

The Didache

Course Reading

Ehrman, Bart D. "Didache" in *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

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Several proto-orthodox authors in the early church mention with approval the "Didache (literally, "The Teaching") of the Twelve Apostles"; some of them view it as standing just on the borders of the canon.¹ But the book was eventually lost from view, until a copy was discovered in 1873 in a monastery library in Constantinople. Since then the book has made a significant impact on the way scholars understand the social life and ritual practices of the early church. For this is the first "church manual" to have survived from early Christianity.

The first part of the book describes the "Two Paths of Life and Death" (see Introduction to the Epistle of Barnabas). The Path of Life (chaps. 1–4) is paved with upright behavior: the author's readers are to love one another, avoid evil desires, jealousy and anger, give alms to the poor, obey God's commandments, and generally lead morally respectable lives. Many of these instructions reflect the teachings of Jesus from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (e.g., praying for one's enemies, turning the other cheek, and going the extra mile). As might be expected, the Path of Death (chap. 5) involves the opposite sorts of behavior: "murders, adulteries, passions, sexual immoralities, robberies," and sundry other transgressive activities.

The bulk of the rest of the book gives instructions for the ritual practices and social interactions of the Christian community (chaps. 7–15), including directions for how to perform baptisms (preferably in cold, running water), when to fast (every Wednesday and Friday), what to pray (the Lord's Prayer, three times a day), and how to celebrate the Eucharist (first giving thanks for the cup, then the bread). Near the end of these instructions the author addresses the problem of wandering "apostles," "teachers," and "prophets" of dubious moral character; evidently, some scoundrels had become itinerant Christian preachers simply for financial gain. The communities are to test the sincerity of these wandering ministers and to limit the length of their stay at the community's expense; moreover, the communities are to appoint leaders of their own to direct their affairs.

¹See the Canons of Athanasius and Eusebius. For further information on the Didache, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 48–49.

Translation by Bart D. Ehrman, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1 (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); used with permission.

The book concludes with a kind of “apocalyptic discourse,” an exhortation to be prepared for the imminent end of the world, to be brought by “the Lord coming on the clouds of the sky” (16:7).

The Didache’s anonymous author appears to be familiar with earlier Christian traditions such as those embodied in Matthew’s Gospel, but he does not evidence any familiarity with the rigid form of church hierarchy that had developed later in the second century (even though he speaks of bishops and deacons). For these reasons, scholars tend to date the book around 100 or 120 CE. It is probable, though, that the author compiled his account from several sources written at earlier times.

The teaching of the Lord through the twelve apostles to the Gentiles.^a

1 There are two paths, one of life and one of death, and the difference between the two paths is great.

2 This then is the path of life. First, love the God who made you, and second, your neighbor as yourself.² And whatever you do not want to happen to you, do not do to another.³

3 This is the teaching relating to these matters: Bless those who curse you, pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For why is it so great to love those who love you? Do the Gentiles^b not do this as well? But you should love those who hate you⁴—then you will have no enemy.

4 Abstain from fleshly passions.⁵ If anyone slaps your right cheek, turn the other to him as well⁶—and you will be perfect.⁷ If anyone compels you to go one mile, go with him two. If anyone takes your cloak, give him your shirt as well. If anyone seizes what is yours, do not ask for it back,⁸ for you will not be able to get it.

5 Give to everyone who asks, and do not ask for anything back.⁹ For the Father

wants everyone to be given something from the gracious gifts he himself provides. How fortunate is the one who gives according to the commandment, for he is without fault. Woe to the one who receives. For if anyone receives because he is in need, he is without fault. But the one who receives without a need will have to testify why he received what he did, and for what purpose. And he will be thrown in prison and interrogated about what he did; and he will not get out until he pays back every last cent.¹⁰

6 For it has also been said concerning this: “Let your gift to charity sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give it.”¹¹

2 And now the second commandment of the teaching.

2 Do not murder, do not commit adultery,¹² do not engage in pederasty, do not

^aOr: *nations* ^bOr: *nations*

²Matt 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18. ³Cf. Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31. ⁴Cf. Matt 5:44, 46–47; Luke 6:28, 32–33, 35. ⁵1 Pet 2:11.

⁶Matt 5:39. ⁷Matt 5:48. ⁸Matt 4:41, 40; Luke 6:29–30. ⁹Luke 6:30. ¹⁰Cf. Matt 5:26; Luke 12:59.

¹¹Source unknown. ¹²The following passage elaborates Exod 20:13–17; cf. Matt 19:18; 5:33.

engage in sexual immorality. Do not steal, do not practice magic, do not use enchanted potions, do not abort a fetus or kill a child that is born.

3 Do not desire what belongs to your neighbor, do not commit perjury, do not give false testimony, do not speak insults, do not bear grudges.

4 Do not be of two minds or speak from both sides of your mouth, for speaking from both sides of your mouth is a deadly trap.

5 Your word must not be empty or false.

6 Do not be greedy, rapacious, hypocritical, spiteful, or haughty. Do not entertain a wicked plot against your neighbor.

7 Do not hate anyone—but reprove some, pray for others, and love still others more than yourself.

3 My child, flee from all evil and everything like it.

2 Do not be prone to anger, for anger leads to murder; nor be zealous, contentious, or irascible. For from all these are born acts of murder.

3 My child, do not be filled with passion, for passion leads to sexual immorality; nor be foulmouthed or lecherous. For from all these are born acts of adultery.

4 My child, do not practice divination,^c since this leads to idolatry; nor use incantations or astrology or rites of purification, nor even wish to see or hear these things. For from all these is born idolatry.

5 My child, do not be a liar, since lying leads to robbery; nor be fond of money or vain. For from all these are born acts of robbery.

6 My child, do not be a complainer, since this leads to blasphemy; nor be insolent or evil-minded. For from all these are born blasphemies.

7 But be meek, since the meek will inherit the earth.¹³

8 Be patient, merciful, innocent, gentle, and good, trembling at the words you have heard.

9 Do not exalt yourself or become impertinent. You should not join forces with the high and mighty, but should associate with the upright and humble.

10 Welcome whatever happens to you as good, knowing that nothing occurs apart from God.

4 My child, night and day remember the one who speaks the word of God to you; honor him as the Lord. For where his lordship is discussed, there the Lord himself is.

2 Every day seek out the company of the saints, that you may find comfort in their words.

3 Do not create a schism, but bring peace to those who are at odds. Give a fair judgment; do not show favoritism when you reproach others for their unlawful acts.

4 Do not be of two minds, whether this should happen or not.

5 Do not be one who reaches out your hands to receive but draws them back from giving.

6 If you acquire something with your hands, give it as a ransom for your sins.

7 Do not doubt whether to give, nor grumble while giving. For you should recognize the good paymaster of the reward.

8 Do not shun a person in need, but share all things with your brother and do not say that anything is your own.¹⁴ For

^ci.e., through observing the flight of birds

¹³Matt 5:5; Ps 37:11. ¹⁴Acts 4:32.

if you are partners in what is immortal, how much more in what is mortal?

9 Do not remove your hand from^d your son or daughter, but from their youth teach them the reverential fear of God.

10 Do not give orders to your male slave or female servant—who hope in the same God—out of bitterness, lest they stop fearing the God who is over you both. For he does not come to call those of high status, but those whom the Spirit has prepared.

11 And you who are slaves must be subject to your masters as to a replica of God, with respect and referential fear.

12 Hate all hypocrisy and everything that is not pleasing to the Lord.

13 Do not abandon the commandments of the Lord, but guard what you have received, neither adding to them nor taking away.¹⁵

14 Confess your unlawful acts in church, and do not come to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the path of life.

5 And the path of death is this. First of all it is evil and filled with a curse: murders, adulteries, passions, sexual immoralities, robberies, idolatries, feats of magic, sorceries, rapacious acts, false testimonies, hypocrisies, split affection, deceit, arrogance, malice, insolence, greed, obscenity, jealousy, impertinence, pride, haughtiness, irreverence.

2 It is filled with persecutors of the good, haters of the truth, lovers of the lie, who do not know the reward of righteousness, nor cling to the good nor to a fair judgment, who are alert not to do good but to do evil; from whom meekness and patience are far removed. For they love what is vain and pursue a reward, showing no mercy to the poor nor toiling for the oppressed nor knowing the one who made them; murderers of children and corruptors of what God

has fashioned, who turn their backs on the needy, oppress the afflicted, and support the wealthy. They are lawless judges of the impoverished, altogether sinful. Be delivered, children, from all such people.

6 Take care that no one lead you astray from the path of this teaching, since that one teaches you apart from God.

2 For if you can bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you cannot, do as much as you can.

3 And concerning food, bear what you can. But especially abstain from food sacrificed to idols; for this is a ministry to dead gods.

7 But with respect to baptism, baptize as follows. Having said all these things in advance, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ in running water.

2 But if you do not have running water, baptize in some other water. And if you cannot baptize in cold water, use warm.

3 But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

4 But both the one baptizing and the one being baptized should fast before the baptism, along with some others if they can. But command the one being baptized to fast one or two days in advance.

8 And do not keep your fasts with the hypocrites.¹⁷ For they fast on Monday and Thursday; but you should fast on Wednesday and Friday.

2 Nor should you pray like the hypo-

^dOr: *Do not refrain from disciplining; or Do not shirk your responsibility toward*

¹⁵Deut 4:2; 12:32. ¹⁶Matt 28:19. ¹⁷Cf. Matt 6:16.

crites,¹⁸ but as the Lord commanded in his gospel, you should pray as follows: “Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.^e And forgive us our debt, as we forgive our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. For the power and the glory are yours forever.”¹⁹

3 Pray like this three times a day.

9 And with respect to the thanksgiving meal,^f you shall give thanks as follows.

2 First, with respect to the cup: “We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your child, which you made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever.”

3 And with respect to the fragment of bread: “We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that you made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever.

4 As this fragment of bread was scattered upon the mountains and was gathered to become one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. For the glory and the power are yours through Jesus Christ forever.”

5 But let no one eat or drink from your thanksgiving meal^g unless they have been baptized in the name of the Lord. For also the Lord has said about this, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs.”²⁰

10 And when you have had enough to eat, you should give thanks as follows: “We give you thanks, holy Father, for your holy name which you have made reside in our hearts, and for the knowledge, faith, and immortality that you made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever.

3 You, O Master Almighty, created all things for the sake of your name, and gave both food and drink to humans for their refreshment, that they might give you thanks. And you graciously provided us with spiritual food and drink, and eternal life through your child.

4 Above all we thank you because you are powerful. To you be the glory forever.

5 Remember your church, O Lord; save it from all evil, and perfect it in your love. And gather it from the four winds into your kingdom, which you prepared for it. For yours is the power and the glory forever.

6 May grace come and this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come; if any one is not, let him repent. Maranatha!²¹ Amen.”

7 But permit the prophets to give thanks^h as often as they wish.ⁱ

11 And so, welcome anyone who comes and teaches you everything mentioned above.

2 But if the teacher should himself turn away and teach something different, undermining these things, do not listen to him. But if his teaching brings righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, then welcome him as the Lord.

3 But act towards the apostles and prophets as the gospel decrees.

4 Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as the Lord.

^eOr: *the bread that we need; or: our bread for tomorrow* ^fLiterally: *eucharist* ^gLiterally: *eucharist* ^hOr: *hold the eucharist* ⁱTwo important witnesses add a verse (with variations); *But concerning the matter of the ointment, give thanks as follows, saying, “We give you thanks, O Father, for the ointment you have made known to us through Jesus your child. To you be the glory forever, Amen.”*

¹⁸Cf. Matt 6:5. ¹⁹Matt 6:9–13. ²⁰Matt 7:6. ²¹Cf. 1 Cor 16:22.

5 But he should not remain more than a day. If he must, he may stay one more. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet.

6 When an apostle leaves he should take nothing except bread, until he arrives at his night's lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

7 Do not test or condemn a prophet speaking in the Spirit. For every sin will be forgiven, but not this sin.²²

8 Not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, but only one who conducts himself like the Lord. Thus the false prophet and the prophet will both be known by their conduct.

9 No prophet who orders a meal in the Spirit eats of it; if he does, he is a false prophet.

10 Every prophet who teaches the truth but does not do what he himself teaches is a false prophet.

11 You are not to condemn any prophet who has been approved and is true, and who acts on behalf of the earthly mystery of the church, even if he does not teach others to do what he himself does, since he has his judgment with God. For even the ancient prophets behaved in this way.

12 Do not listen to anyone who says in the Spirit, "Give me money" (or something else). But if he tells you to give to others who are in need, let no one judge him.

12 Everyone who comes in the name of the Lord should be welcomed. Then, when you exercise your critical judgment, you will know him; for you understand what is true and what is false.

2 If the one who comes is simply passing through, help him as much as you can. He should not stay with you more than two or three days, if need be.

3 If he wants to remain with you, and is a tradesman, let him work and eat.

4 If he does not have a trade—use your foresight to determine how he as a Christian may live among you without being idle.^j

5 If he does not want to behave like this, he is a Christmonger. Avoid such people.

13 Every true prophet who wants to settle down with you deserves his food.

2 So too a true teacher, like the worker, deserves his food.²³

3 Therefore you shall take every first portion of the produce from the wine vat and the threshing floor, and the first portion of both cattle and sheep, and give it to the prophets. For they are your high priests.

4 If you do not have a prophet, then give it to the poor.

5 If you make bread, take the first portion and give it according to the commandment.

6 So too if you open a jar of wine or oil, take the first portion of it and give it to the prophets.

7 And take the first portion of your money, clothing, and everything you own, as it seems good to you, and give it according to the commandment.

14 On the Lord's own day, when you gather together, break bread and give thanks^k after you have confessed your unlawful deeds, that your sacrifice may be pure.

2 Let no one quarreling with his neighbor join you until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled.²⁴

3 For this is the sacrifice mentioned by

^jOr: *through your understanding you should know in advance that no idle Christian is to live among you*

^kOr: *celebrate the eucharist*

²²Cf. Matt 12:31. ²³Matt 10:10. ²⁴Cf. Matt 5:23–24.

the Lord: "In every place and time, bring me a pure sacrifice. For I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is considered marvelous among the Gentiles!"²⁵

15 And so, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord, gentle men who are not fond of money, who are true and approved. For these also conduct the ministry of the prophets and teachers among you.

2 And so, do not disregard them. For these are the ones who have found honor among you, along with the prophets and teachers.

3 Do not reprimand one another in anger, but in peace, as you have learned from the gospel. Let no one speak with a person who has committed a sin against his neighbor, nor let him hear anything from you, until he repents.

4 But say your prayers, give to charity, and engage in all your activities as you have learned in the gospel of our Lord.

16 Be watchful for your life. Do not let your lamps be extinguished or your robes be loosed; but be prepared. For you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming.²⁶

2 Gather together frequently, seeking what is appropriate for your souls. For the entire time of your faith will be of no use to you if you are not found perfect at the final moment.

3 For in the final days the false prophets and corruptors of the faith will be multiplied. The sheep will be turned into wolves, and love into hatred.

4 For when lawlessness increases they will hate, persecute, and betray one another.²⁷ Then the world-deceiver will be manifest as a son of God. He will perform signs and wonders,²⁸ and the earth will be delivered over into his hands. He will perform lawless deeds, unlike anything done from eternity.

5 Then all human creation will come to the fire of testing, and many will fall away and perish, but those who endure in their faith will be saved²⁹ by the curse itself.

6 Then the signs of truth will be manifest:³⁰ first a sign of a rip in the sky, then a sign of the sound of a trumpet,³¹ and third a resurrection of the dead.

7 But not of all the dead. For as it has been said, "The Lord will come and all of his holy ones with him."³²

8 Then the world will see the Lord coming on the clouds of the sky. . . ."^{33 m}

^lOr: *nations* ^mThe conclusion is evidently lost

²⁵Mal 1:11, 14. ²⁶Cf. Matt 24:42; Luke 12:40; cf. Mark 13:35, 37. ²⁷Cf. Matt 24:10–12. ²⁸Cf. Mark 13:22. ²⁹Cf. Matt 24:10, 13. ³⁰Cf. Matt 24:30. ³¹Cf. Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16. ³²Zech 14:5; 1 Thess 3:13. ³³Cf. Matt 24:30.