

The Didache: Teachings of the 12 Apostles

The Didache is, in all probability, the oldest surviving extant piece of non-canonical literature. It is not so much a letter as a handbook for new Christian converts, consisting of instructions derived directly from the teachings of Jesus. The book can be divided into three sections. The first six chapters consist of Christian lessons; the next four give descriptions of the Christian ceremonies, including baptism, fasting and communion; and the last six outline the church organization.

The Didache claims to have been authored by the twelve apostles. While this is unlikely, the work could be a direct result of the first Apostolic Council, c.50 C.E. (Acts 15:28). Similarities to the Apostolic Decree are apparent, and the given structure of the church is quite primitive. Also, the description of the Eucharist (bread and wine) carefully avoids mention of the "body and blood of Christ," obviously being regarded as one of the secret mysteries of early Christianity. Most scholars agree that the work, in its earliest form, may have circulated as early as the 60's C.E., though additions and modifications may have taken place well into the third century. The work was never officially rejected by the Church, but was excluded from the canon for its lack of literary value.

The complete text of the Didache was discovered in the Codex Hierosolymitanus, though a number of fragments exist, most notably in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. It was originally composed in Greek, probably within a small community.

THE DIDACHE

Translated from the Greek text published
by Roswell D. Hitchcock in 1884.

TEACHING OF THE LORD TO THE NATIONS THROUGH THE TWELVE APOSTLES *ONE*

Two ways there are, one of life and one of death, but there is a great difference between the two ways. The way of life is indeed this: First, you will love the God who made you; secondly, "you will love your neighbor as yourself." Now all the things that you do not want to have happen to you, you too do not do *these* to one another.

Now the teaching of these sayings is this: "Praise those who curse you", and pray for your enemies; now fast for those who are persecuting you. For what favor is it if you love those who love you? Don't the gentiles do the same? But you love those who hate you, and you will have no enemies.

"Hold yourself away from the fleshly" and cosmic "strong desires." "If someone should give you a blow to your right cheek, turn to him also the left one," and you will be complete. "If anyone should force you to go one mile, go with him two." "If anyone takes your cloak, give him your tunic also." If anyone takes what is yours away from you, do not ask for it back. For neither are you able. "Give to everyone who asks from you," and do not ask for it back. For the Father wants to give of his own free gifts to everyone.

Blessed is the one who gives according to the precept, for he is guiltless. Woe to the one who takes. For if indeed someone takes who has a need, he will be guiltless. But the one who has no need will give a judgment as to why he took, and for what *reason*, and he will come under arrest and will be examined about what he did. And "he will not go out from there until he pays the last quadrans." But it has also

been said about this: "Let your charitable gifts sweat in your hands, until indeed you know who to give to."

Now the second precept of the teaching is: " You will not murder. You will not commit adultery." You will not sodomize young boys. You will not have unlawful sex. " You will not steal." Do not practice magic. Do not practice sorcery. Neither murder a child by abortion, nor will you destroy what is born. You will not strongly desire your neighbor's things. You will not make oaths. " You will not bear false testimony." You will not say bad things. You will not remember bad things. You will not be double-minded or double-tongued, for the double-tongue is a snare of death. Your message is not to be false or empty, but being filled with practice. You should be neither greedy nor a swindler, nor hypocrite, nor malicious, nor high-minded. You will not take evil counsel against your neighbor. You will not hate any people, but you will reprove some, and you will pray for some, and some you will love more than your life.

My child, flee from every evil thing, and from everything like it. Do not become angry, for anger is the way to murder. Neither should you be jealous, nor *one who creates* strife, nor emotional. For murders are born out of all of these.

My child, do not become strongly desirous, for strong desire is the way to sexual sin. Neither should you be a speaker of filth, nor high-eyed. For adulteries are born out of all of these.

My child, do not become someone who looks for omens, since it is the way to idolatry. Neither should you be an enchanter, nor an astrologer, nor a cleanser. Nor should you want to look at these things, for idolatry is born out of all of these things.

My child, do not become a liar, since lying is the way to theft. Neither should you be greedy, nor a lover of money, nor worthlessly conceited. For thefts are born out of all of these things. My child, do not become a grumbler, since it leads to evil speaking. Neither should you be assumers, nor evil-minded. For evil-speakings are born out of all of these.

But be meek, since "the meek will inherit the land." Become longsuffering, and merciful, and guiltless, and quiet, and good, and throughout everything tremble at the sayings that you have heard.

You will not exalt yourself, nor will you give *over-boldness* to your soul. Your soul will not cling with the high people, but you will conduct yourself with the just and lowly ones. Accept the things that transpire to you as good workings, knowing that nothing happens without God.

My child, remember night and day the one who is speaking God's message to you. Now you will honor him as *you would honor* the Lord. For where the lordship may be spoken, there is the Lord. Now daily you will seek out the faces of the holy ones, so that you would be refreshed by their words. You will not want division, but you will make peace with those who are fighting. You will judge justly. In giving a reproof of a wandering, you will not respect *anyone's* presence. You will not be two souled regarding whether or not it should be. Do not become *like* one who stretches out his hands for taking but who draws them in for giving. If you have, you will give by your hands a ransom for your sins. You will not hesitate to give, nor will you grumble while giving. For you will know who it is that is the nice payer of the reward. You will not turn away the one who is needy, but you will share all things together with your brother, and you will not claim them to be your own things. For if you are partners in what is immortal, how much more *are you partners* in what is mortal?

You will not take your hand away from your son or your daughter, but from youth you will teach the fear of God. You will not give directives in your bitterness to your slave or handmaid, these who are hoping in the same God. Otherwise they may not fear the God who is *over* both of you. For he is not

coming to call *people* according to *appearance*, but upon those whom the spirit has made ready. Now you who are slaves should be submissive to your lords in sobriety and fear, as to a type of God. You will hate every hypocrisy and all of what is not pleasing to the Lord. You will by no means forsake the Lord's precepts, but you will guard what you have received--neither adding to them nor removing from *them*. You will acknowledge your wanderings in an assembly, and you will not come forward to your prayer with an evil consciousness. This is the way of life.

TWO

Now the way of death is this: First of all, it is evil and full of curses: murders, adulteries, strong desires, unlawful sex acts, thefts, idolatries, magic acts, sorceries, robberies, false testimonies, hypocrisies, two-heartedness, deceit, arrogance, badness, assumptions, greed, shameful speech, jealousy, an overbearing nature, loftiness, pride; persecutors of good; hating truth, loving falsehood; not knowing the reward of what is right, not clinging to good, nor to just judgment, watching not for good but for evil. Far from these *people* are meekness and endurance. *They* love worthless things, persuing revenge, not showing mercy to a poor person, not laboring for those who are weary, not knowing the one who made them, murderers of children, corrupters of molded image of God, turning away those who are in need, oppressing the afflicted; comforters of the wealthy, lawless judges of the poor; universal sinners. Children, may you be rescued from all of these.

See to it that no one lead you astray from this way of the teaching, since it does not teach you without God. For if indeed you are able to bear the whole of the Lord's yoke, you will be complete. But if you are not able, do what you are able.

THREE

Now about food: bear what you are able to bear. But watch out for the idol-sacrifices, for this is a religious service of dead gods.

Now about baptism, baptize this way: after first uttering all of these things, baptize "into the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy Spirit" in running water. But if you do not have running water, baptize in other water. Now if you are not able to *do so* in cold *water*, *do it* in warm water. Now if you don't have either, pour water three times on the head, "into the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the holy Spirit." Now before the ritual cleansing, the baptizer and the one being baptized should fast, and any others who are able. Now you will give word for the one who is being baptized to fast for one or two *days* beforehand.

But do not let your fasts be with the hypocrites. For they fast on the second day of the week and on the fifth. But you fast on the fourth day and the day of preparation. Neither should you pray like the hypocrites, but as the Lord gave word in his good message, pray like this: "Our Father, the one who is in Heaven, your name has been made holy. Let your kingdom come. Let what you want also be done on earth, as in Heaven. Give us the bread we need today and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. And don't carry us into trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For yours is the power and the glory for the age." Pray this way three times daily.

Now about the thanksgiving, give thanks this way:

First, about the cup: "We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of your boy David which you made known to us through your boy Jesus. Glory be to you for the age.

Now about the broken *loaf*: "We thank you, our Father, for the life and the knowledge that you made known to us through your boy Jesus. Glory be to you for the age. Just as this broken *loaf* was scattered on top of the hills and as it was gathered together and became one, in the same way let your assembly be gathered together from the remotest parts of the land into your kingdom. "For yours is the glory and the power through Anointed Jesus for the age." Now no one should either eat or drink from your thanksgiving meal, but those who have been baptized into the Lord's name. For about this also the Lord said, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs."

Now after you have been filled, give thanks this way: "We thank you, holy Father, for your holy name, which you made to live in our hearts, and for the knowledge and trust and immortality which you made known to us through Jesus your boy. Glory be to you for the age.

"Almighty master, it was you who created all for the sake of your name. You gave both food and drink to people for enjoyment, so that they might give thanks to you. But to us you have freely given spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your boy. Before all things, we are thankful to you that you are powerful. Glory be to you for the age.

"O Lord, remember your assembly, *remember* to rescue it from every evil and to make it complete in your love, and to gather it from the four winds into your kingdom which you prepared for it--*it*, which has been made holy. For yours is the power and the glory for the age.

"Let generosity come, and let this universe pass away. Hosanna to David's son! If someone is holy, let him come. If someone is not, he should change his mind. Marana-tha. A-mein." Now permit the prophets to give thanks as much as they want.

FOUR

Therefore, the one who comes and teaches you all of these things which have been previously spoken, accept him. But if he, the teacher, should turn to teach another teaching, so as to release *this* one, do not listen to him. But if *he teaches* to promote what is right and knowledge of the Lord, accept him as *you would* the Lord.

Now about the envoys and prophets, do just as according to the tenet of the good message. Now each envoy who comes to you, accept as *you would* the Lord. But he will not remain for one day. Now if there is need, also the next *day*. But if he remains for three, he is a false prophet.

Now when the envoy departs, he should take nothing except bread until he lodges. But if he should ask for money, he is a false prophet.

And every prophet who speaks with the spirit, you will not test or judge, for every sin will be forgiven. But not everyone who speaks with the spirit is a prophet: but if he has the conduct of the Lord.

Therefore, from *their* conduct, the false prophet and the prophet will be made known. And no prophet with the spirit who orders a meal eats from it, unless indeed he is a false prophet. Now every prophet who teaches the truth, if he does not do as he teaches, is a false prophet. But every prophet who has been proved, who is true, who does things for the kosmic secrets of the assembly but who does not teach to do as he does, will not be judged among you. For the ancient prophets did it this way also. But whoever says with the spirit, "Give me money (or something else)," you will not listen to him. But if he says to give on behalf of others who are in need, no one should judge him.

Now everyone who comes in the Lord's name should be accepted. But afterward, you will examine him to know him. For you will have understanding, right and left. If the one who comes is a traveller, help him as much as you are able. But he will not remain with you except for two or three days, if there is a

necessity. But if he wants to dwell with you, since he is a craftsman, he should work to eat. But if he has no craft, provide according to your understanding, so that no lazy person would be living among you *as* an "Anointed". But if he does not want to do this, he is one who profits financially from the Anointed One. Be careful about such people.

Now every true prophet who wants to settle near you is worthy of his wage. In the same way, a true teacher is also worthy, just as the workman, of his wage. Therefore, every foremost part of the products of the press and threshing floor, both of oxen and of sheep, you will take and give to the prophets. For they are your high priests.

But if you do not have a prophet, give *these* to the poor. If you make baked bread, take the foremost part and give according to the precept. In the same way, when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the foremost part and give to the prophets. Now of money and clothing and every possession, take the foremost part as you think it right and give according to the precept.

FIVE

Now according to the Lord's *day*, gather together and break bread and give thanks, after acknowledging your wanderings to *one another*, so your sacrifice would be a clean one. But each one who has something against his friend, do not let him come together with you until they are reconciled, so that your sacrifice would not be made common. For this is what was declared by the Lord: "In every place and time, carry to me a clean sacrifice. Because I am a great king," says Yahweh, "and my name is a wondrous thing among the nations."

SIX

Now hand pick for yourselves overseers and servants worthy of the Lord: men who are meek, not lovers of money, true and proved. For they are giving religious service to you also, as the prophets and teachers are giving religious service.

SEVEN

Now reprove one another, not in anger but in peace, as you have it in the good message. And no one should speak to each one who misses the mark against another one, nor should he hear from you, until he changes his mind. But your vows and your charitable works and all your practices, do these, as you have it in the good message of our Lord.

Be vigilant on behalf of your life. Do not let your lamps be extinguished, and do not relax your loins. But become prepared. For you do not know the hour in which our Lord is coming. Now you will gather together often, seeking the things that are appropriate for your souls. For all the time of your trust will not profit you, if you do not become complete in the last season.

For in the last days, the false prophets and the corruptors will be multiplied, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. For when the lawlessness increases, they will hate one another, and they will persecute and deliver up, and then the deceiver of creation will appear as God's son, and he will do signs and wonders. And the land will be given up into his hands. And he will do lawless things which have never been done from the age.

Then human creation will come into the fire of examination, and many will stumble and be destroyed. But those who endure in their trust will be saved from this accursed thing. And then the signs of truth will appear. First, the sign of an opening in Heaven, then the sign of a trumpet's sound, and thirdly, a

resurrection of dead people. But not of all people; on the contrary, as it was declared, "The Lord will come, and all the holy ones with him." Then creation will see the Lord "coming on the clouds of the sky."