
IGNATIUS: To the Philadelphians

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at Philadelphia in Asia; a church which has found mercy and is irrevocably of one mind with God; which unwaveringly exults in the Passion of Our Lord, and firmly believes in His Resurrection through sheer mercy. This Church I salute in the Blood of Jesus Christ. She is a source of everlasting joy, especially when the members are at one with the bishop and his assistants, the presbyters and deacons, that have been appointed in accordance with the wish of Jesus Christ, and whom He has, by His own will, through the operation of His Holy Spirit, confirmed in loyalty.

1. Regarding this bishop I am informed that he holds the supreme office in the community not by his own efforts, or by men's doing, or for personal glory. No, he holds it by the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am charmed with his sweetness of manner. He accomplishes more by his silence than others that talk to no purpose. No wonder; he is as perfectly in accord with the commandments as strings are with a harp. With all my heart, therefore, I laud his disposition to please God, a disposition virtuous and perfect, as I am very well aware; his unshaken constancy, too, and his passionless temper, modeled on the transcendent gentleness of the living God.

2. Being born, then, of the light of truth, shun division and bad doctrines. Where the shepherd is, there you, being sheep, must follow. For, many wolves there are, apparently worthy of confidence, who with the bait of baneful pleasure seek to capture the runners in God's race; but if you stand united, they will have no success.

3. Avoid the noxious weeds. Their gardener is not Jesus Christ, because they are not the planting of the Father. Not that I found any division in your midst; but I did find that there had been a purge. Surely, all those that belong to God and Jesus Christ are the very ones that side with the bishop; and all those that may yet change their mind and return to the unity of the Church, will likewise belong to God, and thus lead a life acceptable to Jesus Christ. Do not be deceived, my brethren: if a man runs after a schismatic, he will not inherit the kingdom of God; if a man chooses to be a dissenter, he severs all connection with the Passion.

4. Take care, then, to partake of one Eucharist; for, one is the Flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the cup to unite us with His Blood, and one altar, just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants. Thus you will conform in all your actions to the will of God.

5. My brethren, my love for you overflows all bounds, and it is my supreme delight to provide you with safeguards, though it is really not I that do it, but Jesus Christ. Being in chains for His sake, I am all the more apprehensive, since I am not yet perfected. But then, your prayer will make me perfect in the sight of God, so that I may win the lot which, through mercy, has fallen to me. I take refuge in the Gospel, which to me is Jesus in the flesh, and in the Apostles, as represented by the presbytery of the Church. But let us also cherish the Prophets, because they, for their part, foreshadowed the Gospel; and they hoped in Him and waited for Him and were saved by their belief in Him; for thus they were one with Jesus Christ. O those lovable and wonderful saints! Their merits are attested by Jesus Christ, and their message is part and parcel of the Gospel of our common hope.

6. But should anyone expound Judaism, do not listen to him. It is preferable, surely, to listen to a circumcised man preaching Christianity than to an uncircumcised man preaching Judaism. But if neither of them preaches Jesus Christ, they are to me tombstones and graves of the dead, on which only the names of the dead are inscribed. Shun, then, the base artifices and snares of the Prince of this world, for fear you may be harassed by his scheming and grow weak in your love. Rather, come together, all of you, with undivided heart. I thank my God that I have a good conscience as concerning you, and that no one has occasion to boast that I was a burden to anyone either secretly or openly, in great matters or in small. But I also pray for all those in whose midst I spoke, that they may not find in my words any testimony against them.

7. For, even though some were willing enough to lead my human spirit into error, yet the Spirit is not led into error, since He proceeds from God. Indeed, He knows where He comes from and whither He goes, and lays bare what is secret. I cried out, while in your midst, and said in a ringing voice--God's voice: "Give heed to the bishop and to the

presbytery and to the deacons." Some, however, suspected I was saying this because I had previous knowledge of the division caused by some; but He for whose sake I am in chains is my witness, that I had not learned it from any human source. No, it was the Spirit who kept preaching in these words: "Apart from the bishop do nothing; preserve your persons as shrines of God; cherish unity, shun divisions; do as Jesus Christ did, for He, too, did as the Father did."

8. I was doing my part, therefore, acting as a man trained to cherish unity. Where there is division and passion, there is no place for God. Now, the Lord forgives all if they change their mind and by this change of mind return to union with God and the council of the bishop. I trust in the grace of Jesus Christ, who will free you from all enslavement. I exhort you never to act in a spirit of factiousness, but according to what you learnt in the school of Christ. When I heard some say, "Unless I find it in the official records--in the Gospel I do not believe"; and when I answered them, "It is in the Scriptures," they retorted: "That is just the point at issue." But to me the official record is Jesus Christ; the inviolable record is His Cross and His death and His Resurrection and the faith of which He is the Author. These are the things which, thanks to your prayer, I want to be my justification.

9. God, too, are priests; but better is the High Priest who was entrusted with the Holy of Holies, who alone was entrusted with the hidden designs of God. He is the door of the Father, through which enter Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the Prophets and the Apostles and the Church. All these are means of being united with God. But the Gospel contains something special--the Advent of the Savior Our Lord Jesus Christ, His Passion and His Resurrection. The beloved Prophets announced His coming, whereas the Gospel is the imperishable fulfillment. All things alike are good, provided your faith is rooted in love.

10. Since it was reported to me that--thanks to your prayer and kindly interest, inspired by Jesus Christ--the Church at Antioch in Syria is at peace, it is proper that you, as a church of God, should appoint a deacon to go there as God's ambassador, and congratulate the people in a public meeting, and give glory to the Name. Blessed in Jesus Christ is he who is to discharge this office; and you, too, will reap glory. If only you are determined, it is not impossible to do this for God's name, just as the neighboring Churches have, some of them, delegated bishops--others, presbyters and deacons.

11. Now, as to Philo, the deacon from Cilicia, a man of attested merit, who even now assists me in the ministry of the word of God together with Rheus Agathopus, an exquisite character, who has been accompanying me from Syria after turning his back upon this life--well, both these men testify (and I, too, thank God on your behalf) that you received them kindly. May the Lord do so to you! As for those who treated them with disrespect, may they be redeemed by the grace of Jesus Christ! In their love the brethren of Troas wish to be remembered. It is from here that I send this letter through the kindness of Burrus, who, as a testimonial of honor, was sent by the Ephesians and Smyrnaeans to accompany me. These men will be honored by the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they hope with body and soul and spirit and faith and love and concord. Farewell in Jesus Christ, our common Hope.

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