



The Teaching of the Twelve: Believing Practicing the Primitive Christianity of the Ancient Didache Community

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What can we know about the practices of the early church?

“The Didache is the most important book you've never read,” begins Tony Jones, in this engaging study. The Didache is an early handbook of an anonymous Christian community, likely written before some of the New Testament books were written. It spells out a way of life for Jesus-followers that includes instruction on how to treat one another, how to practice the Eucharist, and how to take in wandering prophets. In *The Teaching of the Twelve*, Jones unpacks the ancient document, and he traces the life of a small house church in Missouri that is trying to live according to its precepts.

Readers will find *The Teaching of the Twelve* inspirational and challenging, and they will discover a unique window into the life of the very earliest followers of Jesus the Christ. A new, contemporary English translation of the Didache is included.

The Teaching of the Twelve: Believing Practicing the Primitive Christianity of the Ancient Didache Community Details

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Author : Tony Jones

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From Reader Review The Teaching of the Twelve: Believing Practicing the Primitive Christianity of the Ancient Didache Community for online ebook

Fred Kohn says

This was a practical (not academic) look into the Didache with some interesting observations about how early Christian communities were likely different from modern ones, especially in their emphasis on religious practice over religious beliefs.

Rusty del Norte says

Teaching of the Twelve serves as an insightful introduction to the Didache for the uninitiated & novice theology/religion reader. It gives a book breakdown of the sections of the Didache as well as a basic profile for who & how this 1st century Christian text was composed.

One of the best things is that it provides a nice translation of the Didache. Some translations available are outdated (much as the 19th century Early Church Fathers translations one will come across). There is no break down of the text, but instead gives you clues as to it's between Gospels & Pauline letter's time frame of composition. Truly, these people lived the debates between those who wished to keep thi as no more than a brach of 'Nazarene Judaism' & a worldwide inclusion of the Jewish faith tradition.

Tony brings up several issues that complicate intramural feuds among Christians, but points to this text as a way around them. With help from Trucker Frank & the Cymbrogi community, it is given a practical usage form believers. That is to focus on the simple part of the faith. This is something many people seek but are unable to find.

Whether you are just getting into Ante-Nicene Christianity or you are looking for a middle way, I would recommend this book. It is something many Christians need.

Jason Evans says

We Protestant Christians have a funny relationship with ancient texts. Our entire living and understanding of God hinges upon one ancient text, the Bible. Yet at the same time, many of us enjoy taking jabs at those who site “extra-biblical” ancient books. (Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. I heard what you said about the Apocrypha.)

Tony Jones addresses one of those unfamiliar, ancient volumes, the Didache (pronounced, di-dah-kay), in his book, The Teaching of the Twelve. The Didache is one of the earliest writings we have of Christians after Pentecost. And as Jones explains, this little book was to be, “a handbook for those new to Christianity.” But what might a book written by and for Christians in the first couple of centuries be of value to Christians today?

Christianity in the West is within the throes of major shifts—amidst the Church and surrounding culture. Within the upheaval, many Christians find themselves agitated by all the hoopla that is church. Why must we do this? Why do we need that?

Simultaneously, there are those that have stripped away all that seems unnecessary, yet find themselves asking, “What now defines us and binds us? And how do we go about our life together?”

For all those unsettled and searching, Jones’ new book brings a fresh, yet age-old perspective to the conversation. As he says, we aren’t the first to find ourselves faced with such challenges:

“Of course, we’re not the first generation to quest after a raw, primitive version of the faith. At various stages over the past two millennia, Christians have questioned the traditions of “church” and “religion” in an effort to follow Jesus more authentically. ... And all along, a manual of primitive Christianity sat hidden, right in front of us.”

In *The Teaching of the Twelve*, Jones provides intelligent and accessible background, commentary, interpretation and reflection on the *Didache*. While his book is thoughtful, it is equally practical—just as the text he writes about is.

But the reader is not left with just the opinions of another Christian academic. As Jones writes, he walks alongside a Christian community in Minnesota (Cymbrogi) that has reflected on the *Didache* for some time. His commentary is paired with that of this rural house church and its truck-driving leader, Frank. The inclusion of a contemporary community attempting to interpret and apply this ancient book only makes Jones’ take even more approachable.

I found the *Didache* to be a refreshingly uncluttered yet challenging reflection. And I’m a bit disappointed that I haven’t been thoroughly exposed to the *Didache* until now. As Jones says in the first chapter, “The *Didache* is the most important book you’ve never heard of.” This may be true for many of us. Today we live with countless options and opportunities, we are never short of information. In the midst of that, following Jesus can become quite complicated. *The Teaching of the Twelve* encourages us to get “back to the basics.” As Jones says in his Epilogue:

“Our brothers and sisters in the faith who lived in the *Didache* community call us away from the marginalia that consumes us today. They call us to simple community in which righteous living is taught and expected, sharing life is a way of life, visiting preachers are welcomed but not given any power in the community, baptism and Eucharist are practiced regularly, and Jesus’ return is expected and hoped for. Just a few activities, done well, shaped the *Didache* community.”

I like that: just a few activities, done well. Is it that simple? It never is. But maybe this little book can help you and your community focus on the essentials in order that a life may grow out of that which can better manage the complications that come along. Pick up Tony’s book and give it a shot.

Ryan Motter says

Reads like an extended instructional sermon on the *Didache*, sprinkled through with illustrations drawn

specifically from one intentional non-traditional community. Full of lots of interesting information but not a particularly compelling read. Jones' tone seems to oscillate between drab seminary lecture, over-excited hip cool preacher, and simple faithful Christian seeking to live within the orthopraxy suggested by the Didache

Tim Beck says

this sounded interesting... a book based on the ancient lost text of the Didache - written between the synoptic gospels and the Pauline epistles.

at times Tony Jones' writing is very heady but i have to admit, Jones gives an interesting history lesson on an ancient writing that may have served as a text for training and building early church disciples.

despite its headiness - it was not a difficult read.

i like the simplistic look at what a follower of Christ is and should be.

The complete Didache text is included - with Jones' commentary and explanation. it is a manual for living faith.

"hate no one. correct some. pray for others, and some you should love more than your own life."

Don Heiman says

In 2009 Paraclete Press published Tony Jones' book "The Teaching of the 12: believing and practicing the primitive christianity of the ancient Didache community." This community lived during the first centuries AD in land bordering present day Syria and Palestine. The community used the Didache writings to train its Christian converts in the pragmatics of how to live in a state of love and joy. Jones' research and explanations of the Didache is very easy to understand and full of insight. His reflection questions at the end of each chapter are excellent. (P)

Seth Thomas says

A look at one of the earliest Christian texts, written sometime between the Synoptic Gospels and the writings of Paul. Excellent view of daily life and expectations of new believers in the forming church.

Alan Stucky says

The teaching of the 12 is an interesting little read. I found it to be a nice introduction to the Didache. It's only about 120 pages long and an easy read for the non-theologian. He includes his own translation of the Didache and draws on enough other solid resources that it's clear he's coming from a real depth of understanding.

I would definitely recommend it for people who are unfamiliar with the scholarly world of the New Testament. It is not, however, an in depth, scholarly look at the Didache. There are other resources for that.

I do wonder how much of Tony's own biases come through in this. He's been a big voice in the world of the Emerging church. One who comes out more liberal than others. What struck me as I finished it up today was the recurrence of the ideas of "doing your best" if you can't reach the idea. It's a pragmatism that is legitimately present in the Didache but, for some reason, jumped out at me knowing more about Tony. It's a line of thinking that will surely cause conservatives feathers to be ruffled. Perhaps it's why Tony was attracted to it in the first place.

Overall, I think he does a fair job of connecting the teachings of this little document of the early church to our setting in the western world in a way that normal people can access it. Thumbs up from me.

Lee Harmon says

Every Christian should read the Didache (DID-ah-kay). Every one. You can read the whole thing in twenty minutes, so you have no excuse.

Didache simply means teachings. By our best guess, this is the earliest Christian literature not in the Bible. It probably predates one or more Gospels, and may be made up of about four separate writings. The opening portion appears taken directly from the Q source. So early are the teachings of this Didache community that they show no indication of familiarity with any Pauline writings.

The Didache is not a book about believing, but about living. It's not about evangelizing, but about being a neighbor. It's a guidebook about how to share the Eucharist, how to give alms, how to baptize, how to appoint elders and treat prophets, and more. You won't read anything about miracles, the twelve disciples, the crucifixion, or the resurrection. It's just about how to be a Christian.

Jones relates the words of the Didache, provides a short, inspirational analysis, and relates how a group of Christians he knows has taken its teachings and humbly formed a community determined to return to the simple, compassionate teachings of the early church.

Jeff Reed says

This a nice, short introduction to the Didache. The author presents the material in a very accessible manner for all readers and the study/reflection questions at the end of each chapter are quite helpful and would be very good in a small group setting. I do think he misses the mark on the Eucharist however, equating it to a potluck which no serious sacramental or historical theologian would do.

David Wierzbicki says

Tony has written a short and accessible commentary on the *Didache*—a manual for Christian life from the first few decades after Jesus. It is a work that is remarkable for its lack of New Testament influence. The community that composed the Didache seem to have been uninformed by the writings of Paul and contain

only scant material that echoes the canonical gospels. It is a fascinating manual for a community committed living a faith in Christ. What you do with your hands, not just your head is what is the focus here.

Tony presents the work (both an original translation and commentary) in an accessible yet scholarly style that allows you space to breathe in the essence of the Didache and contemplate its place in the community that created it. Application/Implication comes in conversations with Tony's friend Frank Schutzwohl (Trucker Frank) as he explains how the Didache is formative for the house church community of which he is a part.

Karen says

Found the Didache very interesting. I had never heard of it before. Also, the community studying it was quite intriguing. Would like to read an entire book just on them. Wish there had been more to this book. It was a little LITE..

David says

The Didache is a document from very early Christianity, around the same time as the Gospels, that gives instruction to Christians on how to live. Tony Jones book is a translation with introduction and commentary on this text. He argues that it is a gem of a book, lost to most of Christian history, but with practical lessons for Christians today. The Didache is very Jesus-centered and practical, much more focus on how to live than on what to believe. Jones does a great job of bringing this book to light for contemporary readers.

Jones never says this text should have been included in the Scripture. I think the benefit of the Didache is that it has a much more biblical message than much of the junk at Christian bookstores. Perhaps if more Christians lay aside the latest fluffy bestseller and picked up classics like the Didache, as the Cymbrogi community Jones mentions throughout has, the Church today would become more like Christ.

Kevin says

This handy book takes the Didache and helps the reader flush out ideas and applications that flow from that ancient document. I really enjoyed the way Jones presented the material. It was readable and engaging; inspiring, an at times convicting, without being preachy. Provides both some useful background to this document but also a way to start thinking about how it might impact your life.

Highly recommended.

Jim Hering says

There are many texts from the early days of the Church that didn't make it into the Bible. Many because the Church at the time deemed them heretical in their teachings. This book studies the Didache (DID-a-kay). The author supposes that the Didache was left out of the Bible because it dealt with the mundane and the daily.

It's not really deep. Instead it's very practical. Jones' discussion of the early community that used the text and how it applies to us today is well worth every page of this short read. Many of us wonder how we are to live as Jesus followers in the world today. This 2000 year old picture may give many of us a big clue.
