

Essentials of Discipleship 5: Joining the Church

Part One: Sharing about the radical NT Church.

Read Acts 2.40-47.

In groups of two or three, discuss:

- What do you find exciting and what do you find difficult or scary about this example of a radical Church?

Feed back to the group the main points.

- Is there one area that we are weak on? How could we grow stronger in this area?

Part Two: Thinking about Baptism

Read Matthew 3.11-17.

- Why was John baptising? Why was Jesus baptised?
- What was the most important thing that happened at his baptism? How closely does this correspond to your experience?
- What do you think of the argument that if Jesus was baptised we have no excuse?

Read quickly Romans 10.9; Hebrews 10.22. Romans 6.4; Galatians 3.27.

Each of these texts is thought either to refer specifically to baptism or to part of the simple ceremony that went with baptism in the earliest churches.

- If so, how does each use the imagery of baptism to tell us what happens when we are baptised?

Part Three: Thinking about the Lord's Supper

Read 1 Corinthians 11.17-34

We only know in detail how the early Church celebrate communion because it went wrong in Corinth. Rich people in the Church were showing disdain for others by hungrily eating all the food before they turned up (v21-22 cf v34).

- What in the passage suggests that the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the context of a meal? In what sense is or should communion still be a meal?
- What do you think it means to 'discern the body' (v29) and 'profane the body and blood of the Lord' (v27)? Why is this so dangerous?
- What does Paul recount that Jesus did with the bread and the cup? Why did Jesus say we should re-enact his words and actions? Why won't we need communion when Jesus returns?
- Does anyone in the group have a favourite song or set of words that help to make communion more meaningful for them?

Part 4: For further study: Your Money and your Life

Read 2 Corinthians 8.1-15&9.1-15. This long passage is part of Paul's

encouragement to his Churches to contribute to the famine-ridden Church in Jerusalem. The Corinthians had been so keen to give that Paul has told other Churches - now it's time to deliver.

- How does Paul use the Macedonians behaviour to spur the Corinthians to give (8.1-5)?
- Is giving money the first step? Or What do they do first? (8.5)
- What reasons does Paul give for giving in 8.9, 8.11; 8.14?
- What should the attitude of the giver be? (9.6ff)
- What will the outcome of their generosity be? (9.6-13)
- What motives us to give? How could we become better givers?

Part 5: For Further Study: Baptism

Death bed baptism and infant baptism have both been practised in different Churches in different ages. What practical and pastoral problems do you suppose they were intended to overcome?

Read the story of the conversion of the jailer in Acts 16.25-34.

- Who hears the message preached? Who believes? Who is baptised? Who rejoices?
- How often do we baptise whole family groups today?
- If in some cases whole groups were baptised in the Early Church what might this tell us about how we evangelise today and what should we do about the baptism of children?

Read Acts 19.1-7

- What was wrong with the baptism that the Ephesian disciples had received? What is the difference between their baptism and Christian baptism? What else were they expected to receive at the same time?