



SESSION 5: ST. IGNATIUS TO ST. POLYCARP – READINGS

Translated by Tony Jones

The Didache - The Complete Text

1 There Are Two Ways

1:1 There are two ways, one of life and one of death! and there is a great difference between the two ways.

1:2 The way of life is this: First, you shall love God who made you. And second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you.

1:3 The meaning of these sayings is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the heathens do the same? But you should love those who hate you, and then you shall have no enemies.

1:4 Abstain from fleshly and bodily lusts: If someone strikes your right cheek, turn the other also, and be perfect. If someone forces you to go one mile, go two. If someone takes your cloak, give also your coat. If someone takes from you what is yours, don't ask for it back. You really cannot.

1:5 Give to every one who asks you, and don't ask for it back. The Father wants his blessings shared. Happy is the giver who lives according to this rule, for that one is guiltless. But the receiver must beware; for if one receives who has need, he is guiltless, but if one receives not having need, he shall stand trial, answering why he received and for what use. If he is found guilty he shall not escape until he pays back the last penny.

1:6 However, concerning this, there is a saying: "Let your alms sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give them."

2 The Second Commandment

2:1 The second commandment of the teaching is this:

2:2 Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not corrupt boys; do not have illicit sex; do not steal; do not practice magic; do not practice witchcraft; you shall not murder a child, whether it be born or unborn. Do not covet the things of your neighbor.

2:3 Do not swear or bear false witness. Do not speak evil of others; do not bear grudges.

2:4 You should not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double-tongue is a deadly snare.

2:5 Your speech should not be false nor empty, but fulfilled by action.

2:6 Do not be covetous, or greedy, or hypocritical, or malicious, or arrogant. Do not have designs against your neighbor.

2:7 Hate no one; correct some, pray for others, and some you should love more than your own life.

3 My Child, Flee Evil

3:1 My child, flee evil of all kinds, and everything like it.

3:2 Don't be prone to anger, for anger leads to murder. Don't be jealous or quarrelsome or hot-tempered, for all these things lead to murder.

3:3 My child, don't be lustful, for lust leads to illicit sex. Don't be a filthy talker or allow your eyes a free reign, for these lead to adultery.

3:4 My child, don't observe omens, since it leads to idolatry. Don't be an enchanter, or an astrologer, or a purifier, or be willing to see or hear about these things, for these all lead to idolatry.

3:5 My child, don't be a liar, since a lie leads to theft. Don't love money or seek glory, for these things lead to thievery.

3:6 My child, don't grumble, since it leads to blasphemy, and don't be self-willed or evil-minded, for all these things lead to blasphemy.

3:7 On the contrary, be gentle, since the gentle will inherit the earth.

3:8 Be long-suffering and pitiful and guileless and gentle and good, and with trembling, treasure the words you have received.

3:9 Don't exalt yourself or open your heart to overconfidence. Don't be on intimate terms with mighty people, but with just and lowly ones.

3:10 Accept whatever happens to you as a blessing, knowing that nothing comes to pass apart from God.

4 My Child, Remember

[**4:1** My child, remember day and night him who speaks the word of God to you, and honor him as the Lord. For wherever his lordship is spoken of, there he is.]

4:2 Seek each day the faces of the saints, in order that you may be refreshed by their words.

4:3 Do not initiate divisions, but rather bring peace to those who contend against one another. Judge righteously, and do not take social status into account when reproving for transgressions.

4:4 Do not waver in your decisions.

4:5 Do not be one who opens his hands to receive, or closes them when it is time to give.

4:6 If you have anything, by your hands you should give ransom for your sins.

4:7 Do not hesitate to give, and do not complain about it. You will know in time who is the good Rewarder.

4:8 Do not turn away from one who is in want; rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more in things which perish!

4:9 Do not remove your hand from your son or daughter; teach them the fear of God from their youth.

4:10 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.

4:11 And you, servants, be subject to your masters as to God's image, in modesty and fear.

4:12 You should hate all hypocrisy and everything which is not pleasing to the Lord.

4:13 Do not in any way neglect the commandments of the Lord, but keep what you have received, neither adding nor taking away anything.

4:14 In your gatherings, confess your transgressions, and do not come for prayer with a guilty conscience.

This is the way of life!

5 The Way of Death

5:1 The way of death, on the other hand, is this: It is evil and accursed—murders, adulteries, lust, illicit sex, thefts, idolatries, magical arts, sorceries, robberies, false testimonies, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, deceit, haughtiness, depravity, self-will, greediness, filthy talking, jealousy, over-confidence, loftiness, boastfulness—those who do not fear God.

5:2 The way of death is the way of those who persecute the good, hate the truth, love lies, and do not understand

the reward for righteousness. They do not cleave to good or righteous judgment; they do not watch for what is good, but for what is evil. They are strangers to meekness and patience, loving vanities, pursuing revenge, without pity for the needy and oppressed. They do not know their Creator; they are murderers of children, destroyers of God's image. They turn away from those who are in need, making matters worse for those who are distressed. They are advocates for the rich, unjust judges of the poor. In a word, the way of death is full of those who are steeped in sin. Be delivered, children, from all of this!

6 See That No One Leads You Astray

6:1 See that no one leads you astray from the way of this teaching, since all other teachings train you without God.

6:2 For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able, then at least do what you can.

6:3 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.

7 Concerning Baptism

7:1 Concerning baptism, you should baptize this way: After first explaining all things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in flowing water.

7:2 But if you have no running water, baptize in other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, then in warm.

7:3 If you have very little, pour water three times on the head in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

7:4 Before the baptism, both the baptizer and the candidate for baptism, plus any others who can, should fast. The candidate should fast for one or two days beforehand.

8 Your Fasts and prayers

8:1 Your fasts should not be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays. You should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.

8:2 And do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in the gospel: Our Father in heaven, holy be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us enough bread day-by-day. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

8:3 Pray this three times each day.

9 Concerning the Eucharist

9:1 Concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way.

9:2 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 After the Eucharist

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.]

11 Welcome the Teacher

11:1 Welcome the teacher when he comes to instruct you in all that has been said.

11:2 But if he turns and trains you in another tradition to the destruction of this teaching, do not listen. If he teaches so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord.

11:3 Act according to the precepts of the gospel concerning all apostles and prophets:

11:4 Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord.

11:5 But he must not remain more than one day, or two, if there's a need. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet.

11:6 And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread to last him until his next night of lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

11:7 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.

11:8 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.

11:9 Any prophet who orders a meal in the Spirit does not eat it; if he does, he is indeed a false prophet.

11:10 And any prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet.

11:11 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.

11:12 But whoever says in the Spirit, "Give me money," or something else like this, you must not listen to him. But if he tells you to give for the sake of others who are in need, let no one judge him.

12 Welcome Anyone Coming in the Name of the Lord

12:1 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.

12:2 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.

12:3 If he wants to stay with you, and is a craftsman, let him work for his living.

12:4 But if he has no trade, use your judgment in providing for him; for a Christian should not live idle in your midst.

12:5 If he is dissatisfied with this sort of an arrangement, he is a Christ peddler. Watch that you keep away from such people.

13 Every Genuine prophet

13:1 Every genuine prophet who wants to live among you is worthy of support.

13:2 So also, every true teacher is, like a workman, entitled to his support.

13:3 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.

13:4 But if you have no prophet, give it all to the poor.

13:5 If you bake bread, take the first loaf and give it according to the commandment.

13:6 If you open a new jar of wine or of oil, take the first fruit and give it to the prophets.

13:7 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.

14 On the Lord's Day

14:1 On the Lord's day, gather yourselves together and break bread, give thanks, but first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.

14:2 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.

14:3 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."

15 Appoint Bishops for Yourselves

15:1 Appoint bishops for yourselves, as well as deacons, worthy of the Lord, of meek disposition, unattached to money, truthful and proven; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers.

15:2 Do not despise them, after all, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers.

15:3 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.

16 Watch Over Your Life

16:1 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.

16:2 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.

16:3 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.

16:4 When lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another, and then the world-deceiver will appear claiming to be the Son of God, and he will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will do iniquitous things that have not been seen since the beginning of the world.

16:5 Then humankind will enter into the fire of trial, and many will be made to stumble and many will perish; but those who endure in their faith will be saved from under the curse itself.

16:6 And then the signs of the truth will appear: the first sign, an opening of the heavens; the second sign, the sounding of the trumpet; and the third sign, the resurrection of the dead—

16:7 not of every one, but as it is said: "Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him."

16:8 Finally, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven¹ with power and great glory."

Excerpt from On the Martyrdom of Polycarp
Written by Christian witnesses(es) in Smyrna ~156AD
Translated by J.B. Lightfoot
Abridged by Stephen Tomkins

5. Polycarp's Vision

When he heard about this, the redoubtable Polycarp was not in the least upset, and was happy to stay in the city, but eventually he was persuaded to leave. He went to friends in the nearby country, where as usual he spent the whole time, day and night, in prayer for all people and for the churches throughout the world. Three days before he was arrested, while he was praying, he had a vision of the pillow under his head in flames. He said prophetically to those who were with him, "I will be burnt alive."

6. The Betrayal

Those who were looking for him were coming near, so he left for another house. They immediately followed him, and when they could not find him, they seized two young men from his own household and tortured them into confession. The sheriff, called Herod, was impatient to bring Polycarp to the stadium, so that he might fulfill his special role, to share the sufferings of Christ, while those who betrayed him would be punished like Judas.

7. The Arrest

The police and horsemen came with the young man at suppertime on the Friday with their usual weapons, as if coming out against a robber. That evening, they found him lying down in the upper room of a cottage. He could have escaped but he refused saying, "God's will be done." When he heard that they had come, he went down and spoke with them. They were amazed at his age and steadfastness, and some of them said. "Why did we go to so much trouble to capture a man like this?" Immediately he called for food and drink for them, and asked for an hour to pray uninterrupted. They agreed, and he stood and prayed, so full of the grace of God, that he could not stop for two hours. The men were astounded and many of them regretted coming to arrest such a godly and venerable an old man.

8. Entering the City

When he finished praying... they put him on a donkey, and took him into the city....

9. Polycarp Refuses to Deny Jesus

As Polycarp was being taken into the arena, a voice came to him from heaven: "Be strong, Polycarp and play the man!" No one saw who had spoken, but our brothers who were there heard the voice. When the crowd heard that Polycarp had been captured, there was an uproar. The Proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On hearing that he was, he tried to persuade him to apostatize, saying, "Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent, and say, 'Down with the Atheists!'" Polycarp looked grimly at the wicked heathen multitude in the stadium, and gesturing towards them, he said, "Down with the Atheists!" "Swear," urged the Proconsul, "reproach Christ, and I will set you free." "86 years have I have served him," Polycarp declared, "and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

11. More Attempts to Make Him Submit

"I have wild animals here," the Proconsul said. "I will throw you to them if you do not repent." "Call them," Polycarp replied. "It is unthinkable for me to repent from what is good to turn to what is evil. I will be glad though to be changed from evil to righteousness." "If you despise the animals, I will have you burned." "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why are you waiting? Bring on whatever you want."

13. The Fire is Prepared

It was all done in the time it takes to tell. The crowd collected wood and bundles of sticks from the shops and public baths. The Jews, as usual, were keen to help. When the pile was ready, Polycarp took off his outer clothes, undid his belt, and tried to take off his sandals – something he was not used to, as the faithful always raced to do it for him, each wanting to be the one to touch his skin – this is how good his life was. But when they went to fix him with nails, he said, "Leave me as I am, for he that gives me strength to endure the fire, will enable me not to struggle, without the help of your nails."

14. Polycarp Prays

So they simply bound him with his hands behind him like a distinguished ram chosen from a great flock for sacrifice. Ready to be an acceptable burnt-offering to God, he looked up to heaven, and said, "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before you, I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be

numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as you, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled. I praise you for all these things, I bless you and glorify you, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. To you, with him, through the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and forever. Amen.”

15. A Miracle

Then the fire was lit, and the flame blazed furiously. We who were privileged to witness it saw a great miracle, and this is why we have been preserved, to tell the story. The fire shaped itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, and formed a circle around the body of the martyr. Inside it, he looked not like flesh that is burnt, but like bread that is baked, or gold and silver glowing in a furnace. And we smelt a sweet scent, like frankincense or some such precious spices.

16. The Death of Polycarp

Eventually, when those wicked men saw that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to pierce him with a dagger. When he did this [a dove flew out and] [*this may well be a later interpolation or transcription error] such a great quantity of blood flowed that the fire was extinguished. The crowd were amazed at the difference between the unbelievers and the elect – of whom the great Polycarp was surely one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna. For every word he spoke either has been or shall be accomplished.

17. The Body

When the Enemy saw the wonder of his martyrdom, his blameless life and now his crowning with immortality, he did his utmost to stop us keeping any memorial of him or taking possession of his holy body. He inspired Nicetes, the father of Herod, along with the Jews to ask the governor not to hand over his body for burial. “They might turn from worshipping the crucified one,” he said, “only to start worshipping this one.” They did not realize that it is impossible for us to abandon Christ who suffered for the salvation of the world, or to worship any other....

18. Celebrations

The centurion then, seeing the disturbance caused by the Jews, took the body and publicly burnt it. Later, we collected up his bones, more precious than jewels and better purified than gold, and put them in an appropriate place where, the Lord willing, we shall celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom each year with joy and rejoicing, both to remember those who have run their race and to prepare those yet to walk in their steps.

19. Polycarp’s Reward

This is the story of the blessed Polycarp, the twelfth martyr in Smyrna, though he has a unique place memory of all people, being remembered even by all the heathen. He was not merely an illustrious teacher, but also a pre-eminent martyr, whose death all desire to imitate, being altogether consistent with the Gospel of Christ. Having overcome the unjust governor with patience and acquired the crown of immortality, he now, with the apostles and all the righteous, glorifies God the Father with joy, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls, the Ruler of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.