

## Foreword

The book of Hebrews says, “the word of God is living and active”, a powerful allusion to the fact that we as Christians are responsible for not merely being book worms, but to seek fresh revelation from God and how His word applies to us. This comes married to the responsibility of reconciling what we receive to the written word of God – the Bible. A prophet once put it this way – the word of God is already written on our hearts, but the Bible helps us to bring it out. The spiritual food of every devoted Christian is more than the mere words we read on paper, but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

The Didache, also known as “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”, is a first century Greek manuscript revealing the life and heart of the early Church. It has been the center of much academic interest and controversy since its rediscovery in 1883. It is a manuscript believed to have been penned before most of the gospels and many letters to the early churches - around 49-79 AD. We’ve only recently discovered and had it in our possession for the past 150 years, and a critical text for only half of that time. It has tweaked the interest of many academics in the field, but because evangelicals typically do not take interest in non-canonic texts, it has been reserved for primarily academic or liturgical settings. As a result, there has been little push for a modern, common translation or hermeneutic interpretation.

Interestingly enough, it is the only find for the past 150 years to receive widespread acceptance within the Catholic and Orthodox churches. It is a manuscript that I have found a very powerful read, not because it adds anything to the existing works of the Bible (it doesn’t), but because it reflects and brings out what’s already written on many of our hearts about what the Bible teaches. It illuminates many precepts we Christians frequently fail to vocalize, but know to be true. The Didache has a way of witnessing to the reader. Many beautiful prayers and passages expose the heart of the early church. The many beautiful passages in the Didache bring life, humility, and sometimes conviction.

Upon reading early, rougher translations of the Didache, my interest led me to research it extensively. Upon an intimate examination of the Greek text, I arrived at the conclusion that the available translations of the Didache were in bad shape. The two key problems I discovered about the text were the quality of the translation and the heavily indoctrinated influence with which it was interpreted under. Many translations had verses that didn’t make grammatical or theological sense. The Greek language is amazingly vast; a single word can take on one of a dozen meanings (or more). Because of this, interpreting the text causes the theological beliefs of the translator to be taken into account at some level. Ergo, reading manuscripts in the Greek is the spiritual version of drinking whiskey straight up. Sometimes you get burned.

For example, chapter seven mentions “living water” and “other water”, which some have interpreted along the lines of ‘holy water’ and ‘plain (not holy) water’. In the Greek, however, it can simply mean ‘natural flowing water’ like that from a stream, and ‘drinking water’ or ‘some other water’ like that from a well or pool. Most translations also make overzealous use of the word ‘Eucharist’ in chapter nine, however in the Greek,

## FOREWORD

the word (literally meaning ‘thanksgiving’) has taken on many names throughout history including “communion”, “holy communion” and its transliterated equal, “Eucharist”. While doctrinal interpretations like this are largely unintentional, a manuscript translated by an Orthodox Catholic, for example, is going to look like other scriptures read by an Orthodox Catholic, and use different terminology than a translation by, say, a Baptist or Pentecostal. If the Didache has any scriptural value at all, one shouldn’t have to ascribe to the Catholic persuasion in order to receive it; therefore balancing the neutrality of doctrine was one of my goals in this new translation. My translations have started out with the most neutral and authoritative definitions using A Greek-English Lexicon, 9<sup>th</sup> edition by Oxford Press. Difficult phrases also included various theological interpretations as well as research of a particular word’s use in existing scripture.

This project, in short, is an attempt to restore the beauty and harmony of the Didache as well as explain its historical significance, status within the church, and message. I have attempted to provide an accurate, thorough, and modern-day retranslation of this powerful manuscript from the Greek text, taking special care to document the challenges of specific verses and reconcile its intended meaning to New Testament Christian theology. I’ve worked the text to flow in much the same way as modern-day Bible translations to make it easy to read and understand – without compromising the meaning or the grammatical constructs of the original text. Study notes have also been provided to assist with interpretation.

Much like the book of Jacob (James), the Didache isn’t a teaching about how to live *to be* a believer, but rather a book about how early Christians lived *because* they were believers. Its intent included unification of the early Christian churches, while the message illustrates the lifestyle born-again Christians exhibited – this in a time where many of the canonic texts we have in our Bible did not yet exist or were not widely circulated. It’s not a book about catechism, but a book about *lifestyle*.

Neither is this book anything like other recently discovered texts. In a market where “Da Vinci Code” type books are best sellers to modern-day Gnostics, many trash-heap manuscripts have been published recently, only to be tossed out by the church, in part, because they attempted to turn Christianity into a Zen Buddhist religion - suggesting hidden knowledge to enlightenment that leads to salvation, allegedly hidden away for millennia. These books attempted to challenge the canonic scripture and the deity of Christ. The Didache is nothing like this. It makes no attempts to change the word of God, although it does expound on many precepts. Most importantly, it emphasizes – not diminishes, the deity of Christ and importance of faith. Instead of addressing matters of intellect (as Gnostic texts do), the Didache addresses matters of the heart. Rather than being another book about abstract religion, it’s an active look into the background of the early Christian church and a glimpse of what may have been on our Lord’s heart when He instructed them in matters such as faith, hope, and love.

The Didache is a unique document due to the time of its writing and its strong agreement with scripture. It commands at least the same level of consideration as something off the shelf – and probably more, as the authors were clearly intimate with the early church and

## **FOREWORD**

well educated (they could read and write!) On first read, the beauty and spirit of this teaching should be apparent. The Didache is, at the very least, a great Christian work of literary beauty that should be enjoyed by every believer.

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