

Step by Step - Section 2:

"There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but there is certainly a great difference between these two ways."

This is pretty straightforward: Each person in life has a choice to make, a journey to the Eternal Light of God, or away from that light. No one is static. They are either heading in one direction or the other.

The text makes it clear that you cannot be going to both locations simultaneously. There is a choice each person makes and the evidence of this choice is manifested in the lives of the seeker: a way of light is comprised of one type of conduct and nature, the way of death is comprised of an opposing type of conduct and nature.

What to take from this: I have an important choice to make - life or death. The choice is mine based on the path I choose.

"The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love Alaha who made you; second, your neighbour as yourself; and you should never do to others, what you yourself would not want done to you by others."

Your whole existence is predicated on these 2 principles: The soul cannot live separate from the Presence of God, in entering a covenant with the One God, you have eternal life. That is the first point, the second point is you live a life of peace and compassion with others. A life of reciprocity. If you don't like when someone treats you badly, never treat another person badly. If you like it when someone treats you with kindness, make sure to treat others with kindness.

What to take from this: Its time to focus my attention on my Creator and to make my love and commitment to God abundantly clear. And I need to make sure to treat all people with kindness, never subjecting people to anything, that I myself would not like.

"And of these sayings the teaching is this: (You shall) bless all those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for all those who persecute you. For what good is it then if you love only those who love you? Do the gentiles not also do the same? But you should love those who hate you; and you shall not have an enemy."

Let's summarize the points of this paragraph:

Bless all who curse you.

Pray for your enemies.

Fast for those who persecute you.

Love those who hate you.

In the modern world, what does it mean to curse someone. Some people think this means when another person swears or uses foul language at them, but this is not the original idea behind a curse. Someone who invokes a curse places an evil omen or wish upon another person. In contemporary society, does this happen much? It is more common for someone to swear at you in this day and age, than to lay an actual curse on you. At the time of the writing of the Didache the invocation of curses or dark magic, was much more prevalent.

Still, if anyone wishes you ill will in anyway, you are not allowed to take offense or curse them back. You put an end to the bad behaviour by pre-emptively blessing the person in question. Not only do you not respond negatively, you respond in a rather surprising fashion: you bless that person instead.

In similar fashion, if you have people who simply do not like you for whatever reason, it may be your tendency to complain about them, to criticize them and think a lot of negative things about them. But you are called to do none of these negative and reactionary acts and instead, you offer prayers on their behalf. Not simply "Lord, remove them from my life or have them fall in a pit somewhere" but praying for their welfare, that they may have a chance to know God that they may fare well in life.

Here is one that only the rare few nowadays will undertake: fasting for those who persecute you. Fasting is a challenge when done for religious observance, when it is done for those who make your life miserable, this takes a special kind of person.

You refuse to become downtrodden or complain to God about the conduct of others.

Lastly in this statement, we read "Love those who hate you". Ouch! It is one thing to love those who love you. Maybe it is a challenge to love those who only like you, but how are you going to develop love for someone who actually "hates" you?

The answer is provided by St. James almost immediately, telling us if we act in the manner outlined in this paragraph, that we will never have an enemy.

How can that be guaranteed? There are all kinds of people who hate one another in this world for little or no reason. How can we guarantee that if we bless them, pray for them, fast for them or love them, that they will just automatically like us, be our friends or possibly even loves us?

We can't but these directives are not about changing others, it is about changing our conduct and how we perceive the influence of others in our lives.

The hostile individual, is not aware of you blessing them, or praying for them, of your fasting for them, and no idea of your loving them.

No. All of this is happening within you for the most part.

How can you have an enemy if you do not perceive any individual as an enemy? If no

one poses a threat to you, what is there to be defensive or negative about?

Your demeanor is changed. You are not a person who curses, you are not a person who seeks to make enemies of others, you are not someone who persecutes others and you love everyone.

Maybe others dislike you, hate you even. But if you do not perceive their conduct as being a threat, then they are not a threat to you.

What do I take from this: If I treat everyone the way in which I would most like to be treated, I won't have enemies and I won't spend my life as a victim.

Practice: Try this - the next time someone swears at you or flips you off, just say mentally "May God bless you" and let it go.

The next time you think of someone in your life whom you view as an enemy, go out of your way to pray for their welfare, forgive them for offenses, either real or perceived and let it go.

If someone is hounding you, yelling at you, criticizing you or making it their personal mission to make you feel bad, resolve to fast through a meal on their behalf and let it go.

Lastly, and this will be the greatest challenge, view someone you just cannot stand and find something about them to like. Make it a point to emphasize their good qualities and to actively de-emphasize those qualities you detest and give up holding your bitterness and resentment against others - just let it go. What you hold on to only burdens your soul, not the souls of others.