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CHRISTIAN LOVE AND THE IMITATION OF CHRIST IN
THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS: A SECOND-CENTURY
EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Charles Theodore Mielke IV
May 2017

APPROVAL SHEET

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This thesis is dedicated to Sarah, my love. Thank you for supporting me in every way as I worked to complete this research. You are truly an inspiration to me. I love you.

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PREFACE

This research would not have been possible without support, encouragement, and guidance from numerous people along the way. Timothy Paul Jones served as an exceptional guide to help me become a more accomplished writer and opened my eyes to a deep love for research. I am grateful to have experienced this process with you. Thank you, Greg Brewton, for your guidance through my academic career as I am completing a level of education I never imagined. Also, this thesis would not have been possible without the support and true fellowship of the 2014 cohort.

Thank you to my greatest spiritual mentor and hero of the faith, Terry Herald. You are the man who truly saw the potential I had, much more so than I did. Thank you for pushing me to study to show myself approved.

Finally, thank you, Sarah, for your willingness to listen to me ramble for hours about second-century Christianity. Thank you for your encouragement to push on through tough sections and your willingness to relate to the challenges of doctoral studies. Mostly, thank you for being my greatest cheerleader through this process.

Chuck Mielke

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May 2017

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

Jesus, immediately after leaving the upper room on the night he was arrested, told his disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).¹ Jesus clearly explained to his disciples how they were to be distinguished from all others: their love for one another. Paul also communicates the importance of love in 1 Corinthians 13 when he expounds upon the characteristics of Christian love. He says that all good deeds are done in vain if not motivated by love. He concludes by stating that the greatest aspiration is love. Both of these passages communicate the importance of love for Christians.

The topic of Christian love is also discussed in various early church writings. The *Epistle to Diognetus* is one such document. As the text begins, the author explains that he is seeking to answer three questions. (1) Who is the God of the Christians, and how is he worshiped? (2) What is the nature of the love that Christians have for one another? (3) Why did this new religion (Christianity) come about when it did, and not earlier in history?²

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

²Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II* (London: William Heinemann, 1917), 351. This source will serve as the primary English translation in the context of this writing. All other English translations will be noted otherwise. The introductory chap. of *Diognetus* explains clearly the purpose for

This research focuses on and examines the answers given in the text to the second question: what is the nature of the love that Christians have for one another? As the author of *Diognetus* explores the second question, the importance of Christian love is illustrated by the example of Christ, as well as by the example of Christians. As John wrote that Christians should be known by their love for one another, the author of *Diognetus* illustrates that this love is of utmost importance in the life of a Christian.³

Relevance of the Study

The writings of the apostolic fathers are the first set of Christian writings that exist immediately following the New Testament era, and they have a direct connection back to the apostles. Holmes writes, “The term *apostolic* fathers is traditionally used to designate the collection of the earliest extant Christian writings outside the New Testament.”⁴ The content of these writings is typically very close to Scripture.⁵ Within these writings, verses of Scripture are quoted from the writings of the apostles and placed directly into the writings of the disciple.⁶

the writing, which is that Diognetus has inquired about the Christian faith with three diagnostic questions. I believe he can answer all three questions simultaneously, by simply describing the Christian faith and daily outward expression of fellow Christians.

³*Diognetus* is considered to be an apology in its content, though written before the works of the great apologists. With its purpose being to defend and explain the Christian faith, I chose only three specific topics to utilize in this defense, comparing/contrasting Christian worship with worship practices of other religions, and why Christianity has come into the world only at this time.

⁴Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 1. Holmes argues that the period of time representing these writings is from AD 70-135. In the introduction to this text, Holmes offers an excellent overview of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

⁵Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 1-6.

⁶*Ibid.*

The writings of the apologists are the works written immediately after the apostolic fathers. One of the distinct characteristics of these writings is evidence of a more developed theology than appears in the Apostolic Fathers.

The chief service of this literature was to strengthen believers and to advance theological knowledge. It brought the church to a deeper and clearer sense of the peculiar nature of the Christian religion, and prepared her thenceforth to vindicate it before the tribunal of reason and philosophy.⁷

These writings argued the truth about Christianity, while still doing so in a manner intended to win over the reader for Christ.

These two distinct genres of writing in the early church are vastly different in content and purpose. While the apostolic fathers tended to write to believers, the apologists tended to address pagans or Jews.⁸ The apostolic fathers offered more insight into ecclesiastical issues and were more focused at instructing the Christian to be more like Christ, while the apologists attempted to explain possible misunderstandings regarding aspects of their faith. Both genres, though clearly distinct, serve an important purpose.

Apostolic and apologetic writings served Christianity at different times under different circumstances. *Diognetus* fills the gap between these two types of writings. “The *Epistle to Diognetus* forms the transition from the purely practical literature of the Apostolic Fathers to the reflective theology of the Apologists.”⁹ While *Diognetus* offers a

⁷Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325*, vol. 2 of *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 106.

⁸Ibid., 104-5.

⁹Ibid., 702. Additionally, H. G. Meecham supports Schaff’s claim. Meecham writes, “Often classed with the writings of the Apostolic Fathers the Epistle belongs rather to those of the Apologists. Or perhaps we may say that it forms a literary nexus between the practical exhortations of the Fathers and the more formal apologies of Justin and his successors.” H. G. Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” *The Expository Times* (1943): 97.

robust defense and explanation of the Christian faith, it does so relying primarily on the example of the Christian life as a viable, and even preferable, life within the culture of the second century.¹⁰ This is the expression of the nature of the love that Christians express for one another.

The defense found in *Diognetus* is unique in another way. Rather than a philosophical or theological defense, the unknown author of *Diognetus* offers a clear picture of Christianity during the second century. The picture of these disciples, seen most clearly in chapters 5 and 6 of *Diognetus*, certainly shows signs of expressing true Christian love to one another, as well as to non-Christians. This research focuses on the specific concept of Christian love by illustrating similar word usage between *Diognetus* and the New Testament, as well as the importance of two theological concepts, justification and unity, in both texts.¹¹ While it is not possible to prove direct connection without uncovering a specific New Testament quote in *Diognetus*, the presence of the same theological concepts, and even some similar semantics, illustrates the placement of *Diognetus* squarely in the pattern of Christian thought. The goal of this research is to develop a more concrete understanding of Christian love in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, and illustrate continuity of this love to its origin in the New Testament.

Introduction of the Thesis

This thesis traces how the author of *Diognetus* answers the question of the nature of the love Christians have for one another. The primary focus is to examine how

¹⁰Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” 97.

¹¹While this will be discussed at length later, this research will utilize the Greek text of *Diognetus*, as well as several key English translations.

imitating God, spoken of in *Diognetus* 10, is the essence of Christian love, and then to connect the evidence backward to biblical roots. Utilizing these connections, this thesis argues that *Diognetus* shows a continuity of thought regarding imitating God as a means of discipleship from the New Testament to *Diognetus*. As the content of *Diognetus* is examined, key theological concepts that illustrate the source and expression of God's love will be evaluated. Then, these concepts will be identified in the writings of Paul and John for consistent thought flow and verbiage. The intention is to illustrate continuity from Paul and John, to *Diognetus*.

A vast amount of mystery surrounds the provenance of *Diognetus*. The authorship is unknown, with speculations ranging from Justin Martyr to Roman Catholic priests in the sixteenth century.¹² Much like the question of authorship, the date of writing is also a great mystery.¹³ Scholars have not even been able to determine the recipient of this letter, although he bears the name "Diognetus." With all of the uncertainties that accompany *Diognetus*, researchers have become preoccupied with the provenance, while comparatively little research has been done on the content of the letter.

While the majority of *Diognetus* studies have focused on provenance, this thesis is not primarily concerned with the origin of the letter but accepts the view expressed by Henry Meecham, J. B. Lightfoot, Michael Holmes, Clayton Jefford, and Phillip Schaff. This view claims *Diognetus* was written in the middle of the second

¹²Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," 97.

¹³There is a clear majority consensus among scholars (including Meecham, Lake, Lightfoot, and Holmes, the primary sources for this study) that the date of the writing of *Diognetus* is firmly within the second century. Within these sources, most agree upon a mid-second century time, approximately AD 150.

century.¹⁴ The focus of this research is to dig deeper into the content of *Diognetus* and discover what the author is saying about Christian love.

Gap in Literature

During the proposed time of the writing of *Diognetus*, it had been about 125 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. Believers were still trying to live lives that honored Christ's command to love all men (John 13:34-35).¹⁵ What key characteristics were taught to these new Christians? Was the recorded teaching of Jesus in John 13, that Christians are known by their love, still being professed? An examination of *Diognetus* begins to answer these questions.

One specific area lacking research is the understanding of Christian love as a mark of discipleship. As the unknown author of *Diognetus* answers this proposed question, one observes a picture of a second century disciple of Christ. Utilizing the original Greek, as well as the key English translations from Holmes, Lake, and Meecham (which are slight revisions of Lightfoot's translation), key theological concepts and words used in *Diognetus* will be examined and compared with their usage in the New Testament, specifically in Pauline and Johannine literature.

¹⁴H. G. Meecham, J. B. Lightfoot, Michael Holmes, and Clayton N. Jefford. The work of these four men comprises most of the modern research conducted on *Diognetus*. Numerous works of these men will be utilized throughout this research. Philip Schaff is a church historian who has an excellent overview of *Diognetus* in *History of the Christian Church*. His work will also be utilized to some extent when building the historical context of *Diognetus*.

¹⁵Jesus specifically says to love one another and then explains that love for one another will be a sign of true followership of Christ.

A Lifestyle of Love Illustrated in *Diognetus*

One aim of this research is to illustrate continuity of thought between the writings of the New Testament and *Diognetus* by examining the continuity and conceptualization of Christian love in both writings. Several authors have expounded upon key components of this “love Christians have for one another” In the *Epistle to Diognetus*.¹⁶ Doru Costache focuses on the poetic chapters 5 and 6 in *Diognetus*. The author explains that these chapters are a descriptor of Christian unity based upon identity. The world is a hostile place, so Christians must unify around the one thing they have in common: the love of Christ.¹⁷ H. G. Meecham is considered by most to be the authority on *Diognetus*.¹⁸ He offers an excellent evaluation of the theological concepts present in *Diognetus* and points out the combination of Pauline thought with Johannine terminology.¹⁹ Meecham wrote the English translation that is referenced in numerous works regarding *Diognetus*, and his work offers some of the clearest exposition on the

¹⁶Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 351.

¹⁷Doru Costache, “Christianity and the World in the *Letter to Diognetus*: Inferences for Contemporary Ecclesial Experience,” *Phronema* 27, no 1 (2012): 29-50. Doru explores the second century cultural setting that demanded the writing of *Diognetus*. He says that many issues were vying for the allegiance of the believer, and there is nothing wrong with standing on other issues. He concludes by saying that for the Christian, the highest allegiance is reserved for Christ and his church. This one commonality is the unifier of Christians and source of their love for one another.

¹⁸Almost every source in this research has some reference to Meecham’s work on *Diognetus*. He offers the foundational summaries utilized by many other authors, as well as an excellent theological evaluation of *Diognetus*’ content.

¹⁹Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” 99-100. This article is a summary of Meecham’s complete work on *Diognetus*. This work serves as a seminal resource for any study on *Diognetus*.

doctrinal content of *Diognetus*. Meecham's writings begin to explore the concepts of unity and Christian love of *Diognetus*, and show its New Testament roots.²⁰

Delimitations of Research Literature

This research focuses almost entirely on *Diognetus*. While the concept of love is present throughout *Diognetus*, this research will only examine phrases and specific words that speak to the question of the nature of Christian love. The contexts and semantic range of these phrases and words will be explored for points of continuity and discontinuity compared to Pauline and Johannine literature to *Diognetus*. These concepts will be sought out in the Greek text, as well as English translations by Lightfoot, Meecham, Jefford, and Holmes. This should draw close connection between *Diognetus* and the New Testament on the topic of Christian love. Several key phrases and concepts will be identified in *Diognetus*, as this will provide ample evidence for a strong continuity of thought from the Scriptures to *Diognetus*. As the research moves from concept to concept, each will be evaluated for its biblical origin. Concepts will be evaluated for attribution to the New Testament.²¹

Research Methodology

The research will first offer an overview of the most common views of date of writing, authorship, and place of writing. Then, the available Greek text and previously

²⁰H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949).

²¹*Ibid.*, 97-98. Meecham explains that *Diognetus* is primarily of Pauline origin. (97-98) Jefford submits a hybrid origin of both John and Paul. He also offers connection with other biblical texts including: Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms, 1-2 Peter, James, and Hebrews (72). While this directly supports the Scriptural foundation of *Diognetus*, it is also true that there are many passages in these books that quote each other, especially Old Testament being quoted by New Testament writers. Still, the fact remains that there is a significant amount of biblical language, echo, and allusion within the text of *Diognetus*.

described English translations will be analyzed for key words, phrases, and theological concepts that help to explain how the author of *Diognetus* understands the love of Christians. Next, each of these key words, phrases, and concepts will be evaluated for the potential biblical source. Finally, a concluding discussion regarding the degree of continuity from the New Testament to *Diognetus* will ensue.

When researching early church writings, a researcher tends to evaluate them through one's own theological lens. While this may be beneficial when attempting to glean application from them, it does impose a highly subjective view upon the research findings. This research will employ theologies of retrieval to minimize the subjective reading of these ancient texts.²² Following this model, the text of *Diognetus* communicates a solid defense of Christianity regardless of the cultural context of the author or reader.²³

The research literature consists of the Greek version of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, Lightfoot's English translation, Meecham's English translation, Jefford's

²²John Webster, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 585-86. Theologies of retrieval essentially follow the concept that modern, and post-modern critical thinking should not take a position of superiority over early church writings. These writings existed before highly developed doctrinal statements existed. Webster explains this position, and the damage critical thinking has played on historical post-biblical Christian writings. Webster writes, "Theologies of retrieval resist the view of the situation of theology by proposing different genealogies of modernity and by treating pre-modern Christian theology as a resource rather than problem. These genealogies exhibit some variety, partly as a result of confession divergence. Nevertheless, they converge in a broadly accepted conviction that Christian teaching about God and God's relation to the world must be deployed if the cultural-historical situation of Christian theology is to become comprehensible. Christian theology, that is, is not required or authorized to adopt non-theological descriptions of its situation, nor may theology operate as if context were transparent, requiring no special Christian theological teachings for its illumination. Rather, it is incumbent upon theology to give a theological account of its present and of the developments from which it issues."

²³*Ibid.*, 596. "The major achievements of theology in the mode of retrieval have been to commend a more celebratory style of theological portrayal and to rehabilitate classical sources of Christian teaching and draw attention to their potential in furthering the theological task."

English translation, and Holmes' translation. Other works that will inform this research include several commentaries on *Diognetus*, and numerous journal articles explicating applicable concepts from *Diognetus*. Research sampling is purposive in its nature. *Diognetus* and other writings that aid its interpretation are included in the population. Also, the Greek New Testament, as well as the English Standard Version of the Bible will be used in drawing various New Testament²⁴ connections.²⁵

Pauline Influences on the Theology of *Diognetus*

Moving from the acknowledgement of the love and commonality of all believers, the source or nature of this love must be examined and explored. It is in this research that connections appear between *Diognetus* and the writings of the apostle Paul. Brian Arnold's dissertation (*Justification One Hundred Years After Paul*) offers excellent insight into the Pauline theology within *Diognetus*. Arnold states, "The author of *Diognetus* expounds a view of justification that is in harmony with Paul's understanding of justification as well as a view of the atonement that is in harmony with Paul's understanding of the atonement."²⁶ Michael Heintz's article regarding the usage of the

²⁴Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 115. This research recognizes the orthodox twenty-seven books of the New Testament. This view is supported by the Muratorian Canon, which cites twenty-two of the twenty-seven identified books (Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, James, 1 and 2 John, Revelation, along with the Revelation of Peter and the Wisdom of Solomon) representing a stable core of the New Testament Canon in AD 180.

²⁵This research utilizes the Nestle-Aland *NOVUM TESTAMENTUM GRAECE*, 28th rev. ed., and *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft United Bible Societies versions of the Greek New Testament.

²⁶Brian John Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 105, Arnold has an entire chap. of his dissertation devoted to the exploration of Pauline theology within *Diognetus*. This serves as excellent resource, and provides numerous connections directly back to Paul's writings, including examples of direct copying, and conceptual construction that is consistent with Paul.

phrase “μιμητῆς θεου”²⁷ in *Diognetus* also serves as a clear connection to Paul. He explains that this concept is only seen in the New Testament within Paul’s writings, and is a key theme in *Diognetus*.²⁸ Heintz’s article shows direct connection with Pauline theology. E. H. Blakeney, while not attributing the theology of *Diognetus* directly to Paul, does utilize examples from the text that are quite Pauline in nature, such as the usage of the phrase “sweet reasonableness” found in Philippians 4:5.²⁹ While other sources illustrate the reliance of the author of *Diognetus* on Paul, these are a few examples of direct quotation or transference of theology.

Johannine Influences on the Theology of *Diognetus*

Brandon Crowe, while evaluating the Johannine Christology of *Diognetus*, suggests that the unknown author of *Diognetus* is a potential disciple of John. His writing focuses on the phrase “O sweet exchange!” which is an exclamation in *Diognetus* 9:5.³⁰ Charles Hill also supports this notion that the unknown author of *Diognetus* was a disciple of John, specifically Polycarp.³¹ While the aim of this research is not to determine the author of *Diognetus*, the theological roots of the author can play an

²⁷The generally accepted translation of this phrase is “Imitator of God.”

²⁸Michael Heintz, “Mimetes Theou in the Epistle to Diognetus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 107.

²⁹E. H. Blakeney, “A Gem of Patristic Literature,” *Theology* 43 (1941): 12.

³⁰Brandon D. Crowe, “Oh Sweet Exchange! The Soteriological Significance of the Incarnation in the *Epistle to Diognetus*,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*. No. 102 (2011). Crowe connects this phrase to Johannine theology.

³¹Charles E. Hill, *From the Lost Teachings of Polycarp*. (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

important role when attempting to determine the proposed authorship. Magill's summary of *Diognetus* clearly points out the Johannine connection. Much of his summary is based upon the notion that the plan of God for the redemption of man was determined before the foundation of the earth. He emphasizes *Diognetus*' statement of the eternity of Jesus Christ, reinforcing a Johannine Christology.³² Cross also emphasizes a connection to John's writings.³³ Attribution of *Diognetus* to a disciple of Paul is much more common. However, a strong case will be made for significant Johannine influence on the author.

Conclusion of the Purpose of this Research

While the origin of *Diognetus* is unknown, the content of this second-century epistle is in plain view. This research seeks to illustrate the importance of Christian love as a key mark of discipleship, as well as the continuity of theology from the New Testament to *Diognetus*. Christian love was different than love expressed by pagans in the second century. As Diognetus inquired about the nature of Christianity, he specifically posed questions about Christian love. The implication is that in the middle of the second century, amidst horrific persecution, Christians were living out Jesus' command recorded in John 13, that the world would know Christians by their love.³⁴ Because of the inquiry of this pagan man, a treatise exists that explains the characteristics of Christian love in the second century.

³²Frank Magill, ed., *Masterpieces of Christian Literature in Summary Form* (New York: Salem Press, 1963), 50.

³³F. L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Camelot Press, 1960). Cross's work does not directly attribute *Diognetus*' authorship to a direct disciple of John; however, his emphases on certain verbiage and certain concepts have strong Johannine tendencies.

³⁴Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325*, 105-7.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diognetus is, as Lightfoot stated, “the noblest of early Christian writings.”¹ It paints a picture, both semantically as well as theologically, of Christianity that informs its audience of the nature and content of the faith, as well as the nature of God. While much effort has been put in to attempting to determine the provenance of *Diognetus*, the focus of this thesis is the content. Is there truly evidence that supports continuity in the concept of Christian love from John and Paul to the early apologists? This study of the theological connections between the New Testament and *Diognetus* is divided into two sections: theology and biblical connections. The theology section addresses two key theological concepts: justification and unity. The biblical connections section offers examples, both explicit and implicit, of direct connections between the New Testament text and *Diognetus*. However, before the document is examined for its content, the preliminary question of provenance must be addressed.

Provenance of the *Epistle to Diognetus*

The origin of a document offers significant context for its purpose. The authorship and genre, as well as the date of writing, clarify the context for interpretation

¹J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1879), 158.

of a document. Without these details, one can only utilize clues within the text to determine the meaning and interpretation of the text. *Diognetus* presents a unique case in which none of these details are known with certainty. The date of writing is completely unknown; as the document was not even known to have existed for over twelve hundred years after its proposed writing date.² Due to these mysteries, evaluating *Diognetus* must be accomplished based solely on the text, and not on the context of the writing. However, a brief discussion offering an informative survey of these facets of *Diognetus* follows.

Summary of the Most Common Views of the Authorship of *Diognetus*

Who wrote *Diognetus*? This is a question that has troubled historians since its discovery in the sixteenth century. There are no indications whatsoever of the author, so making any claim is merely hypothetical. The most helpful means to make such a claim is to do so through textual evaluation. Several authors are consistently viewed as potential writers. Theophilus of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Pantaenus, Hippolytus, and Quadratus are only a few who have been proposed to be the author.³ It is almost universally accepted that Justin was not the author, even though the document was first attributed to him and published with his other works.⁴

Polycarp, though considered to be an improbable author, has recently reemerged as a strong candidate for the writing based on the research of Charles E. Hill. Hill argues that Polycarp's experiences and the time in which he lived clearly fit the

²Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 294.

³There is not a common submission of authorship. Each source tends to offer reasoning for several of these men; however it is completely speculative, and based on scant evidence.

⁴Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 292-94.

circumstances that the unknown author of *Diognetus* describes. Hill also argues that it was a transcription of a sermon, or spoken word, rather than a written treatise.⁵ While these arguments shine more credibility on Polycarp's authorship, it is still a completely circumstantial argument.

Another possible author is Quadratus. Philip Schaff, compiler of the *History of the Christian Church* explains that while we know little of Quadratus' life, we know that he presented his own apology to Emperor Hadrian in either Athens or some city in Asia Minor.⁶ Athens may seem more probable, as he was the bishop there during his life. One piece of evidence for this is that he claims to be a disciple of the apostles, something the author of *Diognetus* also claims.⁷ Dom Andriessen claims that the *Fragment of Quadratus* is actually the missing passage in chapter 7 of *Diognetus*.⁸ Michael Holmes also supports this hypothesis. "While it is true that this sentence does not occur in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, there is a gap between verses 6 and 7 of section 7 into which it would fit very well. The evidence supporting this hypothesis, however, is all circumstantial, and the question must be left open."⁹ This is also not conclusive evidence, but it does offer credibility to another potential author. Eusebius explains that Quadratus

⁵Charles E. Hill, *From the Lost Teachings of Polycarp* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). Hill offers an extensive discussion on the issue at hand. His textual analysis is excellent and thorough. To the researcher looking to validate authorship by Polycarp, this text provides excellent material to support this hypothesis.

⁶Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Siefried S. Schatzmann, 2007), 73.

⁷This claim is not in the actual *Diognesian* text, but is a note made on the original manuscript.

⁸Dom P. Andriessen, "The Authorship of the Epistula Ad Diognetum," *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947): 129.

⁹Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 293.

was the first Christian apologist; and that he and Aristides both presented their own apologies for their faith.¹⁰ While none of these men mentioned can be validated to be the author of *Diognetus*, there are some indications within the text that are aid in determining the genre.

Summary of the Most Common Views of the Style of *Diognetus*

If *Diognetus* were written by any of the aforementioned men, then it would be placed in the beginning years of the writings of the apologists. However, it is traditionally published in the collection of Apostolic Fathers. What are the key differences between these two forms, and how does this affect the interpretation of *Diognetus*?

Apostolic fathers. The apostolic fathers offered additional instruction to enrich the existing churches and Christians. These writings are classified as paranaetic,¹¹ meaning they are written to bolster the faith of existing Christians. Many of these writings offer specific instruction for things like public worship or partaking of the Lord's Supper, such as one finds in the *Didache*. Another key important characteristic is that the writings of the apostolic fathers are often epistolary, or in the form of personal correspondence.¹² *Diognetus* does have this format, but it lacks the ecclesial instruction

¹⁰Andriessen, "The Authorship of the *Epistula Ad Diognetum*," 129.

¹¹Diana M. Swancutt, "Paraenesis in Light of Protrepsis," in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context*, ed. James Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 113. Swancutt explains the shade of difference in these two terms, and how they defined the intentions of the writer more than the actual message. The focus, she says was on the audience, not necessarily on the content being delivered. The same content could be delivered to two different audiences, with one delivery being an encouragement to keep doing the same things, and the other to try something new. However, the actual content would remain the same.

and content directed toward Christians that is found in other epistles. *Diognetus* is unique in that it is the only apologetic writing in the collection.

Apologists. The writings of the apologists are typically addressed to pagans or Jews rather than to Christians. The apologists were protreptic in their efforts to either defend Christianity. Protreptic writings seek to explain, defend, or convince an unbelieving audience of the meritorious nature of Christianity.¹³ *Diognetus* offers no ecclesial advice or directives. It instead abruptly condemns Judaism and pagan idol worship with a harsh and often satirical criticism while explaining the merit and validity of Christianity. Though published with the writings of the apostolic fathers, most scholars are in agreement that *Diognetus* should be categorized as an apologetic writing.¹⁴

Summary of the Most Common Views of the Date of Writing

The date of writing is highly contingent upon the authorship. If the author was known, a definite range for a writing date could be established. The content of *Diognetus* does place the writing before the legalization of Christianity in 313 with the Edict of Milan because persecution of Christians is directly referenced throughout the text.¹⁵ One clue to the time of the writing is what other religions are mentioned in the text and how

¹²Brian John Arnold, “Justification One Hundred Years after Paul” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 106.

¹³Swancutt, “Paraenesis in Light of Protrepsis,” 113.

¹⁴Every source surveyed in this research that addresses genre agrees that *Diognetus* bears a much closer resemblance to the writings of the apologists. However, several scholars concede that for sake of church tradition, it should remain categorized with the Apostolic Fathers.

¹⁵Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325*, vol. 2 of *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 72-73. Constantine ordered a series of edicts, beginning in 311, which effectively secured Christianity a legal place in the public square. Initially, Christianity was only tolerated, but by 313 it was legal. Within 75 years, Christianity would become the official state

they are addressed. The apologists typically wrote to defend Christianity while discounting Judaism and Roman/Greek idol worship.¹⁶ These writings originated during the second and early third centuries.

Another potential reason for dating *Diognetus* in the middle of the second century is the persecution that is spoken of so often within its pages.¹⁷ Roman persecution began in AD 64, with Nero accusing Christians of starting the fire in Rome, and continued through the end of the second century. While the persecution theme does not offer a specific range of time, it does continue to validate a date of writing consistent with the second century.

The final piece of evidence for dating *Diognetus* in the middle of the second century is Meecham's summary of evidence for dating the writing.

Some general considerations point to this relatively early date: the condemnation in common of paganism and Judaism; freedom in handling the N.T. writings; the lack of the tendency to identify the ideal of Christian excellence with the ascetic life, and the absence of traces of sacerdotalism; the relatively simple Christology less elaborate than that of Origen; the dominance of the doctrine of the Logos with no doctrine of the Holy Spirit; the problem why the Son had come late in time, which appears in Justin but finds little place in later apologists; the apparent unawareness of formulated heresies, apart from possible hints of the Gnostic emphasis; the traditional assignment of the Epistle to Justin and its place in the Codex with other writings ascribed to him.¹⁸

religion of the Roman Empire.

¹⁶Examples of writings opposing Judaism are Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments*, ed. S. G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), and *The Epistle of Barnabas*. An example of writing opposing pagans is Theophilus of Antioch's *to Autolytus* (Michael Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch Ad Autolytum* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1970]).

¹⁷Both chaps. 5 and 6, as well as immediately after the lacuna in chap. 7, directly speak of the persecution Christians faced.

¹⁸H. G. Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," *The Expository Times*, 54 (1943): 19. This list of reasons is content enough to fill volumes with research. This summary statement stands as a conclusion that many more pieces of evidence for a middle second century date exist within *Diognetus*. Since the focus of this research is on the theological content, not on the provenance, only additional important information on the background of this document will be supplied throughout the course of this paper.

Summary of the Author's View on the Origin of *Diognetus*

For the reasons stated above, this study will accept that the chronological context of *Diognetus* seems to be the middle of the second century. The authorship of *Diognetus* is completely undetermined, although several names are generally considered strong candidates. This work is clearly apologetic, with its content directed toward defending Christianity and introducing it to a pagan audience. Schaff offers an excellent overview of *Diognetus*' content:

The *Epistle to Diognetus* forms the transition from the purely practical literature of the Apostolic Fathers to the reflective theology of the Apologists. It still glows with the ardor of the first love. It is strongly Pauline. It breathes the spirit of freedom and higher knowledge grounded in faith.¹⁹

The Nature of Christian Love

As the unknown author of *The Epistle to Diognetus* begins, he states that he has set out to answer several of Diognetus' questions. The particular question addressed in this research is that of the nature of love Christians have for one another. Second century Greek offers numerous word choices that one might utilize to articulately define "Christian love." Two aspects of the text offer insight into the nature behind, and the definition of this love. Specific word choices are one key to understanding how the author explains Christian love. Another way the author illustrates Christian love is his use of the concept of imitating God, and the implications of this lifestyle. These two characteristics illuminate the author's understanding of the foundation and nature of Christian love.

¹⁹Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325*, 702.

Usage of φιλοστοργιαν and φιλανθρωπος

Through the course of *Diognetus*, the author builds a case for the validity of Christianity. As he answers each of the original questions posed by Diognetus, the answers often intertwine. In seeking to answer the question of interest to the present research, the author of *Diognetus* phrases the concept of “Christian love” in 1:1 as, φιλοστοργιαν. Bauer defines the word in specific relation to *Diognetus* as “deep affection of Christians for each other.”²⁰ However, when the author speaks specifically of Christian love, in 10:7, he uses “φιλανθρωπος,” or “Loving humanity, benevolent.”²¹ Why is there a semantical shift from the question to the answer? Due to his pagan background, the question Diognetus asked was not the most helpful question, and the author is seeking to rephrase the essence of the question in more theologically accurate terms. Michael Heintz explains,

He [Diognetus] was curious to know both about the kind of God Christians worship and about Christian φιλοστοργια. While this is described in [Chapters] 5–6, it is not until this paraenetic passage that the foundation or nature of this love is explained, and it is explained not as φιλοστοργια but in terms of φιλανθρωπια. What Diognetus had perceived and characterized as φιλοστοργια is, in fact, no mere natural affection but a love which is indicative of God’s love of humanity.²²

Diognetus was asking about the deep affection of Christians for one another, and the author answered that this love is from Christians to all mankind, not just between Christians. Heintz does admit that this contrast between words is only inferred, however

²⁰Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1059.

²¹Daniel B. Wallace, *A Reader’s Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 231. Bauer, in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, offers the same definition.

²²Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 114.

the high quality of the writing style indicates that it is intentional.²³ While this is the nature of Christian love, it is not the root or source. An explanation of the root of Christian love follows.

Imitator of God as the Catalyst of Christian Love

Diognetus contains strong language when defining the concept of imitating God. Just as a contrast was drawn between a deep love for one another and love for mankind in general, the author draws another stark contrast between the cultural norm of happiness and the Christian source of joy. Heintz explains that the way one imitates God is to practice godly love, *φιλανθρωπια*.²⁴ Meecham adds to this understanding, “the thought is that if a man loves God, he will seek to ‘imitate His goodness.’”²⁵

Another way in which this love is illustrated and mirrored in this passage is in the means by which God saved men, addressed in chapter 10. God did not force anyone to follow him, but came to persuade men, as stated in 7:4. A final example that Heintz points out is that man is not able to imitate God apart from divine intervention.²⁶ This stands directly in the face of Greek philosophy of the second century. “In the

²³Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*. Holmes goes on to explain that this occurrence is excellent evidence to refute the notion that *Diognetus* was some sort of rhetorical exercise, as espoused by some.

²⁴Ibid., 115. This connects the description of God’s love found in chaps. 7-9 and 9:2. He says, “Christian *φιλανθρωπια* is an imitation of divine *φιλανθρωπια*.”

²⁵Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” 133. Meecham prefaces this statement by explaining the content of these verses is a return to “practical issues of the faith.” He, like Heintz, relates Dg.10:4-6 back to chap. 5 to show the interconnectedness of the theological truth of Christianity and the practical life change exhibited by true Christians. Foundational of all of the characteristics listed in chaps. 5-6 is the imitation of God’s love for mankind.

²⁶Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 117.

philosophical traditions, whether Platonist, Pythagorean, or Stoic, moral achievement is the product of self-discipline and effort. Change for the better comes from within.”²⁷

Theological Elements Defining Love in *Diognetus*

How Justification Informs Christian Love in *Diognetus*

There is a trend to discount the theological depth and content of the earliest Patristic writers,²⁸ and justification is one of many doctrines that are rarely attributed to the Patristic writers. D. H. Williams, professor of Religion in Patristics and Historical Theology at Baylor University, explains, “Theological utilization of the principle of justification by faith has its roots among patristic writers, as the Reformers themselves found when they sought precedents for their teaching. Without the christological and soteriological doctrinal formations of the patristic age, the sixteenth-century formulation of justifying faith could never have been produced.”²⁹ While Williams certainly does not endorse the idea that the Patristic writers clearly explained a significant depth of understanding of justification, he would certainly say that they at least understood the concept that man is made righteous based upon faith in Christ.³⁰

²⁷Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 117. Holmes parallels this to the explanation given in *Diognetus* 7:1-2 that divine revelation is only on behalf of God. Man is not capable of knowing anything about God, apart from God’s own self-revelation.

²⁸D. H. Williams, “Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57, no. 4 (October 2006): 649. It is still axiomatic for some Protestant writers that the principle of justification by faith was ‘discovered’ or ‘rediscovered’ by the Reformers. This often implies that the important principles expounded by Paul about the truth of salvation were overlooked or misunderstood by most of the early and medieval church until Luther, meaning that not until the sixteenth century was Paul’s teaching about the imputation of the righteousness of God to the sinner by faith properly interpreted and integrated into Christian history.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 651.

Justification is a key theological concept in the writings of Paul. One of the key arguments he makes in Romans hinges upon the need of mankind to be made righteous in the eyes of God. This can only be done through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.³¹ While the specific Pauline phraseology is not typically present, *Diognetus* argues for the same justification as Paul described in Romans. Within chapter 9, the primary argument the author makes is that God waited to reveal Christ so that man could truly experience a long season of unrighteousness, and therefore understand the need for salvation. Stated in the form of several rhetorical questions, the author argues that Christ's righteousness is the only possible means by which man may be justified before God.³² The climax of *Diognetus* occurs in this chapter as the author writes, "O sweet exchange, o the inscrutable creation, o the unexpected benefits, that the wickedness of many should be concealed in the one righteous, and the righteousness of the one should make righteous the many wicked!"³³ The term imputed righteousness is found nowhere in *Diognetus*, "nevertheless, the writer speaks plainly of an inability to enter the kingdom of God according to our own worthiness or goodness. Our hope is only in the saving power of God which was demonstrated by the ransoming of His righteous Son for our unrighteousness."³⁴

³⁰Williams, "Justification by Faith," 654.

³¹Arnold, "Justification 100 Years after Paul," 105. This research relies on the argumentation of Arnold regarding the definition of justification as a legal transaction, or penal substitution.

³²Ibid., 133.

³³Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II* (London: William Heinemann, 1917), 371.

³⁴Williams, "Justification by Faith," 654. Williams states that the result of imputed righteousness is mankind being ransomed.

Conclusion of Justification

Chapter 9 delivers a crystal clear image of Pauline justification. One of the results of this justification is that the character of God is revealed. The author explains that the exchange of righteousness for unrighteousness results in belief in God's goodness (χρηστοτητι).³⁵ The chapter closes in a unique way by offering a litany of descriptors of God's roles that display his goodness. The beginning of this list offers several words, which denote a strong sense of pastoral care. "Nurse, father, teacher, counsellor, physician"³⁶ all communicate a nature of love in God's character. Justification is not a requirement placed upon God; God does it because of his goodness. This is the goodness Christians are told they will imitate if they truly love God.³⁷

Justification reveals God's heart for mankind, and the sacrifice of Christ reveals his selfless love for man. Jesus, in the Upper Room Discourse, said of himself, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:12-14). *Diognetus*, through an explanation of justification, rightly identifies God's love as the supreme example, and the author offers Jesus' personal sacrifice as the standard for how to express love to one another.

³⁵Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 370-71.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 371.

³⁷Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," 87. *Diognetus* 10 explains that once the truth of the Gospel, specifically the "sweet exchange" spoken of previously in chap. 9, is understood and acted upon, then the natural response is to love people with the same nature of love that God displays.

The Nature of Unity in Christian Love

Unity is a marker of the Christian faith, but how does one clearly define the basis of this unity? *Diognetus* offers a comparative analysis of the two primary Ancient Near Eastern religions at the time: Judaism and Greek idol worship. In chapters 2 and 3, the author debunks the reasoning behind both of these religions. However, before this occurs, he challenges the audience to “Ἄγε δὴ καθαρὰς σεαυτὸν ἀπο παντῶν τῶν προσκατεχόντων σου τὴν διανοίαν λογισμῶν καὶ τὴν ἀπάτωσαν σε συνήθειαν ἀποσκευασάμενος καὶ γενομένος ὡς περ εἰς ἀρχῆς καινὸς ἄνθρωπος ὡς ἂν καὶ λόγος καινοῦ καθάπερ καὶ αὐτὸς ὡμολόγησας ἀκροατῆς ἐσομένος”³⁸ Several of the commands that stand out in this passage are “καθαράω,” to clean oneself; “ἀποσκευασάμενος,” to get rid of; and “ἀκροατῆς ἐσομένος,” to be a hearer.³⁹ This directive allows the reader to leave their socio-cultural, religious, and ethnic predispositions behind and listen as a new man (καινὸς ἄνθρωπος) listening to a new word (λόγος καινοῦ).

From this basis, the author begins to explain the folly in the other primary religions with which *Diognetus* was familiar: Judaism and Greek idol worship. The author utilizes an apophatic argument to distance Christian worship from false worship. Essentially the author is defining Christianity, which is made up of Jews and Greeks, by expressly condemning these religious practices as foolishness. He draws a masterful contrasting conclusion to this argument in chapter 3, verse 5: “For after all, those who think that they are consecrating sacrifices to him by blood and burnt fat, and whole burnt offerings, and that they are reverencing him by these honours, seem to me to be in no

³⁸Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 350-52.

³⁹Wallace, *A Reader's Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers*, 225.

way better than those who show the same respect to deaf images. For it seems that the one offer to those who cannot partake of the honour, the others to him who is in need of nothing.”⁴⁰

If this is not what denotes a Christian, what are other key indicators that may? As the author closes out chapter 4 and the bulk of the debunking of Judaism, he turns to the task of positively defining Christianity. One of these key identifiers is unity. The next two chapters of *Diognetus* offer an exceptional explanation of how important unity is to the identity of the Christian. The unique nature of Christian unity is not found in any physical socio-ethnic characteristics; it is based on the unseen faith and citizenship of another kingdom, one that is not anchored in the present world. Denise Buell, Dean of Religion at Williams College, explains that customs, homeland, or languages are typical indicators of a unified group of people in most cases. However, as she points out, *Diognetus* argues that these differences do not define Christianity, and anyone from any defined people group may become a Christian.⁴¹

What are the characteristics that provide the framework of this Christian unity that transcend the physical realm? *Diognetus* 5:9 offers the foundation of this unity. “They pass their time upon the Earth, but they have their citizenship in Heaven.”⁴² What defines this “citizenship in Heaven?” The author of *Diognetus* argues that such a citizenship is realized through a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, though he has not arrived at that explicit statement yet. One must move to chapter 10 to

⁴⁰Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 357.

⁴¹Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 31.

see the invitation to believe in Jesus and accept the story of God’s redemption of man.⁴³ And even here, the author offers an outward expression that identifies true followers of Christ. In 10:4 he says, “but by your love you will imitate the example of his [Jesus’] goodness.”⁴⁴ This is the only qualifier to gain citizenship into Heaven.

Roland Chia, the Director of the Centre for the Development of Christian Ministry at the Trinity Theological College in Singapore, offers insight into defining how this citizenship affects how a Christian relates to a secular culture. He explains that culture is a two-edged sword, offering both positive and negative effects for Christians. “A theology of culture must therefore be formulated in the light of the Pauline understanding of Christ and the powers. To speak of culture is to speak of the sum total of the values and activities which shapes a community.”⁴⁵ He explains that the culture, created by God, can both glorify God as well as become the power seat for evil. Having a proper understanding of the Christian’s role in relationship with culture and the church informs an understanding of how to be unified to one another in the world, but not unified with the fallen world. “The church *in via* is shaped and motivated by a different ethic, the ethic of love.”⁴⁶ Chia asserts that the foundation of Christian unity is the shared love. He concludes his article by returning to the foundation of Christianity:

⁴²Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 361.

⁴³*Diognetus* 10:1-2 reads as somewhat of a summary statement to chaps. 7-9. The author actually has a statement that mirrors John 3:16. “For God loved mankind for whose sake he made the world . . . to whom he sent his only-begotten Son, to whom he promised the kingdom of heaven—and he will give it to them who love him.”

⁴⁴*Diognetus*, 373.

⁴⁵Roland Chia, “Resident Alien: Some Reflections on Church and Culture,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 92 (2000): 93.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

The confessing church is always *ecclesia crucis*. Her ambivalent relationship with culture is because she is formed by the tradition of Abraham, not Constantine. Because of the cross, she knows that that ambivalence will continue throughout her earthly existence until the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.⁴⁷

Conclusion of The Nature of Unity in Christian Love

Unity is a clear characteristic of Christian love. As one reads that Christians are strangers in human culture, their unbreakable bond of unity in Christ plays a significant role in the ability to endure this life. What role does unity play on Christian love? *Diognetus* answers that question immediately following the assertion that loving God leads to imitating Christ; “But whosoever takes upon himself his neighbor’s burden, whosoever wishes to benefit another who is poorer in that in which he himself is better off, whosoever by supplying to those in want the things which he has received and holds from God becomes god to those who receive them. This man is an imitator of God.”⁴⁸ With the previous examination of the phrase “μιμητης εστι θεου” [imitator of God], one sees the importance of charity and service to the development of a Christian, as well as the unity of fellow believers.

In this same passage, the author of *Diognetus* offers three results of imitating Christ, “you will begin to speak of the mysteries of God, then you will both love and admire those who are being punished because they will not deny God, then you will

⁴⁷Chia, “Resident Alien,” 97.

⁴⁸H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949), 87.

condemn the deceit and error of the world.”⁴⁹ The second result, love and admiration for fellow believers, is most applicable to this research. Heintz explains that *Diognetus*’ example of love for one another communicates the nature of God himself. The essence of his argument is that the love expressed when one imitates Christ is not just a general love (φιλοστοργια),⁵⁰ but rather a love for fellow man (φιλανθρωπια).⁵¹ The previous discussion of this semantic contrast clarifies the significance of the variance between words. This is the nature of Christian love; love expressed to all mankind. When fellow Christians are imitating Christ, they are showing love for fellow man. This love for one another breeds unity. In a sense, unity is both a byproduct and a foundation for Christian love defined in *Diognetus*.

New Testament Connections to *Diognetus*

As the author was answering *Diognetus*’ questions, he was able to draw from the writings of the apostles. Recorded in the margin of the original manuscript, the author calls himself a disciple of the apostles, so he had first hand knowledge of and access to the men who actually walked with Jesus. He was able to draw from this background, as well as from the many copies of various New Testament writings circulating in his time. Significant portions of *Diognetus* show direct connection, both semantically and conceptually back to the New Testament. The two primary connections are Paul and John. The writings of each of these men had their own unique influence on the content of *Diognetus*.

⁴⁹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 373.

⁵⁰Bauer et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1059.

Connections between *Diognetus* and the Pauline Corpus

The nature of *Diognetus* is not that of a theological treatise or discourse. It is an apology that serves the purpose of defining Christianity to a pagan audience.

However, defining Christianity is most clearly accomplished through a discussion of its major tenets of belief. A challenge to showing connection between these writings over the span of approximately one hundred years is the nature of changing culture. Another challenge is the cultural background of the different writers.

“The Paulinism of *ED* [*Epistle to Diognetus*] has several distinct characteristics. Whereas Paul was a Hellenistic Jewish Christian or a Grecized Judean, the Hellenism of *ED* is acute and the intellectual and literary framework of the letter is Greek philosophy and Asiatic rhetoric.”⁵²

Pauline Justification as Observed in *Diognetus*

One of the bedrock doctrines of Christianity is justification by faith. Justification explains the means by which one is counted righteous in the process of salvation. Wayne Grudem, in his systematic theology writes, “A right understanding of justification is absolutely crucial to the whole Christian faith.”⁵³ Paul wrote extensively on this topic. Paul’s epistle to the Romans is comprehensive in its explanation of how man is justified by the work of Christ. Justification is the description given to the specific

⁵¹Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 114.

⁵²Michael Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, *Paul and the Second Century* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 88.

⁵³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 722.

legal standing with God. While Meecham disagrees on the expression of justification, he does not deny that this is a clear connection and expression of Pauline justification.⁵⁴

Diognetus offers several examples of Pauline justification. The first is rooted in the need that humans have for justification. In the opening of the letter, Diognetus asks three questions, as noted above. The third question inquires as to why God waited so long to reveal the Son and provide salvation. Brian Arnold, in his dissertation identifying Pauline justification in the second century points out that Paul, in Romans 3:25 as well as Galatians 4:4, explains that God waited until this time so that he could be the justifier.⁵⁵ Most of the first eleven chapters of Romans builds a case for the concept that God waited until the time he deemed right to send Christ.

Another place where Pauline justification and *Diognetus* intersect is through the usage of the “δικ” word group. Bauer assigns this word group the generalized meaning of righteous.⁵⁶ Arnold points out that the occurrences of this word group typically relates to the Son.⁵⁷ However, he relates this to the nature of the imputed righteousness that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Meecham supports this claim as well, stating, “it is important to observe that it is in the virtue of his righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) that the Son redeems.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴Meecham, *The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus*, 100. Meecham commits the same error most *Diognesian* commentators do, which is to place too much evaluative weight on the specific theological content of the letter. The key to interpreting *Diognetus* is to remember that it is not a theological treatise, and that it was written before most dogma was established and adopted throughout the global church.

⁵⁵Arnold, “Justification 100 Years after Paul,” 131-32.

⁵⁶Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 246-47.

⁵⁷Arnold, “Justification 100 Years after Paul,” 133.

The Function of μιμητης in *Diognetus* and the Pauline Corpus

Another significant connection between *Diognetus* and Paul is later in chapter 10, as the author explains how one must be saved. Now, he turns to the result, or fruit, of that salvation. “But by your love you will imitate the example of his goodness.”⁵⁹ The focus is the imitation of the Son’s example. While this concept exists in numerous places throughout the Scriptures, this verbiage is strictly in Paul’s writings. Lampe defines μιμησις as “imitate.”⁶⁰ One clear example of the usage of the same word and meaning within the corpus of Paul is in Ephesians 5:1. He urges the Ephesians to “be imitators of God.” However, there is more to this passage than just exact word usage. The previous verses in Ephesians just described the new life one has in Christ. The preceding verses in *Diognetus* express the same thing: that new life in Christ results in imitating “the example of his goodness.”⁶¹

Continuity and Discontinuity between *Diognetus* and the Pauline Corpus

Numerous scholars draw many parallels and connections between Paul and *Diognetus*, and two of the most significant specific connections have been illustrated above. Not all scholars agree with these connections. As illustrated in depth later,

⁵⁸Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to *Diognetus*,” 100.

⁵⁹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 373.

⁶⁰G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 871-72. Bauer et al. and Wallace, *A Reader’s Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers* agree on the definition; however, Lampe offers a wider semantic range to include “copy and counterfeit.”

⁶¹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 373.

Meecham feels that *Diognetus* falls short of truly grasping Pauline Justification.⁶²

However, Bird points out a third connection with Paul and *Diognetus* that spans the entirety of the letter. The anti-Jewish sentiment beginning in chapter 3, resurfacing in chapter 4 and subsequent passages, rings clear with the same criticism Paul expressed.

Bird draws the parallel into one primary focus, which is the contrast of the Law and the Gospel:

Paul's criticism of his Jewish Christian competitors and Jewish compatriots were still very much intra-Jewish debates, whereas in *ED* they have been transformed into contra-Jewish polemic. Thus, the author of *ED* is the most Pauline when he is the most critical of Jewish trust in the efficacy of their law and their boasting in their status as elect.⁶³

Diognetus' reliance on Paul's writings is seen from the opening remarks to the final significant teachings. This trend in the content of this brief letter is vital to its teaching and interpretation, and it should not be ignored.

Connections between *Diognetus* and the Johannine Corpus

The Pauline connections are vast and quite obvious. Connections to John are much more subtle and rely heavily upon connecting primary concepts. Another important consideration to draw a Johannine connection is the authorship of *Diognetus*. Several concepts from *Diognetus* are evaluated, and then a brief discussion on the role authorship plays on interconnectedness with John ensues.

⁶² Meecham, "The Theology of The Epistle to Diognetus," 100. This issue is discussed more in chap. 4 in the section regarding justification.

⁶³ Bird and Dodson, *Paul and the Second Century*, 88. Par Sandin, "Diognetiana," *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 255 agrees with Bird and Dodson in the notion that it is Pauline to write in an anti-Jewish style that critiques their entire faith. Sandin goes even further by stating that Paul would often cast Jews as worse than pagans.

John spent much time writing to combat Gnosticism, and the terminology in his writing reflects this. A popular term John used to describe Jesus was “λογος.” This word communicated the nature of Christ in a way that platonic Hellenists would easily comprehend. Craig Keener supports the notion that one of the reasons John wrote his Gospel was to dispel some of the Gnostic teaching circulating during the late first century.⁶⁴ λογος communicated across those cultural boundaries and clearly taught that Jesus was the ideal example and the pre-eminent one. The author of *Diognetus* employs this very same title for the Son in the 11th chapter. This does prove to be somewhat of a challenge, as many scholars believe that the final two chapters are not original to the letter. However, the teaching contained within is very similar. The usage of “λογος” here lines up clearly with John’s Gospel, particularly John’s prologue.

Another example of connection with John that comes from *Diognetus* appears in chapter 12. “For neither is there life without knowledge, nor sound knowledge without true life; wherefore both are planted together.”⁶⁵ L. W. Barnard suggests that all of *Diognetus* has the same author, but is two distinct documents. He identifies this particular passage as an appeal to Christians, “that true knowledge and true life go together (12.4)—a thoroughly Johannine idea.”⁶⁶

Meecham also offers a place in *Diognetus* in which Johannine influence is visible. He expresses that *Diognetus* 10:3 (“how greatly will you love who thus first

⁶⁴Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1:160-63.

⁶⁵Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 377.

⁶⁶L. W. Barnard, “The Epistle Ad Diognetum Two Units From One Author?” *Zeitschrift fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 56 (1966), 132.

loved you?") is a mirror of 1 John 4:19.⁶⁷ While it is merely a passing comment, this teaching is not present anywhere else in the letter. The verbiage is quite similar, and the context is connected. John is referencing why one should love God and others, while the unknown author of *Diognetus* is explaining why one should love God, and the result of that love is love for others.

While discussing the most appropriate date range for the writing of John's Gospel, Keener draws a parallel with *Diognetus* 6:3 and Jesus' high priestly prayer in the Upper Room recorded in John 17:14-18.⁶⁸ Both passages speak to the concept of being in the world, but not of it. Much like the other Johannine references, these passages also have quite similar contexts. John is praying that God would protect the apostles as they go out into a hostile world to proclaim his name. The author of *Diognetus*, approximately seventy-five years later, explains why the world hates Christians: though they are in the world, they are not from the world. Barnard supports this same connection calling it, "the most striking example in Chapters 1-10."⁶⁹

One final connection with John's Gospel comes while offering a treatment of one of the most well-known passages in the Bible, John 3:16-18. Keener relates this text to *Diognetus* 7:5,⁷⁰ "When he sent him he was calling, not pursuing; when he sent him he

⁶⁷Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," 99.

⁶⁸Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:141.

⁶⁹Barnard, "The Epistle Ad Diognetum," 134. Barnard follows this with a listing of other numerous potential parallels: Dg. 6.5 with John 15.19, 17.14; Dg. 7.4—5 with John 3.17, 12.47; Dg. 9.1 with John 3.5; Dg. 10.2 with John 3.16, 1 John 4.9; and Dg. 10.3 with John 1.4, 4.19.

⁷⁰Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:141.

was loving, not judging.”⁷¹ This same passage from John’s Gospel is echoed later in *Diognetus* chapter 10:

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.⁷²

Conclusion of Connections between *Diognetus* and the Johannine Corpus

John’s influence exists throughout *Diognetus*. These highlighted examples all speak to the nature of God’s love for mankind, a central theme in John’s writing. The *λογος* concept that John is so well known for including in his writings is clearly present, though only in the questioned ending. Even without these examples, *Diognetus* is thoroughly Johannine. Not only does it stand as a connection between the Apostolic Fathers, but it also stands as an excellent and early example of the harmonious blending of Pauline and Johannine theology. With the connections to Paul and John clearly illustrated, a focus on some basic connections to later Apologists follows.

Conclusion of Literature Review Concerning the Concept of Christian Love in *Diognetus*

The *Epistle to Diognetus* is a well-crafted source of theology, doctrine, and an explanation of Christianity that also serves to provide theological connections between the writings of the apostles and the apologists. The vast mystery surrounding its

⁷¹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 365.

⁷²Roberts-Donaldson English Translation, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, in Early Christian Writings, accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>.

provenance should not hinder one from exploring the theological content within.

However, as attested to by many scholars, this is the very occurrence that has plagued earlier studies of this brief apology.⁷³ As Arnold points out, recently much more effort has gone into discovering the actual content of *Diognetus*.⁷⁴

With the entire focus of this research being to evaluate the answer of the nature of Christian love, it was necessary to define this term. Roland Chia offers a beautiful picture of how the church expresses this philanthropic love: “The confessing church seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being herself, that community which the world is not and can never be, unless it too enters into covenant with God.”⁷⁵

Numerous theological concepts exist within the pages of *Diognetus*; however for the sake of this research, two key concepts were examined. Justification and Christology define the Diognetian view of the nature of salvation and the Savior, while the other key concept, unity, explains what Heintz identifies as the heart of Christian love: imitating God in a way that develops unity.⁷⁶ As Arnold points out, the justification present in *Diognetus* is thoroughly Pauline, marked by the presence of and emphasis on

⁷³Almost every article that offers some evaluation on the theology of *Diognetus* includes a comment about the excess of work attempting to solve the problems of provenance and the comparatively small effort of analyzing the actual content.

⁷⁴Arnold, “Justification 100 Years after Paul,” 114.

⁷⁵Chia, “Resident Alien,” 97.

⁷⁶Michael Heintz, “Mimetes Theou in the Epistle to Diognetus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no 1 (Spring 2004): 107-19. Heintz’s entire article explains how the imitation of Christ is the mark of a true Christian.

substitutionary atonement and forensic justification.⁷⁷ The soteriological significance is that of timing and patience (μακροθυμια) as spoken of in 9:2.⁷⁸

Diognetus' Christology is a blend of Pauline and Johannine influences, both with the amplified quotation of John 3:16-18 as well as the emphasis on the humanity and humility of Christ. The emphasis on the nature of Christ, and the fact that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice, only bolsters the depth of God's love expressed. The final theological concept examined is unity. While this is not a technical concept such as the others, it is vital to the central argument of this thesis, as well as the answer to one of *Diognetus*' questions posed in chapter 1. Chia expresses the purpose of this unity. "The confessing church is also concerned with the conversion of persons... in which the person is conjoined with the community through Word and sacrament, and learns together with the community to indwell the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁷⁹

Finally, significant connections exist between Pauline and Johannine literature and *Diognetus*. These connections indicate the continued consistent teaching of the Apostles 100 years after their deaths. With the claim that the author of *Diognetus* makes of being a disciple of the apostles, one might imagine that these teachings would remain intact. However, without any direct Scriptural references, the author creatively and effectively delivers the same orthodox Christianity years later. Whether *Diognetus* is the missing Quadratus apology to Hadrian, the lost work of Polycarp, or a rhetorical exercise with no particular audience in mind, the unknown author "shed lustre on the Christian

⁷⁷Arnold, "Justification 100 Years after Paul," 125.

⁷⁸Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 368.

name in times when it was assailed and blasphemed from Jew and Gentile, and could only be professed at the risk of life. He must be ranked with the ‘great unknown’ authors of Job and the Epistle to Hebrews, who are only known by God.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹Chia, “Resident Alien,” 97. The thrust of Chia’s argument is that Christians are united by their faith and Savior rather than other factors.

⁸⁰Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325*, 700.

CHAPTER 3

DEFINING AND IMITATING THE LOVE OF GOD

As the author of *Diognetus* seeks to answer the second question, posed about the nature of Christian love, he uses four specific words to communicate the essence of this love. The unknown author of *Diognetus* cleverly illustrates the nature of this love throughout the text as he explains God's act of redemption. Then, he utilizes these examples by telling his reader that true Christian love is imitating God's love.¹ This chapter examines the four primary expressions of God's love² and seeks to harmonize these various terms to outline a coherent and cohesive image of divine love. Then, the issue of imitating God will be addressed. Finally, the holistic definition of God's love will be synthesized with the concept of imitating this love, to begin creating the foundation for second century Christian discipleship that is based on imitating the love of God.

Key Greek Words Translated as Love in *Diognetus*

One cannot read the core of *Diognetus* without clearly seeing the goodness and

¹H. G. Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," *The Expository Times*, 54 (1943): 133. Meecham explains that *Diognetus* 10:4-6 adds a very practical note to the nature of loving God and loving others. He explains that when one wants to love God, he demonstrates it by the way he shows love to others.

²The four primary words used to describe God's love, or Christian love, are φιλοστοργίαν, φιλανθρωπος, ἀγάπη, and χρηστοτητα. Other words are used for love; however, they either do not address God's love or are simply different forms of the aforementioned words.

love of God. Meecham explains that this is intentional, as the author seeks to address the love of Christians.³ He continues by expressing the centrality of God's love. When discussing the moral qualities of God, he says, "But the dominant conceptions is the 'goodness' and 'love' of God. The author's mind moves within the circle of God's qualities denoted by χρηστοτης, ἀγαπη, ἀγαπαω, φιλανθρωπος, φιλανθρωπια."⁴ These words are the basis of God's character as expressed throughout the text. One additional word that bears explaining is φιλοστοργιαν.

Familial Love: φιλοστοργια

As already seen, the theme of love runs throughout the whole of *Diognetus*. As the author begins by stating the initial inquiries of his audience, he chooses the word φιλοστοργια to define "the love which they have for one another."⁵ This is a compound word, adding φιλος and στεργω. Both words mean love, however the latter carries the connotation, "to have a benevolent interest in, or concern for."⁶ Together, Meecham points out that this communicates a familial love.⁷ This love is inward focused, even to the exclusivity of outsiders.

This is the type of love that Diognetus perceived Christians had for one another, a love that would be equated with the closeness of a family. Drawing from his

³Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," 21-22.

⁴Ibid., 22.

⁵Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II* (London: William Heinemann, 1917), 351.

⁶Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 943.

⁷Meecham, "The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus," 94.

own cultural context, the scope of the inquiry of Diognetus shows the limited perspective of true Christian love. Diodorus Silucus uses this same word to describe “natural love which parents bear toward their children.”⁸ This usage of φιλοστοργια illustrates the cultural understanding Diognetus has when attempting to quantify Christian love. Lampe defines it as, “tender love, affection, especially of family affection.”⁹ He lists *Diognetus* 1:1 as an example of this usage of the word. While Christians should love each other as family members, this is only one aspect of Christian love. This exclusive love is vital in a comprehensive understanding of Christian love, but it is shortsighted in scope.

Love of All Men: φιλανθρωπος

The author of *Diognetus* goes to great lengths to communicate the love of God. He does this in various ways, although typically it is through the usage of either several adjectives describing God, or adverbs describing God’s love.¹⁰ As Diognetus inquired about the φιλοστοργιον of Christians, the author of the epistle contrasts this love ideal with the picture of God’s character. His usage of φιλανθρωπος is only the beginning of this holistic picture of God’s love.

φιλανθρωπος carries a much more inclusive view of love. The roots of this compound word (φιλος and ανθρωπος) literally translate to “a love of man.” There are numerous shades of meaning and usage for this word throughout Hellenistic Greek.

⁸C. H. Oldfather, *Diodorus of Sicily II*, The Loeb Classical Library 2 (London: Harvard University Press, 1967), 480-81. Diodorus is recounting Greek history in his *Biblioteca historica*.

⁹G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1483.

¹⁰Beginning in *Diognetus* 8:7, most references to God include several modifiers that add significant richness to the nature of God’s character. *Diognetus* 8:7 includes the terms φιλανθρωπος and μακροθυμος.

Plutarch used it to describe Prometheus' devotion to mankind, even as far as to say that this devotion to men rather than the gods was the crime he committed.¹¹ The emphasis of this usage by Plutarch shows Prometheus' love for all mankind, not just a specific group.

Within Diognetus' cultural context, φιλανθρωπος carried the connotation of an inclusion of all men, even extending hospitality to all of humanity. This word was used often to describe how a king related to his people.¹² There is an essence of nobility or good will present in this expression of love. It is far-reaching in its inclusion, and even promotes an understanding of acceptance. It is as though there are the elements of closeness that φιλοστοργος communicates, but they extend beyond the expected relationships, and out to all of humanity. This is the way that the author of *Diognetus* describes God's love.

The author begins chapter 8 by pointing out the folly of popular philosophers' understanding of God. Finally, in *Diognetus* 8:7, the first of the descriptions of God occurs. The text draws somewhat of a paradox on God's character. The author begins by making the claim that God is "the Master and Creator of the universe, who made all things and arranged them in order,"¹³ but he immediately follows that up with the qualifiers of his character, "not only tender-hearted, but also very patient."¹⁴ The paradox of this passage is that God's position as Master and Creator, as well as orchestrator of the universe, is not typically paired with additional characteristics such as loving humanity.

¹¹Hubert Martin, Jr., "The Concept of Philanthropia in Plutarch's Lives," *The American Journal of Philology* 82, no. 2 (April 1961): 166-67.

¹²H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949), 125.

¹³Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 301.

¹⁴Ibid.

The Greek pantheon of gods did not exemplify the characteristic of loving humanity, however, the story of Prometheus does illustrate this.

Holmes translates φιλανθρωπος as “tender-hearted.”¹⁵ Lake’s translation records φιλανθρωπος as meaning, “kind to man,”¹⁶ while Meecham offers the translation, “a lover of man.”¹⁷ Given the roots of this compound word (φιλος and ανθρωπος), Meecham seems to have a more literal translation.¹⁸ However, it is apparent that in all the translations the idea of a heart-felt love for mankind is clearly communicated.

The other instance of φιλανθρωπος occurs in *Diognetus* 9:2. Here, the exact word is φιλανθρωπιας. Holmes, Lake, and Meecham all translate this occurrence as “kindness,” probably due to the presence of αγαπης in the same phrase.¹⁹ In the preceding phrase, the author describes God as having the characteristic of χρηστοτητος, or goodness.²⁰ This passage, describing the greatness of the love of God, echoes Titus 3:4-5. The author of *Diognetus* actually uses the same coupling of words as Paul, χρηστοτητος and φιλανθρωπος, to describe God’s kindness.²¹

The love of God is clearly expressed as a love for all of humanity. In the

¹⁵Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 301.

¹⁶Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 367.

¹⁷Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” 85.

¹⁸Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1056, defines this word as “having a benevolent love for humanity” and cites *Diognetus* 8:7 as an example of this definition.

¹⁹Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 302; Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 369; Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 84-86. This is one of the few times that all of the key translations agree on a specific English word.

²⁰Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 84.

²¹Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 736.

second century mind of Diognetus, seeing φιλοστοργια redefined as φιλανθρωπος meant something important. The author had cleverly shifted Diognetus' paradigm of Christian love from one of exclusion, to that of a love for everyone. As he continues to build his case for the true nature of Christian love, the author addresses the nature of this love by describing the nature of God. The root of Christian love is God's own love for mankind. When the author finally connects this vast description of God's love to the love of Christians, there can be no excuse for his audience to not see the true nature of Christian love. The inclusive aspect of God's love is one piece of the whole concept of love.

Common Love: ἀγάπη

This word is the most common word translated as love in *Diognetus*.²² ἀγάπη is also a common word in the New Testament writings to describe God's love. However, in *Diognetus* it is actually used more often to describe the love of Christians.²³ Meecham makes no specific notes on the usage of this word to describe any specific facet of God's love, but he does acknowledge the usage of it when describing God's love. Leon Morris, former Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, explains that within the New Testament writings, ἀγάπη is the choice word used to describe any divine love.²⁴ Though he tends to place all other "love" words in a subordinate role to ἀγάπη, he does speak to

²²Some form of ἀγάπη appears 13 times throughout the text.

²³Diognetus 5:11; 6:6; 9:2; 10:2; 10:4; and 10:7. No commentator acknowledges any unique meaning in this usage of ἀγάπη. See figure in Appendix 1, "ἀγάπη Translation Chart."

²⁴Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), 129-48. The entire text attempts to survey the term "love" throughout the LXX and Greek New Testament. His research is excellent, however he tends to elevate ἀγάπη over any other term translated from Greek into English as "love" in the Bible.

the overlap in usage between ἀγάπη and the φιλος word group.²⁵ As Morris emphasizes the value of ἀγάπη and, at some level, trivializes other “love words,” he sheds light on the importance of utilizing numerous words to define love. This is the strategy of the author of *Diognetus*.

A second potential reason for the generic usage of ἀγάπη in the text was due to its understanding outside of Christianity. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* explains that in polytheistic Greek writings, only one true example of the word exists, and it is not contextually understood as “love,” but “high esteem.”²⁶ In his commentary on *The Letter of Aristeas*, Meecham gives credence to the selective usage of ἀγάπη outside the Scriptures. He explains that “under the influence of Alexandrian Hellenists the terms [ἀγάπη, ἀγαπαις] were purged of their carnal associations and the way paved for the abundant use of ἀγάπη by N.T. writers to denote a spiritualized love, the love of God for men, and of men for God.”²⁷ These examples serve to inform the contextual understanding of Diognetus as he read this letter. The unknown author had no choice but to use numerous words to accurately describe God’s love. ἀγάπη alone would simply not suffice. However, as he lays out his argument, this word is useful to communicate God’s favor shown toward men.

The author of *Diognetus* explains that Christians are to love (ἀγάπη) other men, both Christians and non-Christians, a total of five times (the greatest usage of the word in *Diognetus*). Meecham points out a progression of thought regarding Christians

²⁵Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 260-69.

²⁶Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 6.

²⁷Henry G. Meecham, *The Letter of Aristeas: A Linguistic Study with Special Reference to the Greek Bible* (Manchester: The University Press, 1935), 63.

loving mankind: “Note how the scope of Diognetus’ original question, “what is the love which they have for one another?” is here enlarged (all men) and later particularized (vi, 6) into love of enemies.”²⁸ In *Diognetus* 6:6 he actually explains that Christians even love their own persecutors.

One of the clearest uses of ἀγάπη to describe God’s love for man is in *Diognetus* 10.2. The author offers a description of God’s action toward man that mirrors the language of John 3:16.²⁹ The love of God communicated in this passage follows the typical New Testament usage of the word. One key to this usage of ἀγάπη is that this love is shown not just in word, but also in deed. Consider John 3:16-17 of which this passage in *Diognetus* is possibly a treatment. John wrote that God loved the world, and then God expressed it by sending Jesus. In every occurrence of ἀγάπη in *Diognetus*, some sort of action is also present to show the love about which is being spoken. The source of the love (God or man), as well as the recipient of the love (God, Christian, pagan) is irrelevant. It appears that the author of *Diognetus* is attempting to show the active nature of the love of Christians.

God’s Goodness: χρηστοτητα

While the three previous words above are clearly translated as some form of love, this word is not. Typically translated as goodness or beneficence,³⁰ this term is used

²⁸Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 132. He goes on to explain, “it gives in brief compass a comprehensive survey of God’s gifts of love to men in creation, redemption, and sanctification . . . A free recollection of John iii, 16.”

²⁹Ibid., 111-12.

³⁰Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1090-91.

in conjunction with φιλανθρωπος to further describe God's character.³¹

This term is used frequently in the Apostolic Fathers to describe the character of God.³² One example of this usage is in 1 Clement 9:1. Here, Clement of Rome has just quoted parts of Isaiah 1, hoping to spur his audience on to faith in Christ. Clement follows this plea for repentance with a call to obey the will of God. In this passage he calls the sinners "petitioners of his mercy and kindness."³³ Clement describes God as exhibiting mercy and kindness (χρηστοτητος). Clement uses χρηστοτητος to also describe God as being generous.³⁴ An interesting observation is that in all three occurrences in Clement's writings, as well as all five occurrences in *Diognetus*, the χρηστοτητος of God is the catalyst for men to follow God. For both of these authors, it appears that God's goodness is more than a simple descriptor. It is such a noble characteristic that it beckons man's response.

This research seeks to define discipleship in *Diognetus* as imitating God's character; therefore, this characteristic of goodness must not be ignored. Paul also utilized χρηστοτητος in his own writings. Titus 3:4 was referenced earlier, but there are three passages (2 Corinthians 6:6, Galatians 5:22-23, and Colossians 3:12) that all echo each other. In all three passages Paul is instructing Christians how to honor God with their lives. As he lists characteristics of the honorable Christian life, kindness appears. Of these passages, Galatians 5:22-23 is probably the most well-known, being the "Fruit of the

³¹See appendix 2, "χρηστοτητος Translation Chart," for a complete list of each key translation of *Diognetus*, and how each translation fits within the context of each passage.

³²Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 125.

³³Bart Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 50-51.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 189-91 and 196-97.

Spirit” passage. In each of these places, kindness has been translated from *χρηστοτητος*.³⁵ Paul is urging Christians to exemplify *χρηστοτητος*, or kindness, in their lives.

Diognetus 10:4 specifically states that the way one loves God is by imitating his *χρηστοτητος*, or goodness.³⁶ Lake actually translates *φιλανθρωπος* as goodness in *Diognetus* 8:7,³⁷ just as he translates *χρηστοτητος* as goodness in *Diognetus* 9:1.³⁸ This beneficence of God is the foundation of his actions to redeem mankind, as is stated in *Diognetus* 9:2.³⁹

Conclusion

Throughout *Diognetus*, the author uses three primary words to define the love of God. Together, these words describe a love that is inclusive of all mankind (*φιλανθρωπια*), is active in its nature (*αγαπη*), and communicates kindness to its recipient (*χρηστοτητος*). While *Diognetus* inquired about a love that his culture misinterpreted as mysteriously exclusive and immoral, the holistic picture of God’s love is vastly different. Now that the author has shown the nature of God’s love, he explains how it is that Christian love shares these same characteristics.

³⁵Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 621, 651, and 692.

³⁶Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 303. All four primary translations translate *χρηστοτητος* as “goodness” in this passage. For a comprehensive list, see Table A2, “*χρηστοτητος* Translation Chart.”

³⁷Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 367.

³⁸Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1090. Within the definition relating *χρηστοτητος* to God, *φιλανθρωπος* and *αγαπη* are listed as synonyms.

³⁹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 85-86. The author of *Diognetus* explains that God allowed the world to be full of sin so that man could understand, without question that he could not enter Heaven in his own power. *Diognetus* states that it was because of God’s “goodness and power” that he chose patience (*μακροθυμια*) and mercy rather than destruction.

“Imitator of God” Defined in *Diognetus*

After crafting a vivid image of the love of the God of Christians, the author of *Diognetus* introduces the concept of imitating God. This concept of imitation of gods was not foreign to Diognetus. In Herodian’s *History of the Empire*, he records Marcus Aurelius being a man of such high character that his subjects sought to imitate (μιμητης) him.⁴⁰ Herodian also describes Antigonus, one of the successors of Alexander the Great, as one who mimicked Dionysus.⁴¹

However, the author of *Diognetus* takes this imitation to another level. *Diognetus* 10:4 offers a higher level of imitation: acting like, or imitating deity. Heintz explains that even in the Hellenistic culture, it was an expected, culturally normative concept for humans to try to imitate the gods.⁴² He continues by stating that this concept would be quite palatable to Diognetus, as it was a common expression in Hellenistic Greek.⁴³ However, the unknown author of *Diognetus* places several parameters on this imitation. This is not simply a self-willed, impulsive attempt to model one’s life after stories of the deeds of the gods. This imitation has a much greater, life-changing depth, and is not even possible outside of the will and power of God.

Imitating God Is Not Self-Willed

“And do not be surprised that a person can become an imitator of God; he can,

⁴⁰C. R. Whitaker, trans., *Herodian, Books I-IV* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 2002), 13.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 13-14. While Herodian wrote describing the events that occurred after the proposed writing, these two examples fall squarely within the accepted understanding of μιμητης and are merely examples outside of Patristic writings and the New Testament that indicate consistency of word usage.

⁴²Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 107-8.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 108.

if God is willing.”⁴⁴ This single verse introduces Diognetus to the concept of imitating the Christian God. Before defining this imitation however, the source and nature of the imitation must be established. The translation above of *Diognetus* 10:4 assigns to God the will that makes imitation possible. This is somewhat of a problematic passage because the subject of the will is the masculine pronoun αὐτοῦ. The two possible antecedents are both masculine: ἄνθρωπος and θεοῦ. Holmes and Meecham both ascribe the will to God,⁴⁵ however Lake retains the vagueness and simply translates it as “he.”⁴⁶ Meecham points out that while the context indicates the man as the agent of the will, it follows more theologically that the will permitting the imitation belongs to God.⁴⁷ Based upon the previous description of the moral ineptness of man (*Diognetus* 9:1-2), it appears to follow that the will capable of empowering man to imitate God belongs to God, himself.

Imitating God Is Humble

If the source of imitating God is the very will of God, what is the nature of the imitation? *Diognetus* 7:3-4 offers a basic understanding of the attitude God had when he reached out to save men. This same attitude defines the nature of how Christians are to imitate God. The author of *Diognetus* writes,

But perhaps he sent him, as a man might suppose, to rule by tyranny, fear, and terror? Certainly not! On the contrary, he sent him in gentleness and meekness, as a king might send his son who is a king; he sent him as God; he sent him as a man to men. When he sent him, he did so as one who saves by persuasion, not compulsion,

⁴⁴Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 303.

⁴⁵Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

⁴⁶Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 373.

⁴⁷Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 135. He also states that Lightfoot agrees with the thought that God is the one willing the imitation of himself, and not man. This mirrors Luke’s usage of μιμητης in Acts 18:21.

for compulsion is no attribute of God.⁴⁸

The nature of Jesus' mission to come to earth and redeem mankind was not a military or political venture, but a mission of love. Jesus did not forcefully make converts, but instead spoke with them of God's love and his forgiveness for their sins. This attitude of humility is necessary to imitate God.

Another example of the humility embodied in Christian love is seen in *Diognetus* 10:5-6. As the author describes imitating God in a practical sense, he states that, "happiness lies not in lordship over one's neighbours, nor in the desire to have more than one's weaker brethren, nor in being rich and coercing the more needy. Not in these things can any man imitate God. They are outside His majesty."⁴⁹ He continues by offering the opposite examples of the place of humility a Christian is to take when imitating God's own humility.

But whosoever takes upon himself his neighbour's burden, whosoever wishes to benefit another who is poorer in that in which he himself is better off, whosoever by supplying to those in want the things which he has received and holds from God becomes a god to those who receive them—this man is an imitator of God.⁵⁰

God's love is rooted in humility. This is seen in the manner in which Jesus came to earth, conducted his own ministry, and sacrificed his life. The author of *Diognetus* draws parallels between the actions and attitude of Jesus and the way in which a Christian should imitate God. Humility is a vital aspect of the love of God that is to be imitated.

⁴⁸Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 300-301. This passage continues by adding several more descriptors of the nature of Jesus' coming to earth to redeem mankind. Passages like this give *Diognetus* its unique beauty and poetry.

⁴⁹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

⁵⁰Ibid.

The Relationship between Imitating God and φιλανθρωπια

Two key passages in *Diognetus* connect the imitation of God to the Christian's love of all men. First, *Diognetus* 9 speaks both of the patience (μακροθυμια) and sacrificial love of God toward mankind. Concepts such as imputed righteousness, justification, and penal substitution are seen in the author's praise of the greatness of Jesus' sacrifice.⁵¹ This vast description of God's love has one particular characteristic that stands out: the author specifically states that it is directed toward "we who in past times were from our own deeds convicted as unworthy of life might now by the goodness of God be deemed worthy."⁵² The love of God was not initially directed toward Christians, but toward sinful men. God did not discriminate in his outpouring of love, and Christians are to follow suit.⁵³ Therefore, Christians are to imitate a non-discriminate love toward all men.

The Relationship between Imitating God and χρηστοτητα

The author of *Diognetus* has developed an excellent description of God's love, as well as an explanation of to whom it is directed. He has also brought a practical "crisis of belief" moment into his writing by explaining one way to love God is to imitate him. Now, in *Diognetus* 10:4 the author gives a command of what specific aspect of God's

⁵¹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87. These specific terms are not mentioned in this passage, but the author uses phrases such as, "the righteousness of one should justify the many," and, "what else could cover our sins but his righteousness?" *Dg.* 9:2-4 will be analyzed more thoroughly for its theological content in chap. 4.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 85.

⁵³Some may argue for election bearing weight on the author's explanation of the distribution of God's love. However, election, as a doctrine, was not a significant topic of discussion in the second century church. Clement of Alexandria appears to endorse the concept of unconditional election in the *Stromata* 7.17.

character one will imitate: God's goodness (χρηστοτητα). There is somewhat of a sense of a circular pattern in these verses. The author is saying one way to love God is by imitating him, and that one way to imitate God is by loving all men (φιλανθρωπος) and showing them God's goodness (χρηστοτητα).⁵⁴ But he continues and offers some practical examples of *how* one is to show God's goodness. Ultimately, it is an attitude of humility and selflessness, reflective of the sacrifice of Jesus. There is some parallel in the text when the author describes the way God came to man and the way a Christian is to show God's goodness. *Diognetus* 7:4 says that the son did not come forcefully (βιαζομενος).⁵⁵ In *Diognetus* 10:5 the author explains that Christians should help others who are needy, not coercing (βιαζεσθαι) them.⁵⁶ The command is explicit: Christians are to show God's goodness to others, thereby imitating God.

Conclusion

Diognetus begins with three questions. As the topic of the second question, the nature of Christian love, is addressed throughout the text, the image of a truly benevolent and loving God appears. This love is not a static act or attitude, but it is a dynamic force that is encapsulated in the greatest act of love ever displayed: the sacrifice of Jesus. This love is multidimensional in that it reaches out to all men, not just the exclusive group envisioned by *Diognetus*. God's love has pure motives behind it. It is a selfless love, with the needs of the recipient at heart. God's goodness is the overarching characteristic that defines his love. The author of *Diognetus* explains through striking imagery the

⁵⁴Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 365.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 364.

importance of imitating God's love and goodness. This, he writes, is what it means to be a true follower of God.

⁵⁶Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 372.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS EXEMPLIFYING LOVE IN THE *EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS*

The *Epistle to Diognetus* is not a theological treatise, and its purpose is not to explain the finer elements of Christian faith. At the point in history when *Diognetus* was supposedly penned (middle second century), there had not been any formal church councils to discuss significant theological issues and developments.¹ The church was still heavily persecuted, and bishops who were beginning to share their apologies were often being executed afterward.² Evaluating theological positions and content within Patristic writings can prove to be difficult, in that this content even predates the descriptors used by the earliest councils. As this research discusses various theological concepts, particular attention is given to not misidentify or overstate a particular doctrinal viewpoint.

While one can seek to understand the Christological or soteriological impetus in *Diognetus*, the two theological concepts most vital to understanding the essence of Christian love are justification and unity. As stated earlier, justification is a key theme

¹The Council of Nicaea would not happen for another 175 years. While there were some localized councils (Jerusalem and Jamnia), there had not been a council to clearly define doctrine.

²Robert M. Grant, "The Chronology of the Greek Apologists," *Vigiliae Christianae* 9, no. 1 (January 1955): 25-33. Grant offers an excellent overview of the timeline of the earliest apologists, beginning with Quadratus' and Aristides' apologies to Hadrian.

throughout chapter 9 of *Diognetus*.³ The author emphasizes the importance of the need of man to be placed into a right standing with God. The other key theological concept evaluated is unity. While this is not a typical category of doctrine, it is a theme the author develops throughout his discussion of who Christians are, why they behave in certain ways, and, most important to this research, why they express love in their unique way.⁴

Justification Identified in *Diognetus*

Justification is a key doctrine to orthodox Christianity. Without a proper understanding of this doctrine, one's view of the atonement of Christ and salvation is theologically inaccurate.⁵ Even in the first century of the church, the presence of this doctrine was significant, though not examined at length. D. H. Williams explains how one sees the presence of justification, particularly Pauline justification, in the Patristic writings.

Basic to patristic hermeneutical assumptions was the sense that any one text of Scripture had to be interpreted in light of all the rest of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. Scripture shares an inner coherence and design because of its divine origins, which means that the act of interpretation is in reality a task of unveiling and clarifying the pattern of truths already present in the structure. A theology gained from one text can and should inform the construal of others. It was automatic, therefore, for patristic writers to find Pauline perspectives in their reading of the Gospel and vice-versa.⁶

³A significant portion of chap. 9 is exegeted in this section of research to validate this claim.

⁴The concept of unity might best be understood as relating to citizenship in the Kingdom of God. However, this terminology is not used significantly (only once in 9:1), and I did not want to raise any unnecessary theological questions that are not even present within the text of *Diognetus*. The closest example of this terminology is "citizenship in Heaven," which is used in *Diognetus* Chap. 10 Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers I*, 371-73.

⁵D. H. Williams, "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57, no. 4 (October 2006): 651. Williams' article illustrates the importance of justification as a foundational doctrine even as early as the Patristic writers. While this doctrine was not viewed with a significant amount of importance until the Reformation, it has been a vital piece of Christian belief since the beginning of Christianity.

⁶*Ibid.*, 664-65.

Williams states that while a specific doctrine, justification in this case, is not explicitly mentioned, the patristic writers exercised excellent hermeneutical practices and interpreted the Scriptures as a whole unit. Therefore, if the claim is made that Paul wrote about justification by faith, then this same justification will be seen in other biblical texts. This is how *Diognetus* proclaims Pauline justification. The exact terminology is absent, but the theological concept is present, and even drives the entirety of *Diognetus'* redemption narrative in chapter 9.

Justification in *Diognetus* is most clearly seen in chapter 9. As the author unfolds God's plan of redemption for mankind, he specifically offers the reasoning behind both the delay and the motive of this redemption. *Diognetus* 9:2 explains that God waited until men had fully understood it was not possible to save themselves, "so that we who in past time were from our own deeds convicted as unworthy of life might now by the *goodness* of God be deemed worthy."⁷ God's goodness and love, which Christians are told to imitate, are the source of justification.⁸

The author of *Diognetus* continues by explaining that God's love is the motivation behind justification. As he builds to the climax of the exchange of the righteous for the unrighteous, he offers a doxological phrase proclaiming the goodness and love of God. This brief statement of praise to God for his goodness and love illustrates that the motive for redeeming mankind was God's love.⁹

⁷H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949), 85. italics mine.

⁸As stated earlier, the typical Pauline terminology of δικ- is not used, but the concept of being made worthy/righteous is clearly espoused.

⁹Ferdinand Probst, "Doctrine and Worship in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era" *The Month*, 16 (1872), 329-33. concludes that this particular phrase in *Diognetus* is most likely a fragment

Before evaluating the evidence of Pauline justification in *Diognetus*, a basic definition must be developed. Nick Needham, minister of Inverness Reformed Baptist Church and lecturer in church history at Highland Theological College, offers a basic understanding of what is termed justification. His basic understanding serves as the definition of justification for this research: “Although it does not always have the same precise connotation, it seems clear that there is a very prominent strand of usage in which it has a basically forensic meaning. That is, it means something like ‘to declare righteous,’ ‘to acquit,’ ‘to vindicate’”¹⁰ This is a basic and somewhat vague definition, but it touches on the essence of Paul’s intent in his own writings, and serves the purposes of this research.

Justification in *Diognetus* chapter 9

He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us; instead he was patient and forbearing; in his mercy he took upon himself our sins; he himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, “the just for the unjust,” the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but his righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!¹¹

This quote embodies the main thrust of the author of *Diognetus*’ description of salvation.

Previously, he has debunked pagan idol worship and the Jewish sacrificial system (chapters 2-4). Then, he explains the counter-cultural nature of Christians. Now, he

of an early Christian hymn.

¹⁰Nick Needham, “Justification in the Early Fathers,” *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 28.

¹¹Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 302.

moves into explaining why Christianity is the only true faith.¹² In this section, the author discusses the essence of God’s redemption of man: the sacrifice of Jesus.

Brian Arnold argues that, “the *Epistle to Diognetus* presents a forensic view of justification that is rooted in grace and stems from penal substitution. For the anonymous author of this epistle, justification is a legal declaration whereby God declares a sinner just and imputes to him the righteousness of Christ.”¹³ Building from this understanding of justification, along with Needham’s definition mentioned earlier, these verses of *Diognetus* clearly communicate each of these descriptions of justification.

Forensic justification. The concept of forensic justification simply means that the justification action has a legal basis, or standing.¹⁴ The author uses terms such as λυτρον (ransom), ἀδίκος (unjust), ἀνομος (lawless), κολασις (punishment). These terms indicate a real transgression and punishment, not just a conceptualization of breaking the law. The author also repeatedly uses the word ὑπερ¹⁵ in verse 2, to emphasize the importance of salvation being an act of God, not man. It is God who justifies man. There is no effort on man’s part. The author of *Diognetus* believes that an action *must* occur for man to be in right legal standing with God.

¹²The author of *Diognetus* is beginning to answer the third question raised by Diognetus, “why has this new race of men or way of life come into the world we love in now and not before?” Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 296.

¹³Brian John Arnold, “Justification One Hundred Years after Paul” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 105.

¹⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 724. Grudem’s perspective is from a reformed mindset; he is not intending to inform church history. However, this understanding does align with the terminology that the author of *Diognetus* uses when describing the act of justification.

¹⁵Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1030-31. ὑπερ is used here to communicate the *action* of redemption. It was not a passive act, but a highly active mission for the Son. Paul uses ὑπερ numerous times specifically in reference to the sacrifice of Christ. Examples include 1 Cor 5:7, Eph 5:2, and 1 Tim 2:6.

Penal substitution. Penal substitution, the doctrine of Jesus actually taking the place of the sinner in regard to the wrath of God, is the source of justification. Millard Erickson explains that in the New Testament there are two primary words used to describe this exchange, ἀντι and ὑπερ.¹⁶ Both carry the connotation that Jesus' death actually paid the cost of the transgressions of men. The author uses ὑπερ six times in *Diognetus* 9:2 when offering different perspectives on the exchange that the death of Christ made possible.¹⁷ This is the same concept Paul references in Ephesians 5:2, as he writes, “. . . καθως και ο Χριστος ηγαπησεν ημας και παρεδωκεν εαυτον υπερ ημων προσφοραν και θυσιαν τω θεω εις οσμην ευωδιας.”¹⁸ While Meecham does not necessarily agree entirely, he does at least acknowledge the presence of substitutionary atonement at some level. “His [the author of *Diognetus*] language (cf. especially ix. 5) trembles on the verge of the substitutionary principle. But the decisive step is not taken.”¹⁹ Meecham's perspective represents some level of discontinuity between Paul and *Diognetus*, however he fails to explain what decisive step *Diognetus* is missing to truly illustrate Pauline justification in *Diognetus* 9:2. In the great expression of joy the author

¹⁶Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 830-31. Like the usage of Grudem earlier, Erickson's systematic theology is not written from a Patristic perspective, but it does draw the connection between Pauline literature and *Diognetus*.

¹⁷Brandon D. Crowe, “Oh Sweet Exchange! The Soteriological Significance of the Incarnation in the Epistle to Diognetus.” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 102 (2011): 101. Each of these six examples communicates a different aspect of the nature of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. For a comparison of the terms, see Figure 1A, “Crowe's λυτρον Usage Chart.”

¹⁸Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 664. This verse is translated “as the Messiah also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God” (Holman Christian Standard Bible).

¹⁹Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” 100.

interjects at the climax of his explanation of salvation, “O sweet exchange,”²⁰ there is a flavor of substitution.

Imputed righteousness. “In this regard it is important to observe that it is in virtue of His righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) that the Son redeems. In an eloquent passage the Epistle names the moral qualities of the Saviour: He is holy, innocent, just, incorruptible, immortal. It then seems to sum them up in one word, righteousness.”²¹ Meecham, who wrongly understands the Diognesian view of redemption to be merely moral change, does rightly place the effectual emphasis of redemption on the righteousness of Jesus, the sacrifice. The author of *Diognetus* attempts to communicate the importance of the purity of the sacrifice of Jesus. In the previously referenced list of comparisons between the Son and mankind (*Diognetus* 9:2), imputed righteousness, though not specifically mentioned by name, is apparent as the author continues explaining redemption. *Diognetus* 9:5 clearly explains the act of redemption in terms of Jesus’ righteousness being the transitive element. “O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while *the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!*”²²

“O Sweet Exchange.” “ὦ της γλυκειας ἀνταλλαγης,”²³ is the exclamatory phrase that marks the climax of the author of *Diognetus*’ explanation of redemption. He

²⁰Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 371.

²¹Meecham, “The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” 100.

²²Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 302. The final phrase in this verse squarely places Jesus’ righteousness as the agent of justification. Millard Erickson explains that while some object to imputation, union with Christ makes true imputation possible. He explains that the nature of the personal relationship with the sinner and Christ makes it possible for the sinner to bear the righteousness of Christ. It is not because the sinner is able to do so, but because of Christ *in* the sinner. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 835-36.

²³Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 371.

is speaking of the exchange of the Righteous One for the sinner. This word has been used as an, “exchange of places when one body is thrust out by another.”²⁴ What an excellent picture of the atonement of Christ; the lawless sinner is thrust out of the seat of God’s wrath, and the righteous son replaces him. This exchange is what makes the justification of man possible. Brandon Crowe offers some insight into the usage of ἀνταλλαγῆς. He explains that the context of the word, one rarely used before *Diognetus*, places the spotlight not just on the sacrificial death of Christ, but also on the righteous life of Christ.

Therefore, in light of this focus on the Son’s Incarnation and death, it is likely that the “exchange” in view should be viewed as the entirety of the work of the Son in the Incarnation, extending both to a positive accomplishment of righteousness, and serving as a sacrificial λυτρον in his death. The “exchange” in this sense would be a holistic exchange between the lawless deeds of humanity, which lead to death, and the righteous life of the Son, which also led to his death (9,2). Viewing the ἀνταλλαγή in this way best retains the author’s own focus on the plurality of lawless deeds that leads to death which could only be offset by the righteousness of the Son who was given for sinners. Thus, this understanding gives due weight to both the Incarnation and sacrifice of the Son, which are highlighted particularly in 9,2b-5.²⁵

Diognetus 9:4 explains justification and the reason behind such a joyous exclamation. “In whom was it possible for us, wicked and impious as we were, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone?”²⁶ The sweetness of the exchange is not that it occurred, but that it occurred without any effort from sinful men. Once again, this illustrates the goodness (χρηστοτητας) of God.

²⁴Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 86. This is a reference to Simplicius’ writings in Aristotle’s *Physics*.

²⁵Crowe, “O Sweet Exchange!” 107. The pages preceding this quote are an exceptional overview of Crowe’s reasoning for placing such significant weight onto ἀνταλλαγῆς.

²⁶Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

Conclusion of Justification Identified in *Diognetus*

Arnold's definition of justification in *Diognetus* states that justification "is rooted in grace and stems from penal substitution."²⁷ If Arnold is correct that the justification presented in *Diognetus* is rooted in God's grace, what is the source of this grace? While *Diognetus* does not specifically use the word "grace" (χαρις), the concept is clearly present, and the example of God's grace also communicates its source.

Diognetus 9:1 states, "Having therefore planned everything already in His own mind with His Child . . . but creating the season of righteousness which is now, so that we who in past times were from our own deeds convicted as unworthy of life might now, by the goodness of God be deemed worthy."²⁸ The author places a contrast in this verse; sinners being convicted as unworthy (ἀναξιοι), then being deemed worthy (ἀξιωθωμεν). Note that the source of the conviction of unworthiness of life is the deeds of men, but the source of the worthiness of life is God's character. God's grace is seen, as it was his choice to act to deem men worthy of life. The source of God's grace is also seen in this verse, "ὑπο της του θεου χρηστοτητος."²⁹ This prepositional phrase shows that God's goodness is the source of his grace. God's goodness, the same characteristic Christians are supposed to imitate in *Diognetus* 10:4, is also the source of God's grace.

God's love and goodness are ultimately the sources of man's salvation. A vital piece of salvation is justification. *Diognetus* 9 argues for the necessity of man to be reconciled to God, and this reconciliation comes only through the exchange of the

²⁷Arnold, "Justification 100 Years after Paul," 105.

²⁸Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 85. The verbiage in Meecham's translation more clearly emphasizes the contrast between sinful men being unworthy, and then being "deemed worthy."

righteous Son for the unrighteous sinner. As the author of *Diognetus* proclaimed the greatness of salvation, this unmerited favor of God is also what he tells Diognetus is the essence of Christian love.

Christian Unity Identified in *Diognetus*

What is Christian unity, and what is the nature of this unity? The author of *Diognetus* states the unifying characteristic of Christians is not their ethnicity, language, culture, or any other outward indicator. Their unity is based upon their shared heavenly citizenship.³⁰ The essence of Christian identity is expressed in *Diognetus* chapter 6, verse 1: “To put it shortly, what the soul is to the body, that the Christians are in the world.”³¹ Christians are unified by their identity in Christ. *Diognetus* 6:5-6 summarizes the role of Christians in the world: “The flesh hates the soul, and wages war upon it, though it has suffered no evil, because it is prevented from gratifying its pleasures, and the world hates Christians though it has suffered no evil, because they are opposed to its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh which hates it and the limbs, and Christians love those that hate them.”³²

The author of *Diognetus* has clearly stated the role of Christians is to love the world that hates them. In the end of this chapter he solidifies this notion by stating that God has assigned Christians to this task, and it is improper for Christians to not live in

²⁹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 84.

³⁰Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 361. *Diognetus* 5 offers a list of paradoxes of the Christian life. The basic premise of each paradox is the sense of otherworldliness of the Christian life. *Diognetus* 5:9 states, “They pass their time on earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven.” This verse seems to encapsulate the sentiment throughout the whole chap.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 363.

this manner.³³ The call to love the world communicates solidarity in purpose. Christians are to unite through primarily one means, their identity as citizens of heaven, and love the world that hates them.

What Christianity Is Not

The author of *Diognetus* does not immediately set out to define what Christianity is, with a doctrinal confession or static list of important characteristics of a Christian. First, he requests that Diognetus clear his mind of his own prejudices and be prepared to hear a new message. Then, he employs the strategy of explaining Christianity through a comparison and critique of both pagan idol worship and the Jewish sacrificial system. In both of these sections the author approaches these false religions with sarcasm and describes them in such a way that exploits their own illogical errors. As he critiques these two religious systems before explaining Christianity, he builds a case, rhetorically, for being able to easily describe how Christianity is different from and superior to other religious systems.

The failure of pagan idol worship. After the initial introduction of the epistle, the author of *Diognetus* immediately launches into a scathing critique of pagan idol worship. An interesting note is that at the outset of this condemnation of idol worship, the author acknowledges that Diognetus does, in fact, participate in these activities.³⁴ The main charge that he brings against idol worship is that the idols being worshiped are

³³There is some disagreement on the intensity of this final statement. The author uses ταξις to communicate the importance of the role, or post of Christians. Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 363 argues that this carries a militaristic sense, while Meecham, *The Epistle of Diognetus*, 117 disagrees. However, both agree that the intent is to communicate that the role of Christians is to be the soul of the world.

³⁴Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 75.

nothing more than physical materials that have been crafted by human hands. To the author of *Diognetus*, there is no logical explanation for idol worship. Meecham explains, “What impresses his mind is not so much the wickedness of idolatry as its absurdity.”³⁵ His primary means of pointing out the foolishness of idol worship is by asking numerous rhetorical questions.³⁶ The answers to each of these questions are so obvious that his questioning almost takes on a sense of absurdity.³⁷ He concludes this chapter by simply stating that his argument is grounded, and if it is insufficient to convince someone of the foolishness of idol worship, then that person does not have enough sense to continue the explanation of Christianity.

The shortcomings of Judaism. After pointing out the obvious flaws in the Greek and Roman idol worship, the author of *Diognetus* sets his sights on Judaism. Whereas there were no redeeming aspects to idol worship, the author does begin his critique of Judaism by at least acknowledging that they do worship the true God. From there however, he clearly condemns their way of worship. While the author spent a single chapter condemning idol worship, he spends two chapters, twice the space, to explaining the shortcomings of the Jewish sacrificial system. Bryan Hollon offers a helpful chart that

³⁵Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 96.

³⁶Ibid., 75-77. The author begins by questioning the very materials of which the idols are made. “Is not one a stone, like that which we tread on, another bronze, no better than the implements which have been forged for our use, another wood already decayed, another silver, which needs a man to guard it lest it be stolen, another iron eaten through by rust, another earthenware, not a whit more pleasing than that made for the meanest service?” He builds by asking questions relating to the manufacturing of these idols, asking how the idols are worthy of worship if they were simply made by those worshiping them. The climax of his questioning comes as he asks, “Are they not all dumb? Are they not blind? Are they not without souls? Are they not destitute of feelings? Are they not without motion? Are they not all rotting away? Are they not all in the course of decay? (5) These things you call gods! These are what you serve! These you worship and in the end you become like them! (6) For this reason you hate (the) Christians—because they do not think that these are gods.”

³⁷The author of *Diognetus* employs a *redactio ad absurdum* argument here to further illustrate the illogical and ridiculous nature of idol worship.

illustrates the apportionment of the text, communicating the significant focus on the Christian lifestyle.³⁸ With Christianity being removed from its Jewish roots for about a century at the proposed date of writing of *Diognetus*, the author seeks to explain why Christianity is vastly different from Judaism. After a brief commendation of the Jews for worshiping the only true God, he instantly condemns their worship practices: “For whereas the Greeks furnish an example of foolishness by making offerings to *images* void of sense and hearing, these *Jews* ought rather to consider it folly maybe, not piety, in thinking that they are offering these things to God as though He were in need of them.”³⁹ The initial charge leveled against the Jews is that they approach God in arrogance because their worship implies that God *needs* their sacrifices.

The next chapter offers additional charges against the Jews. The author of *Diognetus* calls into question the Jewish food and festival laws. As he points out the incredulity of circumcision, food laws, and Sabbatarian observation, he concludes with another rhetorical question concerning how these actions render the Jews worthy (*αξιον*) to worship God.⁴⁰ His final critique of Judaism is about seasonal festivals. He raises the question of how the Jews know how to delineate between various seasonal festivals, and finally calls them foolishness. He concludes chapter 4 by affirming Christians for avoiding the foolishness of idol worship and Judaism, as well as inviting Diognetus to truly learn about the Christian life. But he adds a unique twist to this transition when he states that man, in and of himself, is not capable of teaching the truth of Christianity. This

³⁸Bryan Hollon, “Is the *Epistle to Diognetus* an Apology?” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 28 (November 2005): 134-35.

³⁹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 77.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 78-79.

provides an excellent final contrast between these two false religions, which *can* be explained by man, and Christianity, which requires divine instruction to truly understand.⁴¹

Bryan Hollon summarizes these first few chapters by pointing out the apparent differences in Christianity and other religions. This summary leads into a discussion of *Diognetus* chapters 5 and 6, where the author defines Christianity through a list of paradoxes:

It can be argued that even in the discussions of pagans and Jews, it is the Christians who are the focus. And this is to be expected. Looking back at Chapter 1, we see that, of all Diognetus' questions, only one was not concerned with Christian practices, and this was the inquiry, "what God do they believe in," Interestingly, this question too seems to follow from a general curiosity about Christians in general, Diognetus is so interested in this group of people that he asks, "what God do they believe in," the Christian way of life, in Diognetus' mind, is different and needs explanation. All of the other issues addressed by the author are ancillary to this core concern.⁴²

The Paradox of Christian Life in *Diognetus*

After defining what Christianity *is not* by condemning pagan idol worship and the Jewish sacrificial system, the author now turns to describing what Christianity *is*.

⁴¹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 83. This concept of divine instruction is brought full circle in the beginning of chap. seven, after the author has thoroughly offered Diognetus a vivid description of the Christian lifestyle. "For this is not, as I said, an earthly discovery which was committed to them, and no mortal idea which they think it their duty to guard with such care, not have they been entrusted with the stewardship of mere human mysteries. (2) But in truth God Himself, the all-sovereign and all-creating and invisible God, Himself from heaven established among men the truth and the holy and incomprehensible word and fixed it firmly in their hearts."

⁴²Hollon, "Is the *Epistle to Diognetus* an Apology?" 135. In his research, Hollon seeks to answer the genre question about *Diognetus*. One of the key points he draws from the text is that regardless of the nature of the audience, the central focus of *Diognetus* is the Christian life. If *Diognetus* is an apology, and the audience is a pagan seeking understanding about Christianity, then it follows suit that the author would explain the reasoning behind the differences in the Christian lifestyle. However, if *Diognetus* is actually more of a paranaetic, then the author exhorts his audience to live according to biblical principles. The point is that no matter the purpose of the writing, there is a vast distinction made between the false religions and Christianity.

Chapters 5 and 6 do not offer a litany of descriptors of Christianity, as much as they illustrate the paradox of Christian life in a fallen, sinful world. As the author seeks to describe the Christian life, *Diognetus* 5:4 offers the first insight into the unity of Christians: “While living in Greek and barbarian cities, according as each obtained his lot, and following local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life, they show forth the wonderful and confessedly strange character of the constitution of their own citizenship.”⁴³ This verse offers Diognetus two important concepts: unity outside of ethnicity, and Heavenly (Kingdom) citizenship, both of which will be explored. The unity espoused in both of these concepts is rooted in God’s love.

After this declaration of Christians being citizens of a kingdom not of this world, the author dives into the paradoxes that echo John 17:14-19. These descriptions cover the physical, moral, ethical, social, and spiritual aspects of life. These paradoxes climax at the beginning of chapter 6 when the author writes, “What the soul is in the body, that the Christians are in the world.”⁴⁴ From this point, he applies this analogy to the same areas of life, and shows how it is that God sustains the world through Christians.⁴⁵ The author concludes this chapter by glorifying the role of Christians in the world. His evaluation is that the role of Christians is vital to the well-being of the whole world, and that Christians are obligated to stand as God’s representatives in a fallen world.

⁴³Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 359.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 361.

⁴⁵Meecham, *The Letter of Aristeas*, 16. Meecham draws a parallel with this same concept of God’s people sustaining the fallen world in the *Letter of Aristeas*, except it references the Jewish people, not Christians.

The paradox of the Christian life illustrates the importance of Christian unity. Christians are not united in any sort of earthly way. Their identity is not determined by any social construct. This is valuable to understanding the importance of true Christian unity. Christianity *is* a paradox to the fallen world, and *Diognetus* eloquently illustrates this point.

Unity outside of ethnicity. In the opening chapter of *Diognetus*, the author restates Diognetus' initial questions. One of the questions posed is regarding "why this new race or practice has come to life at this time."⁴⁶ While attention has already been given to the second portion of that question, "at this time,"⁴⁷ the first half of the phrase, "why this new race or practice," sheds light onto how Diognetus perceived Christians. As Diognetus raises the question, he offers two potential descriptors for Christianity, "γενος" and "ἐπιτηδευμα." The first communicates the idea of a people group, or ethno-social homogenous people.⁴⁸ According to Kimber Buell, the ancient mind would define this word with the idea of a group of people such as Roman citizens, or Jews. These groups had some sort of geographical, social, ethnic, or physical commonality that unified them.⁴⁹ The second term, ἐπιτηδευμα, more definitively translates to "a way of living."⁵⁰ Diognetus offered two possibilities that would define the unity of Christians, either a

⁴⁶Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 351.

⁴⁷In the earlier discussion regarding justification, the timing of redemption was discussed and it was determined that the timing of Jesus' sacrifice was so that men could see that it was impossible to provide salvation for themselves.

⁴⁸Daniel B. Wallace, *A Reader's Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 225. Also, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 194.

⁴⁹Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 30-32.

⁵⁰Wallace, *A Reader's Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers*, 225.

socio-ethnic or lifestyle commonality. However, as the author truly defines Christian unity, he redefines these concepts by using a more precise term: “πολιτευοντα,” or citizenship.⁵¹

Heavenly citizenship. Heavenly citizenship is another term for the state of being a Christian.⁵² The author of *Diognetus* writes, “They pass their time on earth, but have their citizenship in heaven.”⁵³ Though only used once in the entire epistle, the author seems to set forth a unique descriptor of this specific characteristic that unites Christians. The author of *Diognetus* does describe how it is that one obtains this citizenship, as well as how a heavenly citizen lives as a sojourner in the earthly life.

How does one obtain this citizenship? *Diognetus* 10:1 raises this question. The challenge in it is the apparent lacuna in the text in the middle of verse one. However, one may infer from verses two and three that the means to citizenship in Heaven is by believing the message from the Father. The Father grants this citizenship; and the means by which one becomes a citizen are, according to *Diognetus* 10:4, through the loving will of the Father.⁵⁴

Finally, the results of the citizenship are visible in the life of the new Christian. Meecham encapsulates several aspects of this new life:

The immediate result of redemption is that man is enabled to ‘enter the Kingdom of

⁵¹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 360-61. *Diognetus* 5:9.

⁵²This term is used in *Diognetus* to poetically define one aspect of Christians. This term also clears Christians of the charge of not having allegiance to the Roman Emperor. A Christian did not have to renounce their Roman citizenship to be a heavenly citizen.

⁵³Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 361.

⁵⁴Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 133-34. The issue of interpretation of whose will allows for man to be saved was settled for the purposes of this research in chap. 2. It is God’s will that governs citizenship into Heaven. This passage carries tones of election.

God,' its moral issue is holy and joyous living. Redemption and sanctification are linked together. After describing the salvation through the Son and the faith and knowledge by which it is apprehended, the author continues,' with what joy, think you, will you be filled? . . . loving Him you will imitate His goodness' (x. 3-4). Thus the redeemed man brings forth ethical fruits.⁵⁵

Meecham seems to focus heavily on the moral and ethical changes that take place in the life of the new Christian as the key benefit of citizenship in Heaven. Denise Kimber Buell also appears to place a significant amount of emphasis on the religious or moral practices of early Christians.⁵⁶ It appears that both Meecham and Buell miss the importance of the true identifier of Christians, which is spiritual regeneration.

The fruit of the conversion is important, as it shows the outward indication of the changed life. This change in lifestyle of imitating God's love is what unifies Christians. It is no mistake that the author of *Diognetus* follows a call for salvation with a command to imitate God. The remainder of *Diognetus* 10 has a similar message to 1 John 4:7-21. If a person claims to be a Christian, then he will love God by loving others.

Intersection of culture and heavenly citizenship. One final note must be made regarding the intersection of heavenly citizenship and worldly culture before evaluating the results of Christian unity portrayed by the author of *Diognetus*. Chia seeks to explain some unique aspects of the intersection of faith and culture, and point out the similarities between the early church era and the twenty-first century. While his cultural analysis on the current time is not particularly useful for this research, his observations

⁵⁵Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 24.

⁵⁶Buell, *Why This New Race*, 42. Buell notes important ideas in the concepts of socio-ethnic identity among early Christians. However her views seem short-sighted because they do not account for the spiritual regeneration and salvific aspects of the changed life of a Christian. These aspects seem to be emphases in *Diognetus*, which she simply missed.

about faith and culture in the second century help to summarize this vast issue. He first observes that Christianity and culture are not mutually exclusive, or even pitted against one another. He proposes that the church exists in, and should have an impact on, the human culture in which it exists.⁵⁷ This same sentiment is shared by *Diognetus*: “so too the world, though in no wise wronged, hates Christians, because they set themselves against its pleasures.”⁵⁸

Second, the church should not be ignorant of its culture, but should seek to engage and interact with the lost world.⁵⁹ This element of interacting within the culture is the underlying issue with the command to love God by loving others. As the author of *Diognetus* describes imitating God’s love in chapter 10, there is a sense of selfless service to the interaction with others. Coupling that type of service with the inclusive nature of God’s love (φιλανθρωπια), it is apparent that Christians are to interact selflessly with those caught up in the worldly culture.

The Results of Christian Unity

After the author of *Diognetus* describes the nature of imitating God, he offers a couple of examples of the attitude in which one does this. To summarize *Diognetus* 10:5-6, the overall attitude of imitating God is in humility and selflessness. The author even exclaims that, “Whoever provides to those in need things that he has received from God,

⁵⁷Roland Chia, “Resident Alien: Some Reflections on Church and Culture,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 92 (2000): 92-93.

⁵⁸Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 81. This portion of verse five was selected for quotation because it embodies both the concept of the church being separate from the world, but also represents the overall tone and message of chap. 6.

⁵⁹Chia, “Resident Alien,” 94-95.

and thus becomes a god to those who receive them, this one is an imitator of God.”⁶⁰ The phrase regarding “becomes a god” raises concern about the theology that is taught in this passage. The author appears to be claiming that when Christians bear these traits, they also bear some of the same characteristics of God, therefore becoming a witness to God.⁶¹ Being a witness for God and showing God’s love in practical ways are only some of the outcomes of imitating God. *Diognetus* 10:7 offers the following three additional outcomes of imitating God that specifically relate to unity.

Speak of the mysteries of God. This result is the spoken word that accompanies the practical actions of love. One might imagine the author of *Diognetus* himself thinking about the very act he is doing in writing down this defense and explanation of “the mysteries of God.” Foster ties both the redemption and imitation of God together as he discusses the overall thrust of *Diognetus*:

Chapter 9 elucidates the salvific dimension of what God brought about through the work of his son in making righteous those who were formerly wicked (9.3-5). Finally, this is seen as placing a responsibility on those whom God has loved (10.1), which necessitates that they emulate the goodness of God.⁶²

Love and admire the persecuted. If *Diognetus* were written in the middle of the second century, it would still be over one hundred fifty years until Christianity would no longer be outlawed in the Roman Empire. Many seasons of persecution and execution awaited these Christians during the second century. Supposing that this epistle is truly

⁶⁰Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 303. Holmes translation is used here because the translation of the Greek is more logical and natural in its flow. Meecham also speaks of the Hellenistic concept of deification of man.

⁶¹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 143-44. Meecham leaves the conversation open-ended, however he seems to support this same notion with support from Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus.

⁶²Paul Foster, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” *The Expository Times* 118, no. 4 (2007): 162-68.

addressed to a Roman official of sorts, Diognetus would likely be quite familiar with the persecution of Christians. The author appears to appeal to Diognetus based upon the baffling fact that Christians are willingly dying for their faith.

Condemn deceit and error of the world. This final outcome is the very thing that unifies Christians: their faith. The Apologists wrote to explain and defend their faith. The first few chapters of *Diognetus* stand as an excellent example of “condemning deceit and error of the world.”⁶³ Note that the author uses the same word, *απατης* (deception), both here as well as earlier (4:6) when commending Christians for avoiding the deceit of Judaism and pagan idol worship. This defense of the Christian faith promotes unity by centering Christians around their faith, which serves as their one commonality,.

Conclusion of Theological Elements in *Diognetus*

The *Epistle to Diognetus* offers a brief snapshot into Christianity about one hundred years into its existence. There are numerous theological conversations that can spring out of this unique text. However, to remain focused most specifically on the application of relating imitating God’s love to discipleship, this research is delimited to two: justification and Christian unity. Other theological issues, such as soteriology and Christology are addressed at some level when discussing justification; but only at the level necessary to more coherently understand justification in *Diognetus*.

⁶³Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 89.

Justification Illustrated in *Diognetus*

As the author of *Diognetus* seeks to define Christianity, one of his strategies is to summarize the biblical redemption narrative and give a clear picture of the specific acts of God that brought about salvation for mankind. One of the key aspects of redemption is justification. As Arnold illustrates, Pauline justification is thoroughly present throughout *Diognetus*.⁶⁴ Particularly focusing in on chapter 9, one sees the exclamation by the unknown author, “O sweet exchange,”⁶⁵ illustrating a clear reference to the penal substitution of Christ’s sacrifice. Finally, the chain of “ὑπερ” actions in *Diognetus* 9:2 reiterate the active nature of salvation. These culminate with the author stating, “and the righteousness of one should justify many wicked!”⁶⁶ This use of justified (δικαιωσυνη), as Lienhard states, emphasizes the importance of the sacrifice of the Son, where his righteousness is placed onto the many wicked.⁶⁷ The depth and humility of God’s love is illustrated through justification. One of the most salient aspects of justification is that God *chose* to act out of his love; the same love Christians are to imitate.

Unity Illustrated in *Diognetus*

Unity is both a byproduct and foundation of Christian love. Through their common beliefs, people from all races, professions, and socio-economic backgrounds are

⁶⁴Brian John Arnold, “Justification One Hundred Years After Paul” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013). See chap. 4, n. 10.

⁶⁵Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 302.

⁶⁶Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

⁶⁷Joseph T. Lienhard, “The Christology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, no. 24 (1970): 286.

unified. This unity is a supernatural citizenship in Heaven. The normative socio-ethnic boundaries fade away, as they are subservient to the greater unifier, eternal life in Christ. But this unity also elicits action. Diognetus acknowledges the differences in the Christian life, and is curious as to their source of this difference. One of the key differences the author illuminates is the nature of Christian love. As Christians are to show love for all men, they must stand boldly in a hostile culture proclaiming their hope. This is faith in action. Bryan Hollon, while speaking of the general nature of the epistle, states this about the consistent theme of the Christian lifestyle:

The rhetorical situation of the *Epistle to Diognetus* is a cultural context where Christians are clearly different from non-Christians. This difference needs explaining, and whether the explanation offered in Diognetus is an exhortative response to the inquiries of a person of high status, or a letter written for the edification of Christians, the rhetorical situation is a context where Christian existence in the world is puzzling. Also, the analysis of the text's arrangement has shown that the inquiries were motivated by Diognetus' curiosity concerning the distinctiveness of the Christian way of living.⁶⁸

The Epistle to Diognetus offers a clear picture of how unity in Christ is the foundation for how Christians are to live, as well as an outward expression of their faith. The author writes, “Whoever provides to those in need things that he has received from God, and thus becomes a god to those who receive them, this one is an imitator of God.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸Hollon, “Is the *Epistle of Diognetus* an Apology?” 127-46.

⁶⁹Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 303.

CHAPTER 5

BIBLICAL CONNECTIONS AND FINAL ANALYSIS

The Epistle to Diognetus is approximately one hundred years removed from the writing of the New Testament. Featuring no direct quotes or specific references of Scripture, it can be difficult to clearly identify biblical references. However, both Pauline and Johannine theology are utilized thoroughly throughout *Diognetus*. In this chapter, the text of *Diognetus* will be compared with the Pauline and Johannine corpuses for similarities in usage of the key terms for love: *χρηστοτης*, *ἀγαπη*, *ἀγαπαω*, *φιλανθρωπος*, *φιλανθρωπια*. Also, parallels will be drawn between the Pauline and Johannine corpuses and the text of *Diognetus* illustrating both key theological concepts (justification and unity). Finally, a summary of the research findings will illustrate the importance of imitating God's love as a mark of true second-century discipleship.

Biblical Connections between *Diognetus* and the Writings of Paul and John

One key source of biblical connection is phrasing and word usage. Several semantic similarities appear, specifically between the Pauline corpus and *Diognetus*. Also, the author utilizes Johannine concepts in his discussion of redemption. Another significant place of Johannine influence is in the final two appended chapters of *Diognetus*, with the use of *λογος*. The purpose of this final section of research is to

illustrate continuity from the New Testament to *Diognetus* regarding imitating God's love as a mark of true discipleship.

Connections between *Diognetus* and the Pauline Corpus

Diognetus is thoroughly Pauline from its Christology to its clear affirmation of substitutionary atonement. Regarding grace, there is perhaps no other document in the Patristic literature, certainly nothing in the ante-Nicene period, that renders a clearer exposition of Paul's doctrine of justification than this apologetic letter. More specifically, the author of *Diognetus* expounds a view of justification that is in harmony with Paul's understanding of justification as well as a view of the atonement that is in harmony with Paul's understanding of the atonement."¹

Diognetus communicates the same theological perspective as Paul in many aspects of justification including the forensic nature of justification, penal substitution, and imputed righteousness. While each of these three characteristics has already been discussed and identified in *Diognetus*, more specific connections to the Pauline corpus will be made below.

God's love for all men (φιλανθρωπια). Describing the love of God that brought about salvation, Paul uses φιλανθρωπια only one time in all of his New Testament writing. In Titus 3:4-5, Paul speaks of the goodness and love (φιλανθρωπια) of God appearing, or being illuminated (ἐπεφανη). A.T. Robertson describes this love as "the philanthropy of God our Saviour."² In this passage, Paul implicitly states that God's love is for all men.³ *Diognetus* 9:2 says that it was out of God's exceeding kindness

¹Brian John Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 104-5.

²A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: The Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 606. Robertson also affirms this being the only usage of this word by Paul.

³D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 444-45.

(φιλανθρωπια) and love that God brought about the season of righteousness (the coming of Christ and redemption).⁴ The foundation of the Gospel is God's kindness toward all mankind, just as *Diognetus* relates God's kindness to the coming about of the age of righteousness and redemption.

God's Goodness (κρηστωτητος). Paul also describes God as having the quality of goodness (κρηστωτητος). Paul uses this word nine times throughout his writings. Once, it is used in 1 Corinthians 15:33 to restate a line from Menander's comedy, *Thais*, saying that bad company corrupts good morals.⁵ Other than this single outlier, Paul uses this term to either describe a characteristic of God relating to salvation, or to the way Christians ought to conduct themselves. Four passages (Romans 2:4 and 11:22, Ephesians 2:7, and Titus 3:4-5) all refer to God having the characteristic of goodness. They also state that this goodness is a motivating factor in God's desire to redeem mankind.

Using Titus 3:4-5 as an example, Paul states, "when the goodness [κρηστωτητος] and loving kindness [φιλανθρωπια] of God our Savior appeared, he saved us." (Titus 3:4-5) This is the same goodness that is spoken of in *Diognetus*, when the author writes, "We, who in past time were from our own deeds convicted as unworthy of life might now by the goodness [κρηστωτητος] of God be deemed worthy."⁶

Another excellent example is Romans 2:4. Paul is invalidating the Jews' perceived ethnical preferential treatment by God. Schreiner explains that Paul is utilizing

⁴H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949), 84-85. Lake and Holmes both also translate φιλανθρωπια as kindness.

⁵Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129.

a diatribal argument, where he holds a mock debate against a pretend foe.⁷ In this debate, he exposes the Jewish pretense that God owes their race favor and goodness. Verse four is the climax of the argument, when Paul states that the Jews presume God's goodness, but the true purpose of God's goodness is to lead men to repentance. In essence, Paul is arguing that God's goodness is a catalyst for salvation. His goodness is both the motivation (Titus 3:4-5) and the catalyst (Romans 2:4) for salvation. The same is seen in *Diognetus* when the author argues that God, in his goodness, chose to save mankind.

The second primary way that Paul uses κρηστωτητος is in describing the way Christians ought to conduct themselves. Four key passages stand as examples of this usage: 2 Corinthians 6:6, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:32, and Colossians 3:12. All of these passages teach the importance of having goodness in one's life. Galatians 5:22 is part of the fruit of the Spirit, while 2 Corinthians 6:6, Ephesians 4:32, and Colossians 3:12 are exhortations about conduct. While the verses leading up to Ephesians 4:32 are restrictive commands, verse thirty-two provides the positive example, opposite of these forbidden negative behaviors. The specific application of kindness in this passage relates to forgiveness. A. Skevington Wood, former Principal of Cliff College, explains,

Having done with all these malicious traits, the Christian will display kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. "Be" is really "become" (ginesthe), for Paul realizes that his readers have not yet attained "the fullest measure of perfection found in Christ" (v.13). To "be kind" (chrestoi) is to show a sweet and generous disposition.⁸

Paul is exhorting the Christians in Ephesus to continue to become more and more kind (κρηστος) and compassionate to one another, following the example of Christ.

⁶Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 85.

⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic: 1998), 105-10.

⁸A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank

The author of *Diognetus* explains that a key indicator of true salvation is a desire to imitate God.⁹ While discussion follows later regarding the nature of imitating God, a few comments are in order regarding the “what” of the imitation. In *Diognetus* 10:4, the author explains that by loving God, one imitates God’s goodness (κρηστοτητος). Again, we see a directive to exhibit the characteristic of goodness. As Paul exhorted Christians in Galatia, Corinth, Ephesus, and Colossae to exhibit goodness [κρηστοτητος] in their lives, so too the unknown author of *Diognetus* states that it is the characteristic of God’s goodness (κρηστοτητος) that one is to imitate. This example offers another example of continuity between Paul’s writings and *Diognetus*.

Imitating God (μιμητης). Immediately following Paul’s exhortation to be kind, found in Ephesians 4:32, he makes a summary statement in 5:1 of the previous encouragement:

The οὖν signals that Paul is now drawing his admonitions in 4:25-32 to a close by stating clearly the principle he has been developing. The previous section has ended with the statement that his readers’ re-creation in God’s image should motivate their behavior (4:24), and the new section began with a διο (διο, therefore) showing that Paul intended to explain what this meant with specific examples (4:25). Now at the close of this section, Paul summarizes his admonitions by returning to the thought that, in their behavior, his readers should be “imitators” (μιμηται, mimetai) of God.¹⁰

Frank Thielman points out the ultimate exhortation is to imitate God, and that these other actions are the byproduct, or even practical ways one imitates God.

E. Gaebelien (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 66.

⁹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 373.

¹⁰Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 320.

Ephesians 5:1 is the only place within the Pauline corpus where a direct command exists to imitate God. All other occurrences of μιμητης or its other forms are either commands to imitate Paul's example, or they are descriptive in nature.¹¹ Paul concludes this command by telling them how to imitate God, namely, by walking in love (actively loving) in the same sacrificial manner as Christ.¹²

Michael Heintz, in his article regarding imitating God in *Diognetus* disagrees with the premise that the author of *Diognetus* was referencing this Pauline teaching, but rather Heintz claims the author was relying on popular Hellenistic culture to inform his audience: "In the 10th chapter of the Epistle, which is clearly paraenetic, the author utilizes language common to Hellenistic moral theory."¹³ He continues by stating that these concepts were common in Hellenistic thought and rooted in platonic philosophy.¹⁴ While he does not directly tie the usage of μιμητης directly to Paul, he also does not deny the possibility. His conclusion is that the author is actually drawing from the cultural concept, knowing that it is also found in the writings of Paul.¹⁵ Heintz does state that the Christian nature of imitating God is unique when compared to the pagan cultural idea of

¹¹First Thessalonians 1:6 records Paul stating that the Christians in Thessalonica imitated the examples of Paul and God. Further in the epistle, Paul states that they also imitated the churches in Judea, by also enduring violent persecution. The only other Pauline usage of imitation is as he encourages both the Corinthian and Thessalonian Christians to imitate his own example.

¹²Wood, *Ephesians*, 66-67.

¹³Heintz, "μιμητης θεου in the *Epistle to Diognetus*," 108.

¹⁴Ibid., 108-9. The examples he cites are from *Phaedrus* and *Theatetus*, which spoke highly of trying to improve one's own virtues by imitating the gods. He also draws from Philo of Alexandria's commentary on the life of Abraham. Philo explains that Abraham's obedience to follow God's command and leave his homeland is an example of commitment to God, by living in accord with the will of God.

¹⁵Ibid., 117. While the Epistle to Diognetus employs the language of "imitation of God," clearly this idiom is not original but rather a part of the philosophical koine of the Hellenistic world. The author of the Epistle, in an effort to persuade Diognetus to embrace Christian faith, uses language which would have been quite familiar to an educated sophisticate of the second century (terms such as λογος, ευδαιμονειν, φιλανθρωπια, ευεργετειν, μιμητης του θεου).

imitating the gods.¹⁶ The goodness of God that bears imitating is quite different than the characteristics of the gods that pagans sought to imitate.

Does *Diognetus* rely on the Pauline corpus, specifically Ephesians 5:1, when speaking of imitating God? The cultural setting is vital to the author because he is not writing to an audience who is most likely well-versed in Paul's writings. However, it appears that extensive parallels exist between *Diognetus* 10:4 and Ephesians 5:1. Both passages speak of imitating God's love and goodness, and both passages carry the same circular pattern that one way to show God love is by showing his love to others.

Man's need for justification. To say that man is in need of justification implies that he is not in right standing with God. Paul uses the first three chapters of Romans to clearly explain this point. His conclusion is found in his own rendering of Psalm 14 in Romans 3:10-12.¹⁷ Paul writes, “οὐκ ἔστιν δικαίος οὐδε εἷς,” translated as no one is righteous, not one.¹⁸ This is an emphatic statement condemning all of mankind. Paul clearly states that all are in need of justification.

This same imperative appears in *Diognetus*. Chapter 9 records, in detail, man's need for redemption and to be justified before God. Verse one, speaking to the issue of why redemption has come at this present time, clearly illustrates the Diognetian view of

¹⁶Heintz, “μυμητης θεου in the *Epistle to Diognetus*,” 118.

¹⁷Schreiner, *Romans*, 165.

¹⁸Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 525.

man's need to be justified before God: "And having clearly demonstrated our inability to enter the Kingdom of God on our own, one might be enabled to do so by God's power."¹⁹

Another significant example of *Diognetus* communicating the essence of Pauline justification is through the usage of ὑπέρ. Friar Maximilian Zerwick, in his excellent work on biblical Greek, explains how the Pauline usage of ὑπέρ in relation to redemption communicated an exchange, or substitution.²⁰ He cites examples of Galatians 3:13 (Christ *became* a curse), 2 Corinthians 5:14 (One has died *for* all), 2 Corinthians 5:15 (he died *for* all), 2 Corinthians 5:21 (he *became* sin), 1 Timothy 2:6 (a ransom *for* all), and Titus 2:14 (he gave himself *for* us). Each of these descriptions of the substitutionary aspect of the atonement is echoed in the text of *Diognetus*. One of the most striking poetic portions of the text illuminates the exchange, or substitution of Christ. *Diognetus* 9:2 offers a litany of phrases that describe the transaction of redemption. While the transitive aspect is unmistakable (five examples are given), one of the key foci is justification. Verse 4 asks the vital rhetorical question, "In whom was it possible for us . . . to be justified, except in the Son of God alone?"²¹ Justification, or right standing before God, is a major theme in the redemption narrative in *Diognetus*. As Paul wrote, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). The compelling force to provide redemption for man was God's love, and this is the love that Christians are commanded to imitate.

¹⁹Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 302.

²⁰Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated Examples* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 30-31.

²¹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

God's timing for redemption. *Diognetus* 9:1 illustrates an important aspect of redemption: its timing. One of the questions raised by *Diognetus* was the timing of Christianity. As the author leads into the climactic portion of the text with his presentation of the Gospel, he offers several Pauline thoughts. First, *Diognetus* 8:10 explains that the plan of redemption was from the beginning. This echoes Ephesians 1:3-10. In this passage, as Paul is thanking God for salvation, he makes several claims, one of which is that the plan of salvation remained a mystery to the world, except the Father and the Son, until the appropriate time.²² In this passage in Ephesians, Paul does not give a specific reason for the timing of redemption, but simply acknowledges that it was according to God's will.

This leads to the next chapter of *Diognetus*. The author of *Diognetus* explains that the reason for the timing is so that man could truly understand his own depravity (*Diognetus* 9:1). The evidence for this conviction of unrighteousness is man's own deeds. Appealing to a previous passage in Romans, Paul shares the same sentiment in Romans 3:12, quoting Psalm 14:3. Tom Schreiner explains that the ultimate root of these sinful deeds is a lack of fear of God. Romans 3:18 shows this lack of fear is manifested in man's deeds.²³

A final example of the timing of redemption being a strong link between Paul's writings and *Diognetus* is found later in Romans 3. Paul explains that redemption has come at this time so that "he [Jesus] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). Again, Paul is appealing to something that Lienhard calls the

²²Verses 9-10 communicate the thrust of the importance of the timing.

²³Schreiner, *Romans*, 164-67.

“Two Age Structure.”²⁴ This is the idea that before Christ, man was unrighteous, and had no power to become righteous. After the sacrifice of Christ, a new age came, where man now has access, through Christ, to be counted righteous, or justified, before God.

The author of *Diognetus* explains that the timing, while proving the inability of man to obtain righteousness, also reveals the goodness (κρηστωτητος) of God. For by man’s deeds he is counted unrighteous, but by the goodness of God, and though God’s power, he can be made worthy. For *Diognetus*, it is God’s goodness that ushered in the age of redemption. Moving into chapter 10, the author also exclaims that the way to show true allegiance to God and be a true faithful disciple is to imitate his goodness (κρηστωτητος).²⁵

Consistent usage of the δικ- word group. Paul utilizes the δικ word group extensively throughout his writings, particularly in Romans. Space permits referencing every place where the usage of righteousness overlaps contextually with Paul and *Diognetus*. This section focuses on several key instances in *Diognetus* that directly support the concept of imitating God’s love and goodness as an example of second century discipleship. General usage of δικ, righteousness contrasted with unrighteousness, and the righteousness of Christ pertaining to the atonement make up these areas that illuminate the greatest overlap with Paul and *Diognetus*.

The most general usage of righteous relates to the overall argument of redemption in *Diognetus*. Outside of chapter 9, which is the central focus of the usage of

²⁴Joseph T. Lienhard, “The Christology of the Epistle to Diognetus,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, no. 24 (1970): 285.

²⁵Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

righteousness, the term appears a handful of times. It appears once in chapter 5, as the author of *Diognetus* is explaining that though Christians “are slandered, they are vindicated.”²⁶ Christians are in right standing with God due to the righteousness of Christ. Another appearance of the term is in the end of chapter 10, when the author speaks of fellow Christians admiring their brothers and sisters undergoing persecution “for the sake of righteousness.”²⁷ All other usages of $\delta\iota\kappa$ relate to redemption or the character of Christ.

The primary usage of $\delta\iota\kappa$ is in relation to describing the character of Christ. Arnold explains that “the emphasis is on the Son’s perfect, active righteousness as the grounds for justification (9.3), for if he had not lived a life free from sin, then he could not have imputed his righteousness to sinners.”²⁸ Righteousness is the active characteristic of the Son that brings about redemption. While Jesus is described in *Diognetus* 9:2 as holy, guiltless, just, incorruptible, and immortal, “it is important to observe that it is in virtue of his righteousness ($\delta\iota\kappa$) that the Son redeems.”²⁹

The key to understanding how righteousness is used throughout *Diognetus* is to remember that it is not a theological treatise, but a personal epistle containing an appeal for the truth of Christianity. While the writing quality is excellent, the author is not necessarily systematic in defining every term. He seems to place trust in the Holy Spirit to illuminate the understanding of *Diognetus*. Still, the truth of the sweet exchange of the one righteous for the many unrighteous illustrates the depth of God’s love, which

²⁶Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 299.

²⁷Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 89.

²⁸Arnold, “Justification 100 Years after Paul,” 133-34.

²⁹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 25.

while man was still at enmity with God, the sacrifice was made for man to have the power to become righteous.

Heavenly citizenship. The author of *Diognetus* speaks of the unifying factor of Christians being their shared identity as citizens of heaven (οὐρανῷ πολιτευονταί).³⁰ Wallace defines the term πολιτευονταί as, “to have one’s citizenship/home.”³¹ As stated earlier, the author of *Diognetus* is explaining that the eternal home of Christians is heaven rather than earth. Paul uses the same terms in Philippians 3:20 as he is encouraging the Christians in Philippi to remain grounded in their faith. J. B. Lightfoot explains there are two possible renderings for the meaning of this term in Philippians.³² First, it could mean, “the state, constitution, to which as citizens we belong.”³³ This definition communicates a simple membership, or identity as part of a defined group. His other rendering, “the functions which as citizens we perform,”³⁴ implies active participation in the group rather than merely a simple identity. Lightfoot notes that this is the more accurate rendering when relating Philippians 3:20 to *Diognetus* 5:9.³⁵ The parallel between these two passages is unmistakable. Both Paul and the author of *Diognetus* use the metaphor of citizenship in heaven to describe Christianity. But more importantly, they both place this

³⁰Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 81.

³¹Wallace, *A Reader’s Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers*, 229.

³²J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Lynn, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1982), 156.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid. An interesting note Lightfoot makes is that this metaphor of citizenship was one of the most popular with Stoics such as Clement of Alexandria.

metaphor in the context of action, or lifestyle witness, and not merely a static identification.³⁶

Conclusion. Clayton Jefford affirms some level consistency from Paul to *Diognetus*. In a lecture given regarding the impact of various New Testament authors on *Diognetus*, he states, “With respect to the role of scripture, scholars usually find two elements at work. The first is the voice of the apostle Paul, easily recognizable in Pauline words and phrases that span most of chapters 1-10.”³⁷ Examples are abundant and clear, particularly pertaining to the nature of God’s love, redemption, and justification. Special attention was given to the specific words that the author of *Diognetus* used to describe God’s love, and the notion of imitating God. One sees clear parallels in the Pauline corpus. While these connections with Paul are vast and sweeping, connections to the writings of John more nuanced, and have more of a conceptual nature.

Connections between *Diognetus* and the Johannine Corpus

Just as Jefford noted the significant Pauline influence on *Diognetus*, he also explains the nature of John’s influence. He says that while the references are far and wide, and John’s theology is alluded to, but never explicitly stated or referenced.³⁸ A second challenge in finding Johannine theological influence in *Diognetus*, particularly

³⁶This idea is seen as one considers the context of both passages. In Philippians, Paul is exhorting the Christians to remain faithful to their call and live in a way that honors God. He does so by contrasting the life of a pagan with the life of a Christian. In *Diognetus*, the author is offering numerous paradoxes of living as a Christian in the fallen world. Both imply making specific choices and intentionally living in a way that is opposite to the world.

³⁷Clayton N. Jefford, “Gospel Traditions in the *Epistle to Diognetus*,” (November 2014): 2.

³⁸Ibid. The exception is in the final two chaps. of *Diognetus*, which are almost entirely agreed upon as being an addition to the original ten chaps, whether by another author, or the same, at a later date.

relating to imitating God's love, is the absence of similar word usage. With the exception of ἀγάπη, the other key words driving this research (φιλανθρωπος, κρηστοτητος, and μιμητης) appear nowhere in John's writings.³⁹ Therefore, the approach to seeing Johannine support for *Diognetus* is to work in the realm of concepts. The concept embodied by each of the key research words is the focus of each of the following sections. Before moving into those sections, one final generality is valuable in understanding the similarities with John and *Diognetus*.

John is often accused of syncretizing platonic philosophy and Christianity.⁴⁰ However, it is more likely that he was utilizing terminology, such as λογος, that was culturally normative to his audience. John was attempting to contextualize his message. Thomas Gaston, writing about platonic influences on the early apologists says of *Diognetus'* attack on Judaism and idol worship, "The fact that Greek philosophy is not victim to similar bombardment is significant."⁴¹ While John did write to refute Gnosticism, he used and redefined *their* terminology. This usage of common platonic philosophy and terminology appears to be a similarity between the Johannine corpus and *Diognetus*.⁴²

³⁹One other exception is the appearance of μιμεομαι in 3 John 11, when John encourages the Christians to imitate good. This example will be discussed marginally.

⁴⁰A clear example of this is the usage of λογος as a descriptor, or name for Jesus. While John was potentially thinking in the mindset of a middle Platonist, this descriptor contextualized his message about the importance of Jesus.

⁴¹Thomas E. Gaston, "The Influence of Platonism on the Early Apologists," *The Heythrop Journal* (2009) 573-80.

⁴²Jefford, "Gospel Traditions in the *Epistle to Diognetus*," 2-3. The overwhelming use of λογος to describe Jesus is found in *Diognetus* 11-12. Due to the delimitations of this research focusing on the concept of imitating God, the instances of λογος in these two chaps. will only be secondary, supportive evidence of Johannine connections, and not a central focus.

God's love for all men (φιλανθρωπια). John does not use φιλανθρωπια, or any other form combining φίλος and άνθρωπος. However, John does use φίλος several times. First, he quotes Jesus referring to Lazarus as his friend (φίλος) in John 11:11. Next, Jesus, in the Upper Room Discourse, tells the disciples that they are his friends (φίλος) if they obey his commands (John 15:14).⁴³ The only other usage is John's narrative of Jesus' trial before Pilate, when the crowd tells Pilate that he is no friend (φίλος) of Caesar if he releases Jesus (John 19:12). The usage of φίλος in each of these passages has the connotation of an intimate friend, not a mere acquaintance. If these are the only uses of φίλος, how does John also communicate the concept of God having a love for all mankind?

First, John's preferential word translated as love is ἀγάπη, or one of its forms.⁴⁴ *A Greek-English Lexicon* records John using ἀγάπη 10 times in reference to the relationship from God to man. These occurrences are the focus of illustrating God's love for humanity. Without examining each passage, several will be briefly discussed to illustrate the presence of the concept that *Diognetus* calls God's φιλανθρωπια.

The most obvious passage is John 3:16. While theologians have debated over who is included as the object of God's love, according to Craig Keener, "In Johannine theology God's love for the "world" represents his love for all humanity."⁴⁵ Another key passage that clearly illustrates God's love for all mankind is 1 John 2:2. John writes, "καὶ

⁴³This passage will also serve as support for the command to imitate God.

⁴⁴ἀγάπη is used 65 times in John's writings, according to *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 5-7.

⁴⁵Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers: 2003), 1:569-71. Keener continues, "This remains a love for potential believers that is qualified by wrath toward those who refuse to respond to his gracious gift (3:36). Nevertheless, that God gave his Son for the world indicates the value he placed on the world."

αὐτος ἰλασμος ἐστὶν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.” The final phrase says that Jesus is the propitiation for our (Christians’) sins, but also the sins of the *whole* world. Daniel Akin explains that the parallel usage of *περὶ* (for, concerning) indicates John’s intent is that the sacrifice of Christ is the propitiation not only of John and his associates’ sins, but also the sins of the whole world.⁴⁶ These two examples stand out among John’s writings as crystal clear statements of God’s love for all mankind. The Father’s love for all mankind is shown in the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus.

Both of these passages are echoed in *Diognetus*. John 3:16-18 appears to be summarized in *Diognetus* 10:2-4. In *Diognetus*, God’s love for the whole world, expressed in the word *φιλανθρωπία*, is also a strong theme throughout John’s Gospel. As mentioned earlier, it seems that the author of *Diognetus* chose his words to juxtapose *Diognetus*’ understanding of Christian love. The essence of 1 John 2:2 is also seen in these verses of *Diognetus*. While the same verbiage may not appear, *Diognetus* communicates the same sacrificial love of God for all of mankind.

God’s goodness (κρηστωτητος). John does not use *κρηστωτητος* anywhere in his writing, nor does he ever explicitly ascribe “goodness” to Jesus. The only occurrence in the Johannine corpus of Jesus being described with the characteristic of goodness is in John 10:11, when Jesus calls himself the “good shepherd.” John chooses the word *καλος*

⁴⁶Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3, John*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 84-85. A note should be made concerning ἰλασμον (propitiation). This research follows the doctrine of propitiation, not expiation. This was discussed earlier as the Diognetian view of justification was defined.

for good, which has the connotation of blameless or excellent.⁴⁷ While Jesus does not directly call himself good in this passage, good is an adjective that is part of the title he claims, good shepherd.⁴⁸ Timothy Laniak offers some insight into the implications of John's usage of *καλος*:

Kalos implies an attractive quality, something noble or ideal. 'Model' captures these connotations, but also implies a second nuance that is important in this context: Jesus should be emulated. John makes it clear elsewhere that Jesus is ultimately training his followers to be like him in his life and death (4:34-38; 14:12; 17:20; 20:21-23; 21:15-19). They will eventually take care of his flock and risk their lives like their master (21:15-23).⁴⁹

While it might seem more common for John to have used *ἀγαθος* to describe the quality of the shepherd, Keener also affirms Laniak's conclusion by explaining that the contextual understanding of *καλος* implied more than just moral uprightness. John's description of the "Good Shepherd" not only elicits imitation, but the description of the actions of the "Good Shepherd" also reveals the nature of God's goodness.

Imitating God (μιμητης). Imitating God is a concept that John seems to communicate throughout his narrative of Jesus' life. However, John's semantical phrasing is opposite from *Diognetus*. The author of *Diognetus* asks the rhetorical question of how to love God. Then he answers the question by stating that one way a Christian loves God is imitating his goodness,⁵⁰ and imitating God's goodness by loving others is also a way to love God. Where John recorded Jesus saying, "If you love me, you

⁴⁷Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 504-5. This is specific usage is ascribed to John 10:11.

⁴⁸This is a basic syllogism. The good shepherd, by title, has the characteristic of goodness. Jesus claims the title of good shepherd. Therefore, Jesus is good.

⁴⁹Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 211.

will keep my commandments,” (John 14:15) the author of *Diognetus* argues that when you imitate God, you *are* showing love to him.

Consider the Upper Room Discourse. In this passage, Jesus offers his closest disciples a directive to follow his commandments. While Jesus does not command them to imitate him, a case could be made that imitation of Christ is implicit. In Jesus’ life, he committed no sin. He set the example of pure obedience to his Heavenly Father. Jesus told the disciples that a primary means to show their love for God was to follow his example and keep his commandments. Keener takes this a step farther and writes,

Those who love Jesus keep his commandments (14:15, 21; cf. 21:15); those who keep his commandments will abide more securely in his love (14:21; 15:10). What Jesus describes here is not a formula—it is far too circular for that—but the pattern for a developing relationship.⁵¹

Another passage to examine briefly is 1 John 4:7-21. John begins this passage by exhorting his readers to love one another (4:7). As he continues, he explains that the love of Christians is from God and has the same essence as God’s love (4:7b-11). This verbiage is echoed in *Diognetus* 10:7-8, as the author describes how by loving God, one will naturally love fellow believers. John returns to the theme of loving fellow Christians in 4:19-21. He says that Christians are to love because God was the first to express love toward them. Logically, this is imitating God and his love of humanity.

One final example of *Diognetus* repeating John as he encourages believers to love one another is 1 John 3:16-18. John describes godly love as being sacrificial, like the

⁵⁰This is the thrust of *Diognetus*. 10:4-6.

⁵¹Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 2:972. In describing the importance of this command to John, Keener writes, “Direct physical sight and hearing like Moses’ are significant (Deu 34:10), as are visions and revelations (2 Cor 12:1; Acts 2:17), but for John the greatest revelation seems to be recognizing Jesus’ character and walking in the light of his character and presence continually (manifested in love, which provides general direction, and probably also specific prophetic long-range direction in 16:13d)” 975-76.

sacrifice of Christ. Then he tells his audience that when they see a brother in need, they should love them *by* meeting the need (3:18). *Diognetus* echoes the same sentiment in chapter 10:5-6. The author says that when a Christian helps his brother in need, then he is imitating God. This clearly teaches the same principle as John: loving others is one way Christians can show their love for God.

λογος in *Diognetus*. Within *Diognetus*, the term λογος is clearly used to describe Jesus. These occurrences appear in the final two chapters of the text and do not relate to the nature of imitating God's love. However, due to the importance of the λογος theme throughout John's writings, it is important to at least briefly discuss how this term interacts with this research. Clayton Jefford states that in the final two chapters of *Diognetus*, Johannine theology and terminology is quite present.⁵² Only once outside of these closing chapters does the term λογος appear. *Diognetus* 7:2 uses the term, but due to the nature of the passage the precise definition is difficult to establish. Meecham explains that there is excellent support for λογος to be interpreted as either a reference to Jesus, or something else, such as "teaching."⁵³ Meecham, as well as Jefford concludes that it is likely not a reference to Jesus, but actually a reference to the teachings of God.⁵⁴ The original ten chapters of *Diognetus* do not utilize this important Johannine term, however, as stated earlier in the chapter, they do employ numerous platonic philosophical terms and concepts, much like John's writings.

⁵²Jefford, "Gospel Traditions in the *Epistle to Diognetus*," 2-3.

⁵³Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 118.

⁵⁴Ibid. Jefford, in his lecture on Gospel traditions in *Diognetus*, states that the evidence either way is inconclusive, which causes one to question the meaning. However, Lightfoot leans in the direction of this being a reference to Christ. Both Lake and Holmes do not capitalize "word," therefore implying that this is not a reference to Christ.

Kingdom citizenship. A final area of connection between John’s writings and *Diognetus* is the concept of citizenship in the Kingdom of God. John only references the Kingdom of God twice, both in Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5). However, John does record a portion of the Upper Room Discourse where Jesus addresses the hatred of the world toward he and his followers. In John 15:18-27 Jesus tells his followers that they are vastly different from the world and that it hates them because of this.⁵⁵ Chia’s article on Christians being resident aliens speaks volumes to this issue.⁵⁶ Also, it appears that *Diognetus* 6:3 contains a very similar statement to part of John 17:16, that Christians are not of this world. Abraham van de Beck, Dean of the Theological Faculty of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, sums up this idea, “So the model of *Ad Diognetum* is that Christians are spread among all nations. They belong to no earthly kingdom because they belong to the kingdom of God. *Ad Diognetum* describes this in elevated language.”⁵⁷

Conclusion of Biblical Connections

The Epistle to Diognetus is replete with Pauline terminology, verbiage, and imagery. From the understanding of redemption, justification, and the atonement, one sees continuity from Paul to *Diognetus* in the understanding of the nature of God’s love for all of mankind. In numerous places, Paul also commands Christians to imitate God

⁵⁵John references the otherworldliness of Christians.

⁵⁶Roland Chia, “Resident Alien: Some Reflections on Church and Culture,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 92 (2000): 92-98. The entire article explains the importance of Christians having the mindset of being sojourners in the world, echoing *Diognetus* chaps. 5 and 6.

⁵⁷Abraham van de Beck, “Every Foreign Land is Their Native Country, and Every Land of

and his love. The connection with John's writings is not as clear cut, however one sees *Diognetus* echo Johannine ideals of God's love being directed toward all mankind, as well as Jesus being the only example worthy of imitation. While additional connections could be made between *Diognetus* and the New Testament, one sees the clear connections with the writings of John and Paul.

Final Analysis

The *Epistle to Diognetus* stands as a testament of second-century Christian life interacting with the lost world. As the author of this brief epistle seeks to describe Christianity to his pagan audience, he crafts a convincing response to the three key questions raised by his pagan audience. First, in chapters 2 through 4, he addresses the two most common religions familiar to Diognetus: Judaism and pagan idol worship. He proclaims the absurdity and lunacy of pagan idol worship, as well as the pride of Judaism. Next, he defines Christianity first by describing the paradox of the Christian life. The litany of metaphors he employs, many of which were discussed earlier, communicates the otherworldliness of the Christian life. Essentially, the Christian life is lived in complete opposition to the ways of the world, and yet is still fueled by a compassion for those in the world who are not followers of Jesus. As the author continues to define Christianity, the love of God for the lost world becomes a key theme.

Finally, in chapter 10, the author confronts Diognetus with a call to become a Christian and follow Jesus. In this section, he explains that the primary means of a Christian's expression of their faith is imitating the love of God. This love is for both

Birth is a Land of Strangers: *Ad Diognetum* 5," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1 (2007): 178-94.

fellow believers and for the lost world. He answers Diognetus' second question by explaining that true Christian love is imitating God's love. Imitation of God's love, and how this imitation is a key component of second-century discipleship, is the subject of this research.

Christian Love as Described in *Diognetus*

The author of *Diognetus* labors over his definition of Christian love. His definition is not simple or trite. While he never offers a declarative statement that explicitly defines Christian love, he uses numerous illustrations interwoven throughout the text to create a robust definition. One of the primary ways this research has quantified Christian love is through an evaluation of the key words in the text: *χρηστοτης*, *αγάπη*, and *φιλανθρωπία*. Each of these words illustrates a unique facet of Christian love. *χρηστοτης* offers an understanding of the goodness of God that causes men to repent, *αγάπη* states the self-sacrificial nature of Christian love, and *φιλανθρωπία* exhibits the inclusive nature of Christian love.

Conclusion of Theological Foundations

While numerous theological concepts exist within the text of *Diognetus*, this research is delimited to two: justification and Christian unity. These two concepts illustrate two aspects of discipleship. Justification communicates the foundation upon which discipleship is built. Without the justification of salvation, discipleship is not possible. Unity illustrates the communal aspect of discipleship.

These two concepts build a theological foundation in two significant ways. First, they create a framework for the understanding of imitating God's love as a mark of

a true disciple. Second, they serve as a significant means to understand how the writings of Paul and John are connected to *The Epistle to Diognetus*. With this theological foundation in place, the understanding of imitating God's love falls in line with discipleship.

Justification. Within the summary of the biblical redemption narrative offered by the author of *Diognetus* sits the doctrine of justification. Pauline justification is present throughout *Diognetus*.⁵⁸ Chapter 9 is one location where justification is not only present, but celebrated with the unknown author.⁵⁹ When one combines this type of redemption based on God's goodness, as well as the very act of substitutionary atonement, God's love stands as the highest love.⁶⁰ The justification provided by the substitutionary atonement of Christ is the example of selfless love. The author of *Diognetus* concludes chapter 9 by stating that the sacrifice making justification possible is founded in God's goodness.⁶¹

Unity. Justification is explicitly discussed at length in the text of *Diognetus*, but unity is much more subtle. Evidence has been examined that supports the idea of Christian unity being a result of imitating God, a key mark of true discipleship. At no place does the author of *Diognetus* specifically claim unity as a byproduct of faith in

⁵⁸This concept is discussed at length in chap. 2 of this research.

⁵⁹Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 87.

⁶⁰Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 605. The word *λυτρον* is used in the original text to describe the nature of Jesus' sacrifice. Bauer explains that this term is typically used to describe payment made for the freeing of a slave.

⁶¹Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, 370-71.

Christ.⁶² However, a key theme throughout chapters 5 and 6 is the paradoxical nature of the Christian life. As the author offers numerous descriptions of how Christians are distinct from the world, the concept of heavenly citizenship becomes the focus. “Being in Christ exceeds all human identities, since we lost our own identity when we were baptized into the Lord.”⁶³ Van Der Beck supports this concept biblically both with a reference to Colossians 3:11 and John 18:36.⁶⁴ Finally, Meecham explains that this concept of Christian unity is recorded elsewhere in the writings of the early apologists, and *Diognetus* is consistent with these other apologies.⁶⁵ The result of Christian unity is selfless care for one another.

Conclusion of Biblical Connections

The Epistle to Diognetus is replete with Pauline terminology, verbiage, and imagery. Numerous theologians’ works⁶⁶ on *Diognetus* communicate the overt Pauline influence. The specific theological concepts of redemption, justification, and the atonement within *Diognetus* are thoroughly Pauline in nature.⁶⁷ Meecham also illustrates

⁶²Extensive effort has gone into determining that there is no explicit reference to unity or commonality. ἐνωτης (oneness) does not occur at all. The only usage of κοινος (commonality) occurs in *Diognetus*. 5:7 when the author describes Christians as offering room and board, but not opening their marriage bed to strangers.

⁶³Van de Beck, “Every Foreign Land Is Their Native Country,” 185.

⁶⁴Ibid., 185-86. Colossians 3:11 states that in Christ ethnicity is not important. John 18:36 records Jesus’ response to Pilate as he proclaimed his kingdom being of another world.

⁶⁵Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 106-8. Meecham references Aristides’ *Apology*, as well as Justin Martyr’s *Apology* both communicate the same importance on Christian unity.

⁶⁶Almost every single commentator referenced within the body of this research that speaks to the theological content of *Diognetus*, as well as the biblical connections, makes specific note of the Pauline influences on the author of *Diognetus*.

⁶⁷Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 57-58; see also 143. According to Meecham, imitating God as a sign of discipleship, the focal concept of this research, is most likely borrowed from Paul in Eph 5:1.

the usage of several important Pauline words such as *χρηστοτης*, *οικονομια*, *παραδρευω*, *συνηθεια*, *αφθαρσια*, and *εκλογη*.⁶⁸

The reliance of *Diognetus* on John's writings is not as direct as that of Paul. *Diognetus* does echo Johannine ideals of God's love being for all men. As well, *Diognetus* does emphasize Jesus being the prime example worthy of imitation. However, in 3 John 11, John urges Gaius to imitate good. Daniel Akin explains, "Ultimately the child of God imitates the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). He is our supreme example. Yet it is the case that we all need earthly flesh and blood examples to imitate (mimic) as well."⁶⁹ The author of *Diognetus* also appeals to the importance of imitating good, as well as acknowledges the importance of earthly examples. In *Diognetus* 10:6-7 the author explains that the good deeds of Christians serve as a witness to God, and should be viewed as examples of the uniqueness of the Christian life. In John's record of Jesus' words in the Upper Room on the night he was betrayed, Jesus clearly taught his disciples that they would be known by their love for one another. The author of *Diognetus* acknowledges the importance of this theme as he responds to the second question raised in the text. While *Diognetus* presents no direct quotation of the Johannine corpus, the ideal of God's love is present throughout.

Conclusion of Thesis

This thesis focused how the author of *Diognetus* responded to the question of the nature of the love Christians have for one another. One key factor to understand this

⁶⁸Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 10. Meecham also discusses the differences in the literary makeup of the original ten chaps. compared to the two appended chaps. (11-12). He explains that the Pauline vocabulary is not nearly as common in the final two chaps, but instead is replaced with the vocabulary of a *logos* theologian (65).

love was to examine how imitating God, spoken of in *Diognetus* chapter 10, is the essence of Christian love.⁷⁰ Strong evidence exists for the continuity of thought from numerous New Testament texts.⁷¹ Utilizing these connections, this thesis illustrates how *Diognetus* shows a continuity of thought regarding imitating God as a sign of discipleship from the New Testament to the middle of the second century. This continuity is seen linguistically, grammatically, conceptually, and theologically. Finally, these connections have been analyzed to illustrate continuity from Paul and John to *Diognetus*.

Regardless of the mysterious nature of the origins of *Diognetus*, it offers “a vivid snapshot of an early attempt to rationally present the integrity of Christianity to a society that was both pluralistic and hostile.”⁷² *Diognetus* also offers a picture of how to be a true disciple of Christ by imitating God’s goodness and selfless love for all mankind. “And when you have acquired this knowledge, with what joy do you think you will be filled, or how will you love him who so loved you first? By loving him you will be an imitator of his goodness.”⁷³

⁶⁹Akin, *1, 2, 3, John*, 250.

⁷⁰Meecham, *The Epistle to Diongetus*, 143-45. Meecham discusses the concept of deification of man and explains that there is a broad range of meaning for this concept. This research supports the idea that when a Christian imitates God, they become a witness, of Christ to the recipient of their love.

⁷¹This thesis has delimited the New Testament connections down to the Pauline and Johannine corpuses.

⁷²Paul Foster, “The Epistle to Diognetus,” *The Expository Times* 118, no. 4 (2007): 167.

⁷³Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 303.

APPENDIX 1
ἀγάπη TRANSLATION CHART

Table A1. ἀγάπη translation chart

Passage	Greek Word	Who is Loving	Object of Love
5:11	ἀγαπωσι	Christians	All men
6:6	ἀγάπα	Christians	Persecutors
6:6	αγαπωσιν	Christians	Persecutors
7:5	αγαπων	Jesus	Men
9:2	αγαπης	Father	
10:2	ηγαπησε	Father	mankind
10:2	αγαπησασιν	Christians	God
10:3	αγαπησεις	Christians	God
10:3	προαγαπησαντα	Father	mankind
10:4	αγαπη	Christians	mankind
10:7	αγαπησεις	Christians	Christians
11:8	αγαπης	Christians	God's Revelation
12:1	αγαπωσιν	Christians	God

APPENDIX 2
χρηστοτητος TRANSLATION CHART

Table A2. χρηστοτητος translation chart

Passage	Greek Word	Holmes	Lake	Meecham
8:8	χρηστος	kind	kind	kind
9:1	χρηστοτης	goodness	goodness	goodness
9:2	χρηστοτης	goodness	kindliness	goodness
9:6	χρηστοτητι	goodness	goodness	goodness
10:4	χρηστοτης	goodness	goodness	goodness

APPENDIX 3
CROWE'S λυτρον USAGE CHART

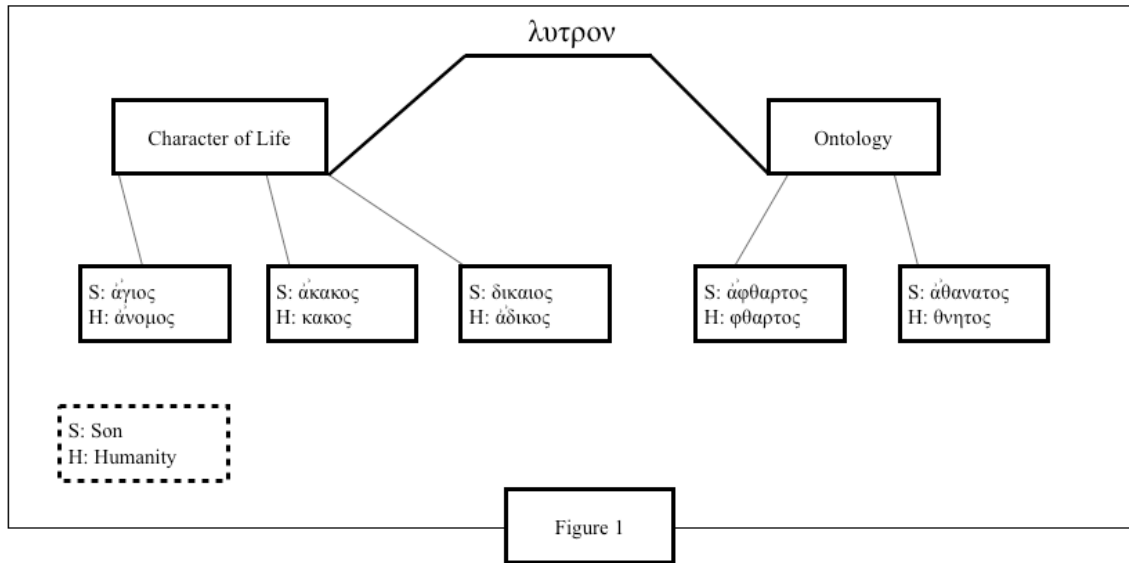


Figure A1. Crowe's λυτρον usage chart

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTIAN LOVE AND THE IMITATION OF CHRIST IN *THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS*: A SECOND-CENTURY EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

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The *Epistle to Diognetus* is an early church writing that offers an excellent picture of the Christian life, as well as deficiencies of other religions. In the text, the author illustrates the nature of God's love. As he comes to the climactic point in the text, he also offers a call for action on the recipient of the letter. This call is to imitate God; but not just a generalized concept of God, specifically God's love. This invitation to imitate God, along with the detailed expression of his love offers a clear image of a true committed disciple in the middle second century. Along with expounding upon the nature of God's love and how to imitate this characteristic, strong connections are drawn between the text of *Diognetus* and the writings of the New Testament. These connections provide support for continuity of thought between the unknown author of *Diognetus*, and the New Testament writers.

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