

Church History

Lesson 5 - Early Church Writings (The Didache)

1. Background, author, date, purpose
 - 1.1. The Didache - the greek word meaning “teaching” or “doctrine” - was a document known to exist because it was referred to in many other writings. However, we did not have a copy of it until 1873!
 - 1.2. The document was probably finalized in its present form between 100-150 AD, but it seems to reflect a time much earlier - perhaps shortly after the death of the apostles, and before writings like Ignatius.
 - 1.3. The most likely location of writing is probably Syria or Palestine.
 - 1.3.1. The document has a very Jewish flavor, especially as seen in the teaching of the “two ways.”
 - 1.3.2. The writing seems very familiar with the Gospel of Matthew, which was written primarily to Jews.
 - 1.3.3. The mention of the mountains in the section on the Eucharist has led some to believe in a Syro-Palestinian provenance for the letter.

2. Discussion of the notable themes in the Didache
 - 2.1. The two ways - basic instruction on Christian living
 - 2.1.1. There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways. (Didache 1:1)
 - 2.1.2. Now this is the way of life: First, you shall love God, who made you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself; but whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another. (Didache 1:2)
 - 2.1.2.1. Note that this contains the two great commandments as stated by Jesus, and also the Golden rule. They clearly had access to the early copies of the sayings of Jesus.
 - 2.1.2.2. In fact, this opening statement is followed by a string of sayings of Jesus, many from the sermon on the mount.
 - 2.1.2.3. However, there are also sayings which are not part of Scripture, showing they apparently had access to independent versions of the sayings of Jesus.
 - 2.1.2.3.1. The teaching of these words is this: **Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what credit is it if you love those who love you? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? But you must love those who hate you, and you will not have an enemy. Abstain from fleshly and bodily cravings....** (Didache 1:3-4)
 - 2.1.2.3.2. But it has also been said concerning this: “let your gift sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give it.” (Didache 1:6)

- 2.1.3.** The second commandment of the teaching is: ² You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not corrupt children; you shall not be sexually immoral; you shall not steal; you shall not practice magic; you shall not engage in sorcery; you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide. You shall not covet your neighbor's possessions; ³ you shall not commit perjury; you shall not give false testimony; you shall not speak evil; you shall not hold a grudge. (Didache 2:1-3)
- 2.1.3.1.** Note the reference to the Ten Commandments.
- 2.1.3.2.** However, once again note that there are other commands not specifically given in Scripture - you shall not corrupt a child.... you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide.
- 2.1.3.3.** These are obviously seen as arising from the commandments, and the same practice is seen in many later catechisms - not only knowing the commands but explaining the intent of the commands which go beyond the express words.
- 2.1.3.4.** It is interesting to note that abortion was specifically forbidden - as part of basic instruction for Christians!
- 2.1.4.** My child, flee from evil of every kind and from everything resembling it. ² Do not become angry, for anger leads to murder. Do not be jealous or quarrelsome or hot-tempered, for all these things breed murders. ³ My child, do not be lustful, for lust leads to sexual immorality. Do not be foulmouthed or let your eyes roam, for all these things breed adultery. (Didache 3:1-3)
- 2.1.4.1.** Note how similar this all sounds to the Sermon on the Mount - not just giving the command from the Decalogue, but going to the heart.
- 2.1.5.** My child, remember night and day the one who preaches God's word to you, and honor him as though he were the Lord. For wherever the Lord's nature is preached, there the Lord is. ² Moreover, you shall seek out daily the presence of the saints, so that you may find support in their words. ³ You shall not cause division, but shall make peace between those who quarrel. (Didache 4:1-3)
- 2.1.5.1.** Note the emphasis on honoring leaders - similar but not nearly as stringent as in Ignatius.
- 2.1.5.2.** Also note the person is not singled out as a bishop as in Ignatius.
- 2.1.5.3.** Finally note the emphasis on gathering with believers regularly to encourage one another.
- 2.1.6.** If you earn something by working with your hands, you shall give a ransom for your sins. You shall not hesitate to give, nor shall you grumble when giving, for you will know who is the good paymaster of the reward. You shall not turn away from someone in need, but shall share everything with your brother or sister, and do not claim that anything is your own. For if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more so in perishable things! (Didache 4:6-8)

- 2.1.6.1. The statement about 'ransom for your sins' is definitely a problem! It seems to directly contradict 1 Peter 1:18-19 that we were not redeemed with silver and gold but the precious blood of Christ.
- 2.1.6.2. This section is a real challenge to the materialism of our own day. I suspect most modern people in the west really would struggle with this - which might show some of our own idols!
- 2.1.7. Do not give orders to your servants when you are angry, for they hope in the same God, and they may lose the fear of God, who is over both of you. God is surely not coming to call on us according to our outward appearance or station in life, but to them whom the Spirit has prepared. And you, servants, be subject to your masters as to God's image, in modesty and fear. (Didache 4:9-11)
 - 2.1.7.1. Notice that slavery is assumed and is not rebuked.
 - 2.1.7.2. On the whole, these comments follow those of Paul and Peter in their writings (see Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Peter 2:18-21; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:1-3; Colossians 3:17-24)
- 2.1.8. But the way of death is this: first of all, it is evil and completely cursed; murders, adulteries, lusts, sexual immoralities, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, sorceries, robberies, false testimonies, hypocrisies, duplicity, deceit, pride, malice, stubbornness, greed, abusive language, jealousy, audacity, arrogance, boastfulness. ² It is the way of persecutors of good people, of those who hate truth, love a lie, do not know the reward of righteousness, do not adhere to what is good or to righteous judgment, who are vigilant not for what is good but for what is evil, from whom gentleness and patience are far removed, who love worthless things, pursue a reward, have no mercy for the poor, do not work on behalf of the oppressed, do not know the one who made them, are murderers of children, corrupters of God's creation, who turn away from someone in need, who oppress the afflicted, are advocates of the wealthy, lawless judges of the poor, utterly sinful. May you be delivered, children, from all these things! (Didache 5)
 - 2.1.8.1. Note how similar some of these sins are to the lists given by Paul, James and other NT writers.
 - 2.1.8.2. Note the list contains things such as personal immorality and not working to help the poor. In many ways it seems like an expansion of James 1:27 - true religion is keeping oneself spotless from the world and taking care of widows.
- 2.1.9. This concept of the two ways was a very popular form of catechism and moral instruction within Judaism. However, the inclusion of all of the New Testament material shows this form has been greatly adapted for Christianity.
- 2.2. Church practices - The second part of the document gives a variety of instructions for church life and practices. These include baptism, fasting, prayer, the Eucharist, and various issues about leadership.

2.2.1. Food

2.2.1.1. Concerning food, do what you are able to do and be on guard against meat offered to idols, for that is to worship dead gods.

2.2.1.2. This seems to go beyond and contradict Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 8-10.

2.2.2. Baptism

2.2.2.1. Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water. ² But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold water, then do so in warm. ³ But if you have neither, then pour water on the head three times in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. ⁴ And before the baptism let the one baptizing and the one who is to be baptized fast, as well as any others who are able. Also, you must instruct the one who is to be baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand. (Didache 7)

2.2.2.1.1. Note the practice following the Trinitarian formula in Matthew 28:19-20.

2.2.2.1.2. Note that many additions - use running water, three times, fasting, etc.

2.2.2.1.3. Note baptism was apparently by immersion, and only by pouring if immersion could not be done.

2.2.2.1.4. Note that the baptism envisioned is for an older believer - they must fast, be instructed, etc. This would either indicate believers baptism or simply not be discussing what happened with the children of believers.

2.2.2.1.5. This shows how hard it can be to determine the actual practices of early believers. Did they not baptize infants - or just not mention it here?

2.2.3. Fasting and prayer

2.2.3.1. But do not let your fasts coincide with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Monday and Thursday, so you must fast on Wednesday and Friday. ² Nor should you pray like the hypocrites. Instead, pray like this, just as the Lord commanded in his Gospel: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors; and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for yours is the power and the glory forever." ³ Pray like this three times a day. (Didache 8)

- 2.2.3.1.1.** Note the references to Jesus' teaching on prayers - not like the hypocrites, Lord's prayer.
- 2.2.3.1.2.** Note idea of not fasting like hypocrites - use different days!
- 2.2.3.1.3.** Note prayer to be done three times a day - very similar to Judaism.
- 2.2.3.1.4.** Notice the Lord's Prayer includes the liturgical ending "yours is the power and the glory...." which is not original in Matthew and is not in Luke. But this shows it was added extremely early.
- 2.2.3.1.5.** It appears a much more liturgical form of life was already developing - as in most religions in history. It is an attempt to give form to faith.

2.2.4. Eucharist - the Lord's Supper

- 2.2.4.1.** Concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way.² 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.
^{9:3}Next, concerning the broken bread: We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through Jesus your servant. To you be the glory forever.
^{9:4} 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. To you is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever. ^{9:5}Allow no one to eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized in the name of the Lord. For concerning this, the Lord has said, "Do not give what is holy to dogs." ^{10:1} After the Eucharist when you are filled, give thanks this way: ^{10:2} We thank you, holy Father, for your holy name which you enshrined in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality that you made known to us through Jesus your servant. To you be the glory forever.^{10:3} You, Master Almighty, have created all things for your name's sake. You gave food and drink to all people for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to you; but to us you freely give spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Jesus, your servant. ^{10:4} Before all things we thank you because you are mighty. To you be the glory forever. ^{10:5} Remember, Lord, your church. Deliver it from all evil and 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. ^{10:6} Let grace come, and let this world pass away! Hosanna to the Son of David! If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not holy,

let him repent. Maranatha! Amen. [^{10:7} But permit the prophets to make thanksgiving as much as they desire. [Didache 9-10]

2.2.4.1.1. Note the Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist - the Greek word for 'thanksgiving.'

2.2.4.1.2. Note prayers are prescribed unless a prophet is present - they can pray as they want! (10:7)

2.2.4.1.3. Note how in 9:5 one must be baptized before eating the Eucharist - otherwise you are giving holy food to dogs!

2.2.4.1.4. Note the liturgical nature (and often Jewish nature) of the prayers.

2.2.4.1.5. Note the reversed order - cup, then bread, then final thanksgiving.

2.2.4.1.6. Note the longest section by far is the final thanksgiving - which is in line with the name given to the meal.

2.2.4.1.7. Note that it does not prescribe the words found in Scripture - in any of the Gospels or 1 Corinthians!

2.2.5. Teachers, Apostles and Prophets

2.2.5.1. So, if anyone should come and teach you all these things that have just been mentioned above, welcome him. ² But if the teacher himself goes astray and teaches a different teaching that undermines all this, do not listen to him. However, if his teaching contributes to righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, welcome him as you would the Lord. (Didache 11:1)

2.2.5.1.1. Note the testing of teachers. They must teach the settled faith - not new ideas.

2.2.5.2. Now concerning the apostles and prophets, deal with them as follows in accordance with the rule of the gospel. ⁴ Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. ⁵ But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. ⁶ And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night's lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet. (Didache 11:1-6)

2.2.5.2.1. Note that roaming apostles and prophets still existed!

2.2.5.2.2. Note the test - leave quickly and ask for no money!

- 2.2.5.3.** In addition, if any prophet speaks in the Spirit, you shall not try or judge him; for every sin will be forgiven, but this sin cannot be forgiven. But not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; only he is a prophet who has the ways of the Lord about him. By their ways will the false prophet and the prophet be known. Any prophet who orders a meal in the Spirit does not eat it; if he does, he is indeed a false prophet. And any prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet. When a prophet, proved true, works for the mystery of the church in the world but does not teach others to do what he himself does, he will not be judged among you, for his judgment is already before God. The ancient prophets acted in this way, also. But if anyone should say in the spirit, "Give me money" or anything else, do not listen to him. But if he tells you to give on behalf of others who are in need, let no one judge him.
- 2.2.5.3.1.** Note the command to not even judge the prophets - a sin that will not be forgiven.
- 2.2.5.3.2.** But then note the ways to test the prophets - clearly there was some tension here with how to be open to the moving of the Spirit, but to not be taken in by false prophets.
- 2.2.5.3.3.** The basic test is by their fruit and life you will know them - especially regarding trying to get money. False people trying to get money was clearly a problem then as well!
- 2.2.5.4.** Welcome anyone coming in the name of the Lord. Receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord, but then, test them and use your discretion. If he who comes is a transient, assist him as far as you are able; but he should not remain with you more than two or three days, if need be. If he wants to stay with you, and is a craftsman, let him work for his living. But if he has no trade, use your judgment in providing for him; for a Christian should not live idle in your midst. If he is dissatisfied with this sort of an arrangement, he is a Christ peddler. Watch that you keep away from such people. (Didache 12)
- 2.2.5.4.1.** Once again note the practical concern with money - this must have been a major problem.
- 2.2.5.4.2.** Note that everyone was expected to try and work and earn their way - as in Paul's command in 2 Thessalonians 3:5-10.

2.2.5.5. Every genuine prophet who wants to live among you is worthy of support. So also, every true teacher is, like a workman, entitled to his support. Every first fruit, therefore, of the products of vintage and harvest, of cattle and of sheep, should be given as first fruits to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have no prophet, give it all to the poor. If you bake bread, take the first loaf and give it according to the commandment. If you open a new jar of wine or of oil, take the first fruit and give it to the prophets. If you acquire money or cloth or any other possession, set aside a portion first, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment. (Didache 13)

2.2.5.5.1. In spite of all the previous concerns about prophets and money, those who live among the community are to be supported.

2.2.5.5.2. Note that the firstfruits are to go to the prophets - or to the poor.

2.2.5.5.3. Note the very literal nature of firstfruits - first loaf, first part of wine or oil, first part of any new purchase.

2.2.6. The Lord's Day Gathering

2.2.6.1. On the Lord's own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. However, let no one who is at odds with his brother come together with you, until he has reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is what the Lord has said: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the of hosts. . . . For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is revered among the nations." (Didache 14)

2.2.6.1.1. Note the meeting was on the Lord's own day - Sunday, the day of the Resurrection - not the Sabbath of Saturday!

2.2.6.1.2. Notice that they apparently took the Eucharist every Sunday.

2.2.6.1.3. Notice that the worship is considered as some form of sacrifice. This could be in line with Hebrews 13:15 (Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise —the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.), or it could be an early form of what later developed into the sacrifice of the mass. I would lean to the former at this early stage.

2.2.7. Elders/bishops and deacons

2.2.7.1. Therefore appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honored men, along with the prophets and teachers. (Didache 15:1-2)

2.2.7.1.1. Note the two fold structure of leaders - bishops (elders - the word is episkopos, which is used for elders in the NT) and deacons. This is different than that seen in Ignatius of bishops, presbyters/elders, and deacons.

2.2.7.1.2. Note this group are considered different that the pervious group of traveling apostles and prophets.

2.2.7.1.3. Note that the people were to appoint for themselves elders and deacons. This uses the same word that is used in Acts 14:23 to speak of Paul and Barnabas appointing elders for the churches. Does this indicate some form of congregational selection?

2.2.7.2. And reprove one another, not in anger, but in peace, as you have it in the gospel. But to anyone who acts amiss against another, let no one speak to him, nor let him hear anything from you until he repents. But your prayers and alms and all your deeds so do, as you have it in the gospel of our Lord.

2.2.7.2.1. Notice all believers are expected to be correcting one another - not just leaders.

2.2.7.2.2. Note that they expect the believers to be familiar with the Gospel of our Lord. They expect people to have access to the teachings of Jesus in some form.

2.2.8. End times teaching

2.2.8.1. Watch over your life, that your lamps are never quenched, and that your loins are never unloosed. Be ready, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Come together often, seeking the things that are good for your souls. A life of faith will not profit you if you are not made perfect at the end of time. (Didache 16:1-2)

2.2.8.1.1. Note this instruction uses the teaching of Jesus that we do not know when He is coming (Mark 13:35,37), not letting your lamps go out (Matthew 25:1ff) and also having your loins girded (Luke 12:35).

2.2.8.2. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters will be plenty, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. When lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another, and And then the deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God and will perform signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will commit abominations the likes of which have never happened before. ⁵Then all humankind will come to the fiery test, and many will fall away and perish; but those who endure in their faith will be saved by the accursed one himself. ⁶ And then there will appear the signs of the truth: first the sign of an opening in heaven, then the sign of the sound of a trumpet, and third, the resurrection of the dead— ⁷ but not of all; rather, as it has been said, “The Lord will come, and all his saints with him.” ⁸ Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven. (Didache 16:3-8)

2.2.8.2.1. This seems to be very general, putting together various stands from the Olivet discourse, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

2.2.8.2.2. The basic point is that tough times are ahead, so be prepared.

2.3. Summary

2.3.1. The Didache contains basic instruction in Christian living.

2.3.1.1. The main topics covered include a lot about the two ways (with major emphasis on the Ten Commandments, especially as interpreted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount), and then basic Christian practices - prayer, fasting, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and life in the Church.

2.3.1.2. This is clearly intended to be a basic manual for Christian living in the early church.

2.3.2. The Didache is not a manual of the beliefs of the church, except as those undergird Christian living

2.3.2.1. What is missing is as notable as what is in the Didache!

2.3.2.2. There is not discussion of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, justification, death and resurrection, etc.

2.3.2.3. This shows that clearly this document was supplemental to other teaching, which is here merely assumed.