

The Mandates

Introduction to the Mandates

IN THE VISIONS, HERMAS'S main role was to be the archetype of a believer weak in faith but willing to grow. As his sins were exposed, Hermas consistently chose the humble path of faith in God, the source of true wisdom. This is demonstrated at the end of the Visions when Hermas faces a terrible monster, but he responds in faith, placing his life in God's hands. As a result, the angel, Thegri, shuts the beast's mouth—a relief for Hermas. As the scene closes, though, his double-mindedness returns, and instead of glorying in the victory, Hermas turns to make sure the monster has not awakened. Although he has demonstrated some steps of faith, his faith is still weak as he journeys toward spiritual maturity.

The Mandates represent the second stage of development for Hermas and, through his example, for the church. The genre loosely follows biblical legal codes, with sparse narrative and some dialogue framing the story. What little dialogue there is serves to indicate transitions in the storyline. The purpose of the Mandates is to present basic catechesis—commandments to help the church discern wise living.¹ The Mandates do not represent a comprehensive list, nor do they reflect elements of the Decalogue, suggesting that Hermas chose specific attitudes necessary for a strong and unified church.

In the early church, catechesis assisted the new believer in growing toward ethical maturity, a focus of first-century leaders because false teachings, while always present in the church, increased after the death of the apostles.² A Christian life reflecting purity of soul became the

1. In the early church, catechesis (κατήχησις), which is training in moral development and doctrine, was found in the *Shepherd* as well as in the works of the church fathers. The desire for converts to grow spiritually continued to flourish throughout the history of the church. Ferguson, *The Church at Work and Worship*, 21.

2. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, 170.

main outward expression of a connection to God through the Spirit, the external badge that separated Christians from pagans.³ As the people of God, believers were to validate this connection through conduct that emulated divine virtues, especially the qualities of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:12–13).⁴ Motivated by the imminence of the parousia, the apostle Paul consistently urged his audience toward maturity.⁵ However, Smalley argues that Paul's language not only emphasizes historical imminence and judgment, but it also reflects an abstract, atemporal quality. The church is urged to grow no matter the timing of Christ's return. Similarly, in the *Visions*, Hermas writes with an urgency that comes from the expectation of an imminent parousia symbolized by the completion of the tower as well as the advent of the beast. These images intended to motivate his audience to immediate repentance and spiritual maturity in case forthcoming persecution was the signal of a realized end.

However, in the *Mandates*, Hermas's urgent tone is muffled. The focus shifts to building the faith of the Christian community through the consistent use of the phrase "live for God," which was defined as repenting and looking to God for wisdom in all matters of daily living. The *Mandates* echo themes found in the Sermon on the Mount that focus on love for others. Hermas speaks on chastity, giving to the poor, and maintaining a patient demeanor—sure signs of the Spirit working in the life of a believer. Mostly, however, Hermas advocates the concepts of faith, fear of God, and self-control, themes he weaves throughout the whole.

Scholars debate the reasons why the urgent eschatological tone fades from view. On a broad scale, they posit different theories concerning the changes found in early ecclesiastical literature, including the *Shepherd*. Some of the theories include: (1) the church experienced a decline of the concept of salvation by grace alone, giving rise to asceticism and legalism (a shift seemingly manifest in the *Mandates*), (2) the church evidences a decline in the charismatic ministry that included prophets and glossolalia, or (3) the church faced an ever-increasing challenge to articulate its doctrines in the face of competing interpretations of Scripture.⁶ Käsemann ar-

3. Justin connected faith, baptism, and godly conduct (1 *Apol.* 65.1; 66.1). Ferguson, *Catechesis, Baptism*, 23–24.

4. Smalley, "Delay of the Parousia," 49.

5. Smalley provides a list of Pauline texts to determine development in Paul's language concerning the parousia. He concluded that Pauline language worked within the framework of "already/not-yet" and that the delay was of less concern to believers than modern scholars posit. Smalley, "Delay," 47–54.

6. J. C. Wilson posits that much German Protestant scholarship concluded that the transition of the church reflected the degeneration of "the kerygma of the primitive

gues that the *Shepherd* represents the transition from the primitive church to the institutional church simply because it demonstrates a decline in the expectation of the parousia.⁷ Overall, the history of the debate focuses on internal changes within the church as it realized that the imminent second advent of Christ had failed to materialize.

In the Visions, the urgency to repent is reinforced by the looming threat of the coming great tribulation or end of the age, an event represented by the metaphor of the tower's completion and rampage of the beast. In Sim. 9, the listeners see that Hermas speaks of a delay of the parousia, also metaphorically depicted as the completion of the tower. And Sim. 10 states that the delay is a result of the patience of the Lord who has opened a window for believers to fully repent.⁸

This naturally leads to a question. What happened to the concept of the urgency of the imminent return of Christ? In the Mandates, the concept of the imminence of the parousia falls into the shadows, although the message to repent immediately continues throughout the book. Hermas does not depart from the tone of Scripture, which urges believers to obedience. Hermas's use of intertextuality, especially of Second Temple Jewish pseudepigrapha, also suggests that this portion was written at the turn of the first century and that the hope of the parousia has yet to fade from the purview of the church.⁹

Perhaps commentators have read more into this shift of emphasis than the actual text warrants. It may be that the readers of *Shepherd* are meant to keep the looming threat of an any-moment parousia ever in their minds. Thus, the apparent de-emphasis may be simply a result of the change of genres. In the Visions, the point was to unveil the sin of the audience. The problem was not that all members of the audience were involved in heinous sin, but that many of them took for granted the power and wrath of God. They lacked respect for the poor, took advantage of others in business

community and Paul into pietistic legalism and moralism." Wilson, *Reassessment*, 1–2. Giet sees a shift in historical circumstances and posits that the change represents multiple authorship. Giet, *Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 177–78.

7. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions*, 237.

8. Hermas echoes 2 Pet 3:8, which attributes the delay to God's desire that none perish. To God, "one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (NASB).

9. Richard Bauckham observes that Christians share both continuous and discontinuous thoughts with first-century Judaic eschatology. Jewish apocalyptic writings reflect similar paradoxical tensions in that they yearn deeply for the final judgment that accompanies the day of the Lord, yet they trust in the Lord's sovereignty and timing as they look forward to the day when evil ceases and righteousness prevails. "Delay of the Parousia," 65–88. See Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 5–24.

ventures, and like Hermas's children and wife, they lived lives that were influenced by the pagan culture. The Mandates focus on catechesis, or commandments, meant to instruct believers in how to develop the internal product of faith, attitudes that form their praxis. Hermas uses literary techniques such as repetition of the commandments, diction, wordplays, illustrations, and metaphor to capture their attention. Yet in the midst of all this ethical living, it seems reasonable that believers are always to be looking over their shoulders for the imminent judgment.

Another reason the concept of the parousia has abated in the Mandates is that through interaction with the Elder Lady, the church, Hermas came to realize what it means to be a true believer. Through repentance and faith, he faced the threat of persecution in the form of the beast—a type of the coming tribulation itself described in almost satanic terms. In the Mandates, Hermas now knows that his faith can and will prevail if another trial occurs—whether localized, temporal persecutions or ultimate, eschatological tribulation. He does not need to be afraid of the coming tribulation because he will find help in a time of need even if he were to lose his life through martyrdom. Yet he knows that he and every other believer like him still need instruction to bolster their faith. Therefore, the Mandates become the means through which Hermas and the church will grow spiritually as they await the coming parousia.

Structure of the Mandates

After Vis. 5 introduces the scene, the audience members become passive learners, vicariously absorbing the lessons through the Shepherd's instruction. The lessons progress sequentially beginning with three internal dispositions necessary to support moral living. These are: (1) to have faith in and to fear the one true God, which fosters self-control (Mand. 1), (2) to have the posture of innocence, to be like a child ready for training (Mand. 2), and (3) to develop a hunger and love for truth that emanates from the Creator (Mand. 3). Mandate 4 turns to a specific issue in Hermas's church and addresses post-baptismal sin and issues of chastity, marriage, and adultery. Mandates 5 and 6 concern the struggle with evil by using a cultural motif of dueling external spirits and internal psychological dispositions. Mandate 7 reminds the audience of the main theme: that fear of the Lord is essential to keeping the commandments. Mandate 8 elaborates on self-control, while Mand. 9 and 10 address double-mindedness and sorrow, negative mental attitudes that lead to sin. Mandate 11 teaches the audience how to discern a

true itinerant prophet from a false teacher. And Mand. 12 completes the list of commandments by warning against wicked passions.

Throughout the Mandates, the goal of self-control and keeping the commandments is to live for God, who is the source of life, truth, goodness, virtue, and justice. The phrase “live for God” (ζήσῃ τῷ θεῷ) is repeated twenty-three times in the Mandates and thirteen times in the Similitudes. This repetition emphasizes that faith in the Creator develops virtue for enhancing the spiritual and moral life of the believer and that the best lifestyle is to live to please God.¹⁰ The phrase will be explained more directly in the comments on Mand. 1 below.

In addition, the Two Ways didactic pattern is detected throughout the Mandates as Hermas creatively places two choices before the audience: to follow God or to follow the devil. At the end of his catechesis, Hermas’s faith still lacks strength. In Mand. 12, he doubts that any believer can fulfill the demands of these commandments, because they are exceedingly difficult. This sets up the final phase of learning through the Similitudes—deeper wisdom that comes from more challenging lessons.

Mandate 1

Faith in the Creator God

Translation

Mand. 1.1–2 (*Shep.* 26.1–2)

[26] ¹“First of all, believe that God is one, who created and ordered all things; he made from what does not exist everything that exists; and he contains all things while alone being uncontained. ²Therefore, trust and fear him, and by fearing, exercise self-control. Observe these things. Cast from yourself every wickedness and put on every virtue of righteousness and you will live for God—if you observe this command.”

10. Osiek notes that this phrase concludes every Mandate except for 5 and 11. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 104. What this means is debated. Scholars such as Wilson and Baumeister believe it is eschatological, looking for future fulfillment. Wilson, “Career,” 361; Baumeister, *Ethik des Pastor Hermas*, 23. To “live for God” is better viewed as being accomplished in an earthly experience culminating in the eschaton. Snyder believes that phrase is associated with the church and the need to live the other-centered life. To live righteously guarantees life in the community, the tower. To live sinfully means being cast aside from the community of believers. Snyder, *Shepherd*, 63–64.

Mandate 1

Commentary

Mandate 1 constitutes a theological and ethical foundation upon which all Jewish-Christian commandments and covenants are built. The structure of the brief message is simple, with no literary devices such as dialogue, illustration, or interruption. Its simplicity highlights its importance. The Shepherd (cf. Vis. 5.7) claims that all faith is established upon the nature and character of the one Creator. All creaturely obedience rests on the truth that the Christian God is one, and this God is a God who knits together all things completely.¹¹ Faith in this God is incontrovertible because the character of God was one that established creation with order, justice, goodness, and stability.¹² This monotheistic ethical foundation of God as Creator is nothing new. The Two Ways catechetical pattern begins with the affirmation, “you shall love God, the one who made you” (*Did.* 1.2; cf. *Barn.* 19.2).

Adolph von Harnack observed that Mand. 1 reflects Jewish theology, but noted that although Hermas uses a shortened version of the Shema, his later theology incorporated the Son of God (Christ) as the sustainer of creation (Sim. 9). Harnack concluded that Hermas eventually Christianized the credo in the Similitudes (Sim. 5.6; 9.12.4–8; 9.14.4; 9.15).¹³ In addition to God’s unity, Hermas states that he created all things out of what did not exist, setting them in order (Gen 1; Ps 89:24–25). He contains all things even as he himself is infinite, having no boundaries. This emphasizes God’s supreme power over everything and his claim not only on the physical universe but also over people’s moral lives.

11. The phrase “all things” indicates everything in the natural world. Holmes renders καταρτίζω as “set all things in order.” Osiek renders the phrase “maintain all things.” Osiek’s translation reflects a closer meaning to the Greek, although Holmes incorporates the idea that the Creator is a God of order. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 505; Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 105.

12. After the destruction of the temple, the author of 4 Ezra 6.1–5; 35–38 placed hope in the goodness of God’s justice, looking forward to Israel’s redemption as a nation. Found also in Qumran literature, this concept was conditional upon Israel’s obedience to God (1QH^a I.35–37). The Jews believed that the current epoch of suffering was temporary; although prior to the end, there would be a war between the forces of evil and good (1QS III.24b–25a; 1QS IV.18–19, 23). Some Jewish sects, however, did not believe that the coming of the earthly kingdom was conditional on their obedience but on God’s sovereignty. Nitzan, “Idea of Creation,” 241, 244; Bauckham “Delay of the Parousia,” 65–88.

13. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 130–35. Eugene Merrill describes the Shema as forming “the great principles of covenant relationship that outline the nature and character of God.” Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 162.

It is debated whether Hermas intended to affirm *creatio ex nihilo* as expressed in later Christianity by the church fathers. Osiek claims that Hermas repeats a Jewish formula like that found in Wis 11:17, 2 Macc 7:28, *Epist. Arist.* 1.1, and 2 Bar. 21.4.¹⁴ One theory claims that Jewish tradition provides Christianity with a fully developed notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. Against this, Gerhard May proposes that Jewish conceptions of the Creator are not ontological or concerned with origins, but instead they simply confess that God is the power that created the heavens and the earth. The Jewish formula projects the idea that something that had not existed before was produced by God in the same manner that children are not in existence before their parents procreate.¹⁵ In this approach, God created the world out of preexistent material, expressed in Genesis 1 as chaos composed of water, deep, spirit, and darkness.¹⁶ On the other hand, *creatio ex nihilo* is not completely foreign in Jewish circles. In a debate over the Creator between Rabbi Gamaliel and a philosopher, Gamaliel clarifies that even the chaos was of the Creator's making.¹⁷ Moreover, the statements from Wis 11:17 and 2 Macc 7:28 indicate that God made the heavens and earth from nothing.¹⁸

The New Testament portrayal of Christ as the author and sustainer of the creation (John 1:3; Rom 4:17; Heb 11:3) prompted the church fathers to assert more explicitly the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*.¹⁹ The purpose was to demonstrate the superiority and power of the Christian God. Irenaeus demonstrates this concept in *Haer.* 4.20.2 by incorporating Mand. 1.1 in a passage explaining that this God is a triune God who created the world *ex nihilo*.²⁰ Using the same verbiage as Hermas, Irenaeus explained that it

14. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 105. Aristides states, "And I perceived that the world and all that is therein are moved by the power of another; and I understood that he who moves them is God, who is hidden in them, and veiled by them" (*Epist. Arist.*). Dibelius provides multiple sources and a history of development of the concept. Dibelius, *Hirt*, 497–98.

15. Philo concurs, stating, "In my opinion, what God is to the world, that parents are to their children; since, just as God gave existence to that which had no existence, they also, in imitation of his power, as far at least as they were able, make the race of humankind everlasting" (*Spec. Laws* 2.225). Colson, *Philo: On the Decalogue. On the Special Laws, Books 1–3*, 447.

16. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 23. See also Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries*, 38.

17. Gerhard, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 23.

18. To compare, see Wis 11.17, "For thy Almighty hand, that made the world of matter without form." Second Maccabees 7:28 states, "Look at the sky and the earth . . . and realize that God made it all from nothing," and 2 Bar., "By a word Thou callest into life what is not there."

19. For more on the argument that the Jewish tradition presents a fully developed concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, consult Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie*, 203–28.

20. Irenaeus argues that the Christian God is unique and is to be named "Father,"

is the Father who creates (κτίζω). Irenaeus builds his argument first with Mand. 1, followed by Mal 2:10, Eph 4:6, and Matt 11:27 to demonstrate the triune participation in creation. Bingham states, “The texts . . . and the preceding texts of Gen 1:26 and 2:7 and John 1:1–3, are added to Mand. 1.1 because they make explicit what is only implicit in Hermas: the one Creator of the church’s faith is the Father who creates by his Son and Spirit.” Bingham adds that Hermas projects this concept of the quality of the one God as Creator, albeit vaguely, by using the same words to reflect the following meaning: “The Father creates (κτίζω), the Son makes (ποιέω), while the Spirit completes (καταρτίζω),” the triune aspect projecting “the compound comprehensiveness of his power.”²¹

Theologically, it is uncertain how Hermas viewed the concept. Rhetorically, he used the statement to stimulate such awe and respect that believers would turn in humility toward a God who is not capricious but trustworthy and worthy of worship. The phrase that “he contains all things while alone being uncontained” (Mand. 1.1), reminds the audience that God is beyond human experience, powerful enough to order all creation for good. The notion counters ancient polytheism and conveys the concept that the Christian God is both transcendent *over* and immanent *in* the natural world. He is King of the universe; his transcendence displays dominion over everything, and he rules with supreme power. Yet he is also close to his people. They call upon him, and he answers (Pss 104; Isa 40:12–14; 45:12; 51:9–10; Jer 10:11–13; Acts 17:27).²²

Moreover, the term “Father” indicates that he interacts with creation in a relational way.²³ He offers mercy and redemption from the trials of human suffering, sin, and evil, as seen in the Old Testament, which shows that he ordered covenants with Israel as a picture of relationship (Pss 74:2; 100:3). Jewish and Christian liturgies respond to human insecurity by conveying that although he is God, humans remain precious.²⁴ This is

who is “above all, and in us all.” Rousseau, *Contre les hérésies*, 2:628. Eusebius testifies that Irenaeus considers the *Shepherd* as Scripture (*Hist. eccl.* 5.8). Lake, *Ecclesiastical History*, 457.

21. This verbiage is used by Hermas in Mand. 1.1. Bingham, “Senses of Scripture,” 42.

22. Bultmann provides a comprehensive list of biblical references that reflect the multi-dimensional character of the Christian God. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, 15–34.

23. While not in the Mandates, Hermas twice uses the term “Father” to reference the first member of the Trinity. See Sim. 5.6.3, and 9.12.2.

24. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Apostles’ Creed*, 18–19. Justin associated the concept of *pater* with images of monarch, family, and king. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 1.3; *1 Apol.*, 12.9; 32.10; 36.2; 40.7; 44.2.

the reason Hermas continues Mand. 1.2 with the command, “Trust and fear him.”²⁵ Whereas the command in 1.1 involves the content of belief (πίστευσον ὅτι . . .), the command to “trust . . . him” (πίστευσον . . . αὐτῷ) seems to emphasize the transformative trust relationship based upon that belief. Because God is infinite, powerful, and the Creator of all things, it is in the interest of Hermas’s audience to worship and obey him. They should respect him in a manner that honors a being infinitely greater than they.

Hermas continues by stating that fearing God produces self-control because faith in the Christian God provides the power to turn from evil and to live virtuously.²⁶ This is the path of “living for God,” and the power to repent is a guaranteed reward for exercising faith in the Creator (Mand. 1.2). Though the phrase ζῇ τῷ θεῷ is usually translated “live to God,” this rendering has little meaning in modern English idiom. The more common English phrase “live for God” seems to carry the implied sense.²⁷ The meaning of the phrase is defined more precisely in Mand. 7, when Hermas asks the Shepherd why he referred to keeping the commands as “living for God.” The Shepherd replies, “Every creature fears the Lord but doesn’t keep his commands. Therefore, for those who fear him and keep his commands—their life is with God. But those who do not keep his commands have no life with him” (Mand. 7.5). In the immediate context of Mand. 1, then, it involves observing the commandments, putting off wickedness, putting on righteous virtue, fearing God, and exercising self-control. François Barbaret claims that the phrase conveys the idea that inward change manifests itself outwardly in action.²⁸ He explains that salvation begins a life of faith, which then continues in sanctification.

Barbaret suggests the phrase expresses three concepts: (1) that believers must adhere to God relationally, (2) that they follow the commands of God, and (3) that they incorporate God’s righteousness into the community who follows the same standards.²⁹ The concept is found throughout Christianity at large and is considered the sum of all God’s decrees. Loving God inwardly is expressed by loving God outwardly (Luke 20:38; Rom

25. The οὖν initiates the resultant clause. Note that Barn. 5.2 also connects loving and fearing the Creator as crucial to obeying his commandments.

26. It is noteworthy that Hermas personifies virtue through the seven women who help build the tower, called Faith, Self-Control, Sincerity, Knowledge, Innocence, Reverence, and Love. Faith is the bedrock for the remaining virtues (Vis. 3.8; Sim. 9). The church is unified and contained by human virtue.

27. See, Giet, *Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 269n5; Lelong, *Le pasteur d’Hermas*, 73–74; Leutzsch, *Hirt des Hermas*, 193.

28. Barbaret, “La formule,” 379–80.

29. Barbaret, “La formule,” 389.

7:10–11; 15:7–8; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 2:19, 25; 1 Pet 2:24). The phrase ζήση τῷ θεῷ thus becomes a catch phrase used as a pedagogical tool throughout the Shepherd.³⁰

Hermas grounds any spiritual training in the foundational belief in the Creator God. While most scholars argue that repentance is a key theme in the Shepherd, it is best to consider *faith in the Creator* as the foundational theological concept, while repentance is the practical act of faith. Thus, to “live for God” is first to acknowledge that there is a God worthy of living for, then to cease living for oneself. The entire orientation of our lives turns from an inward, self-absorbed trajectory to an outward, upward, Godward trajectory. Therefore, Hermas places Mand. 1 first because it is the basis for all obedience. His emphasis on God’s supremacy and power motivates his audience toward a life of continual repentance.

Mandate 2

Innocence and Sincerity

Translation

Mand. 2.1–7 (*Shep.* 27.1–7)

[27] ¹He said to me, “Have integrity and be innocent, and you’ll be like infants who don’t know the wickedness that destroys the life of humanity. ²First, slander no one, nor listen with delight to someone who does. Or else you who are listening will also be guilty of the sin of the one who slanders—if you believe the slander you heard. For by believing it, you yourself will also have something against your brother. In that way you’ll be guilty of the sin of the one who slanders. ³Slander is evil, a restless demon, never at peace but always living in conflicts. Keep far away from it and you’ll have a good relationship with everyone.

⁴“So put on reverence, in which there’s no wicked cause for offense, but everything is easy-going³¹ and joyous. Practice what’s good, and from the God-given fruit of your labors, give generously to all in need, not wavering about whether you should give to this or that person. Give to everyone, because God wants to give to all people from his own gifts.

⁵Therefore, the recipients will give an accounting to God, explaining why

30. On the concept of repetition in oral presentation, see Ong, *Orality*, 38.

31. Literally “smooth.” The image seems to relate to the smoothness or levelness of a path in contrast to one that causes a person to stumble. Thus, “easy-going” fits the contemporary English idiom, especially as it relates to well-oiled relationships.