

## IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, sends heartiest greetings to Polycarp, who is bishop of the Church of Smyrna, or rather has for his bishop God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. I am so well pleased with your God-mindedness, firmly built, as it were, upon an immovable rock, that I am exceedingly grateful for the privilege I had of seeing your saintly face. May it, please God, be a constant joy to me! I exhort you, clothed as you are with the garment of grace, to speed on your course and exhort all others to attend to their salvation. Do justice to your once with the utmost solicitude, both physical and spiritual. Be concerned about unity, the greatest blessing. Bear with all, just as the Lord does with you. Have patience with all in charity, as indeed you do. To prayer give yourself unceasingly; beg for an increase in understanding; watch without letting your spirit flag. Speak to each one singly in imitation of God's way. Bear the infirmities of all, like a master athlete. The greater the toil, the greater the reward.

2. If you love good disciples, you can expect no thanks. Rather, reduce to subjection, by gentleness, the more pestiferous. Not every hurt is healed by the same plaster. Allay fits of fever by means of poultices. Be wary like a serpent, yet always guileless like a dove. You consist of body and soul for the reason that you may deal graciously with whatever meets your eye; but pray that what is kept secret may be revealed to you. In this way you will be lacking in nothing and abound in every gift. As a pilot calls on winds and a storm-tossed mariner looks heavenward, so the times call on you to win your way to God. As God's athlete, be sober; the stake is immortality and eternal life. Of this you are firmly convinced. For your sake I sacrifice myself--chains and all, which are your delight.

3. Men that seem worthy of confidence, yet teach strange doctrines, must not upset you. Stand firm, like an anvil under the hammer. It is like a great athlete to take blows and yet win the fight. For God's sake above all we must endure everything, so that God, in turn, may endure us. Increase your zeal. Read the signs of the times. Look for Him who is above all time--the Timeless, the Invisible, who for our sake became visible, the Impassible, who became subject to suffering on our account and for our sake endured everything.

4. Widows must not be neglected. After the Lord, you must be their guardian. Nothing must be done without your approval; nor must you do anything without God's approval, as indeed you do not. Be calm. Let meetings be held as frequently as possible. Seek out all by name. Do not treat slaves, male or female, with a haughty air, but neither must they give themselves airs; on the contrary, for the glory of God they should render all the better service so as to obtain a better freedom from God. They should not pine for release at the expense of the community; otherwise, they turn out to be slaves of unruly appetites.

5. Pay no attention to their wily stratagems; and do more preaching on this subject. Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in body and soul. In like manner, exhort my brethren in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives as the Lord loves the Church. If anyone is able to remain continent, to the honor of the Flesh of the Lord, let him persistently avoid boasting. The moment he boasts, he is lost; and if he is

more highly esteemed than the bishop, he is undone. For those of both sexes who contemplate marriage it is proper to enter the union with the sanction of the bishop; thus their marriage will be acceptable to the Lord and not just gratify lust. Let all things be done to the honor of God.

6. Heed the bishop, that God may heed you, too. My life is a ransom for those who are obedient to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons; and in their company may I obtain my portion! Toil together, wrestle together, run together, suffer together, rest together, rise together, since you are stewards in God's house, members of His household, and His servants. Win the approval of Him whose soldiers you are, from whom you also draw your pay. Let none of you turn deserter. Let your baptism be your armor; your faith, your helmet; your love, your spear; your patient endurance, your panoply. Your deposits should be your works, that you may receive your savings to the exact amount. To sum up: be long-suffering toward one another and gentle, as God is with you. May you be my joy always!

7. Since, as I was informed, the Church at Antioch in Syria enjoys peace through your prayer, I, too, gather fresh courage, carefree and confident in God. If only I win my way to God, for at the resurrection I want to be found your disciple! It is fitting, my dear God-blessed Polycarp, to convene a council invested with all the splendor of God and to appoint someone who is dear to you and untiring in his zeal, one qualified for the part of God's courier; then confer on him the distinction of going to Syria and extolling, for the glory of God, the untiring charity of your community. A Christian is not his own master; his time belongs to God. This is God's work; and it will be yours, too, once you have accomplished it. Yes, I trust in the grace of God that you are ready for a noble work which concerns God. Knowing your intense zeal for the truth, I confine my exhortation to these few words.

8. To conclude. Because of my sudden embarkation from Troas for Neapolis-- for such is the order of the day. I cannot personally write to all the Churches. Therefore, God-minded as you are, you will please write to the principal Churches and tell them to do the same thing: those that can afford it should send messengers; the rest should send letters through the kindness of your personal delegates. You are qualified for this task. In this way you all will reap honor from a work destined to live forever. Remember me to all by name, especially to the widow of Eпитropus, with her whole family and those of her children. Remember me to my dear Attalus. Remember me to the man who will have the honor of going to Syria. God's grace will forever be with him, as also with Polycarp who sends him. I say good-bye to you all forever in Jesus Christ our God, through whom I wish you to be united with God and under His watchful eye. Farewell in the Lord!

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