

- Are Friends “right” in their approach to the sacraments in a way that means other Christian groups are “wrong”? Why or why not?

Conclusion

Friends believe that we have not forsaken biblical teaching nor have we forsaken the broader Christian community in our unique approach to the sacraments. Friends hope to embody the heart of New Testament faith in our emphasis on the spiritual realities of baptism and communion.

***For those interested in further biblical teaching in this area:**

The New Testament is filled with teaching that contrasts the inadequacy of external rituals associated with the law and the inward spiritual realities of New Testament faith. Some particular passages emphasizing these differences are Romans 2:28-29, Galatians 5:1-6, 6:15, 1 Corinthians 7:19, Philippians 3:3, and Colossians 2:11-12.

Scriptural passages pointing to the primarily spiritual nature of baptism are in abundance. In addition to those previously cited in this session, see 1 Corinthians 1:14-17, 12:13, Ephesians 4:5, 1 Peter 3:21, and Acts 19:1-6.

There are fewer passages that particularly point to the spiritual nature of The Lord’s Supper, although an underlying theme of the entire New Testament is that of spiritual communion with God. It is interesting that the instruction of Jesus in John 13:14, to wash one another’s feet, has been spiritualized by most Christian groups, while His words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” spoken at the very same occasion have been interpreted by many as instituting a ritual intended to be physically repeated.

Getting Started

Focus: Remember that this session is intended to accomplish more than simply impart information. It is hoped that a group environment will be cultivated where participants can both learn about Quakerism and experience it first-hand. Consider focusing upon both the presentation of the material in this session as well as developing a sense of community among the group members.

Getting Started Ideas

- Getting to know you; learn a new piece of information about each group member. Begin by asking each participant to briefly share how long they have been participating in your Friends Meeting, and how they got started.
- Be sure to make prayer an important part of each group meeting. Set the tone by beginning this session with prayer.

Introduction: Friends & the Sacraments

Focus: A curious distinctive of Friends, in comparison to other Christian groups, is our approach to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Some erroneously conclude that Quakers don’t believe in baptism or communion. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than rejecting the sacraments, Friends understand that all of life is intended to be experienced sacramentally.

Discussion Questions

- Traditionally Friends have not practiced water baptism or The Lord's Supper. According to your understanding, why is this so?
- Some Christians find genuine meaning in use of the outward symbols of the sacraments. What are some of the benefits of the use of outward symbols?
- Friends have long recognized that use of outward symbols may not always be positive. What dangers are inherent in practicing water baptism or participating in The Lord's Supper?

Friends and Baptism

Focus: The Friends non-use of water baptism cannot be understood without an understanding of the experience of spiritual baptism.

Discussion Questions

- Review these scriptures and, in your own words, describe how these prophecies were fulfilled. Matthew 3:11, Mark 4:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5
- How is the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" experienced today?
- Has every Christian experienced spiritual baptism, or does it represent a level of Christian experience that some believers have not yet attained? What scripture can you cite to support your thoughts on this question?
- If one is unsure if he/she has experienced the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit," how can he/she come to a place of certainty?

Friends and Communion

Focus: Ideally, when the Lord's Supper is observed the participants should experience an awareness of Christ's presence and genuine communion with Him. Friends assert that this experience of spiritual communion is essential, while outward ceremonies pointing to it are not.

Discussion Questions

- Many Christians find meaning in observing rituals such as the Lord's Supper. Others routinely participate in such ceremonies with little genuine spiritual effect. Is it better to maintain ceremonies that may become empty, or to neglect ceremonies that have the potential of being meaningful?
- Quaker history gives evidence to many Friends who lived out of a moment by moment communion with Christ. In your observation, do Friends today still do this well?

Conclusion: Friends and the Bible

Focus: The Quaker view of baptism and communion initially arose out of the experience of the early Friends rather than a response to biblical teaching. When the Friends compared their experience to the Bible, however, they concluded that it was not contradictory at all. In fact, the spiritual realities of baptism and communion appear to be the real emphasis of biblical teaching in this area.*

Discussion Questions

- Are Friends being faithful to biblical admonitions such as Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38? Why or why not?
- Can Friends maintain our approach to the sacraments and at the same time maintain a commitment to obeying biblical teachings?