

Taylor University

Pillars at Taylor University

Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics

Samuel Morris Global Leaders Library

2023

First Christian Voices: Practices of the Apostolic Fathers

Michael T. Cooper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pillars.taylor.edu/spiritualclassics>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cooper, Michael T., "First Christian Voices: Practices of the Apostolic Fathers" (2023). *Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics*. 8.

<https://pillars.taylor.edu/spiritualclassics/8>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Samuel Morris Global Leaders Library at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics by an authorized administrator of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.



SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS 7

*FIRST
CHRISTIAN
VOICES:
Practices of the
Apostolic Fathers*

*Edited by
Dr. Michael T. Cooper*



CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

What “They” Say . . . What Will You Say?

First Christian Voices: Practices of the Apostolic Fathers connects the everyday believer with the world in which God’s Church was planted as a tender shoot. It is a necessary work to illuminate the shadows of ancient history and expose to a disenchanted world the miracle of the Church. Jesus’ resurrection is the miracle that anchors our faith, but the rise of the Church is a miracle story of its own. This story has voices—and they are not “sound and fury.” Michael Cooper has captured some key voices in this volume and represents them in a way that speaks to our wafting world. This work is hefty and handy. It skillfully hits the right academic and historical notes. And it also has an ease of read that invites you to read it as a part of your story.

~ **Kwesi Kamau, DMin,**
Lead Pastor
Impact Church, Dallas, Texas

One of the most compelling truths concerning the Christian faith is that it was lived by real people in various cultures often under dire circumstances over the passage of time. Dr. Cooper has in this concise work invited us into the thoughts and concerns of those earliest disciples who first received the “faith once delivered to the saints” and challenges us to consider how we must continue to uphold the foundational truths of God’s Word in the context that Christ has placed us. Leaders and followers worshiping in every language on every continent will benefit from the insights expressed within these pages. God’s truth will always be challenged by Satan’s lies and it is the responsibility of every Christ-follower to adhere to sound doctrine. As these men considered their place in HIS-story, read and contemplate your own.

~ **David Pope, DMin,**
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church, Millburn, New Jersey

First Christian Voices: Practices of the Apostolic Fathers

© 2023. The Urban Ministry Institute. All Rights Reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-955424-14-1

Copying, redistribution and/or sale of these materials, or any unauthorized transmission, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher is prohibited. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing.

Published jointly in 2023 by TUMI Press and Samuel Morris Publications.

TUMI Press is a division of World Impact, Inc.

TUMI Press
The Urban Ministry Institute
3701 E. 13th Street, Suite 100
Wichita, KS 67208

Equipping Leaders. Empowering Movements.

Samuel Morris Publications:

Samuel Morris Publications
Sacred Roots Project at Taylor University
236 W. Reade Avenue
Upland, IN 46989

Samuel Morris Publications publishes texts in service to the evangelical church's life together and its ongoing pursuit of a deeper conformity to Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:19).

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bible, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

Material adapted from Taylor University's Center for Scripture Engagement is copyright © 2014 by Phil Collins. Please feel free to utilize the information presented here for your personal use. Any commercial use requires the express prior written permission of Phil Collins.

SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS



“Toward Ten Thousand Tozers”

*First Christian Voices:
Practices of the Apostolic Fathers*

SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS 7



Edited by Dr. Michael T. Cooper

*That we should join ourselves
with those who fear the Lord,
those who meditate in their heart
on the commandment which they have received,
those who both utter the judgments
of the Lord and observe them,
those who know that meditation is a work of gladness
and who ruminate on the word of the Lord.*

~ Barnabas 10

*For Lydia, our first daughter-in-law
(and our other children as well).*

*He desired to lead us to trust in His goodness and to
consider Him our Nurse, Father, Teacher,
Counselor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light,
Honor, Glory, Power, and Life,
so that we should not be anxious
concerning clothing and food.*

~ To Diognetus



Table of Contents

<i>Translation Notes</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
<i>The Study of Scripture.</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
<i>The Godhead</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
<i>God the Son</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
<i>The Defense of the Faith</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Chapter 5</i>	
<i>Leadership</i>	<i>.111</i>
<i>Chapter 6</i>	
<i>The Church</i>	<i>.133</i>
<i>Chapter 7</i>	
<i>Character and Imitation</i>	<i>.159</i>

Chapter 8	
Warnings Against Division and the Demonic. 177
Afterword 197
Resources for Application. 203
<i>Soul Work and Soul Care:</i>	
<i>The Christian Discipline of Meditation.</i>	<i>205</i>
<i>Continuing the Conversation</i>	<i>217</i>
<i>Map of Important Places</i>	<i>222</i>
<i>A Letter to God’s Friends and Fellow Warriors</i>	
<i>On Why We Read the Sacred Roots</i>	
<i>Spiritual Classics Together.</i>	<i>223</i>
<i>The Nicene Creed with Scriptural Support.</i>	<i>239</i>
<i>From Before to Beyond Time:</i>	
<i>The Plan of God and Human History</i>	<i>243</i>
<i>About the Sacred Roots Project</i>	<i>246</i>
Scripture Index 251



Translation Notes

The first English translation of the works selected for this volume was completed by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson in the 1860s. As such, this volume consists of works which fall in the area of public domain. Perhaps more accurately, this volume is a derivative of a public domain text. By derivative, I mean that the Roberts-Donaldson translation forms the foundation of the work. I have taken the liberty to revise the use of English grammar to make it more accessible for the twenty-first-century reader. Additionally, I have updated direct quotations from Scripture and relevant portions of paraphrases of Scripture to match the English Standard Version.

In addition, I have compared the Roberts-Donaldson translation with that of Bart Ehrman's update of the Loeb Classical Library's *The Apostolic Fathers, Volumes I & II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Michael Holmes' third edition of *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007). The value of such a comparison is the side-by-side

translation with the original Greek (and Latin in the case of parts of Polycarp's letter *To the Philippians*). Where there were obvious divergences in the three translations, I consulted the Greek and made interpretive decisions when necessary in light of the background of the text and what I perceived to be the intent of the author.

The Roberts-Donaldson translation, which became a part of the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), was prepared by two well-qualified scholars and I do not presume to improve upon their work, but rather modernize it to some degree. Alexander Roberts (1826–1901) was a Scottish biblical scholar and pastor in the Free Church of Scotland. He later became Professor of Humanity at the University of St. Andrews. James Donaldson (1831–1915), also from Scotland, was an educator his entire life with his career culminating as Professor of Humanity at the University of Aberdeen. Both Roberts and Donaldson were Greek scholars having each written Greek grammars.

Their translation utilizes an old mechanism for capitalizing the proper name and pronouns for God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which I have preserved. In passages where paragraphs ran long, I broke them up for ease of reading. Roberts-Donaldson did not divide their translation into chapters and verses, but only chapters. This is inconvenient when wanting to cite a particular passage so I recommend simply citing the chapter of the Apostolic Father and page number of this volume. More importantly than being a scholarly volume, I trust that you will read this work as a devotional and as a testimony of God's faithfulness to those early Christians. Their writings continue to give me hope that God will remain faithful to us as well.



Introduction

History grounds me. One might say that it has rooted me to a past which provides a heritage for my identity as a Christian. In Christianity, that identity is derived not only from the glorious work of Christ in our lives, but also from the continuous thread of faithful disciples who passed down the apostolic tradition to us today. Today we call them the Apostolic Fathers, and listening to their voices inspires me as I can relate to their struggles in the church and society. Their commitment to preserve sound doctrine is my commitment. As I listen they teach me the importance of never compromising about Jesus. Their longing for the unity of the body of Christ encourages me to strive to work with others in my community.

Their passion to imitate Christ as a testimony in society challenges me to let my compassion and kindness toward others be a witness like theirs. Indeed, they learned by hearing and observing the lives of the apostles and their disciples as they also imitated Christ. From the historical study of these early Christians, we too can learn to be imitators of Christ. Truly they have become not only my

friends along the journey of the Christian life but also my mentors. This sacred heritage is preserved in the lives of those saints who lived out their faith in the first and second centuries.

In the introduction to the Roberts-Donaldson translation of the Apostolic Fathers, Alexander Cleveland Coxe appealed to us to continue in the footsteps of the disciples of the apostles like Clement, Papias, Polycarp, and Ignatius:

If you are familiar with Scripture, you owe it largely to these primitive witnesses to its Canon and its spirit. By their testimony we detect what is false, and we identify what is real. Is it nothing to find that your Bible is their Bible, your faith their faith, your Savior their Savior, your God their God?¹

The ancient memory of the apostles has been passed down to the present day beginning with the faithful lives of those early followers of their traditions. Their memory, although often complicated and tempered by two thousand years of history, is our memory. And that memory is all the richer as we listen to these first Christian voices and hear what they teach us today. In that way, they can become your ancient friends and mentors too.

About This Volume

The memory of the apostles passed down to us through the Apostolic Fathers provides not only a continuity to

¹ Arthur Cleveland Coxe, "Introductory Notice" in *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), vii.

our faith, but also examples of how the disciples of the apostles continued the work of Jesus Christ. However, we face challenges in sorting through the various issues presented in these ancient Christian works. So, how do we decide which sources to use in order to faithfully express the practices of the ancient church? At some level, this seems like an easy question to answer. Yet, when we take into consideration that the writings of Christians in the late first and second centuries are limited and disputed, it makes the decision all the more challenging. So, how do we get to the genuine practices of the ancient church, those practices which express the historic Christian faith passed down from the apostles?

Some sources seem clear enough. One of the early letters often identified as 1 Clement is perhaps the most obvious choice, as are the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, as well as the fragments of Papias. Clement is often associated with Paul (Phil 4:3) and Ignatius was the bishop of the famed church in Antioch which sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3). It is safe to assume that Ignatius knew some of the apostles since he was in that important city. He likely came in contact with Luke, Matthew, Mark, Barnabas, and perhaps even Paul. The legend that he was the child who crawled into Jesus' lap is an embellishment of Mark 10:13–16. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna, one of the seven churches mentioned in the New Testament book of Revelation, and was a hearer of the Apostle John along with Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, who might have been John's amanuensis.²

² Amanuensis – Similar to a secretary, one who wrote as another spoke. For example, Papias may have written the book of Revelation while John told him what to write.

Still, there are disputes. For example, although Clement is never identified by name in 1 Clement, there are numerous testimonies, mostly based on Eusebius, that the letter came from Rome with Clement as the author.³ Irenaeus (AD 130–202) might be the most reliable source as he maintains that during Clement’s time as bishop a letter came from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth.⁴ However, I contend that the later testimonies regarding Clementine authorship reflect a maturing “monarchical episcopacy,” that is, a church which was governed solely by a bishop who acted as a teacher and shepherd. This form of church governance appears much later.⁵

The collective title of those who wrote in the late first to early second centuries, Apostolic Fathers, is a modern convention attempting to communicate that these were disciples of or closely related to the apostles, Jesus’ disciples. This apostolic connection held authority in the early church. Some authors most definitely were disciples of the original twelve apostles, as we noted. However, one letter takes the name of an apostle but clearly was not written by him. The Letter of Barnabas was written well after the Apostle Barnabas (1 Cor 9:3–6) would have died. It could be that the letter communicated Barnabas’ ideas though he did not write it, as the letter includes information

3 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1–5*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library 153 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 3.38.

4 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.3, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885).

5 I do not include 2 Clement as it was not written by Clement and contains some gnostic references, but most scholars agree that it is an early example of a Christian sermon outside of the New Testament. For that reason, I encourage you to read it.

about the rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem during the reign of Hadrian (AD 117–138).⁶ The Shepherd of Hermas also can claim no apostolic authority. Nevertheless, it was one of the most popular early Christian non-canonical writings. I tend to think of it as the *Left Behind* or *This Present Darkness* book of the second century—popular yet fictitious.

This volume is divided into different topics important for today. I wanted a way for us to think about how the Apostolic Fathers could connect with issues we are wrestling with in our own faith communities—issues like church division, leadership, Jesus’ identity, and others. So, each chapter includes selections of the Apostolic Fathers that seemed most relevant to the subject. Even so, by the end of this book you will have read most of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. For the most part, all that you are missing from the writings are the greetings and salutations.

The Concerns of the Apostolic Fathers

There are three primary concerns shared in the Apostolic Fathers. First, the authors wanted to be certain that their audiences understood clearly who Jesus is. Heresy was an existential threat to the early church and to combat it demanded a proper doctrine about Jesus Christ (see Tables 1 & 2). Especially in Ignatius, the authors expected Christians to study and learn about Jesus (*To the Magnesians* 6). This should not be understood in any modern sense of study as the Roman Empire was predominately illiterate.

⁶ By the way, the temple turns out to be dedicated to Jupiter yet Hadrian fooled the Jews into helping reconstruct it.

Table 1: Christology of the Apostolic Fathers

Approximate Date (AD)	Source	Key Characteristics of God the Son
67-95	First Clement to the Corinthians	Jesus is not lowly because He was poor, but because of what He endured in giving His blood to bear our sin.
100	The Didache	Jesus is the means by which we know the Father.
110	Ignatius <i>To the Ephesians</i>	Jesus is fully God and fully human.
110	Ignatius <i>To the Magnesians</i>	Jesus, the eternal Word, is one and came from the Father to reveal the Father.
110	Ignatius <i>To the Romans</i>	Jesus Christ is God.
110	Ignatius <i>To the Trallians</i>	Jesus Christ is our God who died for us.
110	Ignatius <i>To the Philadelphians</i>	Jesus' cross, death, and resurrection is more ancient.
110	Ignatius <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>	Jesus is the focal point of the universal church.
110-135	Polycarp <i>To the Philippians</i>	Jesus is our everlasting High Priest who suffered for our sins, was raised from the dead, and was given glory and the throne by God who has subjected all things to Him.
123-135	The Letter of Barnabas	Jesus the King, revealed in the flesh, resurrected by God, foretold by Abraham and Moses, is the Son of God who redeems of our hearts.

Approximate Date (AD)	Source	Key Characteristics of God the Son
160-181	The Letter to Diognetus	The Son is the Word of God.

However, illiteracy did not mean ignorance as can be inferred by the depth of theological discussion in early Christian writings. All Christians were encouraged to study, even if that meant orally. Nevertheless, study required leadership, particularly educated leaders. So, the primary role of leaders in the early church was to ensure proper doctrine about Jesus Christ. To safeguard such doctrine meant that they themselves had to study and needed the skills to properly teach in the expected conversational method of the day (Didache 4). The sermon, as well as pulpit and pews, were foreign to believers in the late first to early second centuries (see Acts 20:7). Their learning took place in conversation as the community of Christ followers.

The early heretical teachings about Jesus are often called Gnosticism. Gnosticism was not a single religious system. That is, some use the term “Gnosticism” as a specific religion like one would use the term “Christianity” as a specific religion. However, Gnosticism is best understood as a catch-all term describing a myriad of beliefs that are generally dualistic as they pit good against evil, light against dark, spiritual against physical. While there are most definitely Gnostic elements in early heresies about Jesus, we cannot think of Gnosticism as a single coherent belief system.

Related to our day, we continue to see heretical teachings and beliefs about Jesus. For instance, the observational study conducted by Lifeway Research and Ligonier from 2016–2022 has consistently shown that the majority of evangelicals in America believe Jesus was the first being created by God.⁷ This false teaching has its roots all the way back to the second century. Additionally, many new religious movements such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church), Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostalism all share similar false teachings about Jesus refuted in the Apostolic Fathers.

Table 2: Christological Heresies⁸

Time Period (AD)	Heresy	Description
Second century	Docetism	Christ appeared to have flesh, but was actually a ghost.
Second century	Adoptionism	Impersonal power comes on Jesus, who has lived a holy life, and God adopts him as a son.
Second century	Modalism	One God expressed in three different types or modes.
Second century	Monarchianism	God the Father enters Mary’s womb, suffers, dies, and rises from the dead.
320s	Arianism	Christ is subordinate to the Father and is a created being.
380s	Apollonarianism	Christ is human and his soul is replaced with the Logos.

⁷ For more information, go to www.thestateoftheology.com.

⁸ Adapted from Michael T. Cooper, *Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement* (Littleton, CO: William Carey, 2020).

Time Period (AD)	Heresy	Description
430s	Nestorianism	Christ has two separate natures, and the Logos passes through Mary.
450s	Monophysitism	The single nature of Christ is divine and covered in flesh.

Secondly, the early authors wanted the church to act appropriately toward one another. In fact, it was expected as the natural outworking of their belief about Jesus. Modern evangelical interpreters of the ancient Christian writers will often assume that the early church went sideways on proper soteriology⁹ and taught a salvation by works (Ignatius *To the Ephesians* 14). Yet, nothing can be further from the truth. The ancient church had a clear understanding of the gracious salvific work of the Father through the Son. And they also knew that evidence of a person's salvation manifested in their behavior to one another (Ignatius *To the Philadelphians* 11). There was no “easy-believism” in the early church.

However, divisions and schisms occurred in the early church. Most notable was the disunity in the church of Corinth addressed in 1 Clement. In its harshest expression, the leaders in Rome declared to the church in Corinth that the manner in which they were acting toward each other was actually causing those outside of the church to blaspheme the name of Jesus. This sounds somewhat similar to the church today. We will learn something from the Apostolic Fathers about what it means for Christians

9 Soteriology – the doctrine of salvation.

to act not just civilly with one another, but in genuine love for each other.

Finally, the early authors shared a deep concern for the reputation of the church in the community. In some cases as mentioned, they warned the church that outsiders were watching and that their actions caused people to be blasphemous (1 Clement 47). On other occasions, they defended the actions of Christians as examples of good citizens living in the Roman Empire (To Diognetus 5). While there are limited examples of the direct proclamation of the gospel, the content of that proclamation is clearly considered: it was about Jesus as both Lord and Savior, God and King. Even so, some have argued that the early church fermented the faith in a slow process of simply witnessing by example.¹⁰ While this is true at some level, the Apostolic Fathers were mostly concerned with the church where it had already been planted rather than the continuing expansion of Christianity in the world. For the testimony of expansion, we turn to the early church histories of Eusebius and Socrates of Constantinople.

Nevertheless, these three concerns harmonize well with the writings of Jesus' apostles themselves. The New Testament letters of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John all express concern for proper belief about Jesus, corresponding behavior among His followers, and outward witness to the world. So, we can easily conclude that the selected works of these Apostolic Fathers, those connected in some way with the apostles, express a continuation of the work of Jesus' disciples and therefore of Jesus Himself. We learn from them something that

10 Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

is often lacking in the church today: unity of belief and purpose. The early church was united in their belief about Jesus and their purpose to love each other and to love their neighbors.

Timeline and Geographical Breadth of the Writings

We are very fortunate to have ancient documents that tell the story of the early church. They act as threads that unite the past with the present. When we read these stories, we want to be sure to understand why and by whom they were written. Situating historical documents in their proper time period gives us a greater depth in understanding the motivations behind the author's intentions (see Map of Important Places). Just as an interpretation of Scripture cannot mean to us what it did not mean to the first audience, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers are the same. They were dealing with particular cultural issues and expressed their practices in uniquely relevant ways. Still, we can learn something about how they applied the teaching of the apostles to their context and even discern doctrinal and practical principles consistent with the New Testament and applicable for us today.

Table 3: Authorship and Audience

Title	Author	Approximate Date (AD)	Origin	Audience
First Clement	Leaders in Rome	67-95	Rome	Corinth
The Didache	Unknown	100s	Antioch or Philippi	Unknown

Title	Author	Approximate Date (AD)	Origin	Audience
Ignatius <i>To the Ephesians</i>	Ignatius	110	Smyrna	Ephesians
Ignatius <i>To the Magnesians</i>	Ignatius	110	Smyrna	Magnesians
Ignatius <i>To the Romans</i>	Ignatius	110	Smyrna	Romans
Ignatius <i>To the Trallians</i>	Ignatius	110	Smyrna	Trallians
Ignatius <i>To the Philadelphians</i>	Ignatius	110	Troas	Philadelphians
Ignatius <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>	Ignatius	110	Troas	Smyrnaeans
Ignatius <i>To Polycarp</i>	Ignatius	110	Troas	Polycarp
Polycarp <i>To the Philippians</i>	Polycarp	110-135	Smyrna	Philippians
The Letter of Barnabas	Unknown	123-135	Alexandria	Unknown
The Letter to Diognetus	An unknown Christian apologist	160-181	Rome?	Diognetus

Final Thought

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers are not inspired and should never be considered as authoritative for the Christian life. They are examples of the way in which the early saints lived out their Christian lives. In many instances, we should consider imitating them, especially where we find congruency with the New Testament. In other cases, we can appreciate the challenges they faced as they engaged culture with their faith. They do, after all, make up part of that great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1–2).

Even so, we do well in our ministry today to pay careful attention to the Apostolic Fathers and how they lived out the faith passed down to them. Indeed, we currently live in a spiritual climate that has much in common with the late first and early second centuries. Still, we “do church” as if we are living in the sixteenth century. Yet even the Reformer John Calvin looked back to the early church as his anchor while the Reformation progressed. We also do well to follow his example as we root our identity in the entire history of Christianity. Calvin notes,

But we do not despise [the Church Fathers]; in fact, if it were to our present purpose, I could with no trouble at all prove that the greater part of what we are saying today meets their approval. Yet we are so versed in their writings as to remember always that all things are ours (1 Cor 3:21–22), to serve us, not to lord it over us (Luke 22:24–25), and that we all belong to the one Christ (1 Cor 3:23), whom we must obey in all things without exception (cf. Col 3:20).¹¹

11 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, Library of Christian Classics 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 18–19.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers are the historic writings of all of Christianity. The Apostolic Fathers provide a glimpse into the practices of the ancient church. Those practices are not a cure-all solution for the perennial pastoral problems we face today, but they certainly help us understand how the early church grew so significantly. They also show us that what we believe corresponds to how we belong to each other and behave as Christians in the world.

It has truly been an honor to work on this volume. While I have had academic training in the early church as a part of my doctoral studies, to approach them as a student once again has been refreshing. By student, I do not mean someone who simply looks at a subject from an intellectual posture. Rather, a student is a disciple who has the passion to learn, incorporate what is learned into his personal life, and apply it in his world. To study the Apostolic Fathers in this manner is not only refreshing, but encouraging and, at some level, devotional as I observed once again their deep love for Jesus and their church communities as well as their love for reaching out to their neighbors. My hope is that you will allow these faithful saints who lived in genuinely perilous times to disciple you. Their history is our history just as their identity is also our identity.

To help facilitate supplementary discussions about the practices of the ancient church, an on-demand learning experience has been designed in partnership with Ephesiology Master Classes and Kairos University as an additional resource for your personal study. It is free, interactive, and a space where you can engage with others who are also disciples of the Apostolic Fathers.

To access the course, you can scan the QR code or go directly to masterclasses.ephesiology.com/courses/practices-ancient-church.



Discussion Questions



As you compare the issues confronting the Apostolic Fathers and those confronting us today, where do you see similarities?



What are you most looking forward to in your study of the Apostolic Fathers?



If you have a sense of where you might expect change in your own spiritual life while studying the Apostolic Fathers, make a note of it now and come back to it once you have completed the book.



You are going to be challenged by the way in which the early church lived out their lives. Begin to pray now that God will give you wisdom about how to practically apply what you learn from the Apostolic Fathers.



The book is divided into eight themes found in the Apostolic Fathers. If you are reading the book for your own benefit, please do not rush through it. Instead, use it to complement your personal devotion and take the time to engage with the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. If you are using the book for a small group study, be sure that you allow the space for everyone to process and share what they are learning.

The Text





CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



Chapter 1

The Study of Scripture

Chapter Summary

What does your study of Scripture look like? In this chapter, we will see that in the early centuries of Christianity the Apostolic Fathers placed a high value on “leaning into” the study of Scripture. For example, when Polycarp wrote to the church in Philippi, he captured this idea of leaning into study:

When [Paul] was among you, he accurately and unwaveringly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. When he was absent from you, he wrote you letters. If you carefully study them, you will find them to be the source for building you up in the faith that has been given you. Faith which is followed by hope and preceded by love toward God and Christ and our neighbor “is the mother of us all” (Polycarp *To the Philippians* 3).

Among the Apostolic Fathers, the word translated “carefully study” is only used by Polycarp and the writers of 1 Clement (40, 45, 53) in early Christian literature. The Greek word is *egkypto*, an instructive word derived from the prefix *eg* meaning “into” and *kypto* meaning “to bend.” In a vernacular cliché, we might translate it as “to lean into.” However, the Greek holds the meaning to examine carefully so as to gain an insight. Even so, you will certainly note the many references to the study of Scripture in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

In Polycarp’s reference to *egkypto*, the “careful study” of Paul’s letters took place in community rather than in isolation. “Careful study” was as much about proper teaching as about the worship of Christ as God and the engagement of the neighbor. Faith, hope, and love, according to Polycarp, were the natural products—a beautiful result of theological education.

Indeed, as Larry Hurtado points out, Christianity is distinct from other religions in its study of sacred texts.¹ Even in a predominately illiterate Roman society, Christians gathered to hear the Scripture read and then corporately discussed its content and implications—how it is lived out in the community. Early Christian history testifies that theological education played an important role in the continuing establishment of a better religion and philosophy in the Roman Empire. So, reading the Apostolic Fathers will show us the importance of the study of Scripture for the growing Christian movement.

1 Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*, repr. ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).



IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

The Discipline of Scriptural Study

FIRST CLEMENT 40: Since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, the following things therefore are revealed to us. It is appropriate to do all things in order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times. He has instructed offerings and service to be performed, and those not to be done thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will in order that all things being sincerely done according to His good pleasure, may be pleasing to Him. Those, therefore, who present their offerings at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed. For inasmuch as they follow the laws of the Lord, they do not sin. For his own peculiar services are assigned to the high priest, and their own proper place is prescribed to the priests, and their own special services transfer to the Levites. The layman is bound by the laws that pertain to laymen.

FIRST CLEMENT 45: You are fond of contention, friends, and full of zeal about things which do not pertain to salvation. Look carefully into the Scriptures which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. See that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them. There you will not find that the righteous were cast off by men who themselves were holy. The righteous were indeed persecuted, but only by the malicious. They were cast into prison, but only by the unholy. They were stoned, but only by transgressors. They were slain, but

only by the accursed, and by those who had conceived an unrighteous envy against them.

Exposed to such sufferings, they endured them gloriously. For what will we say, friends? Was Daniel cast into the den of lions by those who feared God? Were Ananias, and Azarias, and Mishael shut up in a furnace of fire by those who practiced the great and glorious worship of the Most High? Far from us be such a thought! Who, then, were they that did such things? The hateful, and those full of all wickedness, were roused to such a tone of fury that they inflicted torture on those who served God with a holy and blameless purpose. They did not know that the Most High is the Defender and Protector of all those who with a pure conscience worship His excellent name. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen. But those who endured with confidence are now heirs of glory and honor, and have been exalted and made distinguished by God in their memorial forever and ever. Amen.

FIRST CLEMENT 53: You understand, dear ones, and you understand well the sacred Scriptures. You have looked very carefully into the sayings of God. We write these things for your remembrance. When Moses went up into the mountain, and camped there with fasting and humiliation, forty days and forty nights, the Lord said to him, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf” (Exod 32:7–8). And the Lord said to him, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that



I may make a great nation of you” (Exod 32:9–10). But Moses said, “But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written” (Exod 32:32). O marvelous love! O insurmountable perfection! The servant speaks freely to his Lord, and asks forgiveness for the people, or begs that he himself might perish along with them.

The Fruit of Doctrine

FIRST CLEMENT 2: Moreover, you were all distinguished by humility, and were in no respect puffed up with pride. Instead, you produced obedience rather than extorted it. Plus, you were more willing to give than to receive. Satisfied with the provision which God had made for you, and carefully attending to His words, you were filled with His doctrine, and His sufferings were before your eyes. Thus, a profound and rich peace was given to you all, and you had an insatiable desire for doing good.

At the same time, a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was on each of you. Full of holy designs, and with true earnestness of mind and a godly confidence, you stretched out your hands to God Almighty. You asked Him to be merciful to you, if you had been guilty of any involuntary transgression. Day and night, you were anxious for the whole church, that the number of God’s elect might be saved with mercy and a good conscience. You were sincere and uncorrupted, and forgiving of injuries between one another.

Every kind of faction and schism was offensive in your sight. You mourned over the transgressions of your neighbors: their deficiencies you deemed your own. You never grudged any act of kindness, being “ready for every

good work” (Titus 3:1). Adorned by a thoroughly virtuous and religious life, you did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and rules of the Lord were written upon the tablets of your hearts.

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 13: Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, so that in all things, whatsoever you do, you may flourish both in the flesh and spirit, in faith and love, in the Son and in the Father and in the Spirit, in the beginning and in the end. Do this together with your most admirable bishop, and the admirably crafted spiritual crown of your elders, and the godly deacons. Be subject to the bishop and to one another just as Jesus Christ was to the Father according to the flesh, and the apostles to Christ. Be subject also to the Father and to the Spirit so that there may be harmony between the flesh and spirit.

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 3: These things, friends, I write to you concerning righteousness. I do not write because I take anything upon myself, but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such as me, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. When he was among you, he accurately and unwaveringly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. When he was absent from you, he wrote you letters. If you carefully study them, you will find them to be the source for building you up in the faith that has been given you. Faith which is followed by hope and preceded by love toward God and Christ and our neighbor is the mother of us all. For if anyone be inwardly controlled by these graces, he has fulfilled the command of righteousness since love is far from all sin.



TO DIOGNETUS 2A: Come, then, after you have freed yourself from all the biases possessing your mind, and laid aside what has been typically quick to deceive you. Instead, become a new person as from the beginning like you are about to hear a new doctrine according to your own acknowledgment. Come and consider, not with your eyes only but also with your understanding, the substance and the form of those who you declare and believe to be gods.

Three Doctrines of the Lord

BARNABAS 1: The doctrines of the Lord, then, are three: the hope of life, the beginning, and the completion of it. For the Lord has made known to us by the prophets both the things which are past and present, giving us also the first fruits of the knowledge of things to come, which things as we see accomplished, one by one, we should with the greater richness of faith and elevation of spirit draw near to Him with reverence. I then, not as your teacher, but as one of you, will lay out a few things by which in your present circumstances you may be all the more joyful.

Knowledge to Walk in the Way of Light

BARNABAS 19: The way of light, then, is as follows. If anyone desires to travel to the appointed place, he must be zealous in his works. The knowledge, therefore, which is given to us for the purpose of walking in this way is the following. You will love Him who created you. You will glorify Him who redeemed you from death. You will be simple in heart and rich in spirit.

You will not join yourself to those who walk in the way of death. You will hate doing what is displeasing to God. You will hate all hypocrisy. You will not abandon the commandments of the Lord. You will not exalt yourself, but will be of a humble mind. You will not take glory to yourself. You will not entertain evil counsel against your neighbor. You will not allow pride to enter into your soul. You will not commit fornication. You will not commit adultery. You will not be a corrupter of youth. You will not let the word of God issue from your lips with any kind of impurity. You will not be biased toward anyone you accuse of sin. You will be meek. You will be peaceable. You will respect the words which you hear.

You will not hold a grudge against your brother or sister. You will not be double-minded as to whether something will be or will not be. You will not take the name of the Lord in vain. You will love your neighbor more than your own soul. You will not slay the child by performing an abortion, neither will you destroy it after it is born. You will not withdraw your hand from your son or from your daughter, but from their infancy you will teach them the fear of the Lord. You will not covet what is your neighbor's, nor will you be greedy. You will not be joined in soul with the proud, but you will be counted among those who are righteous and humble.

Receive as good things the trials which come upon you. You will not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double tongue is a snare of death. You will be subject to your masters as the image of God, with modesty and fear. You will not issue orders with bitterness to your maidservant or your manservant who trust in the same God in case they should not fear the God who is above you all. For



He came to call people not according to their outward appearance, but according to the Spirit who prepared them. You will share in all things with your neighbor and do not call things your own. For if you are partners in things which are incorruptible, how much more in those things which are corruptible!

You will not be hasty with your tongue, for the mouth is a snare of death. As far as possible, you will be pure in your soul. Do not be ready to stretch out your hands to take while you withdraw them from giving. You will love as the apple of your eye everyone who speaks to you the word of the Lord. Night and day you will remember the day of judgment. Every day you will seek out the presence of the saints, either by working together in the word and going to encourage them while considering how to save a soul by the word, or by work with your hands for the redemption of your sins. You will not hesitate to give, nor grumble when you give. “Give to everyone who begs from you” (Luke 6:30), and you will know who is the good Paymaster of the reward. You will guard what you have received, neither adding to it nor taking from it. To the end you will hate the wicked. You will judge righteously. You will not make a division, but you will pacify those that are contentious by bringing them together. You will confess your sins. You will not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light.

True Knowledge

TO DIOGNETUS 12: When you have read and carefully listened to these things, you will know what God grants to those who rightly love Him. They become a paradise of delight, presenting in themselves a tree bearing all kinds

of produce and flourishing with various fruits. For in this place the tree of knowledge and the tree of life have been planted, but it is not the tree of knowledge that destroys—it is disobedience that proves destructive. For truly those words which were written are not without significance. From the beginning God planted the tree of life in the midst of paradise, revealing through knowledge the way to life. Then, when those who were first formed did not use it properly, they were stripped naked because of the deception of the serpent. For life can neither exist without knowledge, nor is knowledge secure without life. As a result, both were planted close together.

The Apostle, understanding this importance, blamed knowledge that was without the true commandment which effects life. He declares, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1). For he who thinks he knows anything without true knowledge, and such as is witnessed to by life, knows nothing. Rather, he is deceived by the serpent as not loving life. But he who combines knowledge with fear and seeks after life, plants in hope while looking for fruit.

Make room in your heart for knowledge and let your life be true reason. Bearing this tree and displaying its fruit, you will always harvest those things which God desires. The serpent cannot reach this fruit and deception does not defile it. Nor is Eve then corrupted, but is trusted as a virgin. Moreover, salvation is revealed, and the apostles are filled with understanding, and the Passover of the Lord advances, and the choirs are gathered together and united with the universe, and the Word rejoices in teaching the saints—through whom the Father is glorified. To Him be glory forever. Amen.



Spiritual Meaning in the Study of Moses

BARNABAS 10: Now, when Moses said, “You will not eat the pig, nor the eagle, nor the hawk, nor the raven, nor any fish which is not possessed of scales” (*Deut 14:8–12*), he embraced three doctrines in his mind. Moreover, He says to them in Deuteronomy, “And I will establish my ordinances among this people” (*Deut 4:1*). Is there then not a command of God that they should not eat? There is, but Moses spoke with a spiritual meaning. For this reason, he named the pig as if to say, “You will not join yourself to people who resemble pigs.” For when they live in pleasure, they forget their Lord, but when they have a need they acknowledge the Lord. And the pig, when it has eaten, does not recognize its master, but when hungry it cries out and on receiving food is quiet again.

“You will not eat,” he says, “the eagle, nor the hawk, nor the kite, nor the raven” (*Lev 11:13–15; Deut 14:12–14*). He means that you must not join yourself to people who do not know how to acquire food for themselves by labor and sweat. Instead, they seize on the food of others in their iniquity. Although wearing an aspect of simplicity, they are on the watch to plunder others. So, these birds, while they sit idle, inquire how they may devour the flesh of others proving themselves pests by their wickedness.

“You will not eat,” he says, “the lamprey eel, or the octopus, or the cuttlefish.”² He means that you must not join yourself or be like people who are ungodly to the end and are condemned to death just like those fishes that are cursed, that float in the deep not swimming like the rest, but make their abode in the mud which lies at the bottom.

2 Source unknown.

Moreover, “You will not eat,” he says, “the hare” (*Lev 11:6; Deut 14:7*). Why? Do not become a corrupter of children, neither resemble such people. For the rabbit multiplies the places of its conception year by year. For as many years as it lives so many places it has. Moreover, “You will not eat the hyena.”³ He means that you must not be an adulterer, nor a corrupter, nor resemble those who are such. Why? Because that animal changes its sex annually. At one time it is male and at another it is female. Moreover, he has rightly detested the weasel. For he means that you will not be like those who we hear of who commit wickedness with the mouth on account of their uncleanness. Neither will you be joined to those impure women who commit sin with the mouth. For this animal conceives by the mouth.

Moses then issued three doctrines with a spiritual significance concerning meats. Yet, they understood them according to fleshly desire as if he had spoken of actual meats. David, however, comprehends the knowledge of the three doctrines and speaks in this way, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,” just as fish go in darkness to the depths, “nor stands in the way of sinners,” just as those who profess to fear the Lord, but go astray like swine, “nor sits in the seat of scoffers,” just as those birds that lie in wait for prey (*Ps 1:1*). Take a full and firm grasp of this spiritual knowledge.

But Moses says still further, “You will eat every split-hoofed animal that ruminates” (*Lev 11:3*). What does he mean? He means that the one who receives food recognizes Him that nourishes him, and being satisfied by Him is visibly made glad. He spoke well with respect to the commandment.

3 Source unknown.



What, then, does he mean? That we should join ourselves with those who fear the Lord, those who meditate in their heart on the commandment which they have received, those who both utter the judgments of the Lord and observe them, those who know that meditation is a work of gladness and who ruminate on the word of the Lord. But what does he mean by split-hoofed? That the righteous man also walks in this world and also looks forward to the holy state.

See how well Moses legislated. But how was it possible for them to understand or comprehend these things? We then rightly understand his commandments and explain them as the Lord intended. For this purpose, He circumcised our ears and our hearts so that we might understand these things.

WARNINGS AGAINST FALSE TEACHING

False Teachers

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 8–9: Do not let anyone deceive you as indeed you are not deceived inasmuch as you are completely devoted to God. For since there is no strife raging among you which might distress you, you are certainly living in harmony with God's will. I am your offering and set apart for you Ephesians, a church renowned throughout the world. They who are fleshly cannot do those things which are spiritual. Neither can they who are spiritual do the things which are fleshly. Just as faith cannot do the works of unbelief neither can unbelief do the works of faith. However, even those things which you do according to the flesh are spiritual for you do all things in Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, I have heard that some with false teaching have come your way and you did not allow them to sow their teaching among you. Instead, you covered your ears that you might not receive those things which were sown by them because you are stones of the temple of the Father prepared for the building of God the Father (*1 Pet 2:4–5*). You are drawn up on high by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, making use of the Holy Spirit as a rope, while your faith was the means by which you rose and your love the way that led up to God. You, therefore, as well as all your fellow travelers, are God-bearers, temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holiness, clothed in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ. In Him also I celebrate that I have been considered worthy to converse and rejoice with you through this letter, because you love nothing in life but God alone.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 16: Do not be deceived my friends. Those who corrupt families will not inherit the kingdom of God. If, then, those who do this according to the flesh have suffered death, how much more will this be the case with anyone who corrupts faith in God by wicked doctrines. For this reason Jesus Christ was crucified! Such a corrupted person will go away into everlasting fire and so will everyone who listens to him.

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 6: I therefore, yet not I but the love of Jesus Christ, implore you that you use Christian nourishment only and refrain from every strange plant which is heresy. For these people, pretending to be trustworthy, mix Jesus Christ with themselves. They are like someone who dispenses a deadly drug in



sweet wine which the ignorant insatiably drink with a fatal pleasure leading to his own death.

IGNATIUS TO THE SMYRNAEANS 4–6: I give you these instructions, dear ones, assured that you also hold the same. But I am protecting you ahead of time from those beasts in human form. You must not welcome them nor, if at all possible, even meet with them. Instead, you must pray to God for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance which will be very difficult no doubt. Yet Jesus Christ, who is our true life, has the power to do this.

However, if these things only seemed to be done by our Lord, then I am also only seeming to be in chains. And why have I also surrendered myself to death, to fire, to the sword, to the wild beasts? But, he who is near to the sword is near to God. He that is among the wild beasts is in the company of God provided that he be so in the name of Jesus Christ. I endure all these things so that I may suffer together with Him who became a perfect human and inwardly strengthens me.

There are some who ignorantly deny Him, or rather have been denied by Him. They are the advocates for death rather than for truth. These persons have not been persuaded by the prophets nor by the law of Moses, neither by the gospel even to this day. They are not persuaded by the sufferings we have individually endured. For they think also the same thing regarding us. For what good does it do for me if he praises me but blasphemes my Lord by not confessing that He came in the flesh? But he who does not acknowledge this has in fact altogether denied Him and is clothed in death. However, I did not

think it good to write the names of such persons inasmuch as they are unbelievers. Yes, far be it from me to make any mention of them until they repent and return to Christ's suffering, which is our resurrection.

Let no one be deceived. Both the things which are in heaven, as well as the glorious angels and rulers, both visible and invisible, if they believe not in the blood of Christ will consequently experience condemnation. "Let the one who is able to receive this receive it" (Matt 19:12). Let no one puff anyone up. For that which is worth all is faith and love, to which nothing is to be preferred.

But consider those who are of a heretical opinion with respect to the grace of Christ which has come to us; how opposed they are to the will of God. They have no regard for love, no care for the widow or the orphan or the oppressed, neither for the imprisoned or for the free, nor for the hungry, or for the thirsty.

False Teaching about Jesus

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 10–11: But if some atheists who are unbelieving say that He only seemed to suffer (they themselves only seeming to exist), then why am I in chains? Why do I long to fight the wild beasts? Do I therefore die in vain? Am I not then guilty of falsehood against the Lord?

Flee, therefore, those evil offshoots which produce deadly fruit. If anyone tastes he instantly dies. For these people are not the Father's planting. For if they were they would appear as branches of the cross and their fruit would be imperishable. By the cross He calls you through His



suffering as being His members. The head, therefore, cannot be born without its members since God has promised their unity, which He Himself is.

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 3: Do not let those who seem worthy of recognition but teach strange doctrines fill you with apprehension. Stand firm just like an anvil which is beaten. It is the mark of an honorable athlete to be bruised and yet still conquer. We ought to especially bear all things for God's sake so that He also will bear with us. Always be becoming more passionate than what you are. Carefully understand the times. Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes. He is indescribable and impassible,⁴ yet He became passible⁵ on our account and suffered in every way for our sakes.

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 7: “For whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist” (1 John 4:3); and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil. And whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord for his own desires and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the firstborn of Satan. For this reason, forsaking the foolishness of many and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning, watching in prayer, and persevering in fasting. Let us implore the all-seeing God in our prayers to “lead us not into temptation” (Matt 6:13). As the Lord has said, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41).

4 Impassible – Unable to suffer or feel pain.

5 Passible – Able to suffer or feel pain.

Teaching the Way of Death

DIDACHE 5–6: And the way of death is this. First of all, it is evil and ill-fated: murders, adultery, lust, fornication, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, witchcrafts, rape, false witness, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, deceit, haughtiness, depravity, self-will, greediness, filthy talking, jealousy, over-confidence, loftiness, boastfulness. It is a persecutor 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 that which is good, but for that which is evil.

Meekness and endurance are far from it. It loves vanities and pursues revenge. It does not sympathize with a poor man. It does not work for the afflicted. It does not know Him who made them. It is a murderer of children, destroyer of the handiwork of God. It turns away from him who is in need, afflicts him who is distressed, advocates for the rich. It lawlessly judges the poor and is utterly sinful. Be delivered, children, from all these.

See that no one causes you to stumble from this way of teaching, since they teach you deprived of God. For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be complete. However, if you are not able to do this, do what you can. Now concerning food, bear what you can. However, against that which is sacrificed to idols be exceedingly careful, for it is the service of dead gods.

False Prophets in the Last Days

DIDACHE 16B: For in the last days false prophets and corrupters will be multiplied, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. For when lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and



betray one another. Then the deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God and he will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands and he will do heinous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then will the creation of humanity come into the fire of trial, and many will be made to stumble and will perish. Yet, those who endure in their faith will be saved from under the curse itself. And then will appear the signs of the truth. First, the sign of an opening in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet. And third, the resurrection of the dead—yet not of all, but as it is said, “The Lord will come and all His saints with Him” (*1 Thess 3:13*). Then will the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.

Discussion Questions



It is remarkable to think that the early Christians were predominately illiterate. However, this did not prevent them from studying Scripture. What kind of environments are you creating to help people gather together to corporately study God's Word?



We observe a number of practices for the study of Scripture in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Some seem to read Scripture allegorically or use metaphors to communicate the meaning of Scripture. Others encourage diving deeply into the letters of Paul. All seem to encourage the corporate nature of study. How do you practice studying Scripture together?



It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the study of Scripture was a discipline of love in the early church. As you study Scripture, how do you use what you learn to compel you to a deeper love for God and others?



Corporate study was necessary in the early church due to the issue of illiteracy. But illiteracy did not mean ignorance. In fact, the idea of corporate study of God's Word has great rewards in fellowship with other believers as well as in discovering insights you have not considered before. What practical things might you do to gather believers together to study Scripture?



The discipline of studying Scripture plays an important role in ensuring that the church does not go astray by false teaching. What habits can you create among those in your church to help them stay aligned with proper doctrine?



CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



Chapter 2

The Godhead

Chapter Summary

Who is God? The Apostolic Fathers had a clear idea of who He is, although they did not express God in philosophical terms as later writers did. In this chapter, we will learn that the Apostolic Fathers believed God was the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Much like what we read in the New Testament, the idea of the Trinity finds expression in the number of inferences to the deity of the three Persons without suggesting polytheism. For example, God is Creator of all just as the Lord Jesus is Creator of all. 1 Clement 33 quotes Genesis 1:26 to identify the plurality and oneness of God: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Additionally, we see inferences of the Godhead in the fact that God searches our hearts just as the Holy Spirit also searches our hearts (1 Clement 21).

Furthermore, the Apostolic Fathers were careful to communicate God's sovereign plan to reveal Himself by sending His Son. He would be a ransom for our sins and only through Him could one be justified by faith. Indeed, only by faith could one see God (To Diognetus 8). The new creatures that we become is a work of the Holy Spirit by which He replaces our stony heart with a heart of flesh (*Ezek 36:25–27*). His sovereignty is also extended to the fact that God hears our prayers and knows our secrets. So, as you read this chapter, enjoy the beautiful expressions of who God is and what He has done for you. He sees you, and He hears you.

GOD THE CREATOR

God and Creator of All

FIRST CLEMENT 20–21A: The heavens, revolving under His sovereignty, are subject to Him in peace. Day and night they run the course appointed by Him, in no way hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the multitude of stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their designated limits and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to His will, produces food in abundance at the proper season for humans and animals and all other living beings upon it. It never hesitates, neither does it change any of the laws which He has fixed.

The unsearchable depths of abysses, and the indescribable judgments of the lower world are controlled by the same laws. The vast unmeasurable sea, gathered together by His working into various basins, never passes beyond the bounds placed around it, but does as He has commanded.

For He said, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11). The ocean, impassible to people, as well as the worlds beyond it, are controlled by the same laws of the Lord.

The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter peacefully give succession to one another. The winds in their several quarters fulfill their service without hindrance at the proper time. The ever-flowing fountains, formed both for enjoyment and health, furnish without fail their breasts for the life of humanity. The very smallest of living beings meet together in peace and harmony. All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony. He does good to all, but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and majesty forever and ever. Amen.

Beware, dear ones, in case His many kindnesses lead to a judgment on us all. This will happen if we do not walk worthy of Him. So, with one mind, do those things which are good and well-pleasing in His sight. For it says in a certain place, “The Spirit of the Lord is a candle searching the secret parts of the belly” (*Prov 20:27*). Let us consider how near He is to us and that none of our thoughts or reasonings are hidden from Him. It is right, therefore, that we should not leave the position which His will has assigned us. Let us instead offend those men who are foolish and inconsiderate and boastful and who are arrogant in their speech rather than God. Let us be in awe of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us.

FIRST CLEMENT 19: Thus, the humility and godly submission of so great and illustrious people have

provided not only us, but also all the generations before us, something better. Even those who have received His prophecies in fear and truth are better. So, having as many great and glorious examples set before us, let us turn again to the practice of peace which was the goal set before us from the beginning. And let us look consistently to the Father and Creator of the universe, and hold on to His mighty and excellent gifts and benefits of peace. Let us think about Him with our minds, and look with the eyes of our soul to His patient will. Let us reflect how free from anger He is toward all His creation.

FIRST CLEMENT 33A: What will we do, then, friends? Will we become lazy in doing good, and cease from the practice of love? God forbid that any such path should be followed by us! But rather let us urgently, with all energy and passion, perform every good work. For the Creator and Lord of all rejoices in His own works. For by His infinitely great power He established the heavens, and by His incomprehensible wisdom He put them in order. He also divided the earth from the water which surrounds it, and fixed it upon the immovable foundation of His own will. By His command, He also called the animals which are upon the earth into existence. So likewise, when He had formed the sea and the creatures that are in it, He enclosed them by His own power.

Creator of Humanity

FIRST CLEMENT 33B: Above all, with His holy and unblemished hands, He formed humankind, the most excellent and truly great work as the express likeness of His own image. For God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ . . . So, God created man

in his own image . . . male and female he created them” (Gen 1:26–27). Having thus finished all these things, He approved them and blessed them, and said, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). We see, then, how all righteous people have been adorned with good works, and how the Lord Himself, adorning Himself with His works, rejoiced. Having therefore such an example, let us without delay consent to His will, and let us work the work of righteousness with our whole strength.

Call to Repentance and Fear of God

FIRST CLEMENT 7–8: These things, dear ones, we write to you, not merely to admonish you, but also to remind ourselves. For we also are struggling in the same arena, and the same conflict is given to both of us. So, let us give up vain and fruitless cares, and strive toward the glorious and esteemed manner of our holy calling. Let us attend to what is good, pleasing, and acceptable in the sight of Him who formed us. Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious that blood is to God. His blood, having been shed for our salvation, has set the grace of repentance before the whole world (*1 John 2:2*). Let us turn to every age that has passed, and learn that, from generation to generation, the Lord has granted a place of repentance to all who would be converted to Him. Noah preached repentance, and as many as listened to him were saved. Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites. Yet, they, repenting of their sins, pacified God by prayer and obtained salvation, although they were foreigners.

The ministers of the grace of God have, by the Holy Spirit, spoken of repentance; and the Lord of all things

has Himself declared with an oath regarding it, “As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’” (Ezek 33:11); adding, moreover, this gracious declaration: “Repent O house of Israel, of your iniquity. Say to the children of My people, ‘Though your sins reach from earth to heaven, and though they be redder than scarlet, and blacker than sackcloth, if you turn to Me with your whole heart, and say, “Father!” I will listen to you, as to a holy people’” (Ezek 18:30). And in another place He says:

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord: “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isa 1:16–20)

Desiring, therefore, that all His dear ones should be partakers of repentance, He has established them by His almighty will.

FIRST CLEMENT 23: The all-merciful and benevolent Father has compassion toward those who fear Him. He gently and lovingly presents His favor on those who come

to Him with a simple mind. So, let us not be double-minded, neither let our soul entertain false ideas about His extraordinarily great and glorious gifts. Put far from our minds what has been written, “Shameful are they who are of a double mind, and of a doubting heart; those who say, ‘These things we have heard even in the times of our fathers. But, behold, we have grown old, and none of them has happened to us’” (*Jas 1:8; 2 Pet 3:3–4*).

You foolish ones! Compare yourselves to a tree and consider the vine. First of all, it sheds its leaves, then it buds, next it puts forth leaves, and then it flowers. After that comes the sour grape, and then follows the ripened fruit. You see how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes to maturity. Surely soon and suddenly will His plan be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, “Speedily will He come, and He will not tarry” (*Heb 10:37*). And, “The Lord will suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom you look” (*Mal 3:1*).

FIRST CLEMENT 28: Since all things are seen and heard, let us fear Him and abandon those dreadful works which result from evil desires. If we do, then by His mercy we may be protected from the judgments to come. For where can any of us escape from His mighty hand? Or what world will receive any of those who run away from Him? For the Scripture says in a certain place, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” (*Ps 139:7–8*). Where, then, will anyone go, or where will he escape from Him who understands all things?

God's Gift of Life

FIRST CLEMENT 35: How blessed and wonderful, dear ones, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness! And all these things fall under the mindfulness of our understanding. What then will those things be which are prepared for those who wait for Him? The Creator and Father of all worlds, the Most Holy, He alone knows their number and their beauty. Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those who wait for Him, in order that we may share in His promised gifts.

But how, dear ones, will this be done? By faith, if our mind is fixed on God who rewards. If we earnestly seek the things which are pleasing and acceptable to Him. If we do the things which are in harmony with His blameless will. And if we follow the way of truth, throwing off unrighteousness and iniquity, along with all covetousness, strife, evil practices, deceit, whispering, evil-speaking, all hatred of God, pride and arrogance, vanity and ambition. For they that do such things are hateful to God and not only those who do them, but also those who take pleasure in those who do them. For the Scripture says,

But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers.

"You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These

things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

“Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to the one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!” (Ps 50:16–23)

The Way of Life

FIRST CLEMENT 29: Let us then draw near to Him with holiness of spirit. Let us lift up pure and unstained hands to Him. Let us love our gracious and merciful Father, who has made us participants in the blessings of His elect. For as it is written,

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. (Deut 32:8–9)

And in another place it says, “Behold, the Lord takes a nation for Himself from of the midst of another nation, as a man takes the grain of the threshing floor. And from that nation will come the Most Holy” (Deut 4:34; Num 18:27; 2 Chron 31:14).

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

The way of life is this: First, you will love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. 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 reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do the same (*Matt 5:44–46*)? But love those who hate you, and you will not have an enemy. Refrain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also and you will be complete (*Matt 5:39*). If someone forces you for one mile, go with him two (*Matt 5:41*). If someone takes your cloak, give him also your coat (*Matt 5:40*). If someone takes from you what is yours, do not ask for it back, for indeed you are unable.

Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for it back, for the Father wills that all should be given our own spiritual gift. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is innocent. Woe to him who receives. For if one receives who has need, he is innocent. However, he who receives who does not have a need will pay the penalty for why he received and for what. And coming into prison, he will be examined concerning the things which he has done, and he will not escape from there until he pays back the last penny. Also concerning this, it has been said, “Let your donations sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give.”¹

Unity and the Mind of the Father

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 3–4: I do not issue commands to you as if I were some important person. For though I am chained for the name, I am not yet perfected in Jesus Christ. For now, I only begin to be a disciple and I speak to you as my fellow disciples. For I have needed to be inspired

¹ Source unknown.

by you in faith, exhortation, patience, and longsuffering. Yet inasmuch as love does not allow me to be silent, I have therefore taken upon myself first to exhort you that you would all run together in unity with the mind of God. For just as Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, knows the mind of the Father, so also the bishops appointed throughout the world know the mind of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is fitting that you should run together in accordance with the mind of your bishop, as you are doing. For your renowned body of elders, worthy of God, is attuned exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore, in your one accord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. Now each of you become a part of the choir. So, by being harmonious in love and taking up the song of God in unison you may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ. In this way He may both hear you and recognize by your works that you are indeed members of His Son. It is beneficial, therefore, that you should live in a spotless unity so you may always enjoy communion with God.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 15B: There is nothing hidden from God. Our very secrets are near to Him. Let us therefore do all things as those who have Him living in us, that we may be His temples and He may be in us as our God. For indeed He is, and He will reveal Himself before our faces. For these reasons we rightly love Him.

God Hears Prayer

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 13: The love of the Smyrnaeans and Ephesians greets you. Remember the church that is in Syria in your prayers, from which also I am not worthy

to receive my title, being the least of them. Farewell in Jesus Christ. Continue to be subject to the bishop as to the command and to the elders also. And each of you, do love one another with an undivided heart. Let my spirit be sanctified by yours, not only now, but also when I will reach God. For I am as yet exposed to danger. But the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ to fulfill both mine and your requests. In Him may you be found unblameable.

BARNABAS 2B–3: For He has revealed to us by all the prophets that He needs neither sacrifices, nor burnt offerings, nor any other offering saying,

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?” says the Lord; “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

“When you come to appear before me, who has required of your this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.” (Isa 1:11–13)

He has therefore abolished these things that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the burden, might have a human offering. And again, He says to them,

“For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: ‘Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath.’”
(*Jer 7:22–23; Zech 8:17*)

Therefore, if we truly understand we should recognize the gracious intention of our Father. For He speaks to us and desires that we should ask how we should approach Him and not go astray like them. To us, then, He declares, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a smell of sweet savor to the Lord is a heart that glorifies Him who made it” (*Ps 51:17*). We should therefore, friends, pay careful attention to our salvation in case the Wicked One, having made his entrance by deceit, should hurl us away from our life.

He says then to them again concerning these things,

Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Yet though you bend your neck like a ring, and put upon you sackcloth and ashes, will you call it an acceptable fast? (*Isa 58:4–5*)

To us He says,

Behold, is not this the fast that I choose: not that a person should humble his soul, but that he should loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the straps of the yoke, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be

your rear guard. Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, “Behold, I am with you if you free yourself from hinderances and threatening gestures, as well as words of grumbling, and give your bread cheerfully to the hungry and show compassion to the soul that has been humbled.”
(*Isa 58:6–10*)

To this end, therefore, friends, He is longsuffering, foreseeing how the people who He has prepared will genuinely believe in His Beloved. For He revealed all these things to us beforehand that we should not rush forward as rash acceptors of their laws.

Knowledge of God the Father

TO DIOGNETUS 8: For who among people understood who God was before His coming? Do you accept the empty and silly doctrines of those who are believed to be trustworthy philosophers? Some of them said that fire was God (they call God the thing where they themselves were to go), and others said water and still others said some different elements which were formed by God. But if any one of these theories merit consent, all of the other created things might also be declared to be God. But such declarations are simply the startling and erroneous statements of deceivers.

No one has either seen Him, or made Him known. Rather, He has revealed Himself. And He has revealed Himself through faith, which is the only way it is possible to see God. For God, the Lord and Fashioner of all things, who made all things and arranged them in order, proved Himself not only compassionate but also patient. Yes, He was always of such a character and still is and will ever be

kind and good and free from wrath and true and the only one who is good. And He formed in His mind a great and unspeakable plan which He communicated to His Child alone. Now, as long as He held and preserved His own wise counsel in secret, He appeared to neglect us and to have no care over us. But after He disclosed it through His beloved Child and revealed the things which had been prepared from the beginning, He gave us every blessing all at once so that we should both share in His benefits and see and watch what we could not have imagined.

Sovereignty of God's Plan

FIRST CLEMENT 26–27: Do we then consider it any great and wonderful act for the Maker of all things to raise up again those who have sincerely served Him in the assurance of a good faith when even by a bird He shows us the mightiness of His power to fulfill His promise? For it says in a certain place, “You will raise me up, and I will confess to You” (*Ps 28:7*). And again, “I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me” (*Ps 3:5*). And again, Job says, “You will raise up this flesh of mine, which has suffered all these things” (*Job 19:26*).

Having then this hope, let our souls be bound to Him who is faithful in His promises, and just in His judgments. He who has commanded us not to lie, will not lie Himself. For nothing is impossible with God, except to lie. Let faith in Him therefore be stirred up again within us, and let us consider that all things are near to Him. By the word of His might He established all things, and by His word He can overthrow them. “For who will say, ‘What have you done?’ or can withstand the might of your arm?” (*Wis 11:22; 12:12*). When and as He pleases, He will do

all things and none of the things determined by Him will pass away. All things are exposed before Him, and nothing can be hidden from His counsel. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Ps 19:1–3).

TO DIOGNETUS 9: He was aware, then, of all the plans He had arranged along with His Child so that He permitted us to be carried away by unruly impulses, being drawn away by the desire of pleasure and various lusts in the former times. This was not because He delighted in our sins, but because He was patient. He did not approve of the former season of our unrighteousness. And like a skilled craftsman of righteousness, in spite of this period of time when our own attempts in our unworthy lives might be now put to shame, we might be made worthy through the kindness of God. And having proven that in and of ourselves we were unable to enter into the kingdom of God, we can do so now only through the power of God.

But when our wickedness had reached its height and it had been clearly shown its reward—that is, our imminent punishment and death—and when the time had come which God had appointed before through revealing His own goodness and power (oh, the surpassing kindness and love of God) through His exceeding mercy for people, He did not regard us with hatred, nor thrust us away, nor remember our sin against us. Instead, He showed great patience and restraint. He took upon Himself the burden of our sin. He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the Holy One for sinners, the Blameless One for the wicked,

the Righteous One for the unrighteous, the Incorruptible One for the corruptible, the Immortal One for they that are mortal. For what else was capable of covering our sins except His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified except by the only Son of God? O the sweet exchange! O His unsearchable handiwork! O the benefits surpassing all expectation! All of this so that the wickedness of many should be hidden in a single Righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many sinners!

Having therefore convinced us in the former time that our nature was powerless to reach life and having now revealed the Savior who is powerful enough to save even those things that were impossible to save, because of both of these facts, He desired to lead us to trust in His goodness and to consider Him our Nurse, Father, Teacher, Counselor, Healer, our Wisdom, Light, Honor, Glory, Power, and Life, so that we should not be anxious concerning clothing and food.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit Speaks

FIRST CLEMENT 22: Now the faith which is in Christ confirms all these things. For He Himself by the Holy Spirit speaks to us:

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. (Ps 34:11–17)

And “Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord” (Ps 32:10).

FIRST CLEMENT 45: You are fond of contention, friends, and full of zeal about things which do not pertain to salvation. Look carefully into the Scriptures which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. See that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them. There you will not find that the righteous were cast off by men who themselves were holy. The righteous were indeed persecuted, but only by the malicious. They were cast into prison, but only by the unholy. They were stoned, but only by transgressors. They were slain, but only by the accursed, and by those who had conceived an unrighteous envy against them.

Exposed to such sufferings, they endured them gloriously. For what will we say, friends? Was Daniel cast into the den of lions by those who feared God? Were Ananias and Azarias and Mishael shut up in a furnace of fire by those who practiced the great and glorious worship of the Most High? Far from us be such a thought! Who, then, were they that did such things? The hateful and those full of all wickedness were roused to such a tone of fury that they inflicted torture on those who served God with a holy and blameless purpose. They did not know that the

Most High is the Defender and Protector of all such as those with a pure conscience who worship His excellent name. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen. But those who endured with confidence are now heirs of glory and honor, and have been exalted and made renowned by God in their memorial forever and ever. Amen.

The Holy Spirit Searches

FIRST CLEMENT 21A: Beware, dear ones, in case His many kindnesses lead to a judgment on us all. This will happen if we do not walk worthy of Him. So, with one mind do those things which are good and well-pleasing in His sight. For it says in a certain place, “The Spirit of the Lord is a candle searching the secret parts of the belly” (*Prov 20:27*). Let us consider how near He is to us, and that none of our thoughts or reasonings are hidden from Him. It is right, therefore, that we should not leave the position which His will has assigned us. Let us instead offend those men who are foolish and inconsiderate and boastful and who are arrogant in their speech rather than God. Let us be in awe of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us.

The Holy Spirit Makes Us New

BARNABAS 6B–C: Learn then what Knowledge says: “Hope in Him who will be revealed to you in the flesh—that is, Jesus.” For the human is earth in a suffering state just as the formation of Adam was from the face of the earth. What, then, does “Into the good land, the land flowing with milk and honey” mean (*Deut 31:20*)? Blessed be our Lord, who has placed in us wisdom and understanding of secret things. For the Prophet says, “Who

will understand the parable of the Lord except him who is wise and discerning and who loves his Lord?” (*Prov 1:6; Isa 40:13*). Since, therefore, He has renewed us by the remission of our sins, He has made us after another model so that we should possess the soul of children. That is, He has created us anew by His Spirit. For the Scripture speaks about us when He speaks to the Son, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock” (*Gen 1:26*). And the Lord said, when He saw the creation, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (*Gen 1:28*). These things He said to the Son.

Again, I will show you what the Lord says. He has made a second creation in these last days. And the Lord says, “So the last will be first, and the first last” (*Matt 20:16*). In reference to this, then, the Prophet proclaimed, “Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, and have dominion over it” (*Exod 33:3*). Behold, therefore, we have been refashioned, as again He says in another Prophet, “I will remove the heart of stone from those who the Spirit of the Lord foresaw, and give them a heart of flesh” (*Ezek 11:19*), because He was to be revealed in flesh and to walk among us. For, my friends, the dwelling of our heart is a holy temple to the Lord. For again the Lord says, “And with what will I appear before the Lord my God and be glorified?” (*Ps 42:2*). He says, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you” (*Ps 22:22*). We, then, are they who He has led into the good land.

What, then, does milk and honey mean? It means this. That as the infant is kept alive first by honey and then by milk, so we also, being quickened and kept alive by the faith of the promise and by the word, will live ruling over the earth. But as He said before, “Let them increase, and rule over the fishes” (*Gen 1:28*). Who then is able to govern the beasts, or the fishes, or the birds of heaven? For we should understand that to govern implies authority so that one should command and rule. If, therefore, this does not exist at present, yet still He has promised it to us, when? When we ourselves also have been made complete so as to become heirs of the covenant of the Lord.

Discussion Questions



A recent survey about the religious beliefs of North Americans indicated that many believe God is not perfect and can make mistakes. As you think about the religious landscape of your community, what do you see as the predominate view of God?



The early church had not yet articulated the doctrine of the Trinity as we know it today, which came about two hundred years later. Nevertheless, the Apostolic Fathers did have a clear notion that God is one in three persons. Look back at how the Apostolic Fathers equated God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and consider how you might articulate the Trinity to people today. Discuss your ideas in your group.



Reading about God can often become an academic exercise. However, what seems clear in the Apostolic Fathers was their genuine worship of God. How do you encourage people to take what is in their heads about God and move it to their hearts in worship?



The way of life, according to the Didache, is to love God as well as your neighbor. How does your study of God influence the manner in which you practically love your neighbor?



Try to wake up before sunrise for the next five days. Or, if you find rising in the morning difficult, try staying up until the sky is dark.

Look at the heavens each morning or night and remember what you see. How does the order of the planets and constellations remind you of God's sovereignty?



CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



Chapter 3

God the Son

Chapter Summary

We know today that Jesus is undoubtedly the most influential person to have ever walked the earth. Yet, there are still approximately three billion people who do not have access to knowing about Him. Even in places where the stories about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection have been told for centuries, many still do not clearly understand who He is and what He means to them. No matter if you have gone to church your entire life or you are new to the Christian faith, a proper understanding of God the Son is important for our ongoing maturity as His followers.

In this chapter, we will see how the Apostolic Fathers stress the fact that Jesus is God. Moreover, we will see how they emphasized that those who do not believe Jesus came in the flesh, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died, was buried, and rose again are the antichrist. This was a growing

concern in the early church as many were communicating false teachings about Jesus. To ensure the proper doctrine about Jesus Christ, the Apostolic Fathers relied on the leaders of churches to gather believers together to read and learn about Him. In fact, the primary role of the leader of a church in the second century was to ensure that everyone properly understood that Jesus is God.

As you read about how the Apostolic Fathers communicated about Jesus, you will inevitably recognize ideas from the New Testament. For example, you will recognize from your reading of the Gospel of John that Jesus is the eternal Word. He has two natures as fully God and fully human as we learn from the Apostle Paul's letters. He established a new covenant as the Hebrew author writes. The Apostolic Fathers were faithful to communicate the true nature of Jesus because they knew that false teachers could lead believers astray. It was just as important to them as it was to the authors of the New Testament. The Apostolic Fathers learned that the best defense against such false teaching was clear communication about Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Finally, in this chapter you will observe several Christological typologies. Typologies are simply references to how the Old Testament prophesied about Jesus through different types. A type could be figures like Isaac and Moses, animals like the calf or lamb, or anything else that helped early Christians understand that Jesus was not someone new. Indeed, He was foretold even during the days of the prophets.

Jesus the Eternal Word of God

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 8: Do not be deceived by strange doctrines, nor by old fables which are unprofitable. If we still live according to the Jewish law, then we acknowledge that we have not received grace. For the divine prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. On this account also they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, who did not come from silence, and who in all things pleased Him that sent Him.

TO DIOGENETUS 7: For, as I said, this was no mere earthly invention which was delivered to them, nor was it a mere human system of opinion which they judged right to preserve so carefully, nor does it have a dispensation of mere human mysteries that was committed to them. Rather, the invisible God Himself who is the Almighty Creator of all things has rightly sent the true and holy incomprehensible Word from heaven and placed Him among people. He has firmly established Him in their hearts. He did not, as one might have imagined, send to people just any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who have influence over earthly things. Neither did He send one of those entrusted with the administration of things in the heavens. Rather, He sent the very Creator and Fashioner of all things by whom He made the heavens, by whom He enclosed the sea within its proper bounds, the One whose mysteries all the stars faithfully observe, from whom the sun has received the measure of his daily

course to keep, who the moon obeys as He commands it to shine in the night, and who the stars also obey, following the moon in her course, by whom all things have been arranged, and placed within their proper limits, and to whom all are subject, the heavens and the things in it, the earth and the things on it, the sea and the things in it, fire, air, and the abyss, the things in the heights, the things in the depths, and the things which lie between. This is the One He sent to them.

Did He do this, as one might think, for the purpose of exercising tyranny, or of inspiring fear and terror? By no means! Rather, under the influence of compassion and meekness as a king sends his son, who is also a king, so He sent Him, as God He sent Him, as a person He sent Him to people, as a Savior He sent Him to persuade, not to compel us, for violence has no place in the character of God. He sent Him to call us, not to vengefully pursue us. He sent Him to love us not to judge us. For He will yet send Him to judge us and who will withstand His appearance?

Do you not see them thrown to wild beasts so that they may be persuaded to deny the Lord and yet they are not overcome? Do you not see that as many who are punished the greater becomes the number of the rest? This does not seem to be the work of a person. This is the power of God. These are the evidences of His appearance.

TO DIOGNETUS 11: I do not speak of things foreign to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with proper reason. Instead, having been a disciple of the apostles, I became a teacher of the Gentiles. I properly administer the things delivered to me to those who are disciples of the truth.

For who being rightly taught and effected by the loving Word would not seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to disciples? To them the Word appeared and has revealed to them plainly, although He was not understood by the unbelieving. He explained these things to the disciples who He esteemed faithful and they acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father.

For this reason, He sent the Word that He might be revealed to the world. And when He was dishonored by the people, He was then preached by the apostles and believed on by the Gentiles. This is He who was from the beginning, who appeared as if new, and was found old, and yet who is ever born afresh in the hearts of the saints. This is He who, being from everlasting, is today called the Son. Through Him the church is enriched and grace is widely spread and increases in the saints. This grace is given to provide understanding, reveal mysteries, announce seasons, rejoice over the faithful. It gives to those who seek, those who do not break the pledge of faith, nor the boundaries set by the Fathers.

Then the fear of the law is sung, and the grace of the prophets is known, and the faith of the Gospels is established, and the tradition of the apostles is preserved, and the grace of the church glories. By this grace, if you do not grieve it, you will know those things which the Word teaches, through whom He wills and when He pleases. For whatever things we are moved to speak by the will of the Word commanding us, we communicate to you with difficulty as well as from a love for the things that have been revealed to us.

TWO NATURES OF GOD THE SON

The Divinity of Jesus

FIRST CLEMENT 36: This is the way, dear ones, in which we find our Savior who is Jesus Christ, the High Priest of all our offerings, the defender and helper of our frailty. By Him we look up to the heights of heaven. By Him we behold, as in a glass, His immaculate and most excellent appearance. By Him are the eyes of our hearts opened. By Him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms anew toward His marvelous light. By Him the Lord has willed that we should taste of immortal knowledge, who “is the radiance of the glory of God . . . having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Heb 1:3–4). For it is written, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire” (Heb 1:7). But concerning His Son the Lord spoke: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:7–8; *Heb 1:5*). And again He says to Him, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Heb 1:13). But who are His enemies? All the immoral and those who set themselves to oppose the will of God.

The Humanity of Jesus

FIRST CLEMENT 32: Whosoever will honestly consider these matters will recognize the greatness of the gifts which were given by Abraham. For from him came the priests and all the Levites who minister at the altar of God. From him also came our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh. From him came kings, princes, and rulers of the race of Judah. And his other tribes are not at all insignificant

inasmuch as God had promised, “I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven” (Gen 26:4).

All these, therefore, were highly honored, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they worked, but through the operation of God’s will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have done from a pure heart. Rather, we are justified by the faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 7: For some are in the habit of carrying about the Name in wicked deceitfulness, while they practice things unworthy of God. You must flee these people as you would wild beasts. For they are ravenous dogs who bite secretly. You must be on your guard against them inasmuch as they are people who can scarcely be cured. There is one Physician who possesses both flesh and spirit, both made and not made. He is God existing in flesh, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first possible and then impossible. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 19A: Now the virginity of Mary was hidden from the prince of this world, as was also her giving birth and the death of the Lord—three mysteries of a scream which were accomplished in silence by God. How, then, was He revealed to the world? A star shined out in heaven brighter than all the other stars, the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck people with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star, and its light

was exceedingly greater than them all. And there was a disturbance felt as to where this new spectacle came since it was so unlike anything else.

IGNATIUS TO THE SMYRNAEANS 1–3: I glorify God, even Jesus Christ, who has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that you are completed in an immovable faith, as if you were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit. You are even established in love through the blood of Christ, being fully persuaded about our Lord. He was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh and the Son of God according to the will and power of God. He was truly born of a virgin and was baptized by John in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him. And He was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch, nailed for us in His flesh. By the fruit of His divinely-blessed suffering we exist so that through His resurrection He might set a standard in every age for those who are His holy and faithful people, whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of His church.

Now, He suffered all these things for us so that we might be saved. And He suffered truly, even as He also truly raised Himself up. Not that He only seemed to suffer as certain unbelievers maintain—those who themselves only seem to exist.¹ Just as they believe, it will also happen to them when they will be stripped of their bodies and become mere evil spirits.

For I know and believe that even after His resurrection He was still in the flesh. When, for instance, He came to those who were with Peter He said to them, “Lay hold,

1 Ignatius here refers to the heresy of Docetism. See Table 2 in the Introduction.

touch Me, and see that I am not a disembodied spirit” (Luke 24:39). And immediately they touched Him and believed being convinced both by His flesh and spirit. For this reason also they despised death and were found its conquerors. And after His resurrection He did eat and drink with them as being in the flesh although spiritually He was united to the Father.

THE WORK OF GOD THE SON

The Ministry of Jesus Christ

FIRST CLEMENT 13: Let us therefore, friends, be of humble mind, laying aside all arrogance, and pride, and foolishness, and angry feelings. Let us act according to that which is written. For the Holy Spirit says:

Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in the Lord, in diligently seeking Him, and doing justice and righteousness. (*Jer 9:23–24*)

We should be especially mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spoke, teaching us meekness and patience. For He spoke:

Be merciful, that you may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you. As you do, so will it be done to you. As you judge, so will you be judged. As you are kind, so will kindness be shown to you. With what measure you measure, with the same it will be measured to you. (*Matt 5:7, 6:14, 7:1–2*)

By this instruction and by these rules let us establish ourselves, so that we will walk with all humility in obedience to His holy words. For the holy word says, “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa 66:2).

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 1: I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ. You have followed the example of true love. As fitting you, you have accompanied those who were bound in chains—the fitting ornaments of saints which are indeed the crowns of the true elect of God and our Lord. The strong root of your faith, spoken of in days long gone by, endures even until now and brings fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ who for our sins suffered even to death: “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death” (Acts 2:24). “Though you do not now see Him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet 1:8), which many desire to enter knowing that “by grace you have been saved . . . not a result of works” (Eph 2:8–9), but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

The Suffering of Jesus Christ

FIRST CLEMENT 49: Let him who has love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ. Who can describe the bond of the love of God? What person is able to tell the excellence of its beauty, as it should be told? The height to which love exalts is unspeakable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love bears all things. It is longsuffering in all things. There is nothing improper, nothing arrogant in love. Love admits of no division. Love gives rise to no seditions. Love does all

things in harmony. By love have all the elect of God been made complete. Without love nothing is pleasing to God. In love has the Lord taken us to Himself. On account of the love He had for us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God; His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 18: Let my spirit be counted as nothing for the sake of the cross, which is a stumbling block to those who do not believe, but salvation and eternal life to us. “Where is the one who is wise? . . . Where the debater?” (1 Cor 1:20). Where is the boasting of those claiming to be intelligent? For our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to the plan of God, both from the seed of David and the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized that by His suffering He might purify the water.

BARNABAS 5–6A: For the Lord endured until the end in order to deliver up His flesh to corruption so that we might be sanctified through the remission of sins by the sprinkling of His blood. Partly with reference to Israel, and partly to us, it is written concerning Him, “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities . . . with his stripes we are healed. . . . Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent” (Isa 53:5, 7). Therefore, we should be deeply grateful to the Lord because He has both made known to us things that are past and has given us wisdom concerning things present. He has not left us without understanding in regard to things which are to come.

Now, the Scripture says, “In vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird” (Prov 1:17). This means that a person

who having a knowledge of the way of righteousness and rushes off into the way of darkness perishes justly. Furthermore, my friends, if the Lord endured suffering for our souls, He being Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26), understands how it was that He endured suffering at the hands of people. The prophets, having obtained grace from Him, prophesied concerning Him. And He who appeared in flesh so that He might abolish death and reveal the resurrection from the dead, suffered in order that He might fulfill the promise made to the fathers. Namely, He prepared a new people for Himself and showed that while He dwelt on earth, He will also judge them when He has raised humankind.

Moreover, teaching Israel and doing so many miracles and wonders, He preached to them and greatly loved them. But when He chose His own apostles who were to preach His gospel—those who were sinners above all sin—He showed that He came not “to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32; *Matt 9:13*; *Mark 2:17*). Then He revealed Himself to be the Son of God. For if He had not come in the flesh how could people have been saved by seeing Him? Since looking upon the sun which is to cease to exist, and is the work of His hands, their eyes are not able to bear his rays.

The Son of God therefore came in the flesh with this view: that He might bring to a head the sum of the sins of those who had persecuted His prophets to the death. For this purpose, then, He suffered. For God says, “The

wounds on His flesh is from them”² and “when I strike down the Shepherd, then the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (*Zech 13:7*). He Himself desired to suffer like this for it was necessary that He should suffer on the tree. For he who prophesies regarding Him says, “Deliver my soul from the sword, fasten My flesh with nails, for a company of evildoers encircles me” (*Ps 22:16, 20*). Again he says, “I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard . . . therefore I have set my face like a flint” (*Isa 50:6–7*).

When, therefore, He has fulfilled the commandment, what does He say? “Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Woe unto you, for you will all wear out like a garment; the moth will eat you up” (*Isa 50:8–9*). And again, the Prophet says, “Since as a mighty stone He is laid for crushing, behold I cast down for the foundations of Zion a stone, precious, elect, an honorable cornerstone” (*Isa 28:16*). Next, what does He say? “And he who will trust in it will live forever.” Is our hope, then, upon a stone? Far from it. But He says this because He established His flesh with power. For He says, “and He placed Me as a firm rock” (*Isa 50:7*). And the Prophet says again, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (*Ps 118:22*). And again he says, “This is the great and wonderful day that the Lord has made” (*Ps 118:24*).

I write simply to you so that you may understand. I am the humble servant of your love. What, then, again says the Prophet? “A company of evildoers encircles me” (*Ps 22:16*); “they surrounded me like bees” do a honeycomb (*Ps*

2 Unknown source.

118:12), and “for my clothing they cast lots” (Ps 22:18). Since, therefore, He was about to be revealed and suffer in the flesh, His suffering was foreshown. For the Prophet speaks against Israel, “Woe to their soul because they have consulted an evil counsel against themselves saying, ‘Let us lie in wait for the Righteous One, because He is displeasing to us’” (*Isa 3:9–10; Wis 2:12*). And Moses also says to them, “Behold these things says the Lord God, ‘Go up to the good land which the Lord swore to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and inherit it, a land flowing with milk and honey’” (*Exod 33:1, 3*).

BARNABAS 12: In a similar way, He points to the cross of Christ in another Prophet who says, “And when will these things be accomplished? And the Lord says, ‘When a tree will be bent down, and again arise, and when blood will flow out of wood.’”³ Here again you have an allusion concerning the cross and Him who would be crucified. Yet again He speaks of this in Moses when Israel was attacked by strangers. When they were assaulted, He reminded them that it was on account of their sins that they were delivered to death. So, the Spirit speaks to the heart of Moses that he should make a symbol of the cross and of Him who was to suffer on it. For unless they put their trust in Him, they will be overcome forever. Moses therefore placed one weapon above another in the midst of the hill, and standing upon it so as to be higher than all the people, he stretched out his hands and once again Israel acquired the advantage. But when he let his hands down again, they were again destroyed. For what reason? That they might know that they could not be saved unless they put their trust in Him.

3 Unknown source.

And He declares in another Prophet, “I spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, one that opposes My righteous way” (*Isa 65:2*). And again, Moses makes a type of Jesus showing that it was necessary for Him to suffer so that He would be the author of life. This one they believed was destroyed on the cross when Israel was failing. The Lord brought it to pass that serpents bit them (since transgression was committed by Eve through means of the serpent) so that He might convince them that on account of their transgression they were given over to death.

Moreover, Moses, when he commanded, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image” (*Exod 20:4*), he did so that he might reveal a type of Jesus. Moses then made a bronze serpent and placed it upon a beam, and by proclamation assembled the people. Therefore, when they came together, they implored Moses that he would offer sacrifice on their behalf and prayer for their recovery. And Moses spoke to them saying, “When anyone of you is bitten, let him come to the serpent placed on the pole. Let him hope and believe that even though dead it is able to give him life and immediately he will be restored” (*Num 21:7–9*). And they did so. You have in this also the glory of Jesus. For in Him and to Him are all things.

Again, what does Moses say to Jesus the son of Nun, when he gave him this name (since he was a prophet) with the sole view that all the people might hear how the Father would reveal all things concerning His Son Jesus to the son of Nun? With this name then being given to him when he sent him to spy out the land, he said, “Take a book into your hands and write what the Lord declares. Namely that the Son of God will utterly blot

out the memory of Amalek from the roots in the last days” (*Exod 17:14*). Behold again, Jesus who was manifested both by type and in the flesh is not the Son of man, but the Son of God. Since, therefore, they were to say that Christ was the son of David, fearing and understanding the error of the wicked, he says, “The Lord says to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (*Ps 110:1*). And again, Isaiah says, “The Lord said to Christ, my Lord, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings” (*Isa 45:1*). Behold how David calls Him Lord and the Son of God.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ and a Type of Phoenix

FIRST CLEMENT 24–25: Let us consider, dear ones, how the Lord continually proves to us that there will be a future resurrection. He has proven it by showing that the Lord Jesus Christ is the first fruits and raised Him from the dead. Dear ones, let us think about the resurrection which takes place all of the time. Day and night declare to us a resurrection. The night sinks to sleep, and the day arises. The day departs, and the night comes on. Let us see the fruits and how the sowing of grain takes place. The sower goes out and casts it into the ground. When the seed is scattered, though dry and naked when it fell to the earth, it gradually dissolves. Then out of its deterioration the mighty power of the providence of the Lord raises it up again, and from one seed many arise and bring fruit.

Let us consider that wonderful sign from eastern lands, that is, in Arabia and the surrounding countries. There is a certain bird which is called a phoenix. This is the only

one of its kind, and lives five hundred years. And when the time of its death draws near, it builds itself a nest of frankincense and myrrh and other spices, then, when the time is fulfilled, it enters the nest and dies. But as the flesh decays a certain kind of worm is formed, which, being nourished by the juices of the dead bird, it generates feathers. Then, when it has strengthened, it takes up that nest with the bones of its parent, and carrying these it passes from the land of Arabia into Egypt, to the city called Heliopolis. And flying in the sight of all people during the day, it places them on the altar of the sun. Afterward, it hastens back to its former abode. The priests then inspect the calendars of the dates and find that it has returned exactly when the five hundredth year was completed.

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 9: Cover your ears, therefore, when anyone speaks to you differently about Jesus Christ. He was descended from David and was also of Mary. He was truly born and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate. He was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him. In the same manner His Father will also raise us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.

Ascension

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 2A: “Therefore, preparing your minds for action” (1 Pet 1:13), “serve the Lord with fear” (Ps 2:11) and truth as those who have rejected the vain, empty talk and error of the multitude, and “who through him are believers in God, who raised our Lord

Jesus Christ from the dead and gave Him glory” (*1 Pet 1:21*) and a throne at His right hand. To Him all things “in heaven and on earth are subject” (*Phil 2:10; Col 1:20*). It is He that every spirit serves. He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead. His blood will God require of those who do not believe in Him. But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise us up also if we do His will and walk in His commandments.

CHRISTOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES

Type of Isaac

BARNABAS 7: Understand, then, you children of gladness, that the good Lord has shown all things to us beforehand, that we might know to whom we should render thanksgiving and praise for everything. If therefore the Son of God, who is Lord of all things and who will judge the living and the dead, suffered so that His beating might give us life, then let us believe that the Son of God could not have suffered except for our sakes. Moreover, when fixed to the cross He had been given vinegar and gall to drink.

Listen to how the priests of the temple gave previous indications about this. His commandment was written that, “whoever did not keep the fast should be put to death” (*Lev 23:29*). The Lord instructed this because He also was to offer the vessel of the Spirit in sacrifice for our sins in order that the type established in Isaac when he was offered on the altar might be fulfilled. What, then, does He say in the Prophet? “And let them eat of the goat which is offered at the fast for all their sins.”⁴ Now pay attention, “And let all the priests alone eat the unwashed

4 Unknown source.

intestines with vinegar.”⁵ Why? “Because to me, the one who offers my flesh for the sins of my new people, you are to give gall with vinegar to drink. You eat alone while the people fast and mourn in sackcloth and ashes.”⁶ He says this that He might show what was necessary for Him to suffer for them.

Give your attention to the command. “Take two goats with good features, similar to each other, and offer them. And let the priest take one as a burnt offering for sins” (*Lev 16:7–9*). And what should they do with the other? “Accursed,” He says, “is this one.” Pay attention to the type of Jesus revealed. “And all of you spit upon it and pierce it and encircle its head with scarlet wool and let it be driven into the wilderness.”⁷ And when all this has been done, he who bears the goat brings it into the desert and takes the wool from it and places that upon a shrub which is called Rachi. Of this shrub we are also accustomed to eat its fruits when we find them in the field. Of this kind of shrub alone the fruits are sweet.

Why, again, is this then? Pay attention, “One placed on the altar and the other accursed.” And why is the one accursed crowned? Because they will see Him then in that day having a scarlet robe about his body down to his feet and they will say, “Is not this He whom we once despised and pierced and mocked and crucified? Truly this is He who then declared Himself to be the Son of God. For how alike is He to Him!” This is why the goats are to be of good features and similar, so that when they see

5 Unknown source.

6 Unknown source.

7 Unknown source.

Him coming they may be amazed by the likeness of the goat. Behold, then, the type of Jesus who was to suffer.

But why is it that they place the wool in the midst of thorns? It is a type of Jesus set before the view of the assembly. Anyone who wishes to remove the thorn may find it necessary to suffer much, because the thorn is formidable, and it is obtained only as the result of suffering. So He also says, “Those who wish to behold Me and lay hold of My kingdom must obtain Me through tribulation and suffering” (*Acts 14:22*).

Type of Offering

BARNABAS 8: Now what do you suppose is the type given to Israel? That men of the greatest wickedness are commanded to offer a heifer and slay and burn it? That the children should take the ashes and put them into vessels and tie purple wool around a stick along with hyssop and then sprinkle the people, one by one, in order that they might be purified from their sins?

Consider how He speaks to you with simplicity. The calf is Jesus. The sinful men offering it are those who led Him to the slaughter. But now the men are no longer guilty. They are no longer regarded as sinners. And the children that sprinkle are those that have proclaimed to us the remission of sins and purification of heart. To these He gave authority to preach the gospel, being twelve in number, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel.

But why are there three children that sprinkle? To correspond to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, because these were great with God. And why was the wool placed on the wood? Because by wood Jesus holds His



kingdom so that those believing in Him will live forever. But why was hyssop joined with the wool? Because in His kingdom the days will be evil and polluted in which we will be saved. Also, because he who suffers in body is cured through the cleansing properties of hyssop. So, on this account things are clear to us, but obscure to them because they did not hear the voice of the Lord.

GOD THE SON AND THE NEW COVENANT

The First Covenant

BARNABAS 13–14: But let us see if this people or the former are the heir, and if the covenant belongs to us or to them. Now hear what the Scripture says concerning the people. Isaac prayed for Rebecca his wife because she was barren and she conceived. Furthermore, Rebecca went out to inquire of the Lord and the Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger” (*Gen 25:23*). You should understand who Isaac and Rebecca are representing, and concerning the people He declared that should be greater than another people. And in another prophecy Jacob speaks more clearly to his son Joseph saying, “Behold, the Lord has not deprived me of your presence; bring your sons to me, that I may bless them” (*Gen 48:9, 11*). And he brought Manasseh and Ephraim, desiring that Manasseh should be blessed because he was the older. With this desire, Joseph led him to the right hand of his father Jacob. But Jacob saw in the Spirit the type of the people to come afterward. And what does it say?

And Jacob changed the direction of his hands, and laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, the second and younger, and blessed him. And Joseph said to Jacob, “Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.” But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. . . . Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and he also shall be great.” (*Gen 48:14–19*)

Do you see which people He established to be first and heir of the covenant? Additionally, if the same thing was expressed through Abraham, then we reach the completion of our knowledge. What, then, does He say to Abraham? “Because you have believed, it is counted to you as righteousness. Behold, I have made you the father of the nations who believe in the Lord while uncircumcised” (*Gen 15:6*).

Revelation of the Covenant

Indeed. However, let us ask if the Lord has really given the covenant which He swore to the Fathers that He would give to the people. He did give it, but they were not worthy to receive it on account of their sins. For the Prophet declares, “And Moses was fasting forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai, that he might receive the testament of the Lord for the people” (*Exod 34:28*). And he received from the Lord two tablets written in the Spirit by the finger of the hand of the Lord. And Moses having received them carried them down to give to the people. And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves” (*Exod 32:7*). And Moses understood

that they had again made molten images. And he threw the tablets out of his hands, and the tablets of the testament of the Lord were broken. So Moses received it, but they proved themselves unworthy.

Now learn how we have received it. Moses received it as a servant, but the Lord himself who suffered on our behalf has given it to us so that we should be the people of inheritance. He was revealed in order that they might be completely occupied with their sins, and that we, being established as heirs through Him, might receive the testament of the Lord Jesus who was prepared for this purpose. Namely, by His personal appearance, He came redeeming our hearts from darkness since they were already wasted by death and given over to the sin of error so that He might enter into a covenant with us by His word. For it is written how the Father commanded Him to prepare a holy people for Himself in order to redeem us from darkness. The Prophet therefore declares,

I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give
you as a covenant for the people, a light for the
nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring
out the prisoners from the dungeon and from the
prison those who sit in darkness. (Isa 42:6–7)

You know, then, from where we have been redeemed. And again, the Prophet says, “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel” (Isa 49:6–7). And again, the Prophet says,

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn. (Isa 61:1–2)

Discussion Questions



Many people simply believe Jesus was a great teacher and not really God. As you consider your context, what do you see as the predominate view about Jesus?



Based on how people think about Jesus, what ways do the Apostolic Fathers help you communicate accurately about Jesus as God?



Reflecting theologically about biblical truth occasionally results in a faith that simply stays in our head. If ever there were a topic that needs to come out of the head and into our devotion, it is the way in which we think about Jesus. How does His life, ministry, death, and resurrection move you to worship the One whom Ignatius called his God?



Considering Jesus' life, what are five examples you see in the Apostolic Fathers that you can model to your family and your church?



It takes time and discipline to study about Jesus. As you think about those you know who have never heard about Jesus or who believe falsely about Him, what are some things you could share with them from the Apostolic Fathers' teachings about Jesus?



Chapter 4

The Defense of the Faith

Chapter Summary

Have you had to defend an idea that was important to you? In early Christianity, the Roman culture was very suspicious of new ideas that seemed to threaten its beliefs and lifestyle. At times, the suspicion grew to anger and violence against Christians. To persuade Christians to renounce their new ideas, many were put to death. In fact, all seven of Ignatius' letters were written on his way to Rome surrounded by guards in order to be thrown to wild beasts and martyred in the Colosseum for his beliefs.

It was not always easy for the Christians to defend their faith. In fact, just like in Corinth, the divisions caused within the church actually contributed to the church's persecution as if God Himself were punishing the believers because of their factions. So, the church in Rome wrote to the church in Corinth to sort out the schism among them

and let their good deeds be a testimony to their community. We will read more about this in chapter eight.

One letter stands out among the Apostolic Fathers as an early example of a defense of the faith, also known as an apologetic: the Letter to Diognetus. We know very little about its author or its recipient. Nevertheless, it is a clear example of an apologetic of the same nature and tone as we read from the Apostle Peter:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet 3:13–16)

So, we begin this chapter with the Letter to Diognetus. You will certainly notice the posture of the apologist. You will also notice that the defense of the faith was as much about the verbal proclamation of Jesus as it was the daily living out a life as one of His followers.

Posture

TO DIOGNETUS 1: Since I see that you, most excellent Diognetus, are especially desirous to learn the manner of worshiping God prevalent among the Christians, and that you are inquiring very carefully and earnestly concerning them—about the God they trust in and what form of religion they observe so as to look down upon the world



itself and despise death while they neither recognize the gods who are numbered as such by the Greeks, nor hold to the superstition of the Jews, not to mention the friendliness which they treasure among themselves and why possibly this new race or practice has only appeared into life now and not before—I warmly welcome your desire and I ask God who empowers us both to speak and to hear, to grant to me to speak so that, above all, I may hear that you have been edified and that you might hear the one who speaks and may have no cause of regret for having done so.

DEFENSE AGAINST THE JEWS AND GREEKS

The Jewish Law

BARNABAS 4A: It is therefore incumbent upon us who inquire much concerning events at hand to search diligently into those things which are able to save us. Let us then flee from all the works of iniquity in case these should take hold of us. Let us hate the error of the present time so that we may set our love on the world to come. Let us not give loose reins to our soul so that it would have power to run with sinners and the wicked in case we become like them.

The final stumbling block is approaching concerning which Enoch says, “For the Lord has cut short the times and the days that His Beloved may hasten to come and take His inheritance.”¹ And so the Prophet also speaks: “Ten kingdoms will reign upon the earth and a little king will rise up after them who will subdue three of the kings by one” (Dan 7:24). Similarly, Daniel says concerning the same,

¹ Source unknown.

And I saw the fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly stronger than all the beasts of the earth, and how from it sprang up ten horns, and out of them a little budding horn, and how it subdued three of the great horns by one. (*Dan 7:7–8*)

You must therefore understand. And this also I further implore as being one of you and loving you both individually and collectively more than my own soul. Pay attention now to yourselves. Do not be like some adding largely to your sins and saying, “The covenant is both theirs and ours.”² Even so, they ultimately lost it after Moses had already received it. For the Scripture says, “And Moses was fasting in the mount forty days and forty nights, and received the covenant from the Lord, tablets of stone written with the finger of the hand of the Lord” (*Exod 31:18; Exod 34:28*). However, turning to idols, they lost it. For the Lord says to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves” (*Exod 32:7*). And Moses understood and cast the two tablets out of his hands. Then their covenant was broken in order that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed upon our heart in the hope which flows from believing in Him.

Superstitions of Greeks

TO DIOGNETUS 2B–4: Is not one of the gods a stone similar to that on which we walk? Is not a second brass in no way greater than those utensils which are made for our ordinary use? Is not a third wood already rotted? Is not a fourth silver, which needs a person to watch it in case it is stolen? Is not a fifth iron consumed by rust? Is not a sixth

2 Source unknown.



earthenware that is no degree more valuable than that which is formed for the humblest purposes? Are not all these of corruptible matter? Are they not fabricated by means of iron and fire? Did not the sculptor fashion one of them, the brazier a second, the silversmith a third, and the potter a fourth? Was not each one of them subject to change in its own way before they were crafted into the shape of these forms? Might not those things which are now utensils, formed from the same materials, become the same things if they were crafted by the same artisans? Might not these things which are now worshiped by you be crafted by human hands similar to others? Are they not all deaf? Are they not blind? Are they not without life? Are they not deprived of feeling? Are they not incapable of motion? Are they not all liable to rot? Are they not all corruptible?

These are the things you call gods. These you serve, these you worship. In the end, you become just like them. For this reason, you hate the Christians because they do not believe these to be gods. But do you yourselves who regard and worship these not cast much more contempt upon them than they? Do you not mock and insult them much more when you worship those that are made of stone and earthenware without appointing anyone to guard them while those made of silver and gold you shut up by night and by day you appoint watchmen to look after them in case they be stolen?

And those gifts by which you mean to honor them, do you not rather insult them if they do indeed possess awareness? However, if they do not possess awareness, then you condemn them while you worship them with the blood and fat of sacrifices. Let any one of you

experience such indignities! Let any one of you endure such things being done to himself! But not a single human being will, unless compelled, endure such treatment since he is given sense and reason. Yet, a stone endures it because it is unaware. Certainly, do you not prove that it is possessed of awareness?

So as to the fact that Christians are not accustomed to serve such gods, I might easily find many other things to say. However, even if what has been said does not seem sufficient to anyone, then I deem it pointless to say anything further.

Superstitions of Jews

And next I imagine that you are most interested in hearing something about why the Christians do not observe the same forms of divine worship as the Jews. Indeed, if the Jews were to refrain from the kind of service described above and deem it proper to worship one God as being Lord of all, then they understand. However, if they were to offer Him worship in the way which we have described, then they greatly err. For while the Greeks provide an example of madness by offering such things to those that are devoid of sense and hearing, the Jews, by thinking to offer these things to God as if He needed them, could rightly consider it an act of folly rather than of divine worship.

For He who made heaven and earth and all that is them, who also provides us all the things for which we are in need, certainly does not require any of those things which He Himself has provided us as if to think they provide Him something. But those who imagine that by



means of blood and fat and burnt offerings they offer sacrifices to Him and that by such honors they show Him reverence, these appear to me in no respect different from those who seriously confer the same honor on things devoid of awareness. The one gives to those unable to enjoy such honors, and the other thinking they can provide something to One who needs nothing.

But I do not think that you require to learn anything from me as to their anxiety concerning food and their superstition in regards to the Sabbath, neither their boasting about circumcision and their fancies about fasting and the new moons. These things are utterly ridiculous and unworthy of mention. For how can it be lawful to accept some things which have been created by God for human use as created good and to reject others as useless and redundant? And how is it not irreverent to speak falsely of God as if He prohibited us to do what is good on the Sabbath days? And how is it not outrageous to take pride in the circumcision of the flesh as a proof of election as if they were especially beloved by God on account of it? And as for their observing of months and days as if waiting upon the distribution of the stars and the moon according to their own tendencies and the fluctuations of the seasons appointed by God, making some for festivities and others for mourning, who would deem this a part of divine worship rather than an expression of folly? I suppose, then, you are sufficiently convinced that it is proper for the Christians to refrain from the futility and error common to the Jews, as well as from their nosey ways and silly boasting.

The Jewish Temple

BARNABAS 16: Moreover, I will also tell you about the temple, how those wretched people wandering in error did not trust in God Himself. Instead, they trusted in the temple as being the house of God. For almost like the Gentiles they worshiped Him in the temple. But how does the Lord speak when abolishing it? Listen!

“Who has marked off the heavens with a span, and the earth with his palm? Was it not I?” says the Lord. “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?” (*Isa 40:12; 66:1*)

You understand that their hope is vain. Moreover, He again says, “Behold, they who have razed this temple, even they will build it up again” (*Isa 49:17, LXX*). And it has happened. For by going to war, it was destroyed by their enemies. And now, they, as the servants of their enemies, will rebuild it. Again, it was revealed that the city and the temple and the people of Israel were to be given up. For the Scripture says, “And it will come to pass in the last days that the Lord will deliver up the sheep of His pasture, as well as their sheep pen and watchtower, to destruction” (*Isa 5; Jer 25*). And it happened just as the Lord had spoken. Let us ask, then, if there still is a temple of God. There is! It is where He Himself declared He would make and finish it. For it is written, “And it will come to pass, when the week is completed that the temple of God will be built in glory in the name of the Lord” (*Dan 9:24–27*).

I find, therefore, that a temple does exist. How then will it be built in the name of the Lord? Learn! Before we believed in God, the dwelling of our heart was corrupt



and weak as being indeed like a temple made with hands. For it was full of idolatry and was a home to demons since we did such things as were opposed to God. However, pay attention, a temple will be built in the name of the Lord in order that the temple of the Lord may be built in glory. How? Learn! Having received the forgiveness of sins and placing our trust in the name of the Lord, we have become new creatures formed again from the beginning. As a result, God truly dwells in us in our dwelling. How? His word of faith, the calling of His promise, the wisdom of the statutes, the commands of the doctrine, He Himself prophesying in us, He Himself dwelling in us. He has opened the door of the temple to us who were enslaved by death. The door is the mouth by which repentance is given to us so that He introduces us into the incorruptible temple. He then, who wishes to be saved, looks not to a person, but to the One who dwells in him and speaks to him, amazed at never having either heard such words uttered with his mouth, nor having ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple built for the Lord.

CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

Act According to Speech

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 15: It is better to be silent and exist than to speak and not exist. It is good to teach if he who speaks also acts. There is then one Teacher who spoke and it was done, while even those things which He did in silence are worthy of the Father. He who possesses the word of Jesus is truly able to hear even His very silence so that he may be complete and may both act as he speaks and be known by his silence.

Christians and Culture

TO DIOGNETUS 4B–6: But you must not expect to learn from any human the mystery of the Christians peculiar way of worshipping God.

For the Christians are not distinguished from other people by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any distinctiveness. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of clever people. Nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, living in Greek as well as barbarian cities, according to the lot determined for each of them, and following the native customs regarding clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.

They live in their own countries, but simply as strangers. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all. They bear children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws and at the same time surpass the laws by their private lives. They love all people and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned. They are put to death and restored to life. They are poor,



yet make many rich. They are in need of all things and yet thrive in all things. They are dishonored, yet are glorified in their very dishonor. They are spoken of as evil, yet are justified. They are cursed, yet they bless. They are insulted and repay the insult with honor. They do good, yet are punished as evildoers. When punished, they rejoice as if brought to life. They are assailed by the Jews as foreigners and are persecuted by the Greeks. Yet, those who hate them are unable to give any reason for their hatred.

To sum up all in a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body. And Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and indeed Christians are known to be in the world, but their worship of God remains invisible.

The flesh hates the soul and wars against it, though itself suffering no injury because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures. So also, the world hates the Christians, though it is in no way injured because they renounce pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it as well as its members. Christians likewise love those who hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body. And Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle. And Christians dwell as strangers in the perishable, looking for an imperishable dwelling in the heavens. Yet, the soul, when mistreated with food and drink, becomes better. In like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment,

increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position which it was not proper for them to forsake.

Testimony of Good Deeds

FIRST CLEMENT 30: Seeing, therefore, that we are the portion of the Holy One, let us do all those things which relate to holiness. We must avoid all evil-speaking, all abominable and impure embraces, together with all drunkenness and rioting, all repulsive lusts, detestable adultery, and awful pride. For “God,” it says, “opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6).

Instead, let us hold to those to whom grace has been given by God. Let us clothe ourselves with harmony and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all gossiping and evil-speaking, being justified by our works and not our words. For it says,

He that speaks much, will also hear much in answer.
And does he that is ready in speech consider himself righteous? Blessed is he that is born of woman, who lives but a short time. Be not given to much speaking.
(*Job 11:2*)

Let our praise be in God, and not of ourselves. For God hates those who commend themselves. Let the testimony of our good deeds be spoken of by others, as it was in the case of our righteous ancestors. Boldness and arrogance and audacity belong to those who are cursed by God. Instead, those who act in moderation, humility, and meekness are blessed by Him.



THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Verbal Proclamation

BARNABAS 11B: Note how He has described at the same time both the water and the cross. For these words imply, “Blessed are they who place their trust in the cross and have gone down into the water. For,” says He, “they will receive their reward in due time.” Then He declares, “I will reward them.” But now He says, “Their leaves will not fade.”³ This means that every word which proceeds out of your mouth in faith and love will tend to bring conversion and hope to many.

Common Hope

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 5: My friends, I am greatly overflowing in love for you, and extremely rejoiceful as I seek your safety. Yet it is not I, but Jesus Christ, for whose sake I am bound and fear all the more because I am imperfect. But your prayer to God will make me perfect so that I may reach that portion which through mercy has been assigned to me. I take safety in the gospel as to the flesh of Jesus and in the apostles as to the elders of the church.

And let us also love the prophets because they too have proclaimed the gospel and placed their hope in Him and waited for Him. In Him they also believed and were saved through union to Jesus Christ. They were holy men, worthy of love and admiration, approved by Jesus Christ, and reckoned along with us in the gospel of the common hope.

3 Source unknown.

Superior Gospel

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 8B–9: I trust in the grace of Jesus Christ who will free you from every chain. And I urge you to do nothing out of dissension, but according to the teaching of Christ. When I heard some saying, “If I do not find it in the ancient Scriptures I will not believe the gospel,” I said to them, “It is written.” They replied, “That remains to be proved.” But to me Jesus Christ is in the place of all that is ancient. His cross and death and resurrection and the faith which is by Him are undefiled monuments of antiquity by which I desire to be justified through your prayers.

The priests indeed are good, but the High Priest is better. To Him the Holy of Holies has been entrusted, and He alone has been trusted with the secrets of God. He is the door of the Father, by whom enter Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the apostles and the church. All of these join together in the unity of God. But the gospel possesses something superior; namely, the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, His passion, and resurrection. For the beloved prophets announced Him, but the perfect gospel is eternal. All these things together are good if you believe with love.

A Call to God

TO DIOGNETUS 10: If you also desire this faith, you must first of all receive the knowledge of the Father. For God has loved humanity, on whose account He made the world, to whom He subjected all the things that are in it, to whom He gave reason and understanding, to whom alone He imparted the privilege of looking upwards to Himself, whom He formed after His own image, to whom



He sent His only-begotten Son, to whom He has promised a kingdom in heaven and will give it to those who have loved Him. Then, when you have received this knowledge, with what joy do you think you will be filled? Or, how will you love Him who has first so loved you? And if you love Him you will be an imitator of His goodness.

Do not marvel that a person may become an imitator of God. He can if he is willing. For happiness is not found by ruling over his neighbors, or by seeking to hold superiority over those who are weaker, or by being rich and showing violence toward those that are inferior. No one can become an imitator of God by these things. These things do not at all encompass His majesty. On the contrary, an imitator of God is one who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbor. He is ready to benefit another who is deprived by whatever means he is better. The one who has received from God and provides for the needy becomes as God to them.⁴ This one is an imitator of God.

Then you will see while you are still on earth that God rules in the heavens. Then you will begin to speak the mysteries of God. Then you will both love and admire those that suffer punishment because they will not deny God. Then you will condemn the deceit and error of the world because you will know what it is to live truly in heaven. When this happens, you will despise that which is believed to be death here on earth and you will fear what is truly death, that which is reserved for those who will be condemned to the eternal fire which afflicts those who are committed to it even until the end. Then you will

⁴ In other words, "The one who has received from God and provides for the needy does the work of God for them."

admire those who for righteousness' sake endure the fire that is momentary and will consider them happy when you understand that other fire.

Justification by Faith

FIRST CLEMENT 31–32: Let us hold on then to His blessing, and consider the means of possessing it. Let us think over the things which have taken place from the beginning. For what reason was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he worked righteousness and truth through faith (*Gen 15:6*)? Isaac, with perfect confidence, as if knowing what was to happen, cheerfully gave himself as a sacrifice (*Gen 22:1–19*). Jacob, through reason of his brother, went out with humility from his own land and came to Laban and served him (*Gen 27:41–45*). And there was given to him the scepter of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Whosoever will honestly consider these matters will recognize the greatness of the gifts which were given by Abraham. For from him came the priests and all the Levites who minister at the altar of God. From him also came our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh. From him came kings, princes, and rulers of the race of Judah. And his other tribes are not at all insignificant inasmuch as God had promised, “I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven” (*Gen 22:17*).

All these, therefore, were highly honored, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they worked, but through the operation of God's will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves,

nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have done from a pure heart. Rather, we are justified by the faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Discussion Questions



As you consider your own cultural context, what can you identify as some of the leading issues people have against Christianity? How might the Apostolic Fathers provide an example for addressing those issues?



We often think of an apologetic as intellectual arguments for the defense of Christianity. The Letter to Diognetus especially focuses on such arguments in relationship to Christianity's distinction from other religions. What are ways in which you see distinctions between Christianity and the religions or predominate beliefs in your community?



The Letter of Barnabas makes the remarkable statement, "Every word which proceeds out of your mouth in faith and love will tend to bring conversion and hope to many." Reflect on that statement for a moment. What is the heart posture one should take in sharing the gospel with others?



The Apostolic Fathers focused on the manner in which the Christian lived her life. They understood that the life of a Christian was as much a witness to the gospel as was the actual proclamation. How do the Apostolic Fathers encourage us to live our lives in our communities?



Look for opportunities this week to talk with someone about Christianity. Listen to what they say. Some might share how they have been hurt by the actions of some Christians or they might feel like Christianity has oppressed them in some way. An important part of defending the faith is listening to others before talking.



CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



Chapter 5
Leadership

Chapter Summary

Church leadership seems to be in the news frequently. Unfortunately, we hear more about the bad examples of leaders than the good. Leadership played a vital role in the life of the early church. Throughout the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we read that leaders were led by the Holy Spirit and appointed by the church to care for members. Their character was of utmost importance as they literally followed in the footsteps of the apostles and represented God on earth.

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood topics of leadership is the structure of the early church. Often in the letters of Ignatius we read about the bishop, elders, and deacons and think that there must be a hierarchical organization in the church. Ignatius writes, “Your bishop presides in the place of God, and your elders in the place of the assembly

of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, who are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time and in the end was revealed” (*To the Magnesians* 6). Equating the bishop with God, the elders with the apostles, and the deacons with Jesus’ ministry does not necessarily indicate a hierarchy as much as it communicates the leadership’s commitment to being on God’s mission. Therefore, as long as leadership maintains that commitment, the church should honor, respect, and submit to the leaders as those appointed by the congregation to ensure that the church also continues on its mission.

Another important observation about early church leadership is the focus on preserving the unity of the church in her beliefs about Jesus. For this reason, Christians were to study together with the leaders and conduct the activities of the church in conjunction with the leaders. Such activities included the observance of the Eucharist, sometimes referred to as the Lord’s Supper or Communion. The Eucharist is the visible sign or symbol of Jesus’ work on earth when His body was broken and His blood shed for us. To get this wrong meant that the church would risk misunderstanding the nature of salvation. Thus, the leaders ensured the activities of the church reflected the proper understanding of Jesus.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The Holy Spirit and Leaders

FIRST CLEMENT 42: The apostles have preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has done so from God. Christ therefore was sent by God, and the

apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the Word of God with full assurance of the Holy Spirit, they went out proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And accordingly, proclaiming the gospel through countries and cities, they appointed the first fruits to be bishops and deacons of those who believed after first confirming them by the Spirit. This was not any new thing, since indeed it was written many years before concerning bishops and deacons. For the Scripture says in a certain place, “I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness” (Isa 60:17).

DIDACHE 11C: Every prophet who speaks in the Spirit you will neither test nor judge. For every sin will be forgiven but this sin will not be forgiven. However, not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet but only if he holds the ways of the Lord. Therefore, the false prophet and the prophet will be known by their conduct. What is more, every prophet who orders a meal in the Spirit should not eat it. If he does he is indeed a false prophet. And every prophet who teaches the truth but does not do what he teaches is a false prophet. And every true prophet working for the mystery of the church in the world, yet not teaching others to do what he himself does, will not be judged among you. For from God he has his judgment as did also the ancient prophets. But whoever says in the Spirit, “Give me money, or something else,” you will not listen to him. However, if he tells you to give for the sake of others who are in need, let no one judge him.



Appointing Leaders

FIRST CLEMENT 44: Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be conflict surrounding leadership. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had acquired a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed leaders. Then they gave instructions, that when these should die, other approved men should replace them in their ministry. We are of the opinion, therefore, that those appointed by the apostles, or afterwards by other outstanding men with the consent of the whole church, who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and unselfish spirit, and have maintained a good reputation among all cannot be justly removed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small if we remove those who have blamelessly and devoutly fulfilled their duties in the bishop's office. Blessed are those elders who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure. For they have no fear that anyone should deprive them of the place now appointed for them. Yet, we see that you have removed some men of excellent behavior from the ministry which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honor.

DIDACHE 15A: Appoint, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord. These should be men meek and not lovers of money, truthful and proven. For they also serve you in the ministry of prophets and teachers. Therefore, do not despise them, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers.

Honoring Leaders

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 3: Now it is not proper that you treat your bishop disrespectfully on account of his youth, but give him all respect having regard for the power of God the Father. I know even your saintly elders do not hastily judge by his obvious youthful appearance. But as being themselves sensible in God, they submit to him, or rather not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ who is the bishop of us all. It is therefore fitting that you should, without hypocrisy, submit in honor of Him who has willed it since he who does not do so deceives not the bishop who is visible, but seeks to mock Him who is invisible. And all such behavior is not fitting in the flesh, for God knows all secrets.

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 4: It is fitting, then, not simply to be called Christians, but to actually be so, as some indeed give one the title of bishop, but do all things without him. Now it seems to me that such persons do not have a good conscience, seeing they are not consistently gathering together according to the commandment.

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 2–3: For since you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is apparent to me that you live not after the manner of people but according to Jesus Christ. He died for us in order that by believing in His death, you may escape from death. Therefore, it is necessary that, as you already do, you should not conduct activity without the bishop. You should also be subject to the elders as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope. In Him we will be found if we live accordingly. It is fitting also that the deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ should in every respect be pleasing to all. For they are not ministers of food and drink, but ministers of the church

of God. They are bound, therefore, to avoid all grounds of accusation as though they were fire.

In like manner, let everyone respect the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the elders as the council of God and assembly of apostles. Apart from these, there is no church. Concerning all this, I am persuaded that you are of the same opinion. For I have received the expression of your love in your bishop, who is still with me. His very appearance is highly instructive and his meekness in itself a power. I imagine even the ungodly must respect him. Because I love you, I will spare you from writing more sharply about this matter. I have not considered myself to have reached such a height of confidence that, even though I am a condemned man, I should issue you commands as if I were an apostle.

Unity with Church Leaders

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 2B: It is therefore proper that you should glorify Jesus Christ, who has glorified you in every way through being perfectly joined together in submission to the bishop and the elders, that you may be sanctified in all respects.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 20: If Jesus Christ will graciously permit me through your prayer and His will, I will clarify the divine plan to you in a second letter which I will write regarding the new man, Jesus Christ—about His faith and His love, as well as about His suffering and His resurrection. I will do this especially if the Lord makes known to me that each of you personally gather together through grace in one faith and in Jesus Christ—who was of the seed of David according to the flesh, being both the Son of Man

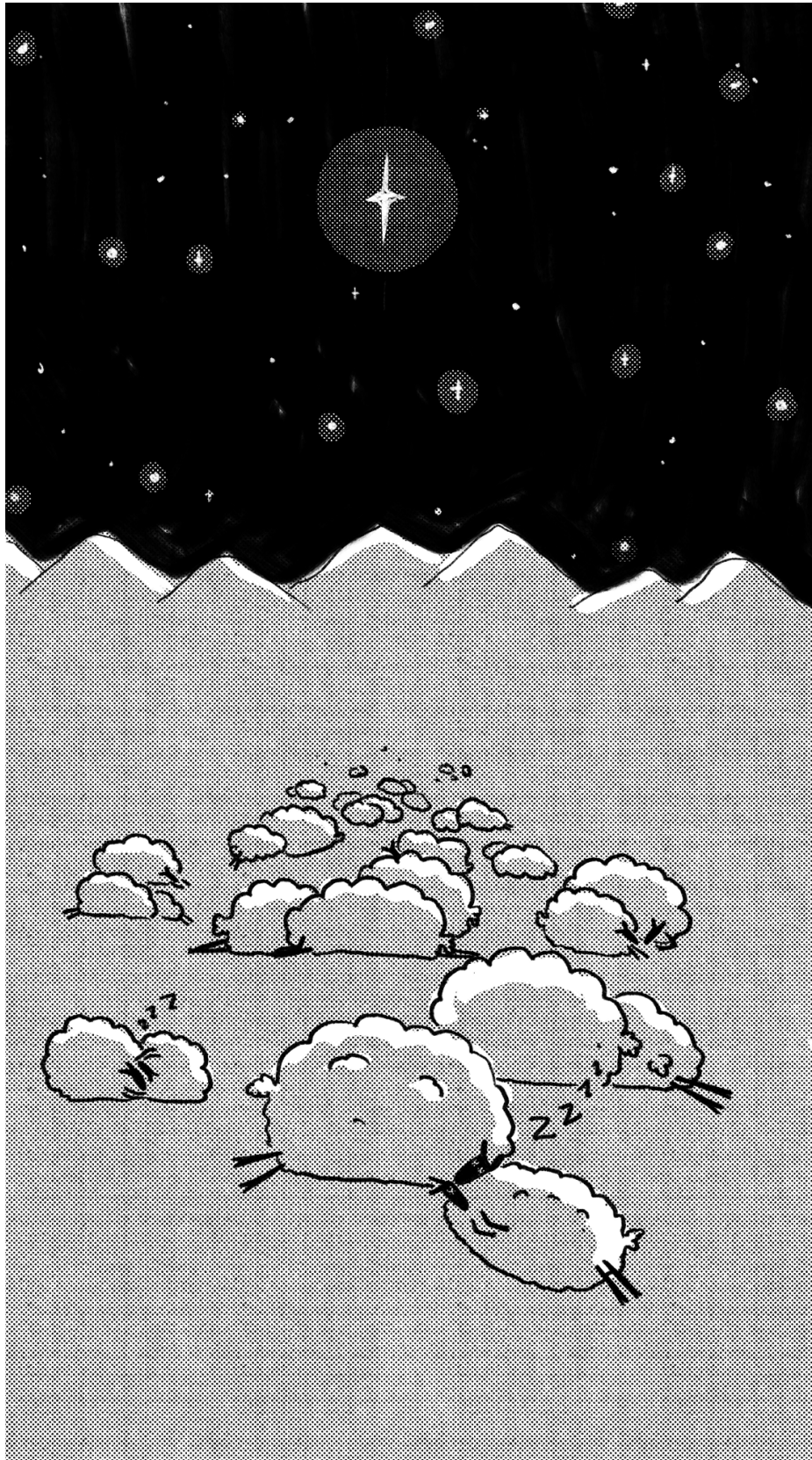
and the Son of God—listening to the bishop and the elders with an undivided mind, breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote to prevent us from dying and to live forever in Jesus Christ.

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 7–8: Be on your guard, therefore, against such persons. And you will be, if you are not puffed up and remain in intimate union with Jesus Christ our God, and the bishop, and the instructions of the apostles. The one who is within the altar is pure, but the one who is without is not pure; that is, the one who conducts activities apart from the bishop, elders, and deacons. Such a person is not pure in his conscience.

Not that I know there is anything of this kind going on among you. Instead, I put you on guard because I love you greatly and anticipate the snares of the devil. As a result, clothe yourselves with meekness. Be renewed in faith—that is the flesh of the Lord—and in love—that is the blood of Jesus Christ. Let none of you cherish any grudge against his neighbor. Give no opportunity for the Gentiles to slander God’s congregation because of a few foolish people. For, “Woe to him by whose narcissism my name is blasphemed among any” (*Isa 52:5*).

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS SALUTATION: I greet you in the blood of Jesus Christ who is our eternal and enduring joy, especially when in unity with the bishop, the elders, and the deacons who have been appointed according to the mind of Jesus Christ, whom He established according His own will and in the confidence of His Holy Spirit.

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 8A: Therefore, I performed my role as one devoted to unity. For where there is division



and anger, God does not dwell. To all who repent, the Lord grants forgiveness if they turn in sorrow to the unity of God and to communion with the bishop.

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 6: Pay attention to the bishop so that God may give attention to you. My soul is for those who are submissive to the bishop, to the elders, and to the deacons. May my share be along with them in God! Labor together with one another. Strive in company together. Run together. Suffer together. Rest together and awake together. Do these as the stewards and associates and servants of God. Please Him under whose command you fight and from whom you receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms. Let your faith endure as your helmet. Let your love endure as your spear. Let your patience endure as a complete set of armor. Let your works be the charge assigned to you so that you may receive a worthy reward. Be patient, therefore, with one another. Be meek as God is toward you. May I find joy in you forever!

CHARACTER OF LEADERS

Silence of the Bishop

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 6: Now even more, if anyone sees the bishop keeping silent then he should revere him all the more. For we should receive everyone who the Master of the house sends to be over His household just as we should receive Him who sent him. It is evident, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself. For Onesimus himself greatly commends your good order in God. He reports that you all live according to the truth and that no heresy



has any place among you. Indeed, you do not listen to anyone unless they speak the truth about Jesus Christ.

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 1: Your bishop, I know, did not obtain the ministry of the fellowship from himself, neither by people, nor through vainglory, but by the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am struck with admiration for his meekness and who by his silence is able to accomplish more than those who talk vainly. For he is attuned with the instructions even as the harp is with its strings. For this reason, my soul blesses his mind toward God. I know it to be virtuous and complete, and that his stability as well as freedom from all anger is according to the example of the infinite meekness of the living God.

Compassion and Mercy

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 6: And let the elders be compassionate and merciful to all. They must bring back those that wander, visit all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor. They must always “aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man” (2 Cor 8:21), abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unjust judgment. They must keep away from all covetousness, not quickly holding against any one, not severe in judgment as knowing that we are all under a debt of sin.

If then we entreat the Lord to forgive us, we ought also ourselves to forgive. For we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and “must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10). Let us then serve Him in fear and with all



reverence, even as He Himself has commanded us, as did the apostles who preached the gospel to us, and also the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord. Let us be passionate in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offence, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord and lead foolish people into error.

Love All the Disciples

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 2: If you love the good disciples, no thanks are due to you on that account. Rather, seek with gentleness to calm the more troublesome. Every kind of wound is not healed with the same plaster. Ease irritations with gentle applications. In all things be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt 10:16).

For this purpose, you are composed of both flesh and spirit, that you may deal tenderly with those that present themselves visibly before you. In respect to those that are not seen, ask that they be revealed to you in order that you may not lack anything, but may flourish in every gift. The times call for you to seek God, just as the sailors seek for harbor when the winds are tossed with tempest. Be sober as an athlete of God. The prizes set before you are immortality and eternal life, of which you are also persuaded. In all things may my soul be for the things that you have loved just as my chains also.

Leadership and the Community

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 6–7: Since, therefore, I have seen in the persons mentioned above the whole multitude of you in faith and love, I encourage you to strive to do all things in divine harmony. Your bishop presides in the

place of God, and your elders in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, who are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ. He was with the Father before the beginning of time and in the end was revealed.

Let everyone, then, imitate the same divine conduct and pay respect to one another. Let no one look upon his neighbor after the flesh. Rather, continually love each other in Jesus Christ. Do not let anything exist among you that may divide you, but be united with your bishop, and those that preside over you, as an example and evidence of your blamelessness.

Just as the Lord did nothing without the Father, either on His own or with the apostles, for He was united to Him so you too should not do anything without the bishop and elders. Do not try anything that appears reasonable and proper to yourselves apart from the others. Rather, being together in the same place, let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope in love and in joy unblemished. There is one Jesus Christ, in whom nothing is more excellent. You all, therefore, move together as one temple of God, as one altar, as one Jesus Christ, who came from one Father and is with the One and has returned to the One.

IGNATIUS TO THE SMYRNAEANS 9: Moreover, it is in accordance with reason that we should return to soberness, and while we yet have opportunity, exercise repentance toward God. It is well to respect both God and the bishop. He who honors the bishop has been honored by God. He who conducts matters without the knowledge of the bishop does serve the devil.

BARNABAS 21B: I implore you who are leaders, if you will receive any counsel from my good intentions. You have among yourselves those to whom you may show kindness. Do not fail them. The day on which all things will perish with the Evil One is near. The Lord is also near as is His reward. Again, and yet again, I implore you, be good lawgivers to one another. Remain faithful counselors to one another. Do away with all hypocrisy from among you. And may God who rules over all the world give you wisdom, intelligence, understanding, knowledge of His judgments with patience.

And be a God-learner, inquiring diligently what the Lord asks from you. And do it that you may be safe on the day of judgment. And if you have any remembrance of what is good, be mindful of me and meditate on these things in order that both my desire and watchfulness may result in some good. I implore you, asking this as a favor. While you are still in this fair vessel, do not fail in any one of those things, but unceasingly seek after them, and fulfill every commandment. For these things are worthy. For this reason, I have been all the more serious about writing to you as my ability enables so that I might cheer you.

Restoring Leaders

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 11: I am greatly grieved for Valens who was once an elder among you. He failed to understand the place that was given him.

I encourage you, therefore, to refrain from covetousness and be innocent and truthful. “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:22). For if a person cannot oversee himself in such matters, how will he instruct others? If a person does not keep himself from covetousness, he will be defiled

by idolatry and will be judged as one of the Gentiles. But who among us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord? “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world” (1 Cor 6:2), as Paul teaches? But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you who the blessed Paul labored and who are commended in the beginning of his letters. For he boasts about you to all those churches which alone then knew the Lord at a time when we had not yet known Him.

Therefore friends, I am deeply grieved for Valens and his wife to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! You then be sensible in regard to this matter, and “do not regard him as an enemy” (2 Thess 3:15). Rather, call them back as suffering and straying members so that you can save your whole body. For by so doing you will edify yourselves.

APOSTLES, PROPHETS, TEACHERS, AND DEACONS

Teachers, Apostles, and Prophets

DIDACHE 11A–13: Whosoever, therefore, comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. However, if the teacher himself turns and teaches another doctrine to the destruction of what you have heard, do not listen to him. Yet, if he teaches so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, welcome him as you would the Lord.

Now concerning the apostles, who are also prophets, act according to the rule of the gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be welcome as you would the Lord. But he will not remain more than one day or two days, unless there is a need. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle departs, let him take nothing but

bread until he lodges the next night. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

Receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord. Then examine him, for you will know right from wrong. If he who comes is a traveler, assist him as far as you are able, but he should not remain with you more than two or three days if need be. However, if he wants to stay with you, and is an artisan, let him work and eat. But if he has no trade, according to your understanding, see to it that, as a Christian, he will not live with you inactive. If he decides not to cooperate, he is peddling Christ. Watch that you keep away from such.

But every true prophet who wants to live among you is worthy of his support. So also, a true teacher is himself worthy of his support just like the worker. Every first fruit, therefore, of the products of a winepress and threshing floor, of oxen and of sheep, you will take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have no prophet, give them to the poor. If you make a batch of dough, take the first fruit and give according to the commandment. So also, when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the first fruit and give it to the prophets. As for money and clothing and every possession, take the first fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment.

Deacons

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 10–11: Since it is reported to me in answer to your prayers and the compassion which you feel in Christ Jesus that the church which is at Antioch in Syria possesses peace, it is fitting for you as a church of

God to select a deacon to act as God's ambassador that he may rejoice along with them when they meet together and glorify the name. Blessed in Jesus Christ is the one who will be considered worthy of such a ministry, and you too will be glorified. And if you are willing, it is not beyond your power to do this for the sake of God. For the nearest churches have also sent bishops and others have sent elders and deacons.

Now, as to Philo the deacon of Cilicia, a man of reputation, who still ministers to me in the Word of God, along with Rheus Agathopus, a chosen man who has followed me from Syria without regard for his own life—these speak on your behalf. And I myself give thanks to God for you, because you have received them even as the Lord. But may those who dishonor them be forgiven through the grace of Jesus Christ!

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 5A: Knowing, then, that “God is not mocked” (Gal 6:7), we ought to walk worthy of His commandment and glory. In like manner, the deacons should be blameless before the face of His righteousness as the servants of God and Christ, not of men. They must not be slanderers, double-tongued, or lovers of money. Rather, they should be temperate in all things, compassionate, industrious, walking according to the truth of the Lord who was the servant of all. If we please Him in this present world, we will receive the future world according to His promise that He will raise us again from the dead. If we live worthily of Him, “we will also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12), provided only that we believe.

Discussion Questions



Consider again for a moment that the majority of Christians in the early church were illiterate. Can you imagine the challenges leaders faced as they sought to communicate spiritual ideas to an oral culture? Even so, this was normal at the time. While it might seem daunting to us, it was the typical manner in which people learned. How do people learn where you are? What are ways in which your style of leadership can help believers learn about Jesus?



We read very little about apostles, prophets, and teachers, and we see nothing about evangelists or shepherds in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. This seems remarkable, especially since Paul tells us that Jesus gave these leaders to the church (Eph 4:9–11). Even so, according to Ignatius, the role of the deacon was to do the ministry of Jesus. How would you describe His ministry? Do you see examples where Jesus' ministry included those activities that correspond to the apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher?



Perhaps one of the most challenging actions of a leader is to love those who are not lovable (Ignatius *To Polycarp* 2). What heart change do you think it requires for a leader to love all the disciples, both the good ones and the bad ones?



Look at how the leaders of the early church treated those they led. Make a list of the expectations for leaders you observe in the Apostolic Fathers.



Consider the observations you just made about the manner in which leaders lead. What do you need to do to make those observations a regular practice in your leadership?



CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



Chapter 6

The Church

Chapter Summary

What is the church? This might be one of the most pressing questions Christians have today. Over the past several decades, many have come up with answers believed to harken back to the early centuries of Christianity. In searching for the New Testament church, evangelicals and other Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, and Coptic believers all claim to be the expression of early Christian practices.

The Apostolic Fathers do not add many details to what we already know about the church from the New Testament. Several things are noticeably absent from the Apostolic Fathers. For example, there is no mention of worship songs or choirs. We have nothing about a Sunday sermon or a pulpit. In fact, there is nothing about a church building. The Letter of Barnabas, for instance, seems to criticize

the Jews for their desire to restore the temple. While the Apostolic Fathers do write about the sacraments, there are only two: baptism and the Eucharist.

Rather, the Apostolic Fathers reinforce the importance of how believers treat one another, and of living lives devoted to prayer, fasting, and gathering together. If there is anything significant that we might take away from the Apostolic Fathers it is the fact that the early Christians gathered together frequently. They understood that the days were evil and had a sense that the Lord could return at any moment. Therefore, it was important to be with one another to encourage each other and to hold each other accountable. “Watch your life,” the author of the *Didache* states, as it is a light for all to see.

LIFE IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Submission to One Another

FIRST CLEMENT 37–38: Let us then, dear ones, with all urgency act the part of soldiers, in accordance with His holy commandments. Let us consider those who serve under our generals, with what order, obedience, and submissiveness they perform the things which are commanded of them. All are not prefects, nor commanders of a thousand, nor of a hundred, nor of fifty, nor the like, but each one in his own rank performs the things commanded by the king and the generals. The great cannot survive without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of combination of all and from there emerges a mutual advantage.

Let us take our body for an example. The head is nothing without the feet, and the feet are nothing without the

head. Yes, the very smallest members of our body are necessary and useful to the whole body. But all work harmoniously together and are under one common rule for the preservation of the whole body.

Let our whole body, then, be preserved in Christ Jesus. And let everyone be subject to his neighbor, according to the special gift imparted upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect to the strong. Let the rich man provide for the needs of the poor, and let the poor man bless God because He has given him one by whom his need may be supplied. Let the wise man display his wisdom, not only by words, but through good deeds. Let the humble not boast about himself, but let another speak of him. Let him that is pure in the flesh not grow proud of it and boast knowing that it was another who gave him the gift of self-control. Let us consider, then, friends, of what we were made—by whom and of what manner of beings we came into the world. For we came out of a sepulcher and from utter darkness. He who made us and fashioned us, having prepared His generous gifts for us before we were born and introduced us into His world. Since, therefore, we receive all these things from Him, we should give Him thanks for everything. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Brotherly Love

FIRST CLEMENT 48: Let us therefore, with all haste, put an end to this. Let us fall down before the Lord, and beg Him with tears that He would mercifully be reconciled to us and restore us to our former fitting and holy practice of brotherly love. For this is the gate of righteousness that

is set open for the realization of life. As it is written, “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it” (Ps 118:19–20). Although, therefore, many gates have been set open, yet this gate of righteousness is the gate to Christ by which all who have entered in are blessed. They have directed their way in holiness and righteousness, doing all things without disorder. Let a person be faithful. Let him be powerful in the exclamation of knowledge. Let him be wise in judging of words. Let him be pure in all his deeds. And the more he seems to be superior to others then the more humble-minded he should be. He should seek the common good of all and not merely his own advantage.

FIRST CLEMENT 50: You see, dear ones, how great and wonderful a thing is love. There is no describing its perfection. Who is fit to be found in it, except such as those granted by God? Let us pray, therefore, and plead for His mercy, that we may live blamelessly in love, free from all human favoritisms for one over another. All the generations from Adam even to this day have passed away. But those who, through the grace of God, have been made perfect in love, now possess a place among the godly. They will be revealed at the revelation of the kingdom of Christ. For it is written, “Enter your secret chambers for a little while, until my anger and fury pass away, and I will remember a favorable day, and will raise you from your graves” (*Isa 26:20; Ezek 37:12*).

Blessed are we, dear ones, if we keep the commandments of God in the harmony of love. Through love our sins may be forgiven. For it is written, “Blessed is the one whose

transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Ps 32:1). This blessedness comes on those who have been chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Way of Life

DIDACHE 1–3: The way of life is this: First, you will love God who made you. Second, love your neighbor as yourself and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. 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 reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do the same (*Matt 5:44–46*)? But love those who hate you, and you will not have an enemy. Refrain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also and you will be complete (*Matt 5:39*). If someone forces you for one mile, go with him two (*Matt 5:41*). If someone takes your robe, give him also your coat (*Matt 5:40*). If someone takes from you what is yours, do not ask for it back, for indeed you are unable.

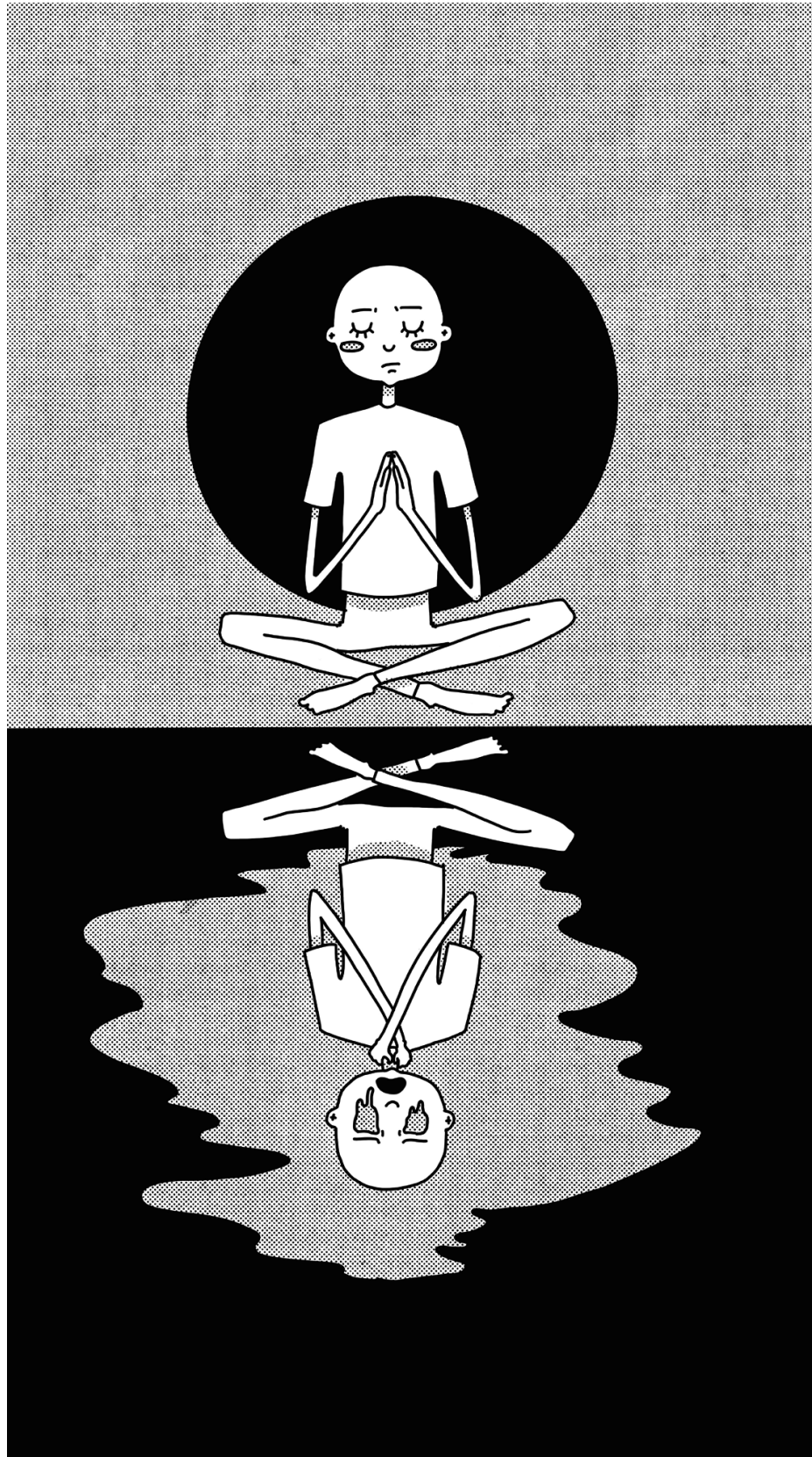
Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for it back, for the Father wills that all should be given our own spiritual gift. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is innocent. Woe to him who receives. For if one receives who has need, he is innocent. However, he who receives who does not have a need will pay the penalty for why he received and for what. And coming into prison, he will be examined concerning the things which he has done, and he will not escape from there

until he pays back the last penny. Also concerning this, it has been said, “Let your donations sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give.”¹

And this is the second commandment of the teaching: You will not commit murder, you will not commit adultery, you will not exploit children, you will not commit sexual immorality, you will not steal, you will not practice magic, you will not practice witchcraft, you will not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born. You will not covet the things of your neighbor, you will not swear, you will not bear false witness, you will not speak evil, you will bear no grudge. You will not be double-minded nor double-tongued, for to be double-tongued is a snare of death. Your speech will not be false, nor empty, but accompanied by action. You will not be envious, nor greedy, nor a hypocrite, nor spiteful, nor haughty. You will not plot evil against your neighbor. You will not hate any man. Some you will reprove, and concerning some you will pray, and for some you will love more than your own life.

My child, flee from every evil thing, and from every likeness of it. Do not be inclined to anger, for anger leads to murder. Be neither jealous, nor quarrelsome, nor of hot temper, for out of all these murders are born. My child, be not a lustful one. For lust leads to fornication. Be neither a filthy talker, nor of wandering eyes. For out of all these adulteries are born. My child, be not an observer of omens, since it leads to idolatry. Be neither an enchanter, nor an astrologer, nor a magician, nor be willing to see or hear these things. For out of all these

1 Source unknown.



idolatries are born. My child, be not a liar, since a lie leads to theft. Be neither money-loving, nor conceited. For out of all these thefts are born. My child, be not a grumbler, since it leads the way to blasphemy. Be neither self-willed nor evil-minded. For out of all these blasphemies are born.

Rather, be meek since the meek will inherit the earth (*Matt 5:5*). Be patient and merciful and innocent and gentle and good and always respecting the words which you have heard. You will not exalt yourself, nor allow your soul to become arrogant. Your soul will not be joined with lofty ones, but it will have its interaction with just and lowly ones. Accept whatever happens to you as good, knowing that apart from God nothing comes to pass.

DIDACHE 4B: Do not be one who reaches out the hands to receive and draws them back to give. If you have earned anything with your hands, you will make a payment for your sins. Do not hesitate to give, nor complain when you give. For you will know the good reward of the wages. Do not turn away from him who is in want. Rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are participants in that which is immortal, how much more in things which are mortal?

Do not remove your hand from your son or daughter. Rather, teach them the fear of God from their youth. Do not order anything in your bitterness upon your manservant or maidservant, who hope in the same God as you, in case they will no longer fear God who is over all. For He comes not to call according to the outward appearance, but to them who the Spirit has prepared. And you manservants will be subject to your masters in modesty

and fear as to a type of God. You will hate all hypocrisy and everything which 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 to them neither taking away from them. In the church you will acknowledge your transgressions, and you will not come near with your prayer from an evil conscience. This is the way of life.

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 5: Seeing, then, that all things have an end, these two things are simultaneously set before us: death and life. What is more, everyone will go to his own place. For there are two kinds of coin—the one of God, the other of the world—and each of these has its special character stamped upon it. The unbelievers bear the character of this world, but the believers in love bear the character of God the Father through Jesus Christ, whose life is not in us if we are not ready to die into His suffering.

Husbands, Wives, Children, and Widows

FIRST CLEMENT 21B: Let us hold high those who lead us. Let us honor the elderly among us. Let us train up the young men in the fear of God. Let us direct our wives to that which is good. Let them exhibit a character of the lovely habit of purity. Let them show the sincere temperament of meekness. Let them make it obvious in the way they speak that they follow the command which they have on their tongue. Let them show their love, not by preferring one to another, but by showing equal affection to all who sincerely fear God. Let your children be partakers of true Christian training. Let them learn how important humility is to God—how much the spirit of pure affection can succeed with Him—how excellent and great His fear is,

and how it saves all those who walk in it with a pure mind. For He is a Searcher of our thoughts and desires. His breath is in us, and when He pleases He will take it away.

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 5B: Speak to my sisters, that they should love the Lord and be satisfied with their husbands both in the flesh and spirit. In like manner also, exhort my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ, that they love their wives even as the Lord loves the church. If anyone can continue in a state of purity to the honor of Him who is Lord of the flesh, let him so remain without boasting. If he begins to boast he is undone. If he considers himself greater than the bishop he is ruined. But it is fitting for both men and women who marry to form their union with the approval of the bishop so that their marriage may be according to God and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honor of God.

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 4: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Tim 6:10). Knowing, therefore, that “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out” (1 Tim 6:7), let us equip ourselves with the armor of righteousness. And let us teach ourselves, first of all, to walk in the commandments of the Lord. Next, also teach your wives to walk in the faith given to them, and in love and purity. They must tenderly love their own husbands in all truth, and love others equally in all chastity. They must train up their children in the knowledge and fear of God.

Teach the widows to be discreet in regards to the faith of the Lord. They should pray continually for all, being far from all slandering, evil-speaking, false witnessing,

love of money, and every kind of evil, knowing that they are the altar of God. He clearly perceives all things and nothing is hidden from Him, neither reasonings, nor reflections, nor any of the secret things of the heart.

Other Relationships

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 5B: In like manner, let the young men also be blameless in all things. They should be especially careful to preserve purity and keep themselves away from every kind of evil as with a bridle. For it is well that they should be cut off from the lusts that are in the world, since “every lust battles against the spirit” (1 Pet 2:11). And “neither the sexually immoral . . . nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality . . . will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9–10), nor those who do things inconsistent and unbecoming. For this reason, it is needful to abstain from all these things, being subject to the elders and deacons, as unto God and Christ.

The virgins also must walk in a blameless and pure conscience.

SACRAMENTS

Baptism and Eucharist²

DIDACHE 7: And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first taught 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 have no running water, baptize into some other water. If you cannot do so in cold water,

2 Eucharist – The word “Eucharist” comes from the biblical Greek word that means “thanksgiving.” Other words for Eucharist include “Lord’s Supper” or “Communion.”

do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head by the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Before the baptism let the baptizer fast as well as the baptized, and whoever else can. Also, you will instruct the baptized to fast one or two days beforehand.

DIDACHE 9–10: Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks in 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 which 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 Eucharist unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord. For the Lord has also said concerning this, “Do not give dogs what is holy” (Matt 7:6).

But after you are filled, give thanks this way:

We thank You, holy Father, for Your holy name which You did cause to live 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, Master Almighty, did create 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. Before all things 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 complete 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.³ Amen.

But allow the prophets to make thanksgiving as much as they desire.

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 4: Pay attention, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup of the unity of His blood. There is one altar just as there is one bishop, along with the elders and deacons, my fellow servants, so that whatsoever you do you may do it according to God.

IGNATIUS TO THE SMYRNAEANS 7–8: They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they confess the

³ Maranatha – An Aramaic phrase meaning “Our Lord, come!” which also appears in 1 Cor 16:22.

Eucharist to not be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father, from His goodness, raised up again. Those, therefore, who speak against this gift of God suffer death in the midst of their disputes. But it was better for them to treat the Eucharist with respect that they also might rise again.

See that you all follow the bishop even as Jesus Christ followed the Father. And follow the elders as you would the apostles and respect the deacons just as you do God's commandments. Let no one conduct matters connected with the church without the bishop. Let the Eucharist be deemed proper when administered by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the gathered also be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the universal church. It is not permitted either to baptize or to celebrate a love feast without the bishop. But whatsoever he approves, that is also pleasing to God so that everything that is done may be trusted and valid.

It is fitting, therefore, that you should avoid such persons and not to speak of them either in private or in public. Instead, give attention to the prophets and above all to the gospel in which the suffering has been revealed to us as well as the resurrection which has been fully proved. But avoid all divisions as the beginning of evils.

Baptism and the Cross in the Prophets

BARNABAS 11A: Let us further inquire whether the Lord took any thought to foreshadow the water and the cross. Concerning the water, indeed, it is written in reference to the Israelites, that they should not receive the baptism which leads to the remission of sins. Instead, they

should acquire another for themselves. The Prophet therefore declares,

“Be appalled, O heavens, at this,” declares the Lord, “because my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out for themselves broken cisterns. Is my holy hill Zion a desolate rock? For you will be like fleeing birds, which fly away when the nest is scattered.”
(*Jer 2:12–13; Isa 16:2*)

And again the Prophet says,

I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord. (*Isa 45:2–3*)

And, “He will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks” (*Isa 33:16*). Furthermore, what does He say about the Son? “His water will be sure. Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty” (*Isa 33:16–17*), “your heart will muse on the fear of the Lord” (*Isa 33:18*). And again He says in another Prophet,

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (*Ps 1:3–6*)

BARNABAS 11c: Again, another Prophet says, “and the land of Jacob will be exalted above every land” (*Zeph 3:19*). This means the vessel of His Spirit which He will glorify. Furthermore, what does He say? “And there was a river flowing on the right and from it arose beautiful trees. Whosoever will eat of them will live forever” (*Ezek 47:12*). This means that we indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up bearing fruit in our heart, having fear and trust in Jesus in our spirit. “And whosoever will eat of these will live forever.” This means that whosoever, He declares, will hear you speaking and believe will live forever.

CHURCH GATHERING

The Lord’s Day

DIDACHE 14: On every Lord’s day,⁴ gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks after having confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his brother or sister come together with you until they are reconciled so that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is what the Lord has spoken: “‘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’” (*Mal 1:11*).

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 9: If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient practices have taken possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our life rose up again through Him and His death (which some deny) according to the mystery

4 Lord’s Day – Sunday.

we have found in faith and have patiently endured that we may be found as disciples of Jesus Christ our only Teacher, then how can we live apart from Him, who, in the Spirit, the prophets themselves did wait as their Teacher? And therefore, He, for whom they rightly waited, having come, raised them from the dead.

Assembling with the Church

FIRST CLEMENT 34: The good servant receives the bread of his labor with confidence. The lazy and idle cannot look his employer in the face. It is necessary, therefore, that we be prompt in the practice of doing good, for all things are from Him. For He warns us: “Behold the Lord! His reward is with him, to repay everyone for what he has done” (*Isa 40:10; 62:11; Rev 22:12*). He urges us, therefore, with our whole heart to attend to this, that we are not to be lazy or idle in any good work. Let our boasting and our confidence be in Him. Let us submit ourselves to His will. Let us consider the whole multitude of His angels, how they stand ever ready to minister to His will. For the Scripture says, “A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him” (*Dan 7:10*); “and one called to another and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of host, the whole earth is full of his glory’” (*Isa 6:3*). And let us therefore, dutifully gathering together in harmony, cry to Him earnestly, as with one mouth, that we may be made participants in His great and glorious promises. For it says, “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (*1 Cor 2:9*).

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 5: For if I in this brief period of time have enjoyed such fellowship with your bishop—

which was not merely fleshly, but of a spiritual nature—how much more do I commend you who are so joined to him as the church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father, so that all things may agree in unity.

Let no man deceive himself. If anyone is not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two possesses such power, how much more that of the bishop and the whole church. He, therefore, who does not assemble with the church has demonstrated his arrogance and condemned himself. For it is written, “God opposes the proud” (Jas 4:6). Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop in order that we may be submitted to God.

Frequency of Gathering

DIDACHE 4A: My child, remember night and day him who explains the Word of God to you, and honor him as you do the Lord. For wherever the teaching is discussed, there is the Lord. And day by day seek out the company of the saints, in order that you may rest upon their words. Do not long for division, but rather bring those who oppose you to peace. Judge righteously and do not show favoritism when condemning a person’s transgression. You will not hesitate about your decision.

DIDACHE 16A: Watch your life. Do not let your lamps go out, nor your clothes be unprepared. Be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord will come. But gather together often, seeking the things which are suitable to your souls. For the entire time in your faith will not profit you if you are not made complete by the end.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 13: Be eager to gather together regularly to give thanks and praise to God. For when you gather often in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith. Nothing is more precious than peace, by which all war, both in heaven and earth, is brought to an end.

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 4: Do not let widows be neglected. After the Lord, you are their protector and friend. Do not let anything be done without your consent. Neither should you do anything without the approval of God, as indeed you do not. You are unwavering. Assemble together frequently. Seek out everyone by name. Do not despise either male or female slaves, yet neither let them be puffed up with conceit. Rather, let them submit themselves all the more for the glory of God so that they may obtain a better liberty from God. They should not long to be set free at the public expense so that they do not become slaves to their own desires.

BARNABAS 19c: You will not be hasty with your tongue, for the mouth is a snare of death. As far as possible, you will be pure in your soul. Do not be ready to stretch out your hands to take while you withdraw them from giving. You will love as the apple of your eye everyone who speaks to you the word of the Lord. Night and day you will remember the day of judgment. Every day you will seek out the presence of the saints, either by working together in the word and going to encourage them while considering how to save a soul by the word, or by work with your hands for the redemption of your sins. You will

not hesitate to give, nor grumble when you give. “Give to everyone who begs from you” (Luke 6:30), and you will know who is the good Paymaster of the reward. You will guard what you have received, neither adding to it nor taking from it. To the end you will hate the wicked. You will judge righteously. You will not make a division, but you will pacify those that are contentious by bringing them together. You will confess your sins. You will not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light.

PRAYER

Admonish and Correct One Another

FIRST CLEMENT 56: Let us then also pray for those who have fallen into any sin, that gentleness and humility may be given to them, so that they may submit, not to us, but to the will of God. For in this way they will be remembered by us, with sympathy for them, both in our prayers to God and our mention of them to the saints.

Let us receive correction, dear ones, on account of which no one should feel displeased. Those exhortations by which we admonish one another are both good and highly profitable, for they tend to unite us to the will of God. For thus says the Holy Word: “The Lord has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death” (Ps 118:18). “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:6). “Let a righteous man,” it says, “strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; but let not the oil of sinners make my head fat” (Ps 141:5). And again, he says,

Blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal. He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the beasts of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is at peace, and you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing. You shall know also that your offspring shall be many, and your descendants as the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheaf gathered up in its season. (Job 5:17–26)

You see, dear ones, that protection is afforded to those who are disciplined by the Lord. For since God is good, He corrects us that we may be admonished by His holy reprimand.

DIDACHE 15B: And admonish one another, not in anger but in peace, as you have it in the gospel. But to anyone that acts inappropriately against another, let no one speak, nor let him hear anything from you until he repents. But your prayers and gifts and all your deeds, do them as you have it in the gospel of our Lord.

Prayer and Fasting

DIDACHE 8: But do not let your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Monday and Thursday.

Rather, you must fast on Wednesday and Friday.
Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord
commanded in His Gospel, like this:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your
kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in
heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive
us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil. (Matt 6:9–13)

Pray like this three times each day.

Pray for Non-Christians

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 10A: Pray without ceasing on
behalf of others. For there is in them the hope of repentance
that they may find God. See, then, that they learn by your
works, if by no other way. Be meek in response to their
wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting. To their
blasphemies return your prayers. In contrast to their error,
be unwavering in the faith. And for their cruelty, reveal
your gentleness. While we take care not to imitate their
conduct, let us be found their friends in all true kindness.

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 12C: Pray for all the saints.
Pray also for kings and sovereigns and princes, and for
those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies
of the cross, that your fruit may be evident to all and that
you may be perfect in Him.

Pray for the Global Church

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 14: Knowing as I do that
you are full of God, I have but briefly encouraged you.
Remember me in your prayers especially that I may

succeed in God. And remember the church in Syria, from whom I am not worthy to derive my name. For I stand in need of your united prayer to God and of your love that the church which is in Syria may be refreshed by the prayer of your church.

Pray Together

FIRST CLEMENT 58: May God who sees all things and who is the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh—who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be an unusual people—grant to every soul that calls upon His glorious and holy Name faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity, and sobriety, to the pleasure of His Name, through our High Priest and Protector, Jesus Christ, by whom be to Him glory, and majesty, and power, and honor, both now and forevermore. Amen.

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 12: I greet you from Smyrna, together with the churches of God which are with me, who have refreshed me in all things, both in the flesh and in the spirit. My chains, which I carry about with me for the sake of Jesus Christ (praying that I may reach God), exhort you. Continue in harmony among yourselves and in prayer with one another. It is fitting for each of you, and especially for the elders, to refresh the bishop, to the honor of the Father of Jesus Christ and of the apostles. I implore you in love to hear me that I may not be a testimony against you by what is written. And do also pray for me who has need of your love along with the mercy of God. Pray that I may be worthy of the portion for which I am destined, and that I may not be found a sinner.

Pray for Understanding

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 1: Having obtained solid evidence that your mind is fixed on God as an immovable rock, I greatly rejoice that I have been thought worthy of your blameless face. May I ever enjoy it in God! I urge you by the grace with which you are clothed to press forward in your race and to encourage all so that they may be saved. Uphold your ministry with all care both in the flesh and spirit. Concern yourself with preserving unity for nothing else is better. Endure with all even as the Lord does with you. Support all in love as also you do. Give yourself to prayer without ceasing. Ask for greater understanding than what you already have. Be watchful with a sleepless spirit. Speak to everyone separately as God enables you. Bear the misery of all as a complete athlete. Where there is great pain there is more gain.

Discussion Questions



North American culture today is certainly fragmented. Families seem at times to be going in a million different directions. Many find it challenging simply to spend time together. Between commitments at work, children's sports, hobbies, and more, adding anything else to one's calendar seems more like an inconvenience than a delight. As you consider the frequency of the early church's gathering, how might you encourage a cultural shift in your community?



Cultures change over time and it would be altogether unfair to expect that we should replicate the church of the Apostolic Fathers. Still, there are certainly principles we might apply from their day to our own. As you consider this chapter, what principles can be applied today?



Life together in the Christian community can be a beautiful witness to others. This was definitely the situation in the church of the Apostolic Fathers. The manner in which we demonstrate brotherly love directly connects with our love for Jesus. How do the Apostolic Fathers inspire you toward brotherly affection for those in your church?



Frequent gatherings, prayer and fasting, observing the sacraments, doing life together. All of these demand practical expressions.

Take some time to consider what these might look like in your community. How can you practically incorporate each of these into the life of your community?



This chapter highlights the practice of prayer in the early church. What weekly or daily actions might you take in your personal and corporate prayer life?



Chapter 7

Character and Imitation

Chapter Summary

Is there someone who comes to mind that you would like to imitate? The nineteenth century Irish poet, Oscar Wilde, famously quipped, “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness.” This is most likely not what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Instead, Paul called for believers to follow his example of imitating God. In fact, such imitation was expected of those who were called His children (Eph 5:1).

In oral cultures, imitation is an important way to pass along information about the way to live. In fact, one might argue that imitation is the most effective means to make disciples. We see it as children imitate their parents or when young athletes imitate the professionals. We see it even in the students of Greek philosophers as well. The

Stoic philosopher Seneca (ca. AD 64) gets to the idea of imitation when he writes about the disciples of Socrates, “Plato, Aristotle, and the whole throng of sages who were destined to go each his different way, derived more benefit from the character than from the words of Socrates” (Epistle 6.5). Seeing the way in which someone lives their life can be truly transformative, and this was also evident in the early church.

In this chapter, we will explore imitation as a form of discipleship. The Apostolic Fathers clearly expected that Christians would live a certain way. More than simply demanding obedience to the commands of Christ, the Apostolic Fathers expected Christians to actually live like Christ, to genuinely follow Him and own His teachings for themselves. The Apostolic Fathers encouraged the church to imitate faithful believers—from Old Testament saints who first proclaimed His coming, to those who later suffered martyrdom because they followed Christ—inasmuch as they provided a real and visible demonstration of Christian character.

IMITATION AS DISCIPLESHIP

Imitate Jesus Christ

FIRST CLEMENT 16: For Christ is with those who are humble-minded, and not with those who exalt themselves over His flock. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Rod of the majesty of God, did not come in the pomp of pride or arrogance, although He might have done so, but in a lowly condition, as the Holy Spirit had declared regarding Him. For He says,



Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isa 53:1–12)

And again He says,

I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” (Ps 22:6–8)

You see, dear ones, the example which has been given us. For if the Lord humbled Himself in such a way, what will those of us do who have come under the yoke of His grace because of Him?

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 10B–12: And let us seek to be imitators of the Lord even though unjustly treated, even destitute, and more condemned, so that no weed of the devil may be found in you. Instead, you must remain in all holiness and seriousness in Jesus Christ, both with respect to the flesh and spirit.

The end times are upon us. Let us therefore be of humble spirit and fear the patience of God, so that it does not lead to our judgment. For let us either stand in awe of the wrath to come, or show respect for the grace which is at present displayed—one of these two things. Only let us

be found in Christ Jesus in the true life. Do not let anything attract you except Him. In Him I bear these chains, these spiritual jewels. In them I hope to rise again through your prayers. May I always be a recipient of them, in order that I may be like the Christians of Ephesus who have always been of the same mind with the apostles through the power of Jesus Christ.

I know both who I am and to whom I write. I am a condemned man and you have been the objects of mercy. I am subject to danger and you are established in safety. You are the road by which those who are being killed for the sake of God travel. You are initiates with Paul, the holy, the martyred, the deservedly most happy, at whose feet may I be found when I will reach God. Who in all his letters makes mention of you in Christ Jesus.

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 8: Do not be deceived by strange doctrines, nor by old fables which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. For the divine prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. On this account also they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, who did not come from silence, and who in all things pleased Him that sent Him.

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 10–11: Let us not, therefore, be unaware of His kindness. For if He were to reward us according to our works, we would cease to be. Therefore, having become His disciples, let us learn to live according to the principles of Christianity. For whosoever is called by any other name besides this is not of God. Lay aside,

therefore, the evil, the old, the sour leaven, and be changed into the new leaven which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in Him, in case anyone among you becomes rotten since by your stench you will be convicted. It is absurd to profess Christ Jesus and to Judaize. For Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity, so that every tongue which believes might be gathered together to God.

These things I write, my dear ones, not that I know any to be in such a condition, but, as one least among you, to forewarn you unless you fall upon the snares of false doctrine. Instead, be fully convinced of the birth, and suffering, and resurrection truly and certainly accomplished by Jesus Christ during the time of the government of Pontius Pilate. He is our hope. May none of you ever be turned aside from this assurance.

POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS 8–10: Let us then continually persevere in our hope and in the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ. He who “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24), who “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Pet 2:22), endured all things for us that we might live in Him. Let us then be imitators of His patience. If we suffer for His name’s sake, let us glorify Him. For He has set us this example in Himself and we have believed that such is the case.

I urge you all, therefore, to yield obedience to the word of righteousness, and to exercise all patience, such as you have seen before your eyes, not only in the case of the blessed Ignatius, and Zosimus and Rufus, but also in others among yourselves, including Paul himself and the rest of the apostles. Be convinced that all these people have not

run in vain. Rather, they have run in faith and righteousness. They are in their proper place in the presence of the Lord for whom also they suffered. For they did not love this present world but Him who died for us and for our sakes was raised again from the dead by God.

Stand fast, therefore, in these things, and follow the example of the Lord, being firm and unchangeable in the faith, loving the brotherhood, and being joined to one another in the truth, exhibiting the meekness of the Lord in your communication with one another, and despising no one. When you can do good, do not wait because “almsgiving delivers from death” (Tob 4:10). “Be subject to one to another, keeping your conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (1 Pet 2:12–13), that you may receive praise for your good works and the Lord may not be blasphemed through you. But woe to him by whom the name of the Lord is blasphemed! Teach, therefore, self-control to all and also in your own conduct.

The Characteristic of Faithfulness

FIRST CLEMENT 9–12: So, let us be obedient to His excellent and glorious will, and long for His mercy and lovingkindness, forsaking all fruitless labors, strife, and envy which leads to death. Let us return to His compassions. Let us steadfastly think about those who have perfectly served His excellent glory. Let us consider, for instance, Enoch, who, being found righteous in obedience, was taken up and did not know death. Noah, being found faithful, preached restoration to the world through his ministry, and the Lord saved by him the animals which, with one accord, entered into the ark.

Abraham, called “the friend,” was found faithful, inasmuch as he obeyed the words of God. Being obedient, he went out from his own country, his relatives, and his father’s house, in order that by leaving a small territory, a weak family, and an insignificant house he might inherit the promises of God. For God said to him,

Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12:1–3)

And again, when Abraham departed from Lot, God said to him,

Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. (Gen 13:14–16)

And again it says,

[God] brought [Abram] outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. . . . So shall your offspring be.” And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:5–6)

On account of his faith and hospitality, a son was given him in his old age. And in the exercise of obedience, he



offered him as a sacrifice to God on one of the mountains which He showed him.

On account of his hospitality and godliness, Lot was saved from Sodom when the region around him was punished by means of fire and brimstone. The Lord made it clear that He does not give up on those who hope in Him. Instead, He gives up on those who depart from Him to punishment and torture. For Lot's wife was made an example. Although she left with him, she was of a different mind and did not continue in agreement with him, so she was turned into a pillar of salt to this day. This was done that all might know that those who are of a double mind and who distrust the power of God, bring down judgment on themselves and become a sign to all succeeding generations.

On account of her faith and hospitality, Rahab the harlot was saved. For when spies were sent by Joshua, the son of Nun, to Jericho, the king of the country discovered that they had come to spy out their land. So, he sent men to seize them in order that when taken, they might be put to death. But the hospitable Rahab took them in and hid them on the roof of her house under some stalks of flax. And when the men sent by the king arrived and said "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." She answered them, "True, the men came to me, but quickly departed again and are gone," thus not revealing the spies to them (*Josh 2:2-6*).

Then she said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us . . . Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly



with my father's house" (Josh 2:9, 12). And they said to her, "We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land . . . you shall gather into your house all your family, and they will be preserved. But anyone found outside of your dwelling will perish" (Josh 2:17–19). Moreover, they gave her a sign to this effect, that she should hang out from her house a scarlet thread (Josh 2:18, 21). And thus they revealed that redemption should flow through the blood of the Lord to all those who believe and hope in God. You see, dear ones, that there was not only faith, but also prophecy in this woman.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 14: None of this is hidden from you if you completely possess the faith and love toward Christ Jesus which are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith and the end is love. Now these two being inseparably connected together are from God. All other things which are necessary for a holy life follow after these two. No one making a profession of faith sins, nor does he that possesses love hate anyone. The tree is made manifest by its fruit. So, those who profess themselves to be Christians will be recognized by their behavior. For there is not merely a call for profession. Rather, may a person be found continuing in the power of faith to the end.

IMITATE LEADERS

Old Testament Leaders

FIRST CLEMENT 17–19: Let us be imitators also of those who in goat skins and sheep skins went about proclaiming the coming of Christ. I speak of Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel among the prophets, along with those who share a similar

testimony. Abraham was especially honored and was called the friend of God. However, seriously considering the glory of God, he humbly declared, “I who am but dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27). Moreover, it is written about Job, “that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). But bringing an accusation against himself, he said, “No man is free from desecration, even if his life be but only one day” (Job 14:4–5, LXX). Moses was called faithful in all God’s house, and through his ministry God punished Egypt with plagues and tortures. Even though greatly honored, he did not speak pridefully when the divine voice came from out of the burning bush. Instead he said, “Who am I that You send me? I am slow of speech and of tongue” (Exod 3:11; 4:10). And again he said, “I am but as the smoke of a pot.”¹

Then what will we say concerning the testimony of David of whom God said, “I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart” (Acts 13:22) and “with everlasting mercy I have anointed him” (Ps 89:20)? Yet this very man says to God,

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin

¹ Source unknown.

did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Ps 51:1–17)

Thus, the humility and godly submission of so great and illustrious people have provided not only us, but also all the generations before us, something better. Even those who have received His prophecies in fear and truth are better. So, having as many great and glorious examples set before us, let us turn again to the practice of peace which was the goal set before us from the beginning. And let us look consistently to the Father and Creator of the universe, and hold on to His mighty and excellent gifts and benefits of peace. Let us think about Him with our minds, and

look with the eyes of our soul to His patient will. Let us reflect how free from anger He is toward all His creation.

FIRST CLEMENT 43: And who should be concerned if those in Christ who were entrusted with such a duty by God appointed those mentioned? Consider the blessed Moses who was also “faithful in all God’s house as a servant” (Heb 3:5). He wrote in the sacred books all the commands which were given him, and the other prophets also followed him bearing witness with one mind to the ordinances which he had assigned. For when rivalry arose concerning the priesthood and the tribes were contending among themselves as to which of them should be given that glorious title, Moses commanded the twelve princes of the tribes to bring him their rods, each one being inscribed with the name of the tribe. And he took them, bound them, and sealed them with the rings of the princes of the tribes, and laid them up in the tabernacle of witness on the table of God. And having shut the doors of the tabernacle, he sealed the keys, just as he had done the rods, and said to them, “Friends, the tribe whose rod will blossom has been chosen by God to fulfill the office of the priesthood, and to minister to Him” (*Num 17*). And when the morning came, he assembled all Israel, 600,000 men, and showed the seals to the princes of the tribes, and opened the tabernacle of witness, and brought out the rods. And the rod of Aaron was found not only to have blossomed, but to also bear fruit upon it. What do you think, dear ones? Did Moses know beforehand that this would happen? Undoubtedly he knew. However, he acted in such a way that there might be no sedition in Israel, and that the name of the true and only God might be glorified. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Current Leaders

FIRST CLEMENT 5–6: But not only dwelling on ancient examples, let us talk about the most recent spiritual heroes. Let us take the beautiful examples from our own generation. Because of envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and put to death. Consider the illustrious apostles for example. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous trials. And when he had finally suffered martyrdom, he departed to the place of glory suitable for him. Because of envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into prison, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the East and West, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith. He taught righteousness to the whole world, and traveled to the extreme limit of the West. Then he suffered martyrdom under the government. Consequently, he was removed from the world and went into the holy place. He proved himself a striking example of patience.

To these men who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of the elect who, through envy, have endured many indignities and tortures. They provide us with a most excellent example. Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircae, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith with steadfastness. Though weak in body, they received a noble reward. Envy has alienated wives from their husbands, and changed that saying of our father Adam, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”

(Gen 2:23). Envy and strife have overthrown great cities and rooted up mighty nations.

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 1: Much beloved in God, I have become acquainted with your name which you have obtained by the practice of righteousness according to the faith and love in Christ Jesus our Savior. Being imitators of God, and fanning yourselves into flame by the blood of God, you have completely accomplished the work which we appropriately share.

You were eager to see me when you heard that I came bound from Syria for the common name and hope. I am trusting that through your prayers I will be permitted to fight with beasts at Rome, so that by martyrdom I may indeed become the disciple of Him who “gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). I received, therefore, your whole congregation in the name of God through Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love and your bishop in the flesh. I implore you by Jesus Christ to love like him and seek to be like him. Blessed be He who has permitted you who are worthy to have such an excellent bishop.

IGNATIUS TO THE SMYRNAEANS 12A: The love of the friends at Troas greets you, from where also I write to you by Burrhus, who you sent with me together with the Ephesians, your friends, and who has in all things refreshed me. And I wish that all may imitate him as being an example of God’s ministry. Grace will reward him in all things.

Discussion Questions



We are continuously reminded of the oral nature of the early church. In such cultures, even contemporary ones, the lives of people become the examples others follow. Telling the stories of lives lived well inspire people to model themselves accordingly. Such stories become teaching tools to communicate practical theology. As you consider how those you disciple might be inspired by stories of followers of Christ, who are examples you might point to as worthy of imitation?



Look back at the chapter and develop a list of characteristics that should be modeled in the life of a disciple. What other characteristics do you think should be added to your list?



Obedience to a way of life can turn into a legalism when done for the wrong reasons. When we obey for the sake of obedience, our hearts can become callous and insensitive as we strive to keep the letter of the law instead of its spirit. How can you guard your heart from turning obedience into a legalistic list of regulations?



The Apostolic Fathers had many expectations for how the early Christians were to live their lives. As you consider the idea of imitation as discipleship, what are the practical expectations and hopes you have for the lives of your disciples?



What habits do you personally need to develop in order to say like Paul, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1)?



Chapter 8

Warnings Against Division and the Demonic

Chapter Summary

Sometime after the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome around AD 67, the church's leaders wrote a letter to the church in Corinth. Having started in AD 49 or 50, the church in Corinth was well known for her faith.

For who has ever visited you and not approved of your highly virtuous and stable faith? And who has not been astonished by your temperate and gentle piety in Christ? And who has not proclaimed the magnificent character of your hospitality? And who has not uttered a blessing for your perfect and unwavering knowledge? (1 Clement 1)

Even so, the Corinthian church struggled with unity. The Roman church leaders' primary concern was correcting the actions of those causing division in the Corinthian

church by insisting that the church unify around God's will. In the twenty-first century the church seems just as divided, so this chapter is particularly relevant as the Apostolic Fathers share about the root and destructive nature of division. "For," as the writers of 1 Clement warn, "[God's judgment] will happen if we fail to conduct ourselves worthily of Him and do the things that are good and pleasing before Him, in harmony" (1 Clement 21).

Yet division was not the only enemy of the early church. The Apostolic Fathers testify to one who was equally destructive. They refer to him by many names: Prince of the World, Evil One, Wicked One, Dark One, Satan, Adversary, and Devil. They were very aware of his activities, including the influence of evil angels who led people into the way of darkness.

These two topics conclude our exploration of the Apostolic Fathers: divisions and the demonic. As we will see in this chapter, the Apostolic Fathers teach us how destructive both are and warn us that the Holy Spirit uncovers secrets. He knows our hearts and He knows the human penchant for division. The Devil also knows this weakness, and will take advantage of us if we are not careful.

WARNINGS AGAINST DIVISION

The Holy Spirit Warns Against Division

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 6B–7: Now I thank my God that I have a clear conscience in regard to you, and that no one can claim, either privately or publicly, that I have burdened anyone either in much or in little. Furthermore,



I wish for everyone with whom I have spoken to not allow what I have said to become a testimony against them.

For though some people would want to deceive me according to the flesh, yet the Spirit is not deceived because He is from God. For He knows both from where He comes and where He goes, and He uncovers secrets. For when I was among you I cried with a loud voice, God's voice, "Pay attention to the bishop, and to the elders and deacons." Now, some suspected that I spoke from knowing the division caused by some among you. But He is my witness, for whose sake I am in chains, that I did not learn this from anyone. Rather the Spirit proclaims these words, "Do nothing without the bishop. Keep your bodies as the temples of God. Love unity, avoid divisions. Be followers of Jesus Christ, even as He is of His Father."

Danger of Envy

FIRST CLEMENT 3–4: Every kind of honor and happiness was given to you. But then what was written was fulfilled, "My beloved ate and drank, and was enlarged and grew fat, and kicked" (*Deut 32:15*). Hence flowed rivalry and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and disorder, war and captivity. So, the worthless rose up against the honored, those of no reputation against such as were renowned, the foolish against the wise, the young against those advanced in years. For this reason, righteousness and peace are now far away from you. Everyone has abandoned the fear of God and has become blind in faith. No one walks in the laws of His commandment, nor acts as becoming a Christian. Instead, they walk after their own wicked lusts, resuming the practice of an unrighteous and ungodly envy, by which death itself entered into the world.

For this is written:

In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his sacrifices he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. (Gen 4:3–8)

You see, friends, how envy and jealousy led to the murder of a brother. Through envy, also, our father Jacob fled from the face of Esau his brother. Envy made Joseph be persecuted to death, and to come into bondage. Envy compelled Moses to flee from the face of Pharaoh king of Egypt, when he heard these words from his fellow countryman, “Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” (Exod 2:14). On account of envy, Aaron and Miriam had to make their home outside of the camp. Envy brought Dathan and Abiram down alive to Hades, through the sedition which they provoked against God’s servant Moses. Through envy, David underwent the hatred not only of foreigners, but was also persecuted by King Saul of Israel.



Conflict is Evil

FIRST CLEMENT 46–47: Therefore, friends, it is right that we should follow such examples since it is written, “Hold on to the holy, for those who hold on to them will be made holy.”¹ And again, in another place, it says, “With the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous” (Ps 18:25–26). Let us hold on, therefore, to the innocent and righteous, since these are the elect of God.

Why are there discord and uproars and divisions and schisms and wars among you? Have we not one God and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace poured out upon us? And have we not one calling in Christ? Why do we divide and tear to pieces the members of Christ and raise up trouble against our own body? Have we reached such a height of madness as to forget that “we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25)? Remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ how He said:

Woe to that person! It would be better for him that he had never been born than to cast a stumbling block before one of My elect. Yes, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cast a stumbling block before one of My little ones. (*Luke 17:1–3*)

Your schism has subverted many, has discouraged many, has given rise to doubt in many, and has caused grief to us all. And still your sedition continues.

1 Source unknown.

Take up the letter of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you. But your proclivity for one above another entailed less guilt upon you, inasmuch as your favoritisms were then shown toward apostles, already of high reputation, and toward a man whom they had approved.

But now reflect on who those are that have perverted you and lessened the reputation of your brotherly love. It is disgraceful, dear ones, yes, highly disgraceful, and unworthy of your Christian profession, that such a thing should be heard of as that the most steadfast and ancient church of the Corinthians should, on account of one or two persons, engage in sedition against its elders. This rumor has reached not only us, but those also who are unconnected with us. And now, through your obsession, the name of the Lord is blasphemed, while danger is also brought upon yourselves.

Obey God, Not the Seditious

FIRST CLEMENT 14–15: It is right and holy therefore, friends, to obey God rather than to follow those who, through pride and sedition, have become the leaders of despicable rivalries. For we will incur no slight injury, but rather great danger, if we rashly surrender ourselves to the inclinations of men who aim at provoking strife and clamors so as to draw us away from what is good. Let us be kind to one another after the pattern of the tender mercy and gentleness of our Creator. For it is written, “The upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will



remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land” (Prov 2:21–22). And again it says:

I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away, and behold, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found. Mark the blameless and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace. (Ps 37:35–37)

Therefore, let us hold on to those who foster peace with godliness, and not to those who hypocritically profess to desire it. For it says in a certain place, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matt 15:8; *Isa 29:13*). And again, “They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse” (Ps 62:4). And again it says, “They flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues. Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant” (Ps 78:36–37). Therefore, “Let the lying lips be mute” (Ps 31:18). And again:

May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?” “Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the Lord; “I will place him in the safety for which he longs.” (Ps 12:3–5)

Warnings for the Leaders of Sedition

FIRST CLEMENT 57: You therefore who laid the foundation of this sedition, submit yourselves to the elders and receive correction so as to repent. Bend the knees of your hearts and learn to be submissive by laying aside the proud and arrogant self-confidence of your tongue. For it is better

for you that you should be found humble but also in an honorable place in the flock of Christ, than being highly exalted and excluded from the hope of His people. For the all-virtuous Wisdom speaks:

If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. (Prov 1:23–31)

Schisms in the Church

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 2–3: For this reason, as children of light and truth, flee from division and false teaching. For where the shepherd is, there do you as sheep follow. There are many wolves who appear trustworthy yet by their means of malicious pleasure they carry captive those who are running toward God. But in your unity, they will have no place.

Keep yourselves from those evil plants which Jesus Christ does not tend, because they are not the planting of the Father. Not that I have found any division among you,



rather exceeding purity. For many who are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. And as many as are willing in the exercise of repentance, will return into the unity of the church. They also will belong to God as they may live according to Jesus Christ.

Do not err, my friends. If anyone follows him that makes a schism in the church, he will not inherit the kingdom of God. If anyone walks according to a strange opinion, he agrees not with the suffering.

Repent from Division

FIRST CLEMENT 51–52: Let us therefore ask for forgiveness from all those sins which through any influence of the Adversary we have committed. Those who have been the leaders of sedition and disagreement should have respect for the common hope. For those who live in fear and love would rather that they themselves be involved in suffering than their neighbors. They prefer to bear blame themselves, rather than see the harmony which has been virtuously and righteously handed down to us who suffer. For it is better that a person should acknowledge his sins rather than harden his heart. In a similar way, the hearts of those who stirred up sedition against Moses the servant of God were hardened and their condemnation was made apparent. For they went down alive into Hades and death swallowed them up. Pharaoh with his army and all the princes of Egypt as well as the chariots with their riders were sunk in the depths of the Red Sea and perished for no other reason than that their foolish hearts were hardened after so many signs and wonders had been performed in the land of Egypt by Moses the servant of God (*Exod 14*).

The Lord, brothers and sisters, stands in need of nothing. And He desires nothing of anyone, except that confession be made to Him. For, says the elect David, “I will confess to the Lord, and this will please Him more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. When the humble see it they will be glad” (Ps 69:31–32). And again he says, “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps 50:14–15). For “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Ps 51:17).

Unity over Division

FIRST CLEMENT 54–55: Who then among you is noble-minded? Who is compassionate? Who is full of love? Let him declare, “If on my account sedition and disagreement and schisms have arisen, I will depart. I will go away to wherever you desire and I will do whatever the majority command. Only let the flock of Christ live on terms of peace with the elders set over it.” He that acts in this way will attain to himself great glory in the Lord and every place will welcome him. For “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Ps 24:1). In this way, those leading God’s administration both did and always will do without regret.

Here are some examples from among the Gentiles. Many kings and princes, in times of epidemics, when they had been instructed by an oracle, have given themselves up to death in order that by their own blood they might deliver their fellow citizens. Many have left from their own cities so that sedition might be ended within them. We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to prison, in order that they might ransom others. Many,



too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.

Many women also, being strengthened by the grace of God, have performed numerous extraordinary feats. The blessed Judith, when her city was besieged, asked of the elders' permission to go into the camp of the strangers and, subjecting herself to danger, she went out for the love for her country and people under siege. The Lord delivered Holofernes into the hands of a woman. Esther also, being perfect in faith, subjected herself to no less danger in order to deliver the twelve tribes of Israel from impending destruction. For with fasting and humiliation she entreated the everlasting God, who sees all things. And He, perceiving the humility of her spirit, delivered the people for whose sake she had encountered peril.

WARNING AGAINST THE DEMONIC

Obscurity of the Spiritual Realm

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 5: Am I not able to write to you about heavenly things? But I fear to do so in case I should inflict injury on you who are but babes. Forgive me in this respect in case you should be choked by them. For even I, though I am in chains, am not able to understand heavenly things and the places of the angels and their gatherings under their respective princes; these things that are visible and invisible. With reference to such mysterious subjects, I am still but a learner. For many things are lacking to us so that we may not be lacking of God.

BARNABAS 18: But let us now pass to another sort of knowledge and doctrine. There are two ways of doctrine

and authority: the one of light and the other of darkness. But there is a great difference between these two ways. For the light-bringing angels of God are stationed over one, but over the other, the angels of Satan. And indeed, the one is Lord forever and ever, but the other is the prince of the time of wickedness.

The Ways of Darkness

BARNABAS 20–21A: But the way of darkness is crooked and full of cursing for it is the way of eternal death with punishment. In this way are the things that destroy the soul such as idolatry, overconfidence, the arrogance of power, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, adultery, murder, robbery, haughtiness, transgression, deceit, malice, self-sufficiency, poisoning, magic, greed, lack of the fear of God. Similarly, those who persecute the good, those who hate truth, those who love falsehood, those who do not know the reward of righteousness, those who do not hold to that which is good, those who do not adhere to just judgment, who ignore the widow and orphan, those who are not mindful of the fear of God, but of wickedness instead, from whom gentleness and patience are far removed, persons who love futility and follow after a reward, are compassionless toward the needy and do not strive in aid for him who is overcome with hardship, who are prone to evil-speaking, who do not know Him who made them, who are murderers of children, destroyers of the workmanship of God, who turn away him who is in need, who oppress the afflicted, who are advocates of the rich, who are unjust judges of the poor, and who are in every respect sinners.



It is well, therefore, that he who has learned the judgments of the Lord, as many as have been written, should walk in them. For he who keeps them will be glorified in the kingdom of God. But he who chooses other things will be destroyed with his works. On this account there will be a resurrection, on this account a retribution.

Prince of This World

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 17: For this reason did the Lord accept the ointment poured upon His head, that He might breathe immortality into His church. Do not be anointed with the bad fragrance of the doctrine of the Prince of this world. Do not let him lead you away captive from the life which is set before you. And why are we not all cautious, since we have received the knowledge of God which is Jesus Christ? Why do we foolishly perish by not recognizing the true gift which the Lord has sent to us?

IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS 1: Having been informed of your well-ordered godly love, I rejoiced greatly and determined to fellowship with you in the faith of Jesus Christ. For as one who has been thought worthy of the most honorable of all names, in these chains which I bear about, I commend the churches as I pray for the harmony of both the flesh and the spirit of Jesus Christ. He is the constant source of our life, and of faith and love, to which nothing is to be preferred, but especially of Jesus and the Father. In Him, if we endure all the attacks of the Prince of this world and escape them, then we will enjoy God.

IGNATIUS TO THE TRALLIANS 4: I have many thoughts about God, but I restrain myself unless I should die from boasting. For now, I must be more fearful and not give attention

to those that puff me up. For those speaking to me afflict me. For I do indeed desire to suffer, but I do not know if I am worthy to do so. For this envy, though it is not obvious to many, all the more violently attacks me. I therefore have need for humility, by which the Prince of this world is brought to nothing.

IGNATIUS TO THE ROMANS 7–8: The Prince of this world would wish to carry me away and corrupt my godly character. Therefore, let none of you who are present help him. Rather, you be on my side, that is, on the side of God. Do not speak of Jesus Christ and yet set your desires on the world. Do not let jealousy reside among you. When I am present with you, do not be persuaded to listen to me if I say otherwise. Rather listen to those things which I now write to you. For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die.

My love has been crucified and there is no fire in me desiring to be quenched. However, there is a water within me that lives and speaks saying to me inwardly, “Come to the Father.” I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is from the seed of David and Abraham. I desire the drink of God, namely His blood which is incorruptible love and eternal life.

I no longer wish to live according to human values, and my desire will be fulfilled if you consent. Be willing, then, so that you also may have your desires fulfilled. I implore you in this brief letter, trust me! Jesus Christ will reveal that I speak truly. He is the true mouth by which the Father has genuinely spoken. Pray for me, that I may succeed. I



have not written to you according to the flesh, but according to the will of God. If I will suffer, you have desired it for me. However, if I am rejected, you have hated me.

IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS 6A: But if any one teaches the Jewish law to you, do not listen to him. For it is better to listen to Christian doctrine from a person who has been circumcised, than to Judaism from one uncircumcised. But if either of such persons do not speak concerning Jesus Christ, they are in my judgment just as monuments and sepulchers of the dead upon which are written only the names of men. Flee therefore the wicked devices and snares of the Prince of this world in case you are conquered by his tricks and grow weak in love. Instead, join together with an undivided heart.

Persecution from the Devil

IGNATIUS TO THE ROMANS 5: From Syria all the way to Rome I fight with beasts, both by land and sea, both by night and day, being bound to ten leopards—I mean a company of soldiers—who, even when treated well, show themselves all the worse. But I am all the more a disciple because of their mistreatment, “but I am not thereby acquitted” (1 Cor 4:4). May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me. And I pray that they may be found eager to rush upon me. I will entice them to devour me quickly and not deal with me as with some who out of fear they did not touch. But if they be unwilling to attack me, I will compel them to do so.

Bear with me, I know what is for my benefit. Now I begin to become a disciple. And do not let things that are visible or invisible envy me so that I might reach Jesus Christ.





Let fire and the cross, let the crowds of wild beasts, let tearing, breakings, and dislocations of bones, let cutting off of limbs, let crushing of the whole body, let all the dreadful torments of the Devil come upon me. Only let me reach Jesus Christ.

Evil Angel

BARNABAS 9A–B: He speaks moreover concerning our ears, how He has circumcised both them and our heart. The Lord says in the Prophet, “As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me” (Ps 18:44). And again He says, “those who are far off will hear by listening. They will know what I have done” (Isa 33:13). And, “Be circumcised in your hearts” (Jer 4:4) says the Lord. And again He says, “Listen, O Israel, for these things says the Lord your God” (Jer 7:2–3). And once more the Spirit of the Lord proclaims, “Who desires life and loves many days? By listening let him hear the voice of my servant” (Ps 34:12). And again, He says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken” (Isa 1:2). These are testimonies. And again, He says, “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of this people” (Isa 1:10). And again, He says, “Hear, you children, the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Isa 40:3).

Therefore, He has circumcised our ears so that we might hear His word and believe. For the circumcision in which they had trusted is abolished. For He declared that circumcision was not of the flesh, but they disobeyed because an evil angel deluded them. He says to them, “Thus says the Lord,” and here I find a new commandment: “Sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord” (Jer 4:3–4). And what does He say? “Circumcise

therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut 10:16). And again, “Behold, says the Lord, all the Gentiles are uncircumcised in the flesh, but this people are uncircumcised in heart” (*Jer* 9:25–26).

Magic

IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESIANS 19B: Consequently, every kind of magic was destroyed, and every bond of wickedness disappeared. Ignorance was removed and the old kingdom abolished as God Himself was revealed in human form for the restoration of eternal life. And now, that which has been prepared by God takes effect. Namely, from that time on, all things were in a state of turmoil because the destruction of death was being carried out.

IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP 5A: Flee evil arts. Instead, speak against them in public all the more.

The Last Days

BARNABAS 2A: Since, therefore, the days are evil and Satan possesses the power of this world we ought to pay attention to ourselves and diligently inquire into the requirements of the Lord. Fear and patience, then, are helpers of our faith as well as long-suffering and self-control which fight on our side. While these remain pure in the Lord, wisdom, science, knowledge, and experience rejoice along with them.

BARNABAS 4B–C: Now, being desirous to write many things to you, not as your teacher, but as is fitting for one who loves you, I have taken care not to fail to write to you from what I myself possess as your humble servant. We pay close attention in these last days because you will gain nothing from the whole time of your faith unless now in this wicked time we also withstand the coming sources



of danger as is fitting for the children of God. May the Dark One find no means of entrance. Let us flee from every vanity. Let us utterly hate the works of the way of wickedness. Do not withdraw to live a solitary life as if you were already justified. Rather, come together in one place to make common inquiry concerning what tends to your general well-being. For the Scripture says, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” (Isa 5:21).

Let us be spiritually minded. Let us be a perfect temple to God. As much as is in our control, let us meditate upon the fear of God and let us keep His commandments so that we may rejoice in His decrees. The Lord will judge the world without respect to persons. Each will receive as he has done. If he is righteous, his righteousness will precede him. If he is wicked, the reward of wickedness is before him. Pay attention unless while resting at our ease—as if those who are the called should ever fall asleep in our sins—that the wicked Prince might acquire power over us and thrust us out from the kingdom of the Lord. Moreover, attend to this, my friends, as you reflect and see that after extraordinary signs and wonders were performed in Israel, they were abandoned. Let us beware in case we be found as it is written, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14).

Discussion Questions



Division, sedition, and schism are all weighty words when we consider God's desire for the church to be united. As you consider how the Apostolic Fathers described various instances of disunity in the early church, where do you see similarities in the church today?



As you think about where you saw similarities between the early church's struggle for unity and the church today, what proposals would you make to help resolve the fragmentation of Christianity?



At the heart of division, according to the writers of 1 Clement, is envy. It manifests in many forms and ultimately results in destruction. As you think back on this chapter, perhaps even earlier chapters, how do the Apostolic Fathers encourage you to guard your heart from the ways of darkness? In what ways might you anticipate the attacks of the Prince of the world on your heart?



Considering the proposals you suggested for resolving the fragmentation of Christianity, what can you practically do to implement those proposals in your communities?



As you think about division and the demonic, what daily actions might protect your mind against those influences which cause disunity and destruction?

Afterword





CHRISTIAN MINISTRY



Afterword

The writings of the early church fascinate me. I hope that after reading this volume they have fascinated you as well. There is something exciting about reading directly from the disciples of people like Paul, Peter, Barnabas, and Timothy—the first-century giants of the New Testament who set the foundation for Christian belief and practice. Reading about the struggles of the church at Corinth and Rome’s love for the Corinthian believers and heart to help makes me think differently about the churches in my community and our collective testimony to those around us. Seeing Ignatius’ and Polycarp’s emphasis on learning about Jesus in the midst of a growing number of heresies and false teachers puts many other theological differences—the end times, predestination, infant baptism—in their proper place as secondary issues. The calls to living Christlike in the Letter of Barnabas, the Didache, and the Letter to Diognetus are stunning reminders that God expects us to be different. I find these and other topics particularly relevant for our modern efforts of disciple-making, social justice, and church planting.

I am often curious about what compelled people to believe in Jesus after He ascended to the Father. The Christian authors we have read in this volume have given us a glimpse of how the early disciples continued His work. We do not read about overtly evangelistic efforts through mass campaigns. Neither do we see any hint of reducing Jesus to someone He was not in order to attract people. Strategies for various ministry programs are noticeably absent from the life of the early church. There are no children's programs, vacation Bible school, catchy Sunday services in contemporary structures, marketing techniques through social networks, or flashy exegetes in the latest sneakers. That was not the way the early church attracted people to Christ.

Instead, the people living in the first- and second-century Roman Empire witnessed the lives of Christians and were compelled to Christ. As the Letter to Diognetus reminds us, God does not coerce people to faith (chapter 7). Plain and simple, Christians imitated God's compassion and meekness to persuade others to faith. Even though the writings we have studied are mostly descriptions about Christian belief and life, in other places we learn that the disciples carried on the work of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire and, indeed, around the world. For example, in the fourth century Eusebius, the father of church history, writes about the advancement of the gospel in the early centuries we have been studying:

Then starting out upon long journeys they performed the office of evangelists, being filled with the desire to preach Christ to those who had not yet heard the word of faith, and to deliver to them the divine Gospels. And when they had only laid the foundations of faith

in foreign places, they appointed others as shepherds, and entrusted them with the nurture of those that had recently been brought in, while they themselves went on again to other countries and peoples, with the grace and the cooperation of God. For a great many wonderful works were done through them by the power of the divine Spirit, so that at the first hearing whole multitudes of people eagerly embraced the religion of the Creator of the universe.¹

Such activities continued well into the later second and third centuries. For example, in the second century, even Panteanus, the missionary-scholar of the famed catechetical school in Alexandria, an ancient seminary, engaged in missionary efforts in India. Upon his return, he taught doctrine, and provides an early model of the scholar-practitioner.² Even though it is true that the majority of the early Christians were illiterate, they learned doctrine and practice so that they would continue faithfully on the path set before them by the Apostolic Fathers. It is a path worthy for us to walk also. It is one I aspire to walk, and one I hope you will walk as well.

1 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1–5*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library 153 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), III.37.

2 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1–5*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library 153 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), V.2.10.2–4.



CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Resources for Application





CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Soul Work and Soul Care: The Christian Discipline of Meditation

By Isaiah A. Swain

No one presumes to teach an art until he has first carefully studied it. Look how foolish it is for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority, since the care of souls is the art of arts!

~ Gregory the Great, c. 590

Your leaders . . . keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work.

~ Hebrews 13:17a

Each Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic has a “Soul Work and Soul Care” resource to illustrate how Christian leaders across cultures and generations have found a particular spiritual classic helpful in pastoral ministry. “Soul work” includes the *personal* work of watering, weeding, pruning, and fertilizing the garden of one’s own soul. In a similar way, “soul care” involves the *pastoral* work of nurturing growth in another’s friendship with God. When Jesus discusses “soul work” and “soul care,” he often uses metaphors from the medical and agricultural professions. Like a doctor for souls, or a farmer caring for an orchard of fruit trees, congregational leaders who hope to tend souls can learn much from the wisdom of those who have gone before us.

Meditation in Scripture

Jesus spent thousands of hours meditating on Scripture. His life and teaching flowed from deep meditation on texts like Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53. Jesus embodied the kind of life described in Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man” whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps 1:1–2). When people hear the words “meditate” or “meditation,” their minds are often drawn to an emptying of the mind characteristic of the Hindu or Buddhist religious practice. However, biblical meditation and various types of Hindu and Buddhist meditation have different goals.

While many forms of Buddhist and Hindu meditation value emptying the mind, biblical meditation is about filling the heart with Christ and his Word. The Lord commands Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night” (Josh 1:8). A tired David tells God, “I meditate on you in the watches of the night” (Ps 63:6). The psalmist repeatedly declares his intention to meditate on the Scriptures’ statutes, precepts, and promises (Ps 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148). Biblical meditation as a practice emphasizes increasing intimacy with Christ (John 15) and the storing up of God’s words in our heart (Ps 119:10).

The fruit of Christian meditation is a mind centered on God in relation to his Word, works, and world. Thus, the content of Christian meditation is not limited to Scripture. Christians have biblical precedent for meditating on God (Pss 77:3; 145:5), God’s mighty deeds in history and in one’s own life (Pss 77:12; 78; 105; 106; 143:5), creation (Gen 15:5; Pss 77:12; 119:27; 143:5; 145:5; Matt 6:25–30), and wisdom (Ps 49:3; Prov 2:1–15). Each of these subject

areas can be fruitful for believers, but in the rest of this appendix we will focus on meditation and Scripture.

Meditation in the Letter of Barnabas

First Christian Voices: Practices of the Apostolic Fathers has introduced us to a number of church leaders who took their calling to be spiritually minded seriously (Rom 8:6). They recognized that God dwells within believers and the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all who follow Christ (Ezek 36:26–27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29; John 14:17; Acts 2:1–4; 8:17; 10:44–45; 19:6; Rom 8:9, 11; Eph 5:18). Take for example the author of the Letter of Barnabas, who writes: “Let us be spiritually minded. Let us be a perfect temple to God” for “the dwelling of our heart is a holy temple to the Lord” (4, 6). The Holy Spirit dwells specifically in our hearts, in our innermost selves. The author continues:

Before we believed in God, the dwelling of our heart was corrupt and weak as being indeed like a temple made with hands. For it was full of idolatry and was a home to demons since we did such things as were opposed to God. However, pay attention, a temple will be built in the name of the Lord in order that the temple of the Lord may be built in glory. How? Learn! (Barnabas 16)

Before God dwelt in our hearts, the author says our hearts were “full of idolatry” and “a home to demons” (Barnabas 16). But now, God has reformed our hearts and made us into new creatures (Barnabas 16; Ezek 36:26–27; 2 Cor 5:17).

Now that our hearts are made new and house the Holy Spirit, how are we furnishing our hearts? The Holy Spirit

is in our hearts, but what else fills it? At the time of writing, my cousin is living with my wife and I for a few months while she finishes her final round of clinicals at a nearby hospital. I had to rearrange the furniture in our spare bedroom in preparation for her moving in. Before my cousin came, her bedroom contained a small nightstand, a wingback chair, and a large bookshelf. While this was not a bad start for furnishing a bedroom, it was missing some key things. For example, she needed a bed. A lamp and dresser, too, might be useful. My cousin brought these things with her, but she brought other things too. She brought a small rug, a dog bed, and—you guessed it—a dog. Not only did she bring these extra things, but she also brought a nightstand that matched her dresser to replace the nightstand already there. To make space for the new furniture, I ended up moving out all the original furniture.

Now that the Holy Spirit dwells within our hearts, how are our hearts furnished? Is it a comfortable abode for our Comforter, or is some of our “furniture” contradictory? Our old heart was “full of idolatry” and “a home to demons” (Barnabas 16). Now that the Holy Spirit has remodeled our hearts into his dwelling place, what else is filling our hearts? The Letter of Barnabas gives some suggestions. “As much as is in our control, let us meditate upon the fear of God and let us keep his commandments so that we may rejoice in his decrees” (Barnabas 4). We must fill our hearts with the fear of the Lord, which will include filling our hearts with wisdom (Prov 1:7), because “those who fear the Lord” are also “those who meditate in their heart on the commandment which they have received” (Barnabas 10; John 15:12; 1 John 2:7–11). For “those who know

that meditation is a work of gladness” also “ruminate on the word of the Lord” (Barnabas 10). So, believers ought to fill their hearts with the fear of the Lord, wisdom, and God’s commandments.

When my cousin moved in, I did not leave her bedroom as it was—full of things she did not need or want. But, I also did not leave it empty and bare. Rather, I helped her fill it with what she needed and wanted. I listened to her as she explained what she wanted to bring. I moved out what she did not need. Then, I helped her bring in her own things. In the end, she had a comfortable room, furnished to her liking.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit has moved into our hearts. We ought not leave it furnished with the ways of the flesh, but should allow the Spirit to furnish it with his ways. Scripture reveals to us how the Spirit would like our hearts furnished: with the law of the Lord, with wonder at creation, with wisdom, with remembrances of God’s mighty deeds, and with thoughts of God. Christian meditation fills our hearts with these things and helps us stop walking in the flesh and start walking by the Spirit (Gal 5:16–17).

Meditation Today

“How can I incorporate biblical meditation into my regular daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly rhythms of life?”¹ This question is of central importance to firmly

1 For instructions on developing your own “rule of life,” see Hank Voss, “Soul Work and Soul Care: Learning to Be Intentional About our ‘Rule of Life’” in Greg Peters, ed., *Becoming a Community of Disciples: Guidelines from Abbot Benedict and Bishop Basil*, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 2 (Wichita, KS: TUMI Press, 2021), 121–41.

rooted, fruitful followers of Jesus (Ps 1:1–3). Thankfully, there is not just one correct answer. There is no one-size-fits-all method for meditation that works for all Christians. Rather, believers over the centuries have identified and practiced several methods of meditation. In fact, it is likely that you practice meditation, or at least have practiced it before, without calling it by that name. What follows is a brief survey of six possible methods for biblical meditation along with some resources for further study.

As you read through this list, circle any methods of meditation you already practice regularly, underline any methods you have practiced before, and place a star next to any methods you want to study further. The following descriptions are adapted from Taylor University's Center for Scripture Engagement's workshop booklet.² An excellent online resource is the Scripture Engagement section of BibleGateway, developed by the Center for Scripture Engagement and accessible at [BibleGateway.com/Resources/Scripture-Engagement](https://www.biblegateway.com/Resources/Scripture-Engagement).

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (pronounced “lec-tsee-oh di-vee-nah”) is Latin for “divine reading.” It is a four-step method for meditation on the Scriptures first formally described in the 1100s by a serious disciple named Guigo II. *Lectio divina* is “feasting on God’s Word.” Reading is like taking a bite. Meditation is chewing on the food. Prayer is savoring the taste of the food. Contemplation is digesting the food, making it a part of yourself. Just like a gourmet meal is not meant to be devoured as quickly as possible,

2 For more information about Taylor University's Center for Scripture Engagement, visit <https://www.taylor.edu/center-for-scripture-engagement/>.

the Bible is not meant to be read quickly. *Lectio divina* helps us slow down our “eating” so that we can chew, taste, and enjoy the “meal” of Scripture. Table 1 outlines and defines the four steps of *lectio divina*.

Table 1: The Four-Step Method of Lectio Divina

Read	First, read a passage of Scripture. Read slowly. Note any words, phrases, sentences, or ideas that catch your attention. Read the passage a second time slowly. Focus especially on whatever stood out to you during your first read.
Meditate	Second, meditate on the word or phrase that drew your attention. Ask why the Holy Spirit might have drawn your attention to this word, phrase, sentence, or idea today. Is it relevant to something you are going through right now? Does any person come to mind as you think about this word, phrase, sentence, or idea? Is there a change that may need to happen in your life?
Pray	Third, pray about the words, phrases, sentences, or ideas you meditated on, as well as any connections you made to your own life. If you felt worshipful, praise God (Pss 117; 118). If you felt convicted, confess your sins and ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:8–10). If you felt lost, ask for wisdom (James 1:5). If you felt sorrowful, entrust your soul to God (1 Peter 4:19). Talk to God about what you noticed in the passage and what is going on in your life.
Contemplate	Fourth, contemplate. To contemplate is to simply “be” with God, to open your heart to Him, and to listen. Contemplation involves silence in God’s presence (Ps 46:10). Take time after praying to open yourself to what God wants to show you.

Hand Copying Scripture

Hand copying Scripture is writing out passages by hand. It forces us to slow down and meditate on the verses we are writing. God commanded the kings of Israel to hand copy Scripture in Deuteronomy 17:18–20. Hand copying Scripture focuses our attention and, if a single passage is copied multiple times, helps us identify important words or phrases.

Singing Scripture

Singing Scripture can help us meditate on God’s Word, whether we sing a passage of Scripture itself or a song that quotes Scripture. In singing a passage of Scripture, we often find ourselves praying the passage and internalizing it, meditating on it more deeply than if we just read it. Additionally, songs are easier to memorize than plain words. In the same way that children use songs to learn their ABCs, we can use songs to memorize and meditate on Scripture.

Praying Scripture

Praying Scripture is using God’s Word to help us talk to him. We read a passage and then pray it back to God. For example, Psalm 5:2 says, “Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray.” After reading that verse, you might pray something like, “God, I know that you hear my prayers. Thank you for listening to me as I share my joys and struggles with you. You are the King of all the world. Every morning when I pray, I pray to you. Thank you for listening.” The same idea can be applied to other types of passages, such as narrative.

Someone who just read 1 Chronicles 21—the story of David’s lack of trust in God, when he wrongfully ordered a census of all the people of Israel—might pray something like, “God, like David I have not trusted you with this situation in my life. Help me trust in you so that I do not wrongly take matters into my own hands.” Connecting Scripture to our own lives through prayer involves meditating on it.

Journaling Scripture

Journaling Scripture is writing out our reflections on a passage. Writing about words or images that stick out to us, making connections between the passage and our lives, or asking questions of the passage all constitute meditation on Scripture.

Memorizing Scripture

Meditation and memorization go hand-in-hand, since hiding God’s Word in our heart requires mulling a passage over and over in our minds. Remember, Christian meditation is about filling our heart with the Word of God, not emptying our mind. Scripture memorization does just that, allowing “the word of Christ” to “dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). Jesus himself memorized Scripture and used it to reject Satan’s temptations (Matt 4:1–11). We too, by memorizing Scripture, can defend our faith and guard our heart against temptation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Those desiring more information about meditation, the spiritual disciplines listed above, or additional spiritual disciplines may consult these selected resources.

Introductory Resources on Biblical Meditation

Bible Gateway's Scripture Engagement section developed by Taylor University's Center for Scripture Engagement and accessible at www.BibleGateway.com/Resources/Scripture-Engagement.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Instructions in Daily Meditation." In *Meditating on the Word*. Translated by David McL. Gracie. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986. 21–27.

———. *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Revised and Expanded ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015.
See especially "Contemplation," "Journaling," "Lectio Divina/Devotional Reading," "Meditation," "Memorization," and "Praying Scripture."

Clinton, J. Robert. *Having a Ministry That Lasts: By Becoming a Bible Centered Leader*. Altadena, CA: Barnabas, 1997.

Collins, Phil. *Scripture Engagement Workshop*. Upland, IN: Center for Scripture Engagement, 2014.

Davis, Don L. *Master the Bible: How to Get and Keep the Big Picture of the Bible's Story*. Foundations for Ministry. Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2012.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978. See especially "Meditation" and "Prayer."

Howard, Evan B. *Praying the Scriptures: A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999.

Whitney, Donald S. *Praying the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

Wilhoit, James C., and Evan B. Howard. *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012.

Intermediate Resources on Biblical Meditation

Foster, Richard. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York: HarperOne, 1992.

Mulholland, M. Robert Jr. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2000.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Saucy, Robert L. *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Transformation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013.

Advanced Resources on Biblical Meditation

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Prayer*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986.

Casey, Michael. *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*. Liguori, MO: Triumph, 1996.

Leclercq, Jean. *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1961.

Owen, John. *Spiritual-Mindedness*. Edited by R. J. K. Law. Puritan Paperbacks. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009.

Robertson, Duncan. *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011.

Continuing the Conversation

Primary Sources

The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations.
Edited by Michael Holmes. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids:
Baker Academic, 2007.

The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus. Vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325.* Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885.

The Apostolic Fathers, Volume 1: 1 Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache. Edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman. Loeb Classical Library 24. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

The Apostolic Fathers, Volume II: Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. Epistle to Diognetus. The Shepherd of Hermas. Edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman. Loeb Classical Library 25. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Secondary Sources

Cyril of Jerusalem. “Catechetical Lecture 12.” In *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen.* Vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series.* Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Translated by Edwin Hamilton Gifford. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1894.

Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1–5.*
Translated by Kirsopp Lake. Loeb Classical Library
153. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

- . *Ecclesiastical History, Volume II: Books 6–10*. Translated by J. E. L. Oulton. Loeb Classical Library 265. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. In *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus. Vol. 1 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885.
- Jerome. *Chronicon*. Accessed July 2, 2022. Internet resource available from <https://topostext.org/work/530>.
- . “To Eustochium.” In *Jerome: Letters and Select Works. Vol. 6 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Translated by W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1893.
- Suetonius. *Lives of Caesars, Volume I: Julius. Augustus. Tiberius. Gaius. Caligula*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library 31. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.
- Tacitus. *Annals, Books 13–16*. Translated by John Jackson. Loeb Classical Library 322. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937.
- Pliny the Younger. *Letters, Volume I: Books 1–7*. Translated by Betty Radice. Loeb Classical Library 55. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Selected Contemporary Sources

- Aulen, Gustaf. *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*. Translated by A. G. Herbert. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003.
- Brown, C. T. *The Gospel and Ignatius of Antioch*. Studies in Biblical Literature 12. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. Rev. ed. New York: Penguin, 1993.
- Cooper, Michael T. *Ephesiology: A Study of the Ephesian Movement*. Littleton, CO: William Carey, 2020.
- Coxe, Arthur Cleveland. "Introductory Notice." In *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*. Vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885.
- Drobner, Hubertus R. *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Translated by Siegfried Schatzmann. Translation ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Edwards, James R. *From Christ to Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the Church in Less Than a Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.
- Fox, Robin Lane. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Knopf, 1986.

Frend, W. H. C. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1965.

———. *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.

Harper, Kyle. *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*. Princeton History of the Ancient World 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Hurtado, Larry W. *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctives in the Roman World*. Waco: Baylor, 2016.

Kreider, Alan. *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbably Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Macmullen, Ramsay and Eugene N. Lane, eds. *Paganism and Christianity, 100–425 C.E.: A Sourcebook*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992.

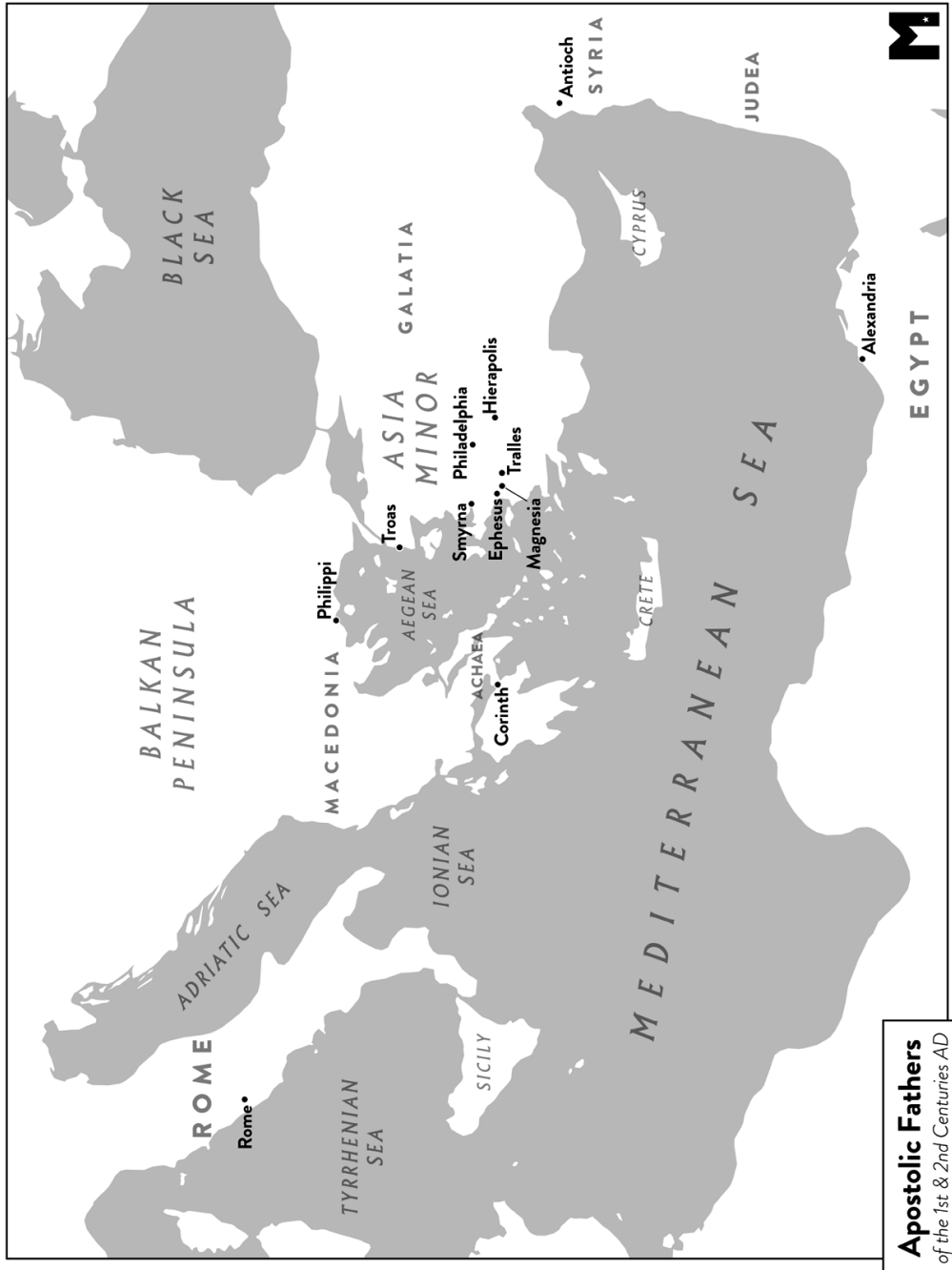
McGowan, Andrew B. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Robinson, Thomas A. *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian Relations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

Schoedel, William R. *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*. Edited by Helmut Koester. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.

- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- Wagner, Walter H. *After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.
- Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- . *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.

Map of Important Places



A Letter to God's Friends and Fellow Warriors On Why We Read the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics Together

Scholars like big books; small books change the world.

~ Rev. Dr. Glen Scorgie

Dear Friends and Fellow Warriors,

Greetings in the strong name of Jesus! What a joy to know that Jesus calls us “Friend” (John 15). What an honor to stand with sisters and brothers from every century and culture to shout, “Worthy is the Lamb!” What a privilege to serve in the Lamb’s army, not fighting flesh and blood, but God’s *internal* (the flesh), *external* (the world) and *infernial* (the Devil) enemies. In light of this cosmic struggle, we put on a wartime (not peacetime) mindset as we follow Jesus. Moses stated that God is present and at work in every generation (Ps 90:1), and the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are for those who desire to be used within their sphere of influence like David was used by God in his generation (Ps 57:2; Acts 13:36).

Our Context: A Battle with God’s Internal, External, and Infernal Enemies

Scripture teaches our daily need to choose a missional mindset (Matt 6:10). God’s kingdom never advances in neutral territory. Every inch in creation, including each inch of our soul, is a contested battlefield. God’s enemies are threefold. First, there is an *internal* enemy hiding within the heart of each redeemed child of God. God

loves us, even though we often battle a “Judas-heart”—a tendency to betray our Lord (John 12:6). Scripture names this brokenness the “flesh,” the old “man” or the “sin nature” (Rom 8; Gal 5–6). We work to kill (“mortify”) this sin lest it succeed in killing us (Rom 8:13).

Second, as followers of Jesus, we battle all *external* enemies opposing the Lamb’s kingdom. Sickened by sin, polluted by greed, corrupted by self-centeredness, idolatry and oppression; our world is not the way it is supposed to be. What God created good has been twisted and now often grieves the Holy Spirit. We choose to stand with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in refusing to bow to the principalities and powers of the age (Dan 3), or to accept the besetting sins of our ethnicities, nations and generations. Scripture and our sacred roots shine painful yet purifying light on our blind spots.

Finally, we are not ignorant of the Devil’s schemes. We may not know if a demon’s name is “Screwtape” or “Legion,” but we do know that an *infernal* enemy opposes God’s kingdom *shalom*. He is the Devil, Satan, the Father of Lies, the Accuser, and one day soon he and his demons will be completely crushed. In this time between the times, the Lamb’s followers resist and renounce the Devil and all his ways with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Our Mission: To Be Faithful Stewards and Wise Servants in Our Generation

Scripture contains a number of “history” psalms (Pss 78, 105, 106, 136; Neh 9:6–38; cf. Heb 11). These songs challenge us to reflect on women and men who chose to serve God in their generation—Abraham and Sarah,

Moses, Phinehas, Rahab, David, Esther and many others. History psalms also warn of those who ignored or refused to participate in God's work (Pharaoh, Dathan, Abiram, Og). Leaders like Rahab the prostitute (Matt 1:5; Heb 11:35; Jas 2:25) and King David were far from perfect (Ps 51). Yet Scripture declares that leaders like David "served the purposes of God in his own generation" (Acts 13:36).

Do you want God to use you in your generation? Are you willing to be a David or Esther today? God is already at work in our communities, schools and workplaces. Sometimes the neighborhoods with the greatest challenges (those with giants like "Goliath" and armies of Philistine enemies) are the very places God finds servants and stewards he can use (1 Sam 17; 1 Cor 4:1).



Like King David, Prince Kaboo of the Kru people in Liberia chose to participate in God's work in his generation. As a child, Prince Kaboo (1873–1893) was taken hostage by a rival tribe and was about to be executed when he experienced a supernatural deliverance. After weeks of traveling through the jungle, Kaboo arrived at a mission station near

Monrovia, Liberia's capital. There, as a fourteen-year-old teenager, he wholeheartedly gave his life to Jesus Christ.

Prince Kaboo took on the name Samuel Kaboo Morris at his baptism, and he spent the next four years working and

studying Scripture—especially Jesus’ teaching about the Holy Spirit as recorded by his friend John (John 14–17). Kaboo was fascinated with the Holy Spirit, for he had personally experienced the Holy Spirit’s powerful deliverance. Eventually, the missionaries told Kaboo they had taught him all they knew and that if he wanted to learn more about the Holy Spirit, he would need to travel to the United States. Kaboo felt the need for more training about the Holy Spirit before being ready to return to the Kru as an evangelist. With no shoes or money, Kaboo walked to Monrovia’s harbor to find passage to New York—trusting his Father in Heaven to provide.

Kaboo’s story is powerful. The ship that transported Kaboo experienced revival with the captain and many crew coming to Christ. Within a few hours of arriving in New York, Kaboo led seventeen men to Christ at an inner-city rescue mission. On his third day in the United States, the eighteen-year-old evangelist preached at a Sunday school meeting and revival broke out with a new missionary society organized that very day. God provided money for Kaboo’s college tuition, housing, books and necessities. By the end of his first week in America, Kaboo had arrived in Fort Wayne, Indiana to begin studying at Taylor University—an evangelical college committed to raising up workers for the harvest fields who walk in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt 9:36; Acts 1:8).

Prince Kaboo’s arrival at Taylor University transformed not only Taylor University’s campus, but also the whole city of Fort Wayne. On his first Sunday in town, Kaboo walked to the front of the church and asked for permission to pray. As he prayed, the power and presence of the Holy

Spirit descended on the congregation in a way none had ever experienced before. The pastor reported, “what I said and what Sammy said I do not remember, but I know my soul was on fire as never before. . . . No such visitation of the Holy Spirit had ever been witnessed” by our congregation.¹



Two years later, on May 12, 1893, at the age of twenty, Prince Samuel Kaboo Morris died from an illness contracted after traveling through a snowstorm to preach. Since his death, Kaboo’s story has influenced thousands of students at Taylor University and elsewhere to participate with the Holy Spirit in mission and seek the Spirit’s power in witness. John Wengatz was a student at Taylor in 1906, the year he first read Kaboo’s story. Some fifty years later, after a lifetime invested as a missionary in Africa, Wengatz remarked “my tears never cease to flow as I read that unrepeatable story.”² Although Kaboo died at twenty, he was used mightily by God in his generation. Will those who tell the story of your life say the same?

Our Vision: Toward Ten Thousand “Tozers”

If you are pursuing God with the same passion and hunger displayed by Samuel Kaboo Morris, than you will be glad to meet A. W. Tozer (1897–1963). Tozer grew up poor without the opportunity to complete high school. While working in a tire factory he heard the good news

1 Lindley Baldwin, *Samuel Morris: The African Boy God Sent to Prepare an American University for Its Mission to the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1987), 59.

2 John Wengatz, *Sammy Morris: Spirit-Filled Life* (Upland, IN: Taylor University Press, 1954), Preface.

about Jesus, repented and believed. At nineteen, he began to preach, becoming one of the most influential pastors in his generation. His books *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy* have helped millions know and love the Triune God revealed in Scripture. When asked how he learned to read Scripture with such clarity and theological depth, Pastor Tozer would often point to his “friends” and “teachers.” These teachers were a list of some thirty-five Christian spiritual classics read and reread throughout Tozer’s life. Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics (SRSC) are for those with a hunger for the Holy Spirit like Prince Kaboo and a desire to be used like Pastor Tozer.

The Sacred Roots Project envisions ten thousand Christian leaders, serving in challenging ministry contexts across North America, engaging with spiritual classics in community by the year 2030. Will you join this growing community as we pursue God together by reading and discussing spiritual classics with gospel friends and kingdom coworkers (Matt 9:35)?

A larger dream also informs the Sacred Roots Project—a dream that imagines a million Christian workers equipped to serve among the global poor (Matt 9:36–38). The Center for the Study of Global Christianity reports that in the middle of 2020 there are approximately two and a half billion people living in urban poverty.³ This number will increase to over four billion by the year 2050. Sacred Roots dreams of equipping one million Christian leaders among this great multitude—women and men like Prince Kaboo—with access to excellent editions of some of the greatest spiritual classics the Christian tradition has

3 For the most current statistics, see www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/status-of-global-christianity/.

produced. Ultimately, the goal is increased faithfulness as leaders mature in representing Christ in local churches that are centered on Scripture, grounded in Great Tradition truth (Nicene), and engaged in contextually relevant witness to Christ's love in thousands of diverse contexts.⁴

Our Strategy:

Scripture, Friendship and Spiritual Classics

Sacred Roots' strategy is simple. We believe fresh readings of Christian spiritual classics can lead Christian leaders into a deeper engagement with the God revealed in Scripture and into deeper friendships with one another.

Christian spiritual classics strengthen and deepen our roots in Scripture and help us produce the Spirit's fruit. One day Jesus asked a serious student of the Bible a simple question, "*How do you read it?*" (Luke 10:26). Of the more than three hundred questions asked by Jesus in the Gospels, few are more relevant today. Faithfulness in our generation demands that we learn to read Scripture in a way consistent with the foundational truths held by followers of Jesus in every culture since the first century. We read Christian spiritual classics to discover faithful and fruitful readings of Scripture. As Dr. Davis has noted, the church's "Great Tradition" perennially opens our eyes to new riches in Scripture's "Authoritative Tradition."⁵

A truth believed by all Christians, in all places, and at all times is that there is one God who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From "before to beyond time," an eternal

4 Don Davis, *Sacred Roots: A Primer on Retrieving the Great Tradition* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2010), 35–45.

5 Ibid.

friendship between the Trinity's three persons has existed at the center of reality. Spiritual friendship provides the start and heart of truth. Just as spiritual classics can reveal new riches from Scripture, so they help us grow in love for God and neighbors. They can provide practical help in deepening our friendships with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and with other believers—both with believers in this generation and with those surrounding us in the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1; 13:7). Why do Christian leaders desperately need to pursue strong friendships? Start with these three reasons.

1. First, each of us has eyes far too small to see what God wants to show us! No one can begin to grasp the great things God is doing across 100 billion galaxies and throughout the many generations since the universe's creation. Friends, standing in different places provides additional eyes to see from different perspectives what God is doing in the world and across history.
2. Second, each of us battles a sinful nature that distorts our perception of the truth. We need friends who speak truth to us, sharpening us like iron sharpening iron (Prov 27:17).
3. Third, all of us view creation through a particular culture's time and place. Each culture exists with a unique version of virtue and vice. Friends who speak to us from other cultures and centuries often affirm virtues in our culture, but they can also reflect ways our culture's vice habitually offends against kingdom *shalom*.

In sum, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics help us grow in our friendship with God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–40). Neighbors include the living Christian leaders with whom we read and discuss this spiritual classic. However, “neighbor” also includes the author (or authors) of this spiritual classic. These women and men walked faithfully with God and neighbor. Their life and teachings produced good fruit in their generation and then continued to do so in the lives of other Christian leaders—often across many cultures and centuries. As an editorial team, we can personally testify to the fruitfulness of the time we have spent with our “friends,” the “ancient witnesses” in the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics. If you choose to invest in careful conversation with these saints of old (Heb 13:7), we are confident you will not only experience practical fruit in the present, but you will also gain new friends for eternity.

Tactical Notes: Christian Leaders Are Christian Readers

Throughout church history, fruitful Christian leaders have been intentional readers. Augustine (d. 430), a pastor and bishop in Africa, was challenged to a new level of ministry by reading a spiritual biography about an Egyptian Christian leader named Anthony (d. 356).⁶ Protestant leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Elizabeth Fry, Phoebe Palmer and many others all published editions of spiritual classics for Christian leaders in their generation. Charles Harrison Mason (d. 1961), founder of the largest Pentecostal denomination in North America (Church of God in Christ), was called to ministry through a reading

⁶ Athanasius, *Renewal in Christ: Athanasius on the Christian Life*, ed. Jeremy Treat, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 6 (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2022).

of the autobiography of missionary and evangelist Amanda Smith.⁷ More recently, leaders like C. S. Lewis, A. W. Tozer, James Houston, and Rick Warren have encouraged Christian leaders to read wisely, especially choosing Christian spiritual classics.⁸

How to Read the Text

Plan your reading. Reading a spiritual classic is a bit like reading your Bible. You can read it anywhere or anytime, but there are times and places that will position you to better receive insight and truth. SRSC readers tend to read each spiritual classic several times, and many will “read” it in both a written version (print or electronic) and in an audible version (audiobook). We read to hear what the original author of the text is saying and to understand what the Holy Spirit might be directing our attention to hear or reflect upon. On your day of rest (Sabbath) reserve some time to read or at least set aside some time to plan when you will read from your spiritual classic that week. If you have a daily commute, perhaps use some of the time to listen and reflect on an audible version of the SRSC.

Work your reading plan. Once you have planned to read your spiritual classic, begin with the Introduction. The introduction is written by a contemporary friend with significant ministry experience. This friend has spent much

7 Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist; Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and Her Travels in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa, as an Independent Missionary* (Chicago: Meyer, 1893).

8 Explore the essays in Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, eds., *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

time reading and getting to know the spiritual classic and the author who wrote it. Often, the introduction is written by someone who has read the spiritual classic dozens, if not hundreds, of times. The introduction will help you get the most out of your first several readings of the text.

After reading the Introduction, notice that all Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are divided into eight chapters. These chapters are not always of equal length, but they all are weighty enough to engage your head, heart, and hands as well as your habitat and habits. Following the eight chapters, every SRSC includes a short section called Continuing the Conversation. If you enjoyed reading the spiritual classic, then Continuing the Conversation will help you discover more resources to engage the author(s) of the spiritual classic.

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are divided into ten parts to make it easier to talk about the text with friends and coworkers. The table below provides four (of many) examples of how to read a SRSC with a group of friends. When friends commit to read and discuss a SRSC together, the group is called a Sacred Roots Cohort.

SRSC Section to Read	"Sunday School" Class	"Church-Based Seminary" Module	Monthly Pastor's Meeting	Quarterly Retreat Discussion Group
	<i>Ten Weeks</i>	<i>Eight Weeks</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Week 1</i>	<i>Week 1</i>	<i>Month 1</i>	<i>Read text before retreat and then discuss</i>
<i>Ch. 1</i>	<i>Week 2</i>			
<i>Ch. 2</i>	<i>Week 3</i>			
<i>Ch. 3</i>	<i>Week 4</i>	<i>Week 3</i>	<i>Month 2</i>	
<i>Ch. 4</i>	<i>Week 5</i>	<i>Week 4</i>		
<i>Ch. 5</i>	<i>Week 6</i>	<i>Week 5</i>		
<i>Ch. 6</i>	<i>Week 7</i>	<i>Week 6</i>		
<i>Ch. 7</i>	<i>Week 8</i>	<i>Week 7</i>	<i>Month 3</i>	
<i>Ch. 8</i>	<i>Week 9</i>	<i>Week 8</i>		
<i>Continuing the Conversation</i>	<i>Week 10</i>			

Review your reading. The best readers, like the best leaders, do more than make a plan and work it. They also pause to take time to review their work—or in this case—their reading.⁹ Robert Clinton has noted that only around 25 percent of leaders in the Bible finished well.¹⁰ If we hope to finish well in our generation we must learn to *attend* to our habitat, our head, our heart, our hands, and our habits. To *attend* means to pay attention, to apply our self, to prioritize and to value something enough to give it our time and our energy. Each chapter concludes with five types of questions aimed at helping you review your progress toward finishing well and hearing Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23).



Habitat? *Habitat questions* ask us to pause and look around at our environment, our culture, our generation, our nationality, and the things that make up the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times). Questions may ask about the author’s habitat or our own. Since the SRSC were written across many centuries and cultures, they often help us notice aspects of our culture needing attention.



Head? Auguste Rodin’s sculpture known as *The Thinker* sits before an 18-foot-tall sculpture called *The Gates of Hell*. The massive sculptural group reflects Rodin’s engagement with a spiritual classic by Dante, *The Divine Comedy*. *Head questions* require serious intellectual

9 The PWR (Plan, Work, Review) process is explained further by Don Allsman, *The Heroic Venture: A Parable of Project Leadership* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2006).

10 Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 185–87.

engagement as you talk with friends about the author's ideas, claims, and proposals.



Heart? In August of 1541 John Calvin wrote a letter to a friend with this promise: "When I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart presented as a sacrifice to God." Calvin's personal seal expressed this sincere desire. God not only owns our mind, but also our will and emotions. *Heart questions* will help you attend to the people and things to which you give your loves.



Hands? Albrecht Dürer sketched a drawing called *Study of the Hands of an Apostle* in the year 1508. The apostles were men of action, yet Dürer portrays the apostle's hands in prayer. The action to which SRSC call us are often surprising. *Hands questions* will challenge you to evaluate carefully what action you are to take after a particular reading.



Habits? Charlotte Mason (d. 1923) was a master teacher. She believed Christian formation must carefully attend to habit formation. Like laying railroad tracks, habit formation is hard work. But once laid, great work requires little effort just as railroad cars run smoothly on tracks. *Habit questions* challenge you to reflect on small daily or weekly actions that form your character and the character of those around you.

Reading with Friends

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are not meant to be read alone; indeed, it is impossible to do so. Every time we open a SRSC we read a book that *has been read* by thousands of Christian leaders in previous generations, *is being read* by thousands of Christian leaders in our generation, and *will be read* (if the return of Christ tarries) by thousands of Christian leaders in generations after us. The readers before us have already finished their race. These thousands of Christian leaders read the text in hundreds of different cultures and across dozens of different generations. All these “friends” read this text with you now. As you read the SRSC, imagine yourself talking about *Benedict’s Rule* (SRSC 2) with the reformer Martin Luther; or picture yourself discussing Madam Guyon’s *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* with the missionary Amy Carmichael. Remember you never read a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic alone.

However, it is not just leaders who have gone before, it is also leaders in the present with whom you must imagine reading this SRSC. Whatever benefit you find in reading will be doubled when you share it with a friend. Whatever trouble or difficulty you find in reading the text will be halved when you share it with a friend. Resolve to never read a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic alone.

Perhaps you have noticed that the word “generation” has already appeared in this preface more than fifteen times? The SRSC represent the work of many generations

working together. Five generations of evangelicals have worked and prayed together on this project since its public commencement in 2018. But these five generations of living evangelicals represent only a small sample of the many generations who have tested the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the SRSC. Why does this matter? In part, it matters because these texts are treasures to use and then pass on to the next generation of leaders. Recognize the emerging leaders God has called you to serve and steward—share the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics with them.

Careful readers of Scripture know that the most influential leaders among God's people have always worked in teams. King David's teams became legends—"the three," "the thirty." The list of Paul's missionary and ministry team members whose first name we know from the New Testament runs to nearly one hundred. Our Sacred Roots team of teams prays that this text will be a blessing and a reliable resource for you and your gospel friends as you pursue kingdom business together.

Grace and Peace,

Don, Uche, Greg, May, Ryan, Isaiah, and Hank

The Nicene Creed with Scriptural Support

The Urban Ministry Institute

We believe in one God,

Deut 6:4–5; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:6

the Father Almighty,

Gen 17:1; Dan 4:35; Matt 6:9; Eph 4:6; Rev 1:8

Maker of heaven and earth

Gen 1:1; Isa 40:28; Rev 10:6

and of all things visible and invisible.

Ps 148; Rom 11:36; Rev 4:11

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son
of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God
from God, Light from Light, True God from True God,
begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father,

John 1:1–2; 3:18; 8:58; 14:9–10; 20:28; Col 1:15, 17; Heb 1:3–6

through whom all things were made.

John 1:3; Col 1:16

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from
heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the
Virgin Mary and became human.

Matt 1:20–23; Luke 19:10; John 1:14; 6:38

Who for us too, was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
suffered and was buried.

*Matt 27:1–2; Mark 15:24–39, 43–47; Acts 13:29; Rom 5:8;
Heb 2:10; 13:12*

The third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
Mark 16:5–7; Luke 24:6–8; Acts 1:3; Rom 6:9; 10:9; 2 Tim 2:8

ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of
the Father.

Mark 16:19; Eph 1:19–20

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the
dead, and his Kingdom will have no end.

*Isa 9:7; Matt 24:30; John 5:22; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom 14:9; 2 Cor 5:10;
2 Tim 4:1*

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver,

*Gen 1:1–2; Job 33:4; Pss 104:30; 139:7–8; Luke 4:18–19; John 3:5–6;
Acts 1:1–2; 1 Cor 2:11; Rev 3:22*

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26; 20:22

who together with the Father and Son is worshiped and
glorified,

Isa 6:3; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Rev 4:8

who spoke by the prophets.

Num 11:29; Mic 3:8; Acts 2:17–18; 2 Pet 1:21

We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:17; Eph 5:25–28; 1 Tim 3:15; Rev 7:9

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sin,

Acts 22:16; Eph 4:4–5; 1 Pet 3:21

And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life
of the age to come.

Isa 11:6–10; Mic 4:1–7; Luke 18:29–30; Rev 21:1–5; 21:22–22:5

Amen.

Memory Verses

Below are suggested memory verses, one for each section of the Creed.

The Father

Rev 4:11 (ESV) — Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

The Son

John 1:1 (ESV) — In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Son's Mission

1 Cor 15:3–5 (ESV) — For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

The Holy Spirit

Rom 8:11 (ESV) — If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The Church

1 Pet 2:9 (ESV) — But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Our Hope

1 Thess 4:16–17 (ESV) — For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

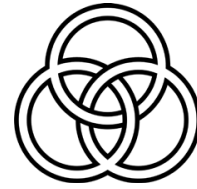
From Before to Beyond Time: The Plan of God and Human History

Adapted from Suzanne de Dietrich. *God's Unfolding Purpose*.
Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

I. Before Time (Eternity Past)

1 Cor. 2:7 (ESV) – But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory (cf. Titus 1:2).

- A. The Eternal Triune God
- B. God's Eternal Purpose
- C. The Mystery of Iniquity
- D. The Principalities and Powers



II. Beginning of Time (Creation and Fall)

Gen. 1:1 (ESV) – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

- A. Creative Word
- B. Humanity
- C. Fall
- D. Reign of Death and First Signs of Grace



III. Unfolding of Time (God's Plan Revealed through Israel)

Gal. 3:8 (ESV) – And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (cf. Rom. 9:4-5).

- A. Promise (Patriarchs)
- B. Exodus and Covenant at Sinai
- C. Promised Land
- D. The City, the Temple, and the Throne
(Prophet, Priest, and King)
- E. Exile
- F. Remnant



IV. Fullness of Time (Incarnation of the Messiah)

Gal. 4:4-5 (ESV) – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- A. The King Comes to His Kingdom
- B. The Present Reality of His Reign
- C. The Secret of the Kingdom:
the Already and the Not Yet
- D. The Crucified King
- E. The Risen Lord



V. The Last Times (The Descent of the Holy Spirit)

Acts 2:16-18 (ESV) – But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be,” God declares, “that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”

- A. Between the Times: the Church as
Foretaste of the Kingdom
- B. The Church as Agent of the Kingdom
- C. The Conflict Between the Kingdoms
of Darkness and Light



VI. The Fulfillment of Time (The Second Coming)

Matt. 13:40-43 (ESV) – Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- A. The Return of Christ
- B. Judgment
- C. The Consummation of His Kingdom



VII. Beyond Time (Eternity Future)

1 Cor. 15:24-28 (ESV) – Then comes the end, when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

A. Kingdom Handed Over to God the Father

B. God as All in All



About the Sacred Roots Project

The Sacred Roots Thriving in Ministry Project seeks to equip and empower under-resourced congregational leaders in urban, rural, and incarcerated communities. One avenue for accomplishing this goal is the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics, a series of abridged Christian spiritual classics that equip congregational leaders to engage the wealth of the Great Tradition.

Other Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics include:

Praying the Psalms with Augustine and Friends

Edited by Dr. Carmen Joy Imes

***Becoming a Community of Disciples:
Guidelines from Abbot Benedict and Bishop Basil***

Edited by Rev. Dr. Greg Peters

***Christian Mission and Poverty:
Wisdom from 2,000 Years of Church Leaders***

Edited by Rev. Dr. Andrew T. Draper

Books Jesus Read: Learning from the Apocrypha

Edited by Dr. Robert F. Lay

Renewal in Christ: Athanasius on the Christian Life

Edited by Rev. Dr. Jeremy Treat

Las Casas on Faithful Witness

Edited by Rev. Dr. Robert Chao Romero
and Rev. Marcos Canales

*Reading the Bible Spiritually:
Guidance from Guigo II, Reformers, and Puritans*
Edited by Rev. Dr. Greg Peters

The Pursuit of God: A. W. Tozer on the First Priority
Edited by Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

*Pulpit Spirituality:
Jonathan Edwards on Soul Work and Soul Care*
Edited by Dr. Kyle Strobel and Dr. Kenneth Minkema

*Mission with Prophetic Power:
The Journal of John Woolman*
Edited by Dr. Evan B. Howard

*Reading the Bible to Meet Jesus:
Irenaeus' Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*
Edited by Dr. Gregory S. MaGee

*Killing Sin:
Lessons on Holiness from John Owen and Phoebe Palmer*
Edited by Dr. Daniel Hill

*The Interior Castle:
Learning to Pray with Teresa of Ávila*
Edited by Nancy Reyes Frazier

*The Autobiography of George Mueller:
A Story of Trust and Missions*
Edited by Dr. Uche Anizor

The Senior Editorial Team of the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics includes:

Rev. Dr. Don Davis
Publisher
The Urban Ministry Institute

Rev. Dr. Hank Voss
Executive Editor
Taylor University

Dr. Uche Anizor
Senior Editor
Biola University, Talbot School of Theology

Rev. Dr. Greg Peters
Senior Editor
Biola University, Torrey Honors College

Dr. May Young
Senior Editor
Taylor University

Rev. Ryan Carter
Managing Editor
The Urban Ministry Institute

Isaiah Swain
Managing Editor
Taylor University

The Senior Editorial Team acknowledges and appreciates the support and encouragement of the following ministers and scholars for their various contributions to this project: Dr. Gwenfair Adams (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Rev. Dr. Nigel Black (Winslow Baptist Church),

Dr. Jonathan Calvillo (Boston University School of Divinity), Dr. Laura Edwards (Taylor University), Rev. Nathan Esla (Lutheran Bible Translators), Dr. Nancy Frazier (Dallas Theological Seminary), Dr. Jeff Greenman (Regent College), Dr. Kevin Hector (University of Chicago Divinity School), Rev. Dr. Wil Hernandez (Centerquest), Dr. James Houston (Regent College), Dr. Evan B. Howard (Spirituality Shoppe), Rev. Susie Krehbiel (Missionary, Retired), Rev. Dr. Tim Larsen (Wheaton College), Dr. Stephanie Lowery (Africa International University), Dr. Daniel Owens (Hanoi Bible College), Rev. Dr. Oscar Owens (West Angeles Church of God), Dr. Bob Priest (Taylor University), Rev. Dr. Robert Romero (University of California, Los Angeles), Rev. Dr. Jerry Root (Wheaton College), Dr. Fred Sanders (Biola University), Dr. Glen Scorgie (Bethel University), Dr. Kyle Strobel (Biola University), Dr. Daniel Treier (Wheaton College), and Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School). Illustrations throughout the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are done by Naomi Noyes.

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are dedicated to all Christian leaders who have loved the poor and have recognized the importance of Christian spiritual classics for nurturing the next generation. We especially recognize these fourteen:

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Rebecca Protten (1718–1780)

Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845)

Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874)

Dora Yu (1873–1931)

A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

Howard Thurman (1899–1981)

Watchman Nee (1903–1972)

James Houston (1922–)

J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

Tom Oden (1931–2016)

René Padilla (1932–2021)

Dallas Willard (1935–2013)

Bruce Demarest (1935–2021)

Remember your leaders,
those who spoke to you the word of God.
Consider the outcome of their way of life,
and imitate their faith.

~ Hebrews 13:7



Scripture Index

Genesis

1:1, 239, 243
1:1–2, 240
1:26, 41, 60, 76
1:26–27, 45
1:28, 45, 60, 61
2:23, 174
4:3–8, 180
12:1–3, 166
13:14–16, 166
15:5, 206
15:5–6, 166
15:6, 87, 106
17:1, 239
18:27, 170
22:1–19, 106
22:17, 106
25:23, 86
26:4, 71
27:41–45, 106

48:9, 86
48:11, 86
48:14–19, 87

Exodus

2:14, 180
3:11, 170
4:10, 170
14, 185
17:14, 79
20:4, 79
31:18, 94
32:7, 88, 94
32:7–8, 22
32:9–10, 23
32:32, 23
33:1, 78
33:3, 60, 78
34:28, 87, 94

Leviticus

11:3, 30
11:6, 30
11:13–15, 29
16:7–9, 83
23:29, 82

Numbers

11:29, 240
17, 172
18:27, 50
21:7–9, 79

Deuteronomy

4:1, 29
4:34, 49
6:4–5, 239
10:16, 194
14:7, 30
14:8–12, 29
14:12–14, 29
17:18–20, 212
31:20, 60
32:8–9, 49
32:15, 179

Joshua

1:8, 206
2:2–6, 168
2:9, 169
2:12, 169

2:17–19, 169

2:18, 169

2:21, 169

1 Samuel

17, 225

1 Chronicles

21, 213

2 Chronicles

31:14, 50

Nehemiah

9:6–38, 224

Job

1:1, 170
5:17–26, 153
11:2, 102
14:4–5, 170
19:26, 55
33:4, 240
38:11, 43

Psalms

1, 206
1:1, 31
1:1–2, 206
1:1–3, 210
1:3–6, 147

1:23–31, 184
2:7–8, 70
2:11, 81
3:5, 55
5:2, 212
12:3–5, 183
18:25–26, 181
18:44, 193
19:1–3, 56
22:6–8, 162
22:16, 77
22:18, 77
22:20, 77
22:22, 60
24:1, 186
28:7, 55
31:18, 183
32:1, 137
32:10, 58
34:11–17, 58
34:12, 193
37:35–37, 183
42:2, 60
46:10, 211
49:3, 207
50:14–15, 186
50:16–23, 49
51, 225
51:1–17, 171
51:17, 53, 186
57:2, 223
62:4, 183
63:6, 206
69:31–32, 186
77:3, 206
77:12, 206
78, 206, 224
78:36–37, 183
89:20, 170
90:1, 223
104:30, 240
105, 206, 224
106, 206, 224
110:1, 80
117, 211
118, 211
118:12, 77
118:18, 152
118:19–20, 136
118:22, 77
118:24, 77
119:10, 206
119:15, 206
119:23, 206
119:27, 206
119:48, 206
119:78, 206
119:148, 206
136, 224
139:7–8, 47, 240
141:5, 152
143:5, 206
145:5, 206
148, 239

Proverbs

1:6, 60
1:7, 208
1:17, 75
2:1–15, 207
2:21–22, 182
20:27, 43, 59
27:17, 230

Isaiah

1:2, 193
1:10, 193
1:11–13, 52
1:16–20, 46
3:9–10, 78
5, 98
5:21, 195
6:3, 149, 240
9:7, 240
11:6–10, 240
16:2, 147
26:20, 136
28:16, 77
29:13, 183
33:13, 193
33:16, 147
33:16–17, 147
33:18, 147
40:3, 193
40:10, 149
40:12, 98
40:13, 60

40:28, 239
42:6–7, 88
45:1, 80
45:2–3, 147
49:6–7, 89
49:17, 98
50:6–7, 77
50:7, 77
50:8–9, 77
52:5, 118
53, 206
53:1–12, 162
53:5, 75
53:7, 75
58:4–5, 53
58:6–10, 54
60:17, 113
61:1–2, 89
62:11, 149
65:2, 78
66:1, 98
66:2, 74

Jeremiah

2:12–13, 147
4:3–4, 193
4:4, 193
7:2–3, 193
7:22–23, 52
9:23–24, 73
9:25–26, 194
25, 98

Ezekiel

11:19, 60
18:30, 46
33:11, 46
36:25–27, 42
36:26–27, 207
37:12, 136
37:14, 207
47:12, 148

Daniel

3, 224
4:35, 239
7, 206
7:7–8, 94
7:10, 149
7:24, 93
9:24–27, 98

Joel

2:28–29, 207

Micah

3:8, 240
4:1–7, 240

Zephaniah

3:19, 148

Zechariah

8:17, 52
13:7, 77

Malachi

1:11, 148
3:1, 47

Matthew

1:5, 225
1:20–23, 239
4:1–11, 213
5:5, 140
5:7, 73
5:39, 50, 137
5:40, 50, 137
5:41, 50, 137
5:44–46, 50, 137
6:9, 239
6:9–13, 154
6:10, 223
6:13, 35
6:14, 73
6:25–30, 206
7:1–2, 73
7:6, 144
9:13, 76
9:35, 228
9:36, 226
9:36–38, 228
10:16, 124
13:40–43, 244
15:8, 183
16:18, 240
19:12, 34
20:16, 60

Matthew, cont.

22:14, 195
 22:37–40, 231
 24:30, 240
 25:23, 235
 26:41, 35
 27:1–2, 239
 28:19, 240

Mark

2:17, 76
 10:13–16, 3
 12:29, 239
 15:24–39, 239
 15:43–47, 239
 16:5–7, 240
 16:19, 240

Luke

4:18–19, 240
 5:32, 76
 6:30, 27, 152
 10:26, 229
 17:1–3, 181
 18:29–30, 240
 19:10, 239
 22:24–25, 13
 24:6–8, 240
 24:39, 73

John

1:1, 241
 1:1–2, 239

1:3, 239
 1:14, 239
 3:5–6, 240
 3:18, 239
 5:22, 240
 6:38, 239
 8:58, 239
 12:6, 224
 14–17, 226
 14:9–10, 239
 14:16–18, 240
 14:17, 207
 14:26, 240
 15, 206, 223
 15:12, 208
 15:26, 240
 20:22, 240
 20:28, 239

Acts

1:1–2, 240
 1:3, 240
 1:8, 226
 1:11, 240
 2:1–4, 207
 2:16–18, 244
 2:17–18, 240
 2:24, 74
 8:17, 207
 10:44–45, 207
 13:1–3, 3
 13:22, 170
 13:29, 239

13:36, 223, 225
14:22, 84
17:31, 240
19:6, 207
20:7, 7
22:16, 240

Romans

5:8, 239
6:9, 240
8, 224
8:6, 207
8:9, 207
8:11, 207, 241
8:13, 224
9:4–5, 243
10:9, 240
11:36, 239
14:9, 240

1 Corinthians

1:2, 240
1:20, 75
2:7, 243
2:9, 149
2:11, 240
3:21–22, 13
3:23, 13
4:1, 225
4:4, 191
6:2, 127
6:9–10, 143
8:1, 28

8:6, 239
9:3–6, 4
10:17, 240
11:1, 159, 176
15:3–5, 241
15:24–28, 245
16:22, 145

2 Corinthians

5:10, 122, 240
5:17, 207
8:21, 122
13:14, 240

Galatians

3:8, 243
4:4–5, 244
5–6, 224
5:16–17, 209
6:7, 129

Ephesians

1:19–20, 240
2:8–9, 74
4:4–5, 240
4:6, 239
4:9–11, 130
4:25, 181
5:1, 159
5:2, 174
5:18, 207
5:25–28, 240

Philippians

2:10, 81
4:3, 3

Colossians

1:15, 239
1:16, 239
1:17, 239
1:20, 82
3:16, 213
3:20, 13

1 Thessalonians

3:13, 37
4:16–17, 242
5:22, 126

2 Thessalonians

3:15, 127

1 Timothy

3:15, 240
6:7, 142
6:10, 142

2 Timothy

2:8, 240
2:12, 129
4:1, 240

Titus

1:2, 243
3:1, 24

Hebrews

1:3–4, 70
1:3–6, 239
1:5, 70
1:7, 70
1:13, 70
2:10, 239
3:5, 172
10:37, 47
11, 224
11:35, 225
12:1, 230
12:1–2, 13
12:6, 152
13:7, 230, 231, 250
13:12, 239
13:17, 205

James

1:5, 211
1:8, 47
2:25, 225
4:6, 102, 150

1 Peter

1:8, 74
1:13, 81
1:21, 81
2:4–5, 32
2:9, 241
2:11, 143
2:12, 165
2:22, 164
2:24, 164
3:13–16, 92
3:21, 240
4:19, 211

2 Peter

1:21, 240
3:3–4, 47

1 John

1:8–10, 211
2:2, 45
2:7–11, 208
4:3, 35

Revelation

1:8, 239
3:22, 240
4:8, 240
4:11, 239, 241
7:9, 240
10:6, 239
21:1–5, 240
21:22–22:5, 240
22:12, 149



"A great primer for those who have never read the Apostolic Fathers. Readable, factual and succinct. A must-read for pastors, priests, and scholars. The development of doctrine is keenly illustrated in this important volume."

~ Father Michael Pacella III, PhD

"Dr. Michael Cooper explores the theological truths and missiological points of interest in the lives and ministries of the Apostolic Fathers. He endeavors to apply the tactful approaches of the Apostolic Fathers to ecclesiastical issues that persist today, such as teaching a sound doctrine of the Triune God, and especially of Jesus Christ. The impressive lives and contributions of the Apostolic Fathers urge Christians today to imitate their faith by living Christ-like in our diverse situations. This book is a must-read book for Christians, and especially missions practitioners."

~ Hrudra Ranjan Lohora, PhD,
Dean of Academics,
Mission India Theological Seminary



Dr. Cooper earned a PhD in Intercultural Studies with a focus on religious movements and a minor in theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He currently serves as a missiologist for East West, where he focuses on missiological research and equipping missionaries for effective cultural engagement, and as Professor of Missiological Theology at Mission India Theological Seminary.