

Life Together Spring 2017

Epistle to Diognetus

READING for JANUARY 22nd

Diognetus 2

1 Come, then, clear your mind of all its prejudices and cast aside the custom that deceives you, and become a new person, as it were, from the beginning, as if you were about to hear a new message, even as you yourself admit. See not only with your eyes but also with your intellect what substance or what form those happen to have whom you call and regard as gods. 2 Is not one of them stone, like that upon which we walk, and another bronze, no better than the utensils that have been forged for our use, and another wood, already rotted away, and another silver, which needs a watchman to guard it lest it be stolen, and another iron, corroded by rust, and another pottery, not a bit more attractive than that made for the most unmentionable use? 3 Are not all these made of perishable matter? Are they not forged by iron and fire? Did the sculptor not make one of them, and the coppersmith another, the silversmith another, and the potter yet another? Before they were shaped by the skills of these craftsmen into the form they have, was it not possible—indeed, is it not possible even now—for each of them to have been given a different form? Might not the ordinary utensils now formed out of the same material be made similar to such images as these, if the same craftsmen were available? 4 Again, could not these things that are now worshiped by you be made by human hands into utensils like the rest? Are they not all deaf and blind, without souls, without feelings, without movement? Do they not all rot, do they not all decay? 5 These are the things you call gods; you serve them, you worship them, and in the end you become like them. 6 This is why you hate the Christians: because they do not consider these objects to be gods. 7 For do not you yourselves, who now regard and worship them as gods, in fact much more despise them? Are you not mocking and insulting them much more when you leave unguarded the stone or pottery gods you worship but lock up the silver and gold ones at night and post guards by them during the day, lest they be stolen? 8 And as for the honors that you think you are offering them: if they are aware of them, then you are in fact insulting them; but if they are not aware, then you are exposing them by worshiping them with the blood and fat of victims. 9 Let one of you undergo this treatment! Allow these things to be done to you! Why, there is not a single individual who would willingly submit to such punishment, for a human being has feelings and reason; but the stone does submit, for it has no feeling. Therefore you disprove its ability to feel. 10 Well, I could say many other things about the fact that Christians are not enslaved to such gods, but if these arguments should seem insufficient to anyone, then I think it is useless to say more.

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Acts 17:22-31 (NRSV)

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23 For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26 From one ancestor[a] he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God[b] and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’

29 Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. 30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Questions as you Read and Annotate

What in these readings surprised you?

Where do you see *Diognetus* depending upon Paul’s words in Acts 17:22-31?

Does *Diognetus* expand upon Paul’s teaching in any way?

It is unlikely that any of us worship idols made of gold, silver, or stone today. What idols do we worship?

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