

Module 101: Didache

The Teaching of the Apostles. Translated by J.B. Lightfoot; Modernized and abridged by Stephen Tomkins; introduced, edited and prepared for the web by Dan Graves

“Be careful how you live.”

Module Introduction

The *Didache* meaning “Teaching” is the short name of a Christian manual compiled before 300AD. The full title is *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Some Christians thought *Didache* was inspired, but the church rejected it when making the final decision which books to include in the New Testament.

Didache contained instructions for Christian groups; and its statement of belief may be the first written catechism. It has four parts: the first is the “Two Ways, the Way of Life and the Way of Death;” the second explains how to perform rituals such as baptism, fasting, and Communion; the third covers ministry and how to deal with traveling teachers; the fourth part is a reminder that Jesus is coming again, with quotations from several New Testament passages which exhort Christians to live godly lives and prepare for “that day.”

Baptism

This is how you should baptize: Having recited all these things, [the first half of the *Teaching*, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death”] baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in running water. If you do not have running water, then baptize in still water. The water should be cold, but if you do not have cold water, then use warm. If you have neither, then just pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Both the one who is baptized and the one who baptizes should fast beforehand, along with any others who are able, the one that is baptized being told to fast for a day or two.

Prayer and Fasting

Your fasting should not be like the hypocrites'. They fast on Monday and the Thursday: you should fast on the Wednesday and Friday. You should not pray like the hypocrites either, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth; Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debt, as we forgive our debtors; Do not lead us into trial, but deliver us from the evil one; for yours is the power and the glory for ever and ever. Say this prayer three times a day.

The Eucharist

This is how you should give thanks at the Eucharist: First, for the cup:

We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of your son David which you revealed to us through your son Jesus. Yours is the glory for ever and ever.

Then for the broken bread:

We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you revealed to us through your son Jesus. Yours is the glory for ever and ever. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may 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 for ever and ever.

No one should eat or drink this Eucharistic thanksgiving, unless they that have been baptized into the name of the Lord. As the Lord has said, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs." After everyone has had enough, thank God with these words:

We give you thanks, Holy Father, for your holy name, which you have revealed to us through your son Jesus.

Yours is the glory for ever and ever. Almighty Lord, you created all things for your name's sake, and gave food and drink to people for their enjoyment, so that they would thank you, but you gave us spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your son. Above all we thank you that you are powerful Yours is the glory for ever and ever. Remember your Church, Lord. Deliver it from all evil, perfect it in your love, sanctify it and gather it together from the four winds into your kingdom which you have prepared for it. Yours is the glory for ever and ever. May grace come and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If any man is holy, let him come; if any man is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen.

Let prophets, however, give thanksgiving as they see fit.

Teachers, Apostles and Prophets

Listen to anyone who comes to teach you such things as these, but if a teacher is led astray and teaches a different doctrine that undermines what you have been told, do not hear him. However if he comes to the increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as you would the Lord.

You should treat apostles and prophets as the Gospel commands. Receive every apostle that comes to you as you would the Lord. But he must not stay more than one day, or two if necessary: but if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. When an apostle leaves you, give him nothing except bread until he finds shelter. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet. Do not test or evaluate any prophet speaking in the Spirit - this is the one unforgivable sin. But not every one that speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, only those who live in the way of the Lord. Thus it is by their conduct that you can tell false prophets from true. Similarly, no prophet shall eat while he is in the Spirit; if he does, he is a false prophet. Even if a prophet teaches the truth, if he does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet. However, if

a prophet that has been approved and found true, and lives out the cosmic mystery of the Church, does not teach you to do all that he does himself, you should not judge such a prophet. His judgment must be left to God, for the prophets in the past also did such things. If anyone says in the Spirit, "Give me silver", or asks for anything else, do not listen to him. But if he tells you to give to others that are in want, let no one judge him.

Receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord. When you have tested them you will know them, for you will be able to discern true from false. If the one who comes is a traveler, assist him, as well as you can, but he should not stay with you more than two days - or three if necessary. But if he is a craftsman who wishes to settle with you, let him work for his bread. If he has no trade, use your discretion to provide a way for him to live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness. If he will not do this, he is trading Christ for profit. Beware of such men. But all true prophets and teacher who wish to settle among you are, like workers, worthy of their food. Therefore you should always give the first fruits of the produce of the wine-press and of the threshing-floor, and of your oxen and sheep, to the prophets, for they are your chief-priests. If you do not have a prophet, give them to the poor instead. In the same way you should give the first fruits to the prophet when you make bread, or open a jar of wine or oil, and the same goes for your money and clothes and all possessions, as you see fit, in accordance with the commandment.

Sunday Worship

On the Lord's day, come together, break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure. Anyone who has a dispute with another, must not join your assembly until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled, for this is the sacrifice spoken of by the Lord: "In every place and at every time offer me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great king,"

says the Lord, "and My name is wonderful among the nations.""

Church Leaders

Therefore appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, who are true and approved, because they also perform the service of prophets and teachers to you. Do not despise them, for they are worthy of honor alongside prophets and teachers.

Wrongdoers and Doing Right

And reprove one another, not in anger but in peace, as the Gospel tells you. If one of you does wrong to another, do not speak a word to him until he repents. Your prayers, your giving to the poor and all your deeds, should be done in accordance with the Gospel of our Lord.

The End Times

Be careful how you live. Do not let your lamps be quenched, nor your loins ungirdled, but be ready, for you do not know the hour our Lord will come. Meet together frequently, pursuing what is good for your souls, for your whole time as a believer will come to nothing if you are found to be imperfect at the end time. In the last days the false prophets and corrupters shall multiply, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. As lawlessness increases, they will persecute and betray and hate one another. And then the deceiver of the world will appear as a Son of God, performing signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands. He will do things more unholy than any since the beginning of the world.

All of humanity shall come to the fire of testing, and many will fall and perish. But all who endure in their faith shall be saved by the Curse. Then the signs of the truth will appear: firstly a rift in the heavens, then the sound of a trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead. But not all will rise,

because, as it is said, 'The Lord shall come, and all his saints with him'. Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.

Discussion Starters:

1. In what ways is the church reflected here different from contemporary churches? How are they similar? How does it compare to what we see of the church in the New Testament?
2. Why do you think cold running water was preferred for baptisms? Are details like this important?
3. "Your fasting should not be like the hypocrites'...." This refers to the non-Christian Jews. Is it right to follow a certain procedure just because it sets you apart from others you disagree with? Can you think of other ways Christians do the same thing these days? Cf. Matthew 6:16-18. Do you think the writer has misunderstood this verse? How do you think the importance of fasting here compares with the New Testament? And how does it compare with our own churches?
4. How does the communion service compare with today's?
5. What rules does The Teaching lay down for prophets and apostles? What is the purpose of these rules, and why do you think they were necessary?
6. Do you think this is a writing that simply repeats the teaching of the New Testament? Or one which fills in the gaps, answering questions that the New Testament doesn't? Or is it going in a whole new direction from the New Testament? Do you believe it is a genuine first-century writing that accurately reflects the teaching of the apostles? And would the Christian faith and the church be any different if it had been included in the scriptures?

7. What can today's church learn from *The Teaching*?

Bible Verses

Matthew 6:9-13

Matthew 7:6

Colossians 2:20-23