

The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians*

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus¹.

To the Church that is at Ephesus, in Asia, deservedly most happy, being blessed in the greatness and fullness of God the Father and predestined before the ages of time that it should be always for an enduring and unchangeable glory, being united and elected through the true passion by the will of the Father and Jesus Christ, our God.

Abundant happiness through Jesus Christ and His undefiled grace.

I have become acquainted with your name, much-beloved in God, which you have acquired by the habit of righteousness, according to the faith and love in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Being the “Imitators of God”² and stirring up yourselves by the blood of God, you have perfectly accomplished the work that was beseeching to you. For, on hearing that I came bound from Syria for the common name and hope, trusting through your prayers to be permitted to fight with beasts at Rome, that so by martyrdom I may indeed become the disciple of Him “who gave Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God”³ — therefore, I received your whole multitude in the name of God, through Onesimus⁴, a man of inexpressible love and your bishop in the flesh, whom I pray you by Jesus Christ to love and that you would all seek to be like him. And blessed be He who has granted unto you, being worthy, to obtain such an excellent bishop.

As to my fellow-servant Burrhus, your deacon in regard to God and blessed in all

things, I beg that he may continue longer, both for your honour and that of your bishop. And Crocus also, worthy both of God and you, whom I have received as the pattern of your love, has in all things refreshed me, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ shall also refresh him — together with Onesimus and Burrhus and Euplus and Fronto, by means of whom I have, as to love, beheld all of you. May I always have joy of you, if indeed I be worthy of it. It is therefore befitting that you should in every way glorify Jesus Christ, who has glorified you, that by a unanimous obedience “you may be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment and may all speak the same thing concerning the same thing,”⁵ and that, being subject to the bishop and the elders, you may in all respects be sanctified.

I do not issue orders to you, as if I were some great person. For though I am bound for the name [of Christ], I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ. For now, I begin to be a disciple, and I speak to you as fellow-disciples with me. For it was needful for me to have been stirred up by you in faith, exhortation, patience, and long-suffering. But inasmuch as love suffers me not to be silent in regard to you, I have therefore taken upon myself first to exhort you that you would all run together in accordance with the will of God. For even Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, is the [manifested] will of the Father; as also bishops, settled everywhere to the utmost bounds [of the earth], are so by the will of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is fitting that you should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which also you do. For your justly renowned eldership, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore, in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. And you, man by man, become a choir, that — being

*The entire letter — in both short and long forms — can be read here: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.v.ii.html>

¹ “God-Bearer”

² See Eph 5:1.

³ Eph 5:2

⁴ possibly the Onesimus of Paul’s letter to Philemon

⁵ 1 Co 1:10

harmonious in love and taking up the song of God in unison — you may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ, so that He may both hear you and perceive by your works that you are indeed the members of His Son. It is profitable, therefore, that you should live in an unblamable unity, that thus you may always enjoy communion with God.

For if I, in this brief space of time, have enjoyed such fellowship with your bishop — I mean not of a mere human, but of a spiritual nature — how much more do I reckon you happy who are so joined to him as the Church is to Jesus Christ — and as Jesus Christ is to the Father — that so all things may agree in unity! Let no man deceive himself: if anyone be not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two possesses such power, how much more that of the bishop and the whole Church! He, therefore, that does not assemble with the Church, has already by this manifested his pride, and condemned himself. For it is written, “God resists the proud.”⁶ Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop, in order that we may be subject to God.

Now the more any one sees the bishop keeping silence, the more ought he to revere him. For we ought to receive every one whom the Master of the house sends to be over His household, as we would do Him that sent him. It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself. And indeed, Onesimus himself greatly commends your good order in God, that you all live according to the truth, and that no heresy has any dwelling-place among you.⁷ Nor, indeed, do you heed anyone rather than Jesus Christ speaking in truth.

For some are in the habit of carrying about the name [of Jesus Christ] in wicked guile, while yet they practice things unworthy of God, whom you must flee as you would wild beasts. For they are ravening dogs, who bite secretly,

against whom you must be on your guard, inasmuch as they are men who can scarcely be cured. There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit, both made and not made, God existing in flesh, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first passible and then impassible — even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let not, then, anyone deceive you, as indeed you are not deceived, inasmuch as you are wholly devoted to God. For since there is no strife raging among you that might distress you, you are certainly living in accordance with God’s will. I am far inferior to you and require to be sanctified by your Church of Ephesus, so renowned throughout the world. They that are carnal cannot do those things that are spiritual, nor they that are spiritual the things that are carnal — even as faith cannot do the works of unbelief, nor unbelief the works of faith. But even those things that you do according to the flesh are spiritual; for you do all things in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, I have heard of some who have passed on from this to you, having false doctrine, whom you did not suffer to sow among you, but stopped your ears, that you might not receive those things that were sown by them, as being stones of the temple of the Father, prepared for the building of God the Father, and drawn up on high by the instrument of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, making use of the Holy Spirit as a rope, while your faith was the means by which you ascended and your love the way that led up to God. You, therefore, as well as all your fellow-travelers, are God-bearers, temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holiness, adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ, in whom also I exult that I have been thought worthy, by means of this letter, to converse and rejoice with you, because, with respect to your Christian life, you love nothing but God only.⁸

And pray without ceasing in behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God. Allow,

⁶ Pr 3:34

⁷ See Rev 2:2-3, 6.

⁸ See Rev 2:4-5

then, that they be instructed by your works, if in no other way. Be meek in response to their wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting; to their blasphemies [return] your prayers; in contrast to their error, be steadfast in the faith; and for their cruelty, manifest your gentleness. While we take care not to imitate their conduct, let us be found their brothers in all true kindness; and let us seek to be followers of the Lord (Who ever was more unjustly treated, more destitute, more condemned?), so that no plant of the Devil may be found in you but that you may remain in all holiness and sobriety in Jesus Christ, both with respect to the flesh and spirit.

The last times are come upon us. Let us therefore be of a reverent spirit and fear the long-suffering of God, that it tend not to our condemnation. For let us either stand in awe of the wrath to come or show regard for the grace that is at present displayed — one of two things. Only [in one way or another] let us be found in Christ Jesus unto the true life. Apart from Him, let nothing attract you, for whom I bear these bonds, these spiritual jewels, by which may I arise through your prayers, of which I entreat I may always be a partaker, that I may be found in the lot of the Christians of Ephesus, who have always been of the same mind with the apostles through the power of Jesus Christ.

I know both who I am and to whom I write. I am a condemned man; you have been the objects of mercy. I am subject to danger; you are established in safety. You are the persons through whom those pass that are cut off for the sake of God. You are initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, the deservedly most happy, in whose footsteps may I be found, when I shall attain to God — who in all his letters makes mention of you in Christ Jesus.

Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God and show forth His praise. For when ye assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and his [act of] destruction is prevented by the unity

of your faith. Nothing is more precious than peace, by which all war, both in heaven and earth, is brought to an end.

None of these things is hid from you, if you perfectly possess that faith and love towards Christ Jesus that are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith, and the end is love. Now these two, being in unity, are of God, while all other things which are requisite for a holy life follow after them. No man making a profession of faith sins,⁹ nor does he that possesses love hate any one. The tree is made manifest by its fruit;¹⁰ so also, those that profess themselves to be Christians shall be recognized by their conduct. For there is not now a demand for mere profession, but rather that a man be found continuing in the power of faith to the end.

It is better for a man to be silent and be [a Christian], than to talk and not to be one. It is good to teach — if he who speaks also acts. There is then one Teacher, who spoke and it was done; while even those things that He did in silence are worthy of the Father. He who possesses the word of Jesus is truly able to hear even His very silence, that he may be perfect and may both act as he speaks and be recognized by his silence. There is nothing that is hid from God, but our very secrets are near to Him. Let us therefore do all things as those who have Him dwelling in us, that we may be His temples and He may be in us as our God, which indeed He is, and will manifest Himself before our faces. Therefore, we justly love Him.

Do not err, my brothers. Those who corrupt families shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If, then, those who do this, as respects the flesh, have suffered death, how much more shall this be the case with anyone who corrupts by wicked doctrine the faith of God, for which Jesus Christ was crucified! Such a one becoming defiled [in this way] shall go away into everlasting fire, and so shall every one that hearkens unto him.

⁹ See 1 Jn 3:7.

¹⁰ See Mt 12:33.

For this end did the Lord suffer the ointment to be poured upon His head,¹¹ that He might breathe immortality into His Church. Be not anointed with the bad odor of the doctrine of the Prince of This World; let him not lead you away captive from the life that is set before you. And why are we not all prudent, since we have received the knowledge of God, which is Jesus Christ? Why do we foolishly perish, not recognizing the gift which the Lord has of a truth sent to us?

Let my spirit be counted as nothing for the sake of the cross, which is a stumbling-block to those who do not believe, but to us salvation and life eternal.¹² “Where is the wise man? where the disputer?”¹³ Where is the boasting of those who are styled prudent? For our God, Jesus Christ, was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb by Mary, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost. He was born and baptized, that by His passion He might purify the water.

Now the virginity of Mary was hidden from the Prince of This World, as was also her offspring and the death of the Lord — three mysteries of renown that were wrought in silence by God. How, then, was He manifested to the ages? A star shone forth in heaven above all the other stars, the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star, and its light was exceedingly great above them all. And there was agitation felt as to from where this new spectacle had come, so unlike to everything else [in the heavens]. Hence, every kind of magic was destroyed, and every bond of wickedness disappeared; ignorance was removed, and the old kingdom abolished — God Himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life. And now that took a beginning that had been prepared by God. Henceforth, all things were in a state of

tumult, because He meditated the abolition of death.

If Jesus Christ shall graciously permit me through your prayers, and if it be His will, I shall, in a second little work that I will write to you, make further manifest to you [the nature of] the dispensation of which I have begun [to teach], with respect to the new man, Jesus Christ, in His faith and in His love, in His suffering and in His resurrection — especially if the Lord make known to me that you come together man by man in common through grace, by name, in one faith, and in Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David according to the flesh, being both the Son of Man and the Son of God, so that you obey the bishop and the elders with an undivided mind, breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote to prevent us from dying, but [which causes] us to live for ever in Jesus Christ.

My soul be for yours and theirs whom, for the honor of God, you have sent to Smyrna, from where also I write to you, giving thanks unto the Lord and loving Polycarp even as I do you. Remember me, as Jesus Christ also remembered you. Pray for the Church that is in Syria, from where I am being led bound to Rome, being the last of the faithful who are there, even as I have been thought worthy to be found to show forth the honor of God. Farewell in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, our common hope.

¹¹See Jn 12:7.

¹²See 1 Co 1:18.

¹³1 Co 1:20