

The Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians*

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus¹.

To those blessed in the grace of God the Father, in Jesus Christ our Savior, in whom I salute the Church that is at Magnesia², near the Meander [River], and wish it abundance of happiness in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ.

Having been informed of your love according to God, so well-ordered, I rejoiced greatly, and determined to commune with you in the faith of Jesus Christ. For as one who has been thought worthy of the most God-becoming name³, in those bonds that I bear about, I commend the churches, in which I pray for a union both of the flesh and spirit of Jesus Christ, the constant source of our life, and of faith and love, to which nothing is to be preferred, but especially of Jesus and the Father, in whom, if we endure all the assaults of the prince of this world and escape them, we shall enjoy God.

Since, then, I have had the privilege of seeing you, through Damas your most worthy bishop, and through your worthy elders Bassus and Apollonius, and through my fellow-servant the deacon Sotio, whose friendship may I ever enjoy, inasmuch as he is subject to the bishop as to the grace of God and to the elders as to the law of Jesus Christ, [I now write to you].

Now it becomes you also not to hold the [young] age of your bishop [against him], but to yield him all reverence, according to the power of God the Father, as I have known even holy elders do, not judging rashly from the manifest youthful condition [of their bishop] but as being themselves, prudent in God, submitting to him — or rather not to him but to the Father of

Jesus Christ, the bishop of us all. It is therefore fitting that you should, after no hypocritical fashion, obey [your bishop] in honor of Him who has willed us [to do so], since he that does not deceives not the bishop that is visible but seeks to mock Him Who Is Invisible. And all such conduct has reference not to flesh but to God, Who knows all secrets.

It is fitting, then, not only to be called Christians but also to be so in reality — as some indeed give one the title of bishop but do all things without him. Now such persons seem to me not to be possessed of a good conscience, seeing that they are not steadfastly gathered together according to the commandment.

Seeing, then, all things have an end, these two things are simultaneously set before us— death and life; and every one shall go unto his own place. For as there are two kinds of coins, the one of God, the other of the world, and each of these has its special character stamped upon it. The unbelieving are of this world; but the believing have, in love, the character of God the Father by Jesus Christ, by whom, if we are not in readiness to die after the likeness of His passion, His life is not in us.

Since, therefore, I have, in the persons before mentioned, beheld the whole multitude of you in faith and love, I exhort you to study to do all things in harmony of God, while your bishop presides in the place of God and your elders in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons — who are most dear to me and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the ages and in the end was revealed. Receiving, then, the like manners of God, pay respect to one another, and let no one look upon his neighbor after the flesh but continually love each other in Jesus Christ. Let nothing exist among you that may divide you, but be united with your bishop and those that preside over you, as a type and evidence of your immortality.

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

¹ "God-Bearer"

² Magnesia was a city near Ephesus.

³ Perhaps by this he means "Theophorus" or "martyr".

As, therefore, the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by Himself nor by the apostles, so neither should you do anything without the bishop and elders. Neither endeavor that anything appear reasonable and proper to yourselves apart; but being come together into the same place, let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope — in love and in joy undefiled. There is one Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is more excellent. All of you, therefore, run together as into one temple of God, as to one altar, as to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father and is with and has gone to one.

Be not deceived by strange doctrines nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. For the holiest prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. On this account also they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, not proceeding forth from silence, and who in all things pleased Him who sent Him.

If, therefore, those who were brought up in old things have come to the possession of a new hope no longer observing the Sabbath but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death — whom some deny, by which mystery we have received to believe and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master — how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples, the prophets, themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And, therefore, He whom they rightly waited for, having come, raised them from the dead.⁴

Let us not, therefore, be insensible to His kindness. For were He to reward us according to our works, we should cease to be. Therefore, having become His disciples, let us learn to live

according to Christianity. For whoever is called by any other name besides this is not of God. Lay aside, therefore, the evil, the old, the sour leaven, and be changed into the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in Him, lest anyone among you should be corrupted, since by your savor you shall be convicted. It is absurd to profess Christ Jesus and to Judaize. For Christianity did not believe into Judaism, but Judaism Christianity, so that every tongue that believes might be gathered together to God.

These things [I address to you], my beloved, not that I know any of you to be in such a state, but rather — as less than any of you — I desire to guard you beforehand, that you fall not upon the hooks of vain doctrine but that you attain to full assurance in regard to the birth and passion and resurrection that took place in the time of the government of Pontius Pilate, being truly and certainly accomplished by Jesus Christ, who is our hope,⁵ from which may not one of you ever be turned aside.

May I enjoy you in all respects — if indeed I be worthy! For though I am bound, I am not worthy to be compared to any of you that are at liberty. I know that you are not puffed up, for you have Jesus Christ in yourselves. And all the more, when I commend you, I know that you are reverent of spirit. As it is written, "The righteous man is his own accuser."⁶

Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, so that all things that you do may prosper both in the flesh and spirit; in faith and love; in the Son and in the Father and in the Spirit; in the beginning and in the end; with your most admirable bishop and the well-compacted spiritual crown of your elders and the deacons who are according to God. Be subject to the bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ is to the Father according to the flesh and the apostles are to Christ and to the Father and to the Spirit, so that there may be a union both fleshly and spiritual.

⁴ See Mt 27:52-53.

⁵ See 1 Tim 1:1.

⁶ Pr 18:17

Knowing as I do that you are full of God, I have but briefly exhorted you. Be mindful of me in your prayers, that I may attain to God; and [be mindful] of the Church that is in Syria, from where I am not worthy to derive my name. For I stand in need of your united prayer in God — and your love — that the Church that is in Syria may be deemed worthy of being sprinkled with dew⁷ by your church.

The Ephesians from Smyrna (from where I also write to you), who are here for the glory of God as you also are, who have in all things refreshed me, salute you, along with Polycarp, the bishop of the Smyrnaeans. The rest of the churches, in honor of Jesus Christ, also salute you. Fare you well in the harmony of God, you who have obtained the inseparable Spirit, who is Jesus Christ.

⁷ that is, “refreshed”