fellowship of believers is in some ways similar. We share a relationship with God, and a faith in the Lord Jesus, which brings us together. Unlike purely human relationships, however, we have no choice about who else shares it. We do not have fellowship with our brothers and sisters because we like them or get on well, and ecclesial life is not something we can take or leave depending on the weather or what is on television. It should be one of the driving forces of our lives, and it should be our constant prayer and desire to strengthen it.

Our fellowship with God changes our view of others. They are loved by him - brothers and sisters for whom Christ died - and we should love each other as a result.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, who sets the solitary in families, we thank you that in your wisdom you have placed us in ecclesias, so that in the fellowship of our brothers and sisters we can grow together in your grace. Help us to make sure that we always do and say things that will build up the faith of those around us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If the young people are not aware of it, you may like to discuss with them the statement of faith.

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to understand what worship is and to gain a balanced appreciation of the forms of worship that our Father requires and accepts.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Psalms 148, 96.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Think about the young people in your group, and how receptive they are likely to be to this lesson. You should aim for as devotional an atmosphere as they can cope with, but do not try to force this upon them; the devotion should come from their own appreciation of the wonder of the Almighty.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

If you can, try to make the lesson an act of worship, as well as a discussion about it. If you have the opportunity, and if the young people are likely to respond, you could take the opportunity to sing some hymns with them.

What are praise and worship?

Ask the young people what they think about the words in the title. Do they mean the same thing or not? Worship is to do with our attitude to God, and praise is something we give him in response. The two thoughts come together in several passages, such as 2 Chronicles 29:30.

Get the young people to look at Psalm 148:7-13, and ask them how a mountain, a tree, or a wild animal could praise God. It obviously cannot sing or speak, but it praises God by being what God wants it to be, and in so doing showing the wonder of his creative power.

The psalm goes on to speak of men and women praising God. How can we praise God in the same way? By being what God wants us to be - people who follow his ways and are guided by his teaching. Philippians 1:9-11 speaks of a way of life that is 'to the glory and praise of God'.

The importance of worship

Talk with the young people about what worship is and what it includes, and get them to think of some examples in scripture that spring to mind. The book of Psalms overflows with praises, and many have been set to music and are used as the hymns we sing today.

Read Psalm 96 with the young people (the Authorised Version text is included in their notes, and you may like to ask them to read a part each).

Then get them to look at the text and pick out the verbs - the things the Psalm exhorts people to do. Examples are: sing; declare; give glory; praise; fear - aspects which should be paramount in our worship, and in our lives.

Examples of worship in scripture

There are many, and varied, examples of worship in the Bible, and rather than dwelling on one as 'the' correct way in which we should worship it is helpful to look at several examples and to see the balance of what the scripture is teaching.

You could spend a minute or two talking about the book of Psalms. Although superficially they look very similar, they are very varied. For example:

- They display a range of emotions, from joy to despair.
- Many are written in specific situations, in particular by David when he was fleeing from Saul or had sinned with Bathsheba.
- Many are prophetic, looking forward to the Lord Jesus.
- Some are personal and intimate, others intended for formal worship in the temple.
- Some are centred on the person writing the psalm, others centred on God and his majesty.
- Some are 'acrostic' psalms, intended presumably to be learned by heart.
- Some are formal and considered, others very emotional, calling for exuberant praise.

Depending on the size of your class, either select some of the following, or share the passages among the young people and ask them to read the verse(s), then ask one of the others to summarise what they say.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Genesis 24:52 | An act of personal rather than communal worship; Abraham's servant bows down in gratitude that God has brought him to the right wife for Isaac. |
| Exodus 15 | The songs of Moses and Miriam are notable examples. Dancing as part of an act of worship is rare but not unknown in scripture - David for example. |
| Leviticus 10:1-3 | This is the occasion when Nadab and Abihu offered an unacceptable worship to God. Remember also that Cain's sacrifice was not accepted. This is not intended to frighten the young people, but it is a solemn reminder that God requires us to approach him, however enthusiastic and emotional we may be, with reverence and humility. |
| 1 Chronicles 16:37-43 | Well organised people each with a job to do. |
| Nehemiah 8:5-10 | Reading of the word, exposition, vitality and joy. |
| Psalms 137:3,4 | The captives' setting was not appropriate to instantly sing a song to praise God. We should make sure the context and attitude are correct before approaching God, not doing it for the sake of doing it, but because we want / need to. |
| Psalms 150 | Imagine a vast orchestra playing music inspired by this psalm. Everything, and everybody, is set loose to praise their maker. |
| Isaiah 29:13 | Worship that was superficial and insincere. |
| Amos 6:1, 4, 5 | A casual, complacent attitude to their worship. |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Matthew 23:27 | The attitude of the Pharisees, wanting to seem very religious to those around them. |
| Luke 4:14-22 | Jesus worshipped in the synagogue by reading and expounding. |
| Acts 16:25 | Paul and Silas in Jail - sang praises in chains whilst in prison - converted the jail keeper by their attitude. |

So why do we worship?

Why do we praise God? Try to include these important points:

- Worship is an expression of our thoughts and our gratitude to God.
- It is the reason he created us (Numbers 14:21; Revelation 5:12,13).
- Worship is recognising God's greatness, looking at our needs and acknowledging our sin.

How do we worship?

Through discussion think about different aspects of worship:

- What about formal worship in, for example, the Breaking of Bread. In what way is there worship in all the parts of the meeting - readings and exhortation, announcements and collections?
- What part should emotion play in our worship?
- Look at the hymn 'Fill thou my life, O lord my God, in every part with praise', and discuss how it is possible in the way we live our lives to give worship to God. Philippians 1:9-11 confirms that in this way we can bring glory and praise to God. John 15:8 and 1 Peter 4:11 also speak of ways in which God is glorified in the lives of his people, and Isaiah 60:18-22 describes the kingdom, in which peace and goodness on the earth glorify our maker.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

The students need to see that because our worship and praise may seem to be less enthusiastic than in some churches around us, that it isn't less intended.

We praise and worship God by following his commandments, coming to Sunday School is an act of worship. We do this for ourselves to show a Godly attitude and because we try to fulfil God's purpose for us. We have to decide for ourselves how best to do this.

PRAYER

Almighty Lord God, who is enthroned far above us, in majesty which we cannot comprehend, we bow our heads in worship and lift our hearts in praise. May we give glory to your name not only in our words but in our thoughts and our actions, so that all our lives may be an offering which will give you pleasure. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

The young people might like to plan an activity for the following week, selecting some hymns, readings, and preparing some thoughts and prayers. If this is helpful it could form part or all of a family service for your ecclesia.

ECCLESIAL LIFE - THE ROLE OF SISTERS

27

AIM OF LESSON

To enable the students - young men as well as women - to compare conventional wisdom with God's truth and to understand what the Bible really says about the relationship between brothers and sisters.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Genesis 1-3; Galatians 3:27-29; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18; Ephesians 5:21-33.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

The Bible appears to imply that men have a wholly pre-eminent role to play, and that women should, as it were, recede to the background. As with other Biblical topics and issues, we need to look at the whole of scripture and consider in the context of the time when these things were written. On the other hand, worldly wisdom tells us that women can do everything men can do and should aggressively pursue roles which have been traditionally the preserve of men. This can be a sensitive issue, and especially so if you happen to be male. You need to think through the issues to be clear in your own mind how to lead the discussion whilst allowing the students to speak freely on the issue.

Note that this topic is about ecclesial, not family, life. While of course there is much in common, and some of the same principles apply, there are also differences. The subject of relationships between husbands and wives is discussed in Part 2 (Family Life - Principles).

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Look up with the young people the relevant passages and draw from them first of all the principles that are clearly laid down from Genesis onwards. Sometimes it will be obvious what the verses are saying. In others you may have to help a little. When they are happy about the meaning get them to fill in a short précis in the students book. The gist of the argument is as follows:

Principles

The Garden of Eden

From Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2: 21-24 and Genesis 3 we can build up the picture that Adam and Eve were both created in God's image, they both were given dominion over the earth, they both knew the rules, they both received a curse and they both had a way of salvation opened to them. Eve was created from Adam's side suggesting a partnership and in marriage they were to become one flesh.

On the other hand we can see from 1 Timothy 2:12-14 that as Adam was created first he had been given greater authority and because he was not deceived, should have used his authority and made sure they did not sin. The curse on Eve, that her husband would rule over her, reflects the fact that this did not happen.

The Law of Moses

Exodus 35:21-22; Numbers 5:5-7 & 6:2; and Deuteronomy 31:11-12 show us that in many respects men's and women's services to God were on an equal footing. As is common in modern usage, the pronoun 'he' is used to cover either sex.

Other passages, however, make a distinction; get the young people to look at Exodus 13:2,12, Leviticus 12:3, Exodus 23:17. From these passages we can also see that first born males were the Lord's; boys were to be circumcised and there were times when the men were specifically instructed to appear before the Lord. Note however that this did not exclude the women. It is clear from Nehemiah 8, for example, that women shared in the feast of Tabernacles; and from Luke 2 that Mary accompanied Joseph when they went to Jerusalem at passover time.

Numbers 30:2-15 describes an area of male authority. Men and women were equally at liberty to take a vow, but a woman's father or husband was allowed to overrule her. This would seem to show that a man was to take overall responsibility for what went on in his house. Note that a widow took responsibility for her own actions and was, in this respect, in the same position as a man. A woman is subject to her father, and then to her husband, but she is not inferior.

In Deuteronomy 1:13 Moses appointed judges over the people. While they had this responsibility, they would in turn be subject to the priests and to Moses; ultimately, of course, all were subject to God. So we begin to see a hierarchy developing among the people, not in importance but in responsibility.

New Testament

Galatians 3:27-29 and 2 Corinthians 6:18 both tell us that in Christ men and women are still one. They still work together to serve their Lord. Luke 10:38-42 shows how Jesus wanted both Martha and Mary to listen to him.

Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1,7 are principally talking about married couples but we are told that the family unit in a Christian household should mirror the relationship of the church to Christ so they are relevant. We see that wives should submit to their husbands, in the same way as we should all submit to Christ. This is not because men are superior but as a mark of love and respect, and out of a desire to serve Christ. Ephesians 5:21 is included because it shows *all* should submit to each other.

In summary, therefore, the teaching of scripture is not that women are subordinate to men, while men are free to take all the decisions and expect their wives to obey them. While a wife is to be

subject to her husband, both are subordinate to Christ, and should obey, serve, and try to emulate him.

In ecclesial life

Get the young people to look at 1 Timothy 2:8-13 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. What are these verses saying about the role of women? The word for 'silence' is the Greek word 'hesuchia', and there is in the students' notes an extract from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* which would indicate that the word has to do with meekness of spirit and disposition. Also in 2 Thessalonians 3:12 (a passage directed at men) the word is translated 'quietness' in the AV and 'settle down' in the NIV. The general conduct of believers should be as Psalm 46:10 says 'Be still and know that I am God.'

Now get the young people to look at 1 Corinthians 14:28-35, where a different word - 'sigao' - is used several times. This time it really does mean being quiet, as the extract from *Vine's* shows. Once more another question is raised. Are sisters actually to be utterly silent throughout a service, not singing, for instance? There again, in what situations do these words apply? Is it only between an opening hymn and a closing prayer, and as soon as the voluntary is over they are allowed to speak? If so, what is the scriptural justification for such a view?

It is instructive to look at the word 'speak', used in verse 34 and 35. *Vine's* lists all the other verses in this chapter where the word is used, and the clear meaning seems to be of teaching, addressing the church.

The context is helpful. In the church in Corinth their services were being reduced to chaos by brethren, and sisters, addressing the church simultaneously, some in tongues which nobody could understand. Paul's solution was to insist that one person should speak at once, and that sisters should be silent.

So what are we to learn from all these passages?

- Both brethren and sisters should behave respectfully, ensuring that the conduct of the church is orderly.
- Sisters should not take a leading role in the ecclesia. It is for men to have the formal responsibility of leading the church.
- Sisters should not address the ecclesia, or have a role of teaching brethren, in the sense of having authority over them.

A notable passage in this context is Acts 18:24-26. By the time Apollos came to Ephesus he was already a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures, who was teaching boldly in the synagogue. It would have been wrong for Priscilla to have stood up in the synagogue and put him right, but there was nothing wrong in her sharing with her husband in completing his understanding of the gospel in their home.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 11:1-5. The teaching about modest apparel, which we have already considered in 1 Peter 3, and the wearing of hats which is mentioned here, also reflects the attitude of a sister to her understanding of these principles. If a woman wears flamboyant or sexy clothing it shows she has other things on her mind than the service of her Lord. It is also important for sisters to realise why they are covering their heads. It is to show that they understand the hierarchy described in 1 Corinthians 11:3, and recognise the principles of authority intended from the beginning. In this context it is instructive to consider the example of Rebekah in Genesis 24:63-65.

Rebekah covered her head when she met Isaac; clearly she had not previously felt the need to do so in the company of Abraham's servant.

After discussing these issues get the young people to write in their books a brief statement about what they have learnt.

So what can sisters do?

This is the most important part of the lesson because all the young people should feel positive about what they can do.

Paul became aware very early on in his ministry that women could exert influence for good and evil. Acts 13:50 tells us that there were 'devout and honourable women'. These women together with the chief men of Antioch were able to create persecution and great hardship for the church. Contrast the work of those women, with that of Eunice and Lois in 2 Timothy 1:5. Timothy was described by Paul as his 'own son in the faith', but was quick to acknowledge that his mother and grandmother were originators of the 'unfeigned faith' that characterised him.

Ask for suggestions from the group, bearing in mind the principles we have agreed on. The young people may come up with a list like:

- 1 Teach in Sunday School or be a CYC leader.
- 2 Write letters, give practical help and visit those in need.
- 3 Teach, for example by CBM correspondence courses, or teach in the isolation league Sunday School.
- 4 Take part in home Bible reading groups. In the sort of environment in which Priscilla taught Apollos with Aquila, this teaching may include women as well as men.
- 5 Organise events.
- 6 Talk to friends and neighbours about what you believe.
- 7 And, yes, sisters can make the tea.

There are some grey areas where ecclesias have interpreted the teaching of scripture in different ways; you may like to take the opportunity to discuss one or two of these with the young people, and maybe explain why your ecclesia operates as it does.

The most important underlying point is that this is not a matter of drawing up list of things sisters may or may not do. The fundamental lesson of scripture relates to a sister's attitude, which should not be domineering or aggressive, and to her role, which should be one of helpful service. Bearing in mind that brethren are equally called to the same values in their service of their Lord, the difference is not that great.

Roles of brethren and sisters

Of course many of the things above can be done by brethren as well as sisters. When the angels visited Abraham it was he who prepared and served the meal. In different ecclesias things will be organised in a different way depending on differing talents. This is what working together is all about.

We do have to recognise though that God has made men and women differently and for a purpose. If we are honest, most women are better than men at preparing an ecclesial supper, talking to

children and old people etc. and men are, in general, better at most of the more leading roles. We should all delight in what we can do and get on with it.

There is no recorded evidence of women addressing a congregation. There is however much evidence that women played an active role in introducing the faith to individuals. Sisters play an active part in the preaching of the gospel, and it is often the case that individuals are introduced to the faith through the example and conduct of a sister. The Bible does not portray women as 'shrinking violets'. Conditions for believers like Lois and Eunice were not easy. They were frequently persecuted, and exhibited considerable courage. It was the women who first approached the tomb of Jesus when the disciples had long fled. It was through the courageous intervention of Esther that God's people were saved from slaughter.

It is also important for the young men in the class to realise that they have duties in this area as well. Their role in ecclesial life, as well as at home, places on them a great responsibility which they have to take seriously; it is not a matter of sitting back and letting their mother, (sister, girl friend, wife) do all the work while they sit around doing nothing.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

As followers of Christ, we need to be aware of our status - that of servants. We all, men and women, should be endeavouring to respond to the commandments of God and the teachings of his Son on his terms. There is no way that any of us should assume authority or boast of achievement or ability. Neither should we be in any way partial in our treatment of one person above another (James 2:1). Scripture teaches us that we are all members of one body, and interdependent upon one another.

Now more than at any other time, girls and boys are taught to be assertive and have high aspirations in the work place. These values contradict the Christian teaching of meekness, godliness, self control and contentment.

We read that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Corinthians 3:19). It follows that as we struggle to become more godly and conform to the example of our Lord, we will find ourselves questioning modern values in society.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Thank you for making us all with different talents and abilities. Help us in our service together to make the most of what we can do and understand your greatness, the greatness of your Son and our comparative insignificance and be grateful that you still want us to work for you. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. The role of women in the family. Proverbs 31:10-31. Notice that she makes decisions and has authority – she goes out and purchases land. The family depends upon her judgement and competence. She is honoured and greatly valued.
2. There are some further questions you might like to discuss. Can an experienced sister teach a young newly baptised brother? What if a brother is wrong (consider Ananias and Sapphira)? What if a brother and sister disagree? When should I wear a hat?

AIM OF LESSON

For the young people to appreciate why it is important that as a community Christadelphians should retain a separate identity, and to appreciate from scripture what should be our attitude to other denominations.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Exodus 19:6; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; Acts 19:8-10; Galatians 1:6-9

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Look for some topical news items about inter-church co-operation and about matters likely to perpetuate division. You could visit a church or a religious bookshop and pick some information about ecumenical activities.

Go through the students' notes and familiarise yourself with the points which should emerge from each section.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Separateness is not a popular idea. Our culture is one which emphasizes that people are the same as each other, and tries to minimize differences. To some extent this is not a bad thing - many differences are prolonged without any good reason. So we need to distinguish between being separate because it is important and being separate to avoid the trouble of having to think.

The principle of separation

Spend a moment or two explaining that the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated by the English 'holy', 'sanctify' and 'saint', actually have as their basic meaning 'separated'. That which is destined for the service of God is 'separated out' or 'holy'. The 'saints' are those human beings who separate themselves in the service of Christ. Look at some examples, like Exodus 19:6.

Talk to the young people about the way in which Israel were made a separate people, dedicated to God. Their separation was physical, and God's people had a separate identity from the rest of mankind. So Abram physically left Ur; the Jews were brought out of Egypt, and were instructed to clear the land of Canaan of the nations that inhabited it.

At the same time God made provision for those strangers who chose to ally themselves to Israel (Numbers 9:14) because Israel had themselves been strangers (Exodus 22:21). This is an important point: Israel was to be separate, but at the same time a route by which Gentiles could come to God.

Now get the young people to look at John 17, and to see the difference in our situation, in that we are not told to separate ourselves physically from the people around us. Follow through the

argument in John 17. Jesus prays for his disciples, 'not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them (v15) ... and sanctify (separate, v17) them by the truth.' He prays, secondly, for 'those who believe in me through their message.' (v20). Jesus prays for 'complete unity among believers,' (v23) in order 'to let the world know that you sent me.' (v23).

Now bring out the same points from these New Testament passages, remembering the meaning of 'holy'. Look at some or all of 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, Hebrews 10:10, and 1 Peter 2:5.

Separation from other denominations

Move on now to the relationship between the Christadelphian community and other denominations. Ask the young people if they have come across any news items about inter-church co-operation or any movement towards re-integration. What are the burning issues which still divide? Should one play down these issues in the spirit of unity?

Ask whether it is a good thing that there are so many different denominations in Christendom?

Scriptural considerations

- The apostle Paul was very concerned that there should be no division in the church. 1 Corinthians 1:10-14; 12:20-25
- In this context you may like to discuss 1 Corinthians 11:18, where Paul says that one benefit of divisions is that they highlight issues and enable the truth to be distinguished.
- Disciples were warned to keep away from people who caused divisions (Romans 16:17).
- Any house which is divided against itself will fall (Luke 11:17)

Practical considerations

- People look at the chaos that exists, with so many different groups saying different things and competing with each other, and conclude that they are all wrong.
- One of the results of the divisions is that there is no clear message communicated about what the Bible teaches.
- If someone wants to turn to God they are faced with a bewildering choice of where to go.

So why are there divisions?

Assuming that you have concluded that the ideal would be a single united church, with everyone believing the true gospel, move on to discuss the reasons behind the divisions between denominations.

It seems clear that in the first century believers began by worshipping in the temple and the synagogue (Acts 2:46; 17:1-2), even though the Jews did not believe in the Lord Jesus. However, as time went on they began to meet separately. Acts 19:8-10 describes how this happened at Ephesus, and gives the reason for the separation - the disbelief of the Jews and their opposition to the truth.

Ask the young people if this is still the situation today?

Wrong teaching

The apostles realised that the gospel would become corrupted by people who, deliberately or accidentally, taught wrong things. Look with the young people at Acts 20:29-30, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, 2 Peter 2:1-2.

This is what happened. Over the centuries, the pagan world affected the thinking of Christians, and bit by bit wrong teachings were incorporated.

History

It is a sad fact of human nature that people are slow to heal divisions and resolve disagreements. It shows itself in the way we behave toward each other as individuals, but groups of people behave in the same way - Northern Ireland is an example. Once people have formed themselves into a 'club', they want to strengthen their identity, rather than diminishing it - look at the example of football supporters.

In the same way, religious groups are reluctant to recognise when they are wrong, and denominations turn in on themselves and exaggerate the differences between themselves and others in order to reinforce their identity.

So what should be our attitude to other denominations?

Mark 9:38-40; Luke 11:23. These apparently conflicting passages should teach us a lot. In the first case the man casting out demons was not opposing Jesus: he merely did not belong in the group of disciples; in the second, Jesus is teaching anyone who does not walk with him is opposing him. Our view of others should not simply be decided by whether or not they are in the same group as ourselves; it should be based on whether or not they are working for the same aims as the Lord Jesus. The attitude of the apostle Paul is a good illustration of this. Look at Philippians 1:14-18.

This does not mean that we should water down our beliefs in order to be able to cooperate with other denominations. Look at Galatians 1:6-9; 2:11-14. Paul is extremely outspoken in the way he speaks of those who taught 'another gospel', and in the way he stood up to the apostle Peter.

What are the positive reasons for remaining separate?

In order to maintain our faith

We have a distinctive and special understanding of scripture, which we can maintain only by meeting separately from other communities.

In order to preach the truth

Similarly, and just as important, is the fact that we are able, in the days before the Lord Jesus returns, to teach some important truths which are not generally believed in Christendom. Examples are:

- The unique position of the nation of Israel as God's witnesses.
- The prophecies of the return of the Lord Jesus at a time of great trouble in the world, when the future of the nation of Israel is under threat.
- Maintaining our faith in biblical morality, rather than compromising it in order to avoid trouble.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

There is a growing tendency among the churches to minimise doctrinal differences in the name of unity. However attractive, the unity is only superficial. We must be on our guard to 'test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.' (1 John 4:1)

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, you have caused the wonder of your truth to be revealed in your word, and we thank you for it. Help us to treasure the special message that we see revealed there, and to teach it with understanding and gentleness to those who do not yet understand it. Give us strength, we pray, to shine as lights in a dark world, not following the evil that we see so often around us, nor ashamed of being different. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

You may like to discuss how we should respond if, for example, we are invited to a wedding in a Church of England or Roman Catholic church. What should we do about hymns or prayers with which we do not agree?

Discuss whether we should ever attend services in the churches of other denominations? If so, what should be our attitude?

POSTSCRIPT

If you will next week be dealing with 'Thy Kingdom Come - Israel & Arabs Today', look at the 'Preparation Required' and think about whether you want to ask the young people to find, during the week, the Web sites it mentions.

AIM OF LESSON

To remind the young people of the relevance of events in the Middle East to our lives, to Bible prophecy, and most importantly to the return of the Lord Jesus.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

This will depend on how you decide to deal with the subject; see the following notes.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

The longer you have to prepare this lesson the better. There are two different approaches you can adopt.

A lesson based on current events

If possible you should try to base the lesson on actual news events and current affairs. Try to pick up information from newspapers, radio or television; in addition the students' notes contain a list of addresses for some Web sites which present either an Israeli or an Arabic view of current events. You should:

- Familiarise yourself with current events in the Middle East and find out the Jewish and Arabic view of what is going on.
- Familiarise yourself with any relevant scriptural background to these events - historical references or relevant prophecies.
- Spend the lesson with the young people going through these materials.

Looking through the Web sites may take some time, and you need to be aware of how much it may be costing. If the young people have access to the internet you may like to share out sites between them and get them to look up what they can in the preceding week - again, you need to check that they are not spending too much of their own or someone else's money.

A lesson based on the fulfilment of prophecy

The students' notes contain a chart of Bible prophecies, on which a lesson and a discussion can be based.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

If you are following the first of the options described above, the lesson will depend on the current situation and what you have been able to find out. The notes that follow, therefore, apply only to the second approach.

Introduction

Get the young people to look at the chart containing prophecies about Israel, the quotations from which they come, and their fulfilments. Get them to link the entries together with pencil lines (so that they can make corrections). The table below summarises the connections.

Prophecies of Israel

| What was prophesied? | Where? | How has it been fulfilled? |
|---|----------------------|--|
| The Jews will be thrown out of their own land and scattered into all nations. | Deuteronomy 28:63-64 | Around 750 - 600 BC the Jews were exiled. They were scattered around the world after AD 70. |
| Jerusalem will be destroyed and ruled by Gentiles. | Luke 21:24 | In AD 70 the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. It was in Gentile hands until 1967. |
| They will be persecuted in the different countries where they are scattered. | Deuteronomy 28:65-67 | Throughout the centuries Jews have been persecuted. They have been expelled from most of the countries they lived in. Probably the worst persecution was in the holocaust. |
| They will return to their land and will rule it themselves. | Ezekiel 36:8,12 | Jews have return to Israel from over 100 countries. In 1948 they became an independent state. |
| The desert areas of Israel will blossom. | Ezekiel 36:34-35 | Until 1948 much of the land of Israel was swamp or desert. Since then Israel has successfully cultivated many of these areas. |
| The land of Israel will be given back to its people before Jerusalem. | Zechariah 12:7 | The Jews ruled some of the land of Israel in 1948, but they did not govern all Jerusalem until 1967. |
| When the Jews return to their land there will be trouble. | Zechariah 10:9,11 | When the State of Israel was declared, the Arab nations immediately attacked. There have been several wars since then, and Israel has never been really at peace. |
| Jerusalem will be the focus of problems for the nations. | Zechariah 12:2 | In the disputes over territory Jerusalem has been a focus of conflict. |
| During these troubles the nation of Lebanon will see destruction. | Zechariah 11:1 | Lebanon was once a beautiful country with a luxurious tourist area and a rich financial centre. Since 1975 war has destroyed it. |
| Israel will produce fruit that will go all over the world. | Isaiah 27:6 | Since 1948 Israel has produced abundant fruit and exports it to many countries. |
| After their return they will still be a Godless people. | Ezekiel 39:26 | Modern Israel is a materialistic, secular state which relies on its own military power. |
| A king will rule with justice and righteousness. | Isaiah 32:1 | This has not yet been fulfilled. |

There are many opportunities for discussion here, so take the opportunity to fill in the details of each of the points in the chart.

The Pattern of the Return

Get the young people to look at the information about the Jewish population of Palestine, and encourage them to think about why the population increased at particular times. This should identify

the holocaust as the key event in driving Jews back to Israel, although stress that persecution also went on after the Second World War in Russia and that the most recent wave of immigrants followed the collapse of Communist rule.

How does this relate to Bible prophecy? Look at Jeremiah 16:14-16.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Stress again how remarkable all this is. The way God has never forgotten his people (Jeremiah 30:3; Jeremiah 31:35-37) is a clear proof of the Bible's claims to be God's Word and to prophesy the near return of Jesus.

PRAYER

You may like to look at some passages such as Paul's prayer in Romans 10:1 or Psalm 122:6-9, and write a prayer with the young people.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Get the young people to look at Jeremiah 30 and 31. Emphasize the hopelessness of the Jewish nation when Jeremiah was given these words - in the last stages of the kingdom of Judah, facing siege in Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and the captivity in Babylon. Ask the students to identify which prophecies in these chapters have, and have not, been fulfilled. If time is pressing, split the task up amongst them.

They should identify the following fulfilled prophecies ...

- Jews regathered to Israel at a time of great distress and persecution (Jeremiah 30:11-15; Jeremiah 31:1-7, 9, 15-17).
- Jews return to Israel from every land, especially the North (Jeremiah 31:8,10).
- Those who had persecuted them are suddenly overcome (Jeremiah 30:16,20).
- The land is replanted and prospers (Jeremiah 30:18, Jeremiah 31:5).

... and the following yet to be fulfilled ...

- The coming of Prince (Messiah) to rule (Jeremiah 30:21).
- A new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- Faithfulness to God restored (Jeremiah 31:6).

Ask the young people to make the connection between the fulfilled prophecies and the events of the last century.

AIM OF LESSON

The aim of this lesson is to create in the young people an expectancy that the return of Christ is near, and an awareness of the signs we should look out for. It is not to produce a 'tick-list' of things that must happen first, nor to place the events in a precise sequence; the Almighty knows what he will do, and we may safely leave the details to him.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Ezekiel 38,39; Daniel 11,12; Joel 2,3; Haggai 2; Zechariah 10,12,14; Mark 13; 2 Thessalonians 1,2; Revelation 11,16,17,19,20.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Find a map which indicates the lands occupied by the descendants of Noah, to assist in discussion of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

The intention in this lesson is for the young people to complete a chart such as the one set out below. It should be emphasised that it is not intended as a definitive statement, nor as an accurate sequence of events. It merely tries to set out relevant scriptural passages in such a way as to provide a framework for teaching and discussion.

Begin by asking them to think of the things they expect to happen at the time of the return of Jesus, and write them on a whiteboard or piece of paper. They may think of most of the points in the left-hand column of the table. In some respects the sequence is straightforward; nations have to come to fight against Israel before they are defeated, for example. So without labouring the point, try to get their points in a 'good' sequence, and help them to fill in the left hand column, giving them some advice about where they should leave gaps if there are things they have not thought of.

Now, beginning with Ezekiel 38, look at the passages listed along the top. There may be other references which you would like to add, or to substitute, but they are a good starting point.

In several cases successive chapters appear to speak of the same events, sometimes in slightly different ways. For example, Ezekiel 36:27 speaks of the conversion of the people of Israel: 'I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees ...', as does 39:29 - 'I will pour out my spirit on the house of Israel'. Whether or not these verses are speaking of the same event is not certain, but the table below does attempt to resolve these parallels where they occur.

The following notes may be helpful.

Ezekiel 38, 39

These chapters contain the only Old Testament reference to Gog. It is clear that Gog is the name of a prince, while Magog is his land. Look at Ezekiel 38:1-6 and spend a moment or two identifying the other nations involved. You may like to look at Genesis 10:2-3 and Ezekiel 27:13-15.

38:7-9

Dwelling in safety; compare with Ezekiel 34:25-28. It is open to some question whether they live in safety at present, but compared with the persecutions of previous centuries the situation is a dramatic improvement. 'Like a cloud covering the land': a similar analogy occurs in Ezekiel 38:16 and in Joel 2:2.

38:14-16; 39:1-2

The invasion comes from the far north. It is wise not to be too dogmatic about the precise direction from which Gog and his allies will come; the Assyrian and Babylonian armies are also described as coming from the north (as in Jeremiah 50:41, and Ezekiel 26:7). It is worth also reflecting on Ezekiel 38:17, which suggests that Gog is to be identified with an Old Testament enemy of Israel.

38:19-20

There are repeated references to earthquakes in these passages, which are presumably literal.

38:21-23; 39:3-6

Another repeated pattern is that the deliverance will clearly be from God, and will not be seen as another triumph for the Israeli forces.

39:9-10

There is a row in the table entitled 'Cleansing the land'. The other passages refer to cleansing by flowing water.

39:21-22, 26-29

These verses speak of the grace of God extended to the people of Israel, in contrast to their faithlessness.

Daniel 11, 12

11:40-43

These verses would seem to apply to the very end not just because of verse 40 but also by virtue of the link at the start of chapter 12.

12:1-3

You may also like to discuss verse 4.

Joel 2,3

This prophecy makes no direct link to any specific historical context, although it no doubt had one. However, towards the end of the book there are many references to the final completion of the purpose of God in the redemption of his people and the judgment of the nations.

2:1-12

A frightening picture of destruction.

2:18-27

It is the Almighty who brings the army, and who then defeats it.

2:28-32

You will recall that the apostle Peter quoted this passage at Pentecost, and appears to have stopped in the middle of v32.

3:1-2

The valley of Jehoshaphat is presumable a reminder of the day when God routed the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites in the wilderness of Tekoa, about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. Whether it refers to a literal valley, or to the manner of the victory, is unclear. There are many echoes in 2 Chronicles 20:22-25 of these events - the repentance of Israel; the victory wrought by God in bringing their enemies to destroy themselves; the clearing of the land afterwards.

Haggai 2

There are some historical parallels with the days of Haggai: people returned to their land, surrounded by enemies, building their own houses rather than a house for God.

2:6-7

The image is of the Almighty shaking the nations like someone holding something upside down and shaking it to collect whatever falls. You may like also to look at Hebrews 12:26-28, where this passage is quoted in a future context.

Zechariah 10, 12, 14

It seems likely that chapters 12 and 14 are talking of the same events - there are many parallels, but it is not certain.

Mark 13

There is a point at which the Olivet prophecy turns from the events of the first century to the events surrounding the return of Christ, and it seems that it occurs at around verse 19.

2 Thessalonians 1,2

You may, or may not, feel it appropriate to discuss the 'man of lawlessness' in chapter 2.

Revelation 11, 16, 17, 19, 20

11:13-18

The seventh trumpet covers the time when the 'mystery of God is finished' (10:7).

16:17-21

Whether the events of Armageddon are the same as those described in Ezekiel 38 and the other passages is not certain, but there are many common elements.

Some other relevant passages

You may also like to think about Psalm 2, Daniel 2, Daniel 7:18-27, and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

| | Ezekiel | Daniel | Joel | Haggai | Zechariah | Mark | 2 Thessalonians | Revelation |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Israel regathered | 38:7-9 | | 3:1 | | 10:7-10 | | | |
| Time of trouble | | 12:1 | | | | 13:20-23 | 2:1-4 | 16 |
| Many nations invade | 38:14-16; 39:1-2 | 11:40-43 | 2:1-12; 3:2, 9-14 | | 12:2-3; 14:1-2 | | | |
| The Lord fights against the nations | 38:21-23; 39:3-6 | 12:1 | 2:18-27; 3:16 | 2:22 | 12:4-5; 14:3 | | | 11:15-18; 17:12-14 |
| Signs in sun moon and stars | | | 3:15 | | | 13:24-25 | | |
| The return of Christ | | | | | 14:4 | 13:26-27 | 1:6-7; 2:8 | 19:11-19 |
| Earthquake | 38:19-20 | | 3:16 | 2:6-7, 21 | 14:4 | | | 11:13-14 |
| Cleansing the land | 39:9-10 | | 3:18 | | 14:8 | | | |
| Repentance of Israel | 39:21-22; 25-29 | | 2:28-32; 3:21 | | 12:10-13:1 | | | |
| Resurrection and judgment | | 12:2-3 | | | | | 1:8-10 | 20:4-5 |
| Worship from Jerusalem | | | | 2:7-8 | | | | |

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Point out that all these events could take only a few days. Modern warfare does not depend any more on armies marching at 3 miles an hour. The events of the wars in 1967 and 1973 illustrate how much can happen in a day.

The relevance to our time is not that we should be able to predict precisely what is going to happen - still less that we should argue about it. What matters is that, as Jesus said at the end of the Olivet prophecy, we should watch, and always be ready for his return.

PRAYER

Almighty Lord God, we do not know when the Lord Jesus Christ will return, but we thank you that you have given us so many glimpses of what the days will be like. We pray that we may be ready when he comes, and prepared to welcome him. In his name, Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. If you have a suitable wall area, you may be able to represent the chart in the students' notes by a layout of paper notes stuck onto the wall with some form of removable(!) adhesive.
2. Look with the young people at Mark 13:35-37, and discuss with them what 'watching' involves.

THY KINGDOM COME - PICTURES OF PEACE

31

AIM OF LESSON

For the young people to want the kingdom to come because of the blessings it will bring.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Psalm 72; Ezekiel 47:8-12; Isaiah 35; Micah 4:1-2.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Familiarise yourself with the relevant passages so that you have clear in your mind the picture of the kingdom you expect the young people to discover and so that you can answer questions which might arise. You will need to decide how to deal with a large number of passages, and work out whether, and how, to share them among the young people.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Ask the young people what they think will happen after Jesus has returned. Depending on the depth of knowledge their answers reveal you may decide how to approach the rest of the lesson.

Many details are not made clear in scripture, so it will be sensible not to get bogged down in trying to sort out details (precisely who is raised in the first and second resurrections, for instance), especially if the young people don't ask.

Who will be there?

James 2:5: Those who are poor in the eyes of the world, but rich in faith, will inherit the kingdom.

Matthew 25:31-40: Those whose faith has shown itself in care for other people, and hence for Christ.

Jews

Romans 11:25-27: The nation will repent and turn to God and find salvation.

Isaiah 60:9-12: The other nations will rebuild Jerusalem and will bring the remaining Jews back to their land.

Arabs

You may like to remind the young people of the time of Solomon, when the kings of all the neighbouring countries brought gifts, and in particular of the Queen of Sheba. Most maps place Sheba (and Dedan, with which it is commonly associated) in Saudi Arabia.

Psalms 72:9-11, 15: The desert tribes will serve him; many lands (Sheba in particular) will bring gifts.

Isaiah 19:19-25: The Egyptians and Assyrians (modern Iraq) will worship together with Israel.

If you have time you may like to mention that Moslems, nominally at least, accept much of the Bible (the law and prophets, and the New Testament), though they believe that the Jews have corrupted the text and that therefore the Koran is the only real authority. Many Arab peoples are descended from (or related to) Abraham through Ishmael, Esau, Ammon and Moab. Ishmael was named by God ('God hears' - Genesis 16:11), and God made repeated promises regarding him. (Genesis 16:10,12; 17:20, 21:18).

What will the world be like?

The land of Israel

Amos 9:13-15: Crops will be so plentiful that there won't be time to harvest them all.

Ezekiel 47:8-12: Fresh water will flow from Jerusalem and will 'heal' the Dead Sea. Explain to the young people that the passage is talking about Jerusalem: it is not clear simply from these verses.

The rest of the world

Psalms 72:16: Crops will be plentiful, so there will be no more hunger and starvation.

Isaiah 11:6-9: Animals will no longer be dangerous.

Isaiah 35:1-2, 7: The desert will blossom. 'Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom'

Micah 4:3-5: There will be peace and security

People

Luke 20:35-36: The saints will be immortal; they will not marry, but will be like the angels.

Isaiah 35:5-6: There will be no more physical handicaps.

Zephaniah 3:9: If the AV translation is correct, all nations will speak one language.

Worship

Zechariah 8:20-22: People will want to learn from God and to worship him.

Micah 4:1-2: Jerusalem will be the centre of worship for the entire world.

Isaiah 11:9: Everyone will know about God and worship him.

Government

Who will be king?

Matthew 25:31: Jesus will be king

Isaiah 9:7: He will reign for ever

Anyone else?

Matthew 19:28: The apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

Daniel 7:27: The saints will assist in government over the rest of the world.

2 Timothy 2:11: Those who have endured will reign with him

How?

Psalms 72:2-4, 12-14: The world will be a fair place, and he will look after those who need help.

Isaiah 11:4: He will be just, and will punish the wicked.

And after the millennium?

1 Corinthians 15:24-28: Christ delivers the kingdom to his Father, so that God may be 'all in all'.

Revelation 21:4: There will be no more unhappiness or death.

Revelation 22:1-5: The work of salvation is complete, everything is refreshed and perfect. There is a slight difficulty regarding verse 2, in that it is hard to understand why anything will need to be healed, but this passage is generally understood to apply to the time after the millennium.

We cannot really imagine this time - we simply have to trust God that it will be wonderful.

Now the important bit

It is not enough for the young people to simply go through a list of passages and write a precis. They need to be brought to a picture of what the kingdom will really be like.

Get them to try to describe it, in their own words, now that they have seen what the scriptures have to say. You may like to ask them some questions like:

- If you were to take a photograph anywhere in the world, what would you see?
- If you were to walk down a street, what would you hear? Smell?
- How would it feel to be there?
- What would you notice was missing from this world?
- How would you feel about that?
- Does anything in life come close to what you have described?
- How much do you want to be there?

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Many of us, especially young people, find it difficult to want Jesus' return when this life seems to hold good things in store. By contrasting these passages with many of the terrible things that happen in the world at the moment we can see that things really will be better when Jesus returns.

PRAYER

Ask the young people to write a prayer for Jesus' return or asking God to help them to really want things to be better and therefore to want his return.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

1. It would be good if you could ask the young people to do something creative to try to describe what the kingdom will be like. Get them to describe the kingdom in terms which have a real impact - things like being able to go out without worrying that someone will break in and steal things; having no worries or fears; not falling out with friends; no bad news of wars or famines ...
2. They may like to look at the words of some appropriate hymns in the light of what they have just learnt and maybe choose one for the end of Sunday School. Appropriate ones might be:
227 Behold! The Mountain of the Lord in latter days shall rise
225 A rose shall bloom in the lonely place
42 (Praise the Lord) He shall reign over all the earth
71 (Sing to the Lord) Hail to the brightness of Zion's glad morning.

AIM OF LESSON

To help the young people to understand that the suffering in the world is not a sign that God does not care, but is an indication of the lengths he is willing to go to in order to bring men and women to repent.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Romans 8:18-32.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

You will need to familiarise yourself with the subject and with the content of the lesson. The frame of mind in which you present the subject is very important. If we are teaching the young people about a compassionate, loving God, the lesson needs to be presented in much the same attitude.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

The scope of this subject is large, and it is important that you should reach a conclusion at the end. You need therefore to keep track of time quite carefully, and you need to be prepared to reduce the content of the lesson, or to spend two weeks on the subject. You should try to avoid spending the time discussing the problem without ever finding any answers.

Definition

Start by introducing the subject, maybe in the context of a recent item of news. Get the young people to make a list of examples of suffering. Make sure that these include:

- Natural disasters which are beyond the control of man - like floods, tornadoes and drought
- Man-made disasters such as wars
- Natural problems which we make worse - like famines exacerbated by war and greed
- Personal suffering caused by illness
- Personal violence, bullying and selfishness
- Unhappiness caused by difficult relationships with other people

Summarise them by saying that they include suffering:

- On a global scale, affecting all nations, as well as personal
- Natural and man-made disasters
- Suffering that affects people who know the gospel as well as those who don't

Causes

Ask the young people about the causes of these things. Some are beyond human control; some are directly attributable to sin; others are a combination of the two.

Does God know?

Ask the young people whether they think God knows what is going on. They will probably answer that he does, but it is still worth referring to the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:29-30, even if you don't turn up the passage: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'

Clearly the Almighty knows and understands every detail of the world that he has made.

How does God feel?

There is a sense in which this is not our business. God is the potter, we the clay, and we have no real right to question his motives or feelings. He has however given us some indications in scripture of how the suffering in the world affects him.

Genesis 6:5-6: At the time of the flood, God was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and 'his heart was filled with pain' (NIV).

1 Chronicles 21:15: When God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem he 'was grieved because of the calamity' (NIV), or 'repented him of the evil' (AV).

Isaiah 63:9,10: God explains his distress at the sufferings of his people, then his vexation (grief NIV) at their disobedience.

Lamentations 3:31-40: God brings suffering reluctantly, but to crush men and women but to cause them to return to him.

Jonah 4:11: God explains his reasons for not destroying Nineveh by saying to Jonah "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Ezekiel 33:11: God has no desire that anyone should die, but wishes everyone to repent.

Luke 19:41-44: Jesus wept over the faithlessness of Jerusalem and their impending destruction.

So, in summary, God is grieved by the wickedness of men and by the suffering that they experience. This applies to all men on the earth, not just his people.

Does God cause suffering?

1 Samuel 2:6-7: God brings life and death; poverty and wealth.

Amos 3:6: Nothing happens without God.

Isaiah 45:5-10: God is the bringer of both good and bad.

Luke 13:1-5: Jesus refers to two disasters - the first man-made, the second natural. In both cases he makes the point that these things did not come as a direct result of the sufferer's sin; we should however learn from them the need for repentance and personal salvation.

Why?

Hebrews 12:5-11: God disciplines his people in the same way as a father disciplines his children.

Ask the young people if they know of any children who always got what they wanted immediately; did they become considerate, compassionate people, or spoiled and selfish.

Hebrews 2:10: Jesus was perfected through his sufferings.

Deuteronomy 8:1-3: God let his people hunger so that they would learn their dependence on him.

1 Peter 5:6-10: Peter writes to disciples who were about to be persecuted, to encourage them with the thought that through their suffering God would strengthen them.

Finally, think about the qualities that are central to God's character - 'the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness'. Can we really understand or develop these characteristics if nobody ever does anything to us that we need to forgive; if there is nobody who needs our help.

Summary

Romans 8:18-25 summarises all of these points. Try to use a modern translation, as the AV is a little obscure. These verses tell us that

- It was God who made his creation 'subject to frustration'. Not only natural disasters, but all the things wrong with the world, were brought about by God.
- He did this 'in hope' - for a positive reason, wanting people to be 'brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.' So the suffering in the world, even if we do not understand it, is not pointless.
- At the moment life is hard and painful - 'the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time'.
- These things grieve us - we 'groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'. We long for something better. We have also learned that they grieve the Almighty.
- It is this hope that brings us to salvation. If everything were perfect now, we would not want God's salvation - 'Who hopes for what he already has?'
- But since it is not perfect, we long for his kingdom to come.

Now read Romans 8:28-32 and talk about the impact they should have on the way we look at life.

Finally you may like to discuss with the young people the quotations on the last page of their notes.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

Some people seem to sail through life with no real problems; others lurch from one crisis to another. But at some point in our lives most of us will experience a real difficulty. We have no idea what it will be; it could be a sudden death of a loved one, or an illness, or unemployment ... who knows? We cannot tell the future, and to us it appears that 'time and chance' happen to us all; but it is good to know that all these things are in the hands of a loving creator.

PRAYER

You may like to say the Lord's prayer with the young people, thinking especially about the words 'Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', and 'deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever', Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

You could talk about what you would say to someone who was suffering. How much might it help them to think about this subject? Is it best to get the topic in perspective at a time when we are not suffering?

THE WAY OF LIFE

33

AIM OF LESSON

For the young people to think ahead to the journey that lies ahead of them, and to see their lives as a purposeful walk to the kingdom of God.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Deuteronomy 30:15-16,19.

PREPARATION REQUIRED

Find out, if you don't know already, about the walking habits of the young people in your group. If you are unfortunate enough to have a group of couch potatoes you may find this lesson a bit hard going. You may be able to think of a different analogy - a long journey by train, for instance, though that is definitely second best. The alternative would be to deal with the subject in general terms - why do 'people' like walking, or to think of a group of mountaineers.

Get something that you can write on during the lesson, like a whiteboard or flipchart. The students' notes have no spaces to be filled in; after all, if the young people have worked their way this far they deserve a week off. They do, however, have a summary of the sorts of conclusions you should be coming to, in the form of scriptural quotations. It is probably best to discourage them from reading their notes ahead of the discussion; they have the rest of their lives to think about them.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

This lesson is all based on the analogy of a walk. It is of course a scriptural parallel - think of the exodus, or the quotation at the head of the students' notes.

You should spend about a third of the time at your disposal thinking with the young people about a real walk in the hills - ideally an actual journey they have made relatively recently. While they talk, make notes on the board.

Then turn to the spiritual journey, and go through the points they have made, drawing out the scriptural and practical lessons for life.

A walk in the hills

Talk to the young people about any time when they may have walked a long way. They will probably have experience of walking in the hills on holiday, at camp, or on some other occasion. Ask them to think of one or two specific journeys that come to mind - it may be helpful if they don't all remember the same terrible day last month when they all got lost and ended up soaked to the skin!

Spend a while thinking simply about this sort of journey, and ask them more questions. They may give the answers in the column on the left, or they may not! If they don't, don't despair. When you come to the second part of the lesson and you are thinking about the 'journey of life', ask them if their answer applies, and think about why it does or doesn't.

A walk in the hills

The Way of Life

How do you feel before the walk?

- Sometimes keen, but not always?
- It's often easier to stay at home.
- Not very keen?
- That's often how we feel about our service to God. It takes some willpower to overcome these feelings, but it's important that we do.

What do you need to do before you start?

They may never have planned such a journey themselves, but you can get them to think about what their parents or CYC leaders may have done.

- Decide where you are going.
- Plan the journey and work out how long it will take.
- Get a map and read it.
- Just as we need to decide about a walk before we start, we do about life. If we keep changing our minds about the destination we will never get anywhere.

How do you decide what to carry?

- Only things essential for the journey.
- A map and compass.
- Protective clothing against the wind and rain.
- Nourishment. It is a tiring business, walking, so you need food for energy, and something to drink.
- Think about the map - the Bible - and a compass - our conscience?
- You may like to think about the 'armour of God' from Ephesians 6.
- Bread and wine - John 6:35.

What should you leave behind?

- Things that you don't need. In practice you need only a fraction of what you have in order to make the journey.
- Think about the thorns that choke the word in the parable of the sower - the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches. As in the hills, it's best to travel light.

A walk in the hills

The Way of Life

What can make the journey easier?

- Footpaths - if other people have walked the way before you it helps you to know where to go.
- A guide who knows the way.
- A good friend to talk to.
- The Bible is full of the examples of people who have 'gone before' - in particular the Lord Jesus.
- We too have a guide who knows the way - a good friend to talk to. Think about the importance of prayer on the journey.

Whom should you travel with?

- People who are going the same way as you!
- People who've been there before.
- People you can trust to help if you are in trouble.
- We should travel with friends who share our faith. Travelling alone can be fun, so long as the sun is shining. But as soon as the way becomes hard, we need help and companionship.
- We should travel with God. He will walk with us and give us guidance and strength.

How many other people do you meet?

- Usually very few. Most people stay at home, go to work or the shops.
- Usually, hardly any. But it's important to remember that the fact that the hills are deserted doesn't mean we're stupid - sadly, everyone else is missing out.

What can make it harder?

- Not knowing the way.
- If it gets misty, or rains heavily, and you can't see the path or any landmarks.
- The way is sometimes unclear. There are some situations in life where the Bible doesn't give us clear guidance. We have to pray and be guided by a conscience that has been primed by God's word.

What things can go wrong?

- You can get lost.
- You might fall and hurt yourself.
- Sometimes we lose our way in life; our faith may become weak. We often sin, and hurt ourselves and other people.

A walk in the hills

When you get lost?

- You need to stop and work out where you are - use the compass and map.
- Then you need to work out a fresh route that will take you to the end of your journey. You may need to retrace your steps.
- But you can always get there from where you are. Getting lost may mean that the journey takes longer, but it's not impossible.

Can it be dangerous?

- It can be, especially if you wander off the path or go to dangerous places.
- But usually it isn't. The path may be faint at times, but if you keep to it you get to the end all right.
- It's dangerous to get separated from the people you're with; you need to keep close together.

What are the most enjoyable things about a walk?

- The fresh air, the scenery, the company
- The exhilaration of being on top of the hills
- The views - you can see for miles

How do you feel at the end?

- Satisfaction
- Feeling of achievement
- Comradeship

You may like to read through the passages in the students' notes with the young people, and discuss what they have to say about this subject. If they missed the opportunity to take notes, there is room!

The Way of Life

- The important thing is to know that there is always a way back. We need to repent and once more follow God's ways, and he will forgive us and bring us back.
- You can always get there from here.

- We can make the journey dangerous for ourselves by going to the wrong places and mixing with the wrong people.
- We need to keep with people on the same journey.

- The vision of the kingdom
- The fact that we understand - in outline at least - what God is doing in the world.
- The spiritual blessings are a rich reward in this life.

- Imagine the end of your journey, being part of a world at peace, full of joy and happiness.

RELEVANCE TO OUR LIVES

The poem by Robert Frost is well-known in the US, but for us it has a special - and scriptural - meaning. The road we have chosen is less travelled - it is a narrow way, with a narrow gate. But the choice does indeed, for us, make 'all the difference'. The difference between life and death; between walking alone and with our maker. Young people are often very self-conscious about being different, but the poem confirms what God tells us in his word: to live, we walk the road less travelled.

PRAYER

O Son of Man, who walked each day a humble road, serene and strong; go with me now upon life's way, my comrade all the journey long. Amen.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Think about a journey in the Bible, like the journey through the wilderness, and bring out all the parallels with our spiritual journey through life.

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