

Excerpts* from The Teaching† of the Twelve Apostles‡

This enigmatic document was well known to the early church — and even considered part of the canon by some — yet was lost to us for centuries until its rediscovery in 1873. Today, it is known by its Greek title, The *Didache*, and is one of the most studied documents of the early church among scholars, as A) it claims to pass on indirectly the teachings from the Twelve Apostles themselves (most of which comes from the Sermon on the Mount) and B) it contains some of the earliest descriptions of church practices and liturgies. It is not known either who recorded these teachings or when they were recorded — or even if it was all written at one place and time. Some date the document as early as AD 50, while others place its writing in as late as the third century. However, regardless of when these “teachings” were written down, the teachings themselves must have come from the time when at least some of the apostles were still living, because the document refers to how to deal with travelling apostles and still considers the offices of bishop and elder to be the same. The Eucharist is also considered a full meal to be shared each Sunday. (While an interesting document, it is highly unlikely that its descriptions of church worship were universal practices of that time, since so few copies of the manuscript were made.)

The Way of Life

There are two ways — one of life and one of death — but a great difference between the two ways.

The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God, who made you; second, your neighbor as yourself. And all things, whatever you wish would not occur to you, also to another do not do.

And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what thanks [is there] if you love those who love you? Do not also the Gentiles do the same? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy. Abstain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If one should give you a blow upon your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you shall be perfect. If one should force you [to go] for one mile, go with him two. If one should take away your cloak, give him also your coat. If one should take from you your own, do not ask for it back. For the Father wills that our own blessings [from Him] should be given to all. Happy [is] he who gives according to the commandment; for he is guiltless. Woe to him who takes. (If one having need takes, he is guiltless; but he [who takes while] not having need shall pay the penalty for why he took and

for what and, coming into prison, shall be examined concerning the things that he has done, and he shall not escape from there until he should pay back the last penny.) But also now concerning this, it has been said, “Let your alms sweat in your hands until you know to whom you should give.”¹

And the second commandment of the teaching: You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not corrupt children; you shall not commit sexual immorality; you shall not steal; you shall not practice magic; you shall not practice witchcraft; you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill what is born; you shall not covet the things of your neighbor; you shall not commit perjury; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not speak evil; you shall bear no grudge; you shall not be double-minded nor double-tongued (for to be double-tongued is a snare of death); your speech shall not be false nor empty but fulfilled by deed; you shall not be covetous nor avaricious nor a hypocrite nor disposed of evil nor haughty; you shall not take

*The entire teaching can be read here:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.viii.iii.html>

†Greek Διδαχη *Didache*

‡Alternate title: *The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles/Nations through the Twelve Apostles*

¹ source unknown

evil counsel against your neighbor; you shall not hate any man (but some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life).

My child, flee from every evil thing and from every likeness of it. Do not be prone to anger, for anger leads the way to murder; neither [be] jealous nor quarrelsome nor of hot temper, for out of all these murders are engendered. My child, be not a lustful one, for lust leads the way to fornication; neither [be] a filthy talker nor of lofty eye, for out of all these adulteries are engendered. My child, be not an observer of omens, since it leads the way to idolatry; neither [be] an enchanter nor an astrologer nor a magician nor be willing to look at these things, for out of all these idolatry is engendered. My child, be not a liar, since a lie leads the way to theft; neither [be] money-loving nor conceited, for out of all these thefts are engendered. My child, be not a murmurer, since it leads the way to blasphemy; neither [be] self-willed nor evil-minded, for out of all these blasphemies are engendered.

But be meek, since the meek shall inherit the earth. Be long-suffering and pitiful and guiltless and gentle and good and always trembling at the words that you have heard. You shall not exalt yourself nor give overconfidence to your soul. Your soul shall not be joined with lofty ones, but with just and lowly ones shall it have its intercourse. The happenings that befall you receive as good, knowing that apart from God nothing comes to pass.

My child, him that speaks to you the word of God remember night and day, and you shall honor him as the Lord; for where the Lord's rule is uttered, there is the Lord. And you shall seek out day by day the faces of the saints, in order that you may rest upon their words. You shall not long for division but shall bring those who contend [with each other] to peace. You shall judge righteously; you shall not respect persons in reproving for transgressions. You shall not be undecided whether it shall be or no.

Do not be a stretcher forth of the hands to receive and a drawer of them back to give. If you have anything through [the work of] your hands, you shall give ransom for your sins: you shall not hesitate to give, nor murmur when you give; for you shall know who is the good payer of the hire. You shall not turn away from him who is in want, but you shall share all things with your brother and shall not say that they are your own;² for if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more in things that are perishable!

You shall not remove your hand from your son or from your daughter,³ but from youth shall teach the fear of God. You shall not give orders in your bitterness to your bondman or maidservant, who hope in the same God, lest ever they shall cease fearing God, who is over you both. (For He comes not to call according to the outward appearance but to them whom the Spirit has prepared.) And you bondmen shall be subject to your masters as a symbol of God, in modesty and fear.

You shall hate all hypocrisy and everything that is not pleasing to the Lord. Do not in any way forsake the commandments of the Lord, but keep what you have received, neither adding nor taking away.

In the church, you shall acknowledge your transgressions,⁴ and you shall not come near for prayer with an evil conscience.⁵

This is the way of life.

² See Ac 4:32.

³ that is, in discipline

⁴ See Ja 5:16.

⁵ See Mt 5:23-24.

The Way of Death

And the way of death is this: First of all it is evil and fully cursed: murders, adulteries, lusts, sexual immoralities, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, witchcrafts, robberies, false testimonies, hypocrisies, double-heartedness, deceit, haughtiness, depravity, self-will, greediness, filthy talking, jealousy, over-confidence, loftiness, boastfulness; persecutors of the good, hating truth, loving a lie, not knowing a reward for righteousness, not cleaving to good nor to righteous judgment, not watching for what is good but for what is evil; from whom meekness and endurance are far, loving vanities, pursuing requital, not pitying a poor man, not laboring for the afflicted, not knowing Him that made

them; murderers of children, destroyers of the handiwork of God; turning away from him who is in want, afflicting him who is distressed; advocates of the rich, lawless judges of the poor — utter sinners. Be delivered, children, from all of these.

See that no one should cause you to err from the way of the Teaching, since [such a person] teaches you apart from God. For if you are able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able, do what you are able to do.

Concerning Food

Now concerning food, bear what you are able; but against what is sacrificed to idols be

exceedingly on your guard; for it is the service of dead gods.

Concerning Baptism

Now concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all 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 into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you do not have

either, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can. But you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days beforehand.

Concerning Fasting and Prayer

But do not let your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week, but you should fast on the fourth and the Preparation Day⁶.

Neither pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, pray this way:

“Our Father,
who are in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
as in heaven, [so] on earth.
Give us today our daily bread,

and forgive us our debt,
as we also forgive our debtors.
And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil [one];”
for Yours is the power and the glory
forever.

Three times in the day, pray this way.

⁶ that is, Friday

Concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist)

Now concerning the Thanksgiving, give thanks this way:

First, concerning the cup:

We thank You, Our Father,
for the holy vine of David Your
servant,
which You made known to us
through Jesus Your Servant.
To You be the glory forever.

And concerning the broken [bread]:

We thank You, Our Father,
for the life and knowledge
that You made known to us through
Jesus Your Servant.
To You be the glory forever.

Even as this broken [bread] was
scattered over the hills
and was gathered together and
became one,
so let Your Church be gathered
together from the ends of the
earth into Your kingdom;
for Yours is the glory and the power
through Jesus Christ forever.

But let no one eat or drink of your
Thanksgiving except those who have been
baptized into the name of the Lord. For
concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not
what is holy to the dogs."

And after you are full, give thanks this
way:

We thank You, Holy Father,
for Your Holy Name,
which You caused to tabernacle in
our hearts,

and for the knowledge and faith and
immortality,
which You made known to us
through Jesus Your Servant.
To You be the glory forever.

You, Almighty Master,
created all things for Your Name's
sake;
You gave food and drink to men for
enjoyment,
that they might give thanks to You.
But to us You freely gave spiritual
food and drink and life eternal
through Your Servant.

Above all,
we thank You that You are mighty;
to You be the glory forever.

Remember, Lord, Your Church,
to deliver it from all evil
and to make it perfect in Your love
and gather it from the four winds,
sanctified for Your kingdom,
which You have prepared for it.
for Yours is the power and the glory
forever.

Let grace come,
and let this world pass away.

Hosanna to the God of David!

If anyone is holy, let him come;
if anyone is not so, let him repent.

Maranatha!

Amen.

But permit the prophets to make
Thanksgiving as much as they desire.

Concerning Hospitality to Teachers, Apostles, and Prophets

This excluded section includes instruction at some length about how to judge a genuine teacher, apostle, or prophet from a false one and how long such travelling ministers of the Gospel should be expected to stay and who should feed them, *etc.* The Teaching then returns briefly to the Eucharist, instruction about church leaders, and finally to a miniature apocalypse....

Concerning the Lord's Day

Now every Lord's Day, gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanksgiving, after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who has any dispute with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your

sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is what was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations."⁷

Concerning Bishops and Deacons

Appoint, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord — men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved — for they also render to you the

service of prophets and teachers. Do not despise them, therefore, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers.

An Apocolypse[§]

And reprove one another, not in anger, but in peace, as you find in the Gospel. But to everyone who acts amiss against another, let no one speak [to him] nor let him hear anything from you until he should repent.

But your prayers and alms and all your deeds so do, as you find in the Gospel of our Lord.

Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched nor your loins unloosed, but be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes.

But you shall come together often, seeking the things that are befitting to your souls; for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you should not be made perfect in the last time.

For in the last days, false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another. And then shall appear the World-Deceiver as the Son of God, and he shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things, which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many

shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth: first, the sign of an opening in heaven; then, the sign of the sound of the trumpet; and the third, the resurrection of the dead — yet not of all, but as it is said, "The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him."⁸ Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.

⁷ Mal 1:11, 14

[§] See Mt 24.

⁸ Zech 14:5