

The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*

Polycarp and the elders with him,

To the Church of God sojourning at Philippi.

Mercy to you and peace from God Almighty and from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, be multiplied.

I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because you have received the patterns of true love [as displayed by God] and have accompanied — as was proper for you — those who were bound in chains, the fitting ornaments of saints and which are indeed the diadems of the true elect of God and our Lord;¹ and because the strong root of your faith, spoken of in days long gone by, endures even until now² and brings forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] “whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the [birth] pangs of Hades.”³ “In whom — though now you see Him not — you believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,”⁴ into which joy many desire to enter, knowing that “by grace you are saved, not of works,”⁵ but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, “girding up your loins,”⁶ “serve the Lord in fear”⁷ and truth, as those who have forsaken the vain, empty talk and error of the multitude, and “believed in Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave Him glory,”⁸ and a throne at His right hand. To Him all things in heaven and on earth are

subject. Every spirit serves Him. He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead, whose blood God will require of those who do not believe in Him. But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also, if we do His will and walk in His commandments and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness; “not rendering evil for evil, or insult for insult”⁹ or blow for blow or cursing for cursing but being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching: “Judge not, that you be not judged;”¹⁰ “forgive, and it shall be forgiven you;”¹¹ “be merciful, that you may obtain mercy;”¹² “with what measure you use, it shall be measured to you again;”¹³ and once more: “Blessed are the poor and those that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”¹⁴

These things, brothers, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you letters, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith that has been given you and that — being followed by hope and preceded by love towards God and Christ and our neighbor — “is the mother of us all.”¹⁵ For if any one be inwardly possessed of these graces, he has fulfilled the command of righteousness, since he that has love is far from all sin.

*The entire letter can be read here:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iv.ii.html>

¹ He is probably referring to Ignatius here.

² See Ph 1:5.

³ Ac 2:24

⁴ 1 Pe 1:8

⁵ Eph 2:8-9

⁶ Eph 6:14

⁷ Ps 2:11

⁸ 1 Pe 1:21

⁹ 1 Pe 3:9

¹⁰ Mt 7:1

¹¹ Mt 6:12, 14; Lk 6:37

¹² Lk 6:36

¹³ Mt 7:2; Lk 6:38

¹⁴ Mt 5:3, 10; Lk 6:20

¹⁵ Gal 4:26

“But the love of money is the root of all evils.”¹⁶ Knowing, therefore, that “as we brought nothing into the world, so we can carry nothing out,”¹⁷ let us arm ourselves with the armor of righteousness,¹⁸ and let us teach, first of all, ourselves to walk in the commandments of the Lord. Next, [teach] your wives [to walk] in the faith given to them, and in love and purity tenderly loving their own husbands in all truth and loving all [others] equally in all chastity; and to train up their children in the knowledge and fear of God. Teach the widows to be discreet as respects the faith of the Lord, praying continually for all, being far from all slandering, evil-speaking, false-witnessing, love of money, and every kind of evil, knowing that they are the altar of God, that He clearly perceives all things, and that nothing is hid from Him, neither reasonings nor reflections nor any one of the secret things of the heart.

Knowing, then, that “God is not mocked,”¹⁹ we ought to walk worthy of His commandment and glory. In like manner should the deacons be blameless before the face of His righteousness, as being the servants of God and Christ, and not of men. They must not be slanderers, double-tongued, or lovers of money, but temperate in all things, compassionate, industrious, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all. If we please Him in this present world, we shall receive also the future world, according to what He has promised to us, that He will raise us again from the dead and that, if we live worthily of Him, “we shall also reign together with Him,”²⁰ provided only we believe. In like manner, let the young men also be blameless in all things, being especially careful to preserve purity and reining themselves in, as with a bridle, from every kind of evil. For it is well that they should be cut off from the lusts that are in the world, since “every lust wars against the

spirit,”²¹ and “neither fornicators nor effeminate²² nor abusers of themselves with mankind²³ shall inherit the kingdom of God,”²⁴ nor those who do things inconsistent and unbecoming. Therefore, it is needful to abstain from all these things, being subject to the elders and deacons, as unto God and Christ. The virgins also must walk in a blameless and pure conscience.

And let the elders be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor; but always “providing for what is honorable in the sight of God and man;”²⁵ abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unjust judgment; keeping far off from all covetousness, not quickly crediting [an evil report] against any one, not severe in judgment, as knowing that we are all under a debt of sin. If, then, we entreat the Lord to forgive us, we ought also ourselves to forgive; for we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and “we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ and must every one give an account of himself.”²⁶ Let us, then, serve Him in fear and with all reverence, even as He Himself has commanded us and as the apostles who preached the Gospel to us and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord [have alike taught us]. Let us be zealous in the pursuit of what is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offence, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord and draw away vain men into error.

“For whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist,”²⁷ and whoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil, and whoever perverts the sayings of the Lord to his own lusts and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a

¹⁶1 Ti 6:10

¹⁷1 Ti 6:7

¹⁸See Eph 6:11.

¹⁹Gal 6:7

²⁰2 Ti 2:12

²¹1 Pe 2:11

²²that is, “men who are the passive homosexual partner”

²³that is, “men who are the active homosexual partner”

²⁴1 Co 6:9, 10

²⁵Ro 12:17

²⁶Ro 14:10-12; 2 Co 5:10

²⁷1 Jn 4:3

judgment — he is the first-born of Satan. Therefore, forsaking the vanity of many and their false doctrines, let us return to the word that has been handed down to us from the beginning, “watching in prayer”²⁸ and persevering in fasting, beseeching in our supplications the all-seeing God “not to lead us into temptation.”²⁹ As the Lord has said, “The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.”³⁰

Let us, then, continually persevere in our hope and the guarantee of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, “who bore our sins in His own body on the tree,”³¹ “who did no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth,”³² but endured all things for us, that we might live in Him. Let us, then, be imitators of His patience; and if we suffer for His name’s sake, let us glorify Him. For He has set us this example in Himself, and we have believed that such is the case.

I exhort you all, therefore, to yield obedience to the word of righteousness and to exercise all patience, such as you have seen [set] before your eyes, not only in the case of the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus but also in others among yourselves and in Paul himself and the rest of the apostles. [This do] in the assurance that all these have not run in vain but in faith and righteousness and that they are [now] in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they loved not this present world, but Him who died for us and for our sakes was raised again by God from the dead.

Stand fast, therefore, in these things and follow the example of the Lord, being firm and unchangeable in the faith, loving the brotherhood, and being attached to one another, joined together in the truth, exhibiting the meekness of the Lord in your intercourse with one another, and despising no one. When you can do good, do no defer it, because “alms

delivers from death.”³³ All of you be subject one to another, “having your conduct blameless among the Gentiles,”³⁴ that you may both receive praise for your good works and the Lord may not be blasphemed through you. But woe to him by whom the name of the Lord is blasphemed!³⁵ Teach, therefore, self-control to all, and manifest it also in your own conduct.

I am greatly grieved for Valens, who was once an elder among you, because he so little understands the place that was given him [in the Church]. I exhort you, therefore, that you abstain from covetousness and that you be chaste and truthful. “Abstain from every form of evil.”³⁶ For if a man cannot govern himself in such matters, how shall he preach them to others? If a man does not keep himself from covetousness, he shall be defiled by idolatry and shall be judged as one of the heathen. But who of us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord? “Do we not know that the saints shall judge the world?”³⁷ as Paul teaches. But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul labored, and who are commended in the beginning of his letter. For he boasts of you in all those churches that alone then knew the Lord. (But we [of Smyrna] had not yet known Him.) I am deeply grieved, therefore, brothers, for [Valens] and his wife — to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be moderate, then, in regard to this matter, and “do not count such as enemies,”³⁸ but call them back as suffering and straying members, that you may save your whole body. For by so acting you shall edify yourselves.

For I trust that you are well versed in the sacred Scriptures and that nothing is hid from you, (but to me this privilege is not yet granted).³⁹ It is declared, then, in these

²⁸1 Pe 4:7

²⁹Mt 6:13

³⁰Mt 24:41; Mk 14:38

³¹1 Pe 2:24

³²1 Pe 2:22

³³Tobit 4:10; 12:9

³⁴1 Pe 5:5

³⁵See Is 52:5.

³⁶1 Th 5:22

³⁷1 Co 6:2

³⁸2 Th 3:15

³⁹The meaning of the Latin for this parenthetical statement is unclear.

Scriptures, “Be angry and sin not,”⁴⁰ and “Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath.”⁴¹ Happy is he who remembers this, which I believe to be the case with you. But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God and our everlasting High Priest — build you up in faith and truth and in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity; and may He bestow on you a lot and portion among His saints and on us with you and on all who are under heaven who shall believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His Father, who “raised Him from the dead.”⁴² Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings and officials and rulers and for those that persecute and hate you⁴³ and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all and that you may be perfect in Him.

Both you and Ignatius wrote to me that if any one went into Syria, he should carry your letter with him, which I will attend to if I find a fitting opportunity, either personally or through some other acting for me, that your desire may be fulfilled. The letters of Ignatius written by him to us and all the rest [of the letters] that we have with us we have sent to you, as you requested. They are appended to this letter, and by them you may be greatly profited, for they deal with faith and patience and all things that tend to edification in our Lord. Any more certain information you may have obtained regarding both Ignatius himself and those that were him have the goodness to make known to us.

These things I have written to you by Crescens, whom up to the present time I have recommended to you and do now recommend. For he has acted blamelessly among us and, I believe, also among you. Moreover, you will hold his sister in esteem when she comes to you. Be safe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with you all. Amen.

⁴⁰Eph 4:26, quoting Ps 4:5

⁴¹Eph 4:26

⁴²Gal 1:1

⁴³See Mt 5:44.