

The Letter to Diognetus

We do not know who Diognetus was, nor do we know the name of the Christian author who wrote a letter to him. *The Letter to Diognetus*, written during the second century, is a brilliant defence of the Christian faith. It is one of the most eloquent writings we have from the early period of the Christian church.

Evidently impressed by the godly life of the Christians in the evil society of that time, Diognetus inquired about their God and their religion. The Christian author explains why they neither adored the gods of the Greeks nor followed the superstitions of the Jews. He describes their holy conduct even in the face of persecution and death. He explains how God sent his Son to the world to reveal himself and to give us life, and finally, he makes an exhortation to conversion.

Here are some excerpts from the letter. Firstly, a beautiful description of the love of God the Father:

If you also desire to possess this faith, you likewise shall receive first of all the knowledge of the Father. For God has loved mankind, on whose account He made the world, to whom He rendered subject 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. And when you have attained this knowledge, with what joy do you think you will be filled? Or, how will you love Him who has first so loved you?

I love the following paragraph which describes Jesus' work of salvation for those who trust in God. Jesus took away our sins and covered us with his righteousness.

He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! that the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors! Having therefore convinced us in the former time that our nature was unable to attain to life, and having now revealed the Saviour who is able to save even those things which it was formerly impossible to save, by both these facts He desired to lead us to trust in His kindness...

One final quotation, a description of the life of our forefathers in the faith. I pray that God will restore in us the simplicity and beauty of their godly lives.

They love all men, 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 lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as

if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

I encourage you to read the entire letter; it consists of 10 short chapters (chapters 11 and 12 are probably part of a different work). You can easily find it on the Internet by searching for 'Letter to Diognetus'.