

Letter of St. Ignatius to Polycarp

(Abridged, with mixed translation)

Greeting

Ignatius, who is also called "*Theophorus*", sends warmest greetings to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, or rather, to he who has as his own bishop God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

* Chapter 1. Commendation and exhortation

I am so well pleased that your mind is fixed in God, firmly built, as it were, upon an immovable rock. I am truly grateful for the privilege of having seen your saintly face.

I entreat you, by the grace with which you are clothed, press forward on your course, and exhort all that they may be saved. Do justice to your office, both in the flesh and spirit. Be concerned about unity, the greatest blessing. Bear with all, just as the Lord does with you. Have patience with all in love, as indeed you do. To prayer, give yourself unceasingly; beg for an increase in understanding. Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit. Speak to every man separately in imitation of God's way. Bear with the infirmities of all, like a master athlete. The greater the toil, the greater the reward.

Chapter 2. Exhortations

If you love the good disciples, you are due no thanks. Rather, in gentleness seek to subdue the more troublesome. Every kind of wound is not healed with the same remedy. Mitigate violent attacks of disease by gentle applications. Be in all things wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove.

You are composed of both flesh and spirit so that you may deal tenderly with those evils which present themselves visibly before you. With respect to those things which are not seen, pray that God reveals them to you, in order that you may be wanting in nothing, but may abound in every gift.

The times call for you, as pilots do for the winds, and as one tossed with tempest seeks for the haven, so that both you and those under your care may attain to God. Be sober as God's athlete: the prize set before you is immortality and eternal life.

Chapter 3. Exhortations

Do not let those who seem worthy of credit, but teach strange doctrines, fill you with apprehension. Stand firm, like an anvil under the hammer. It is the part of a noble athlete to take blows, and yet to win the fight. We ought to bear all things for the sake of God, that He also may bear with us. Increase your zeal. Read the signs of the times. Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who became subject to suffering on our account and for our sake endured everything.

Chapter 4. Exhortations

Widows must not be neglected. Be, after the Lord, their protector and friend. Nothing must be done without your approval; nor must you do anything without God's approval, as indeed you do not. Be calm. Let your assembling together be as frequent as possible. Seek out all by name.

Do not treat slaves, whether male or female, with a haughty air, but they too should not become puffed up or conceited. On the contrary, for the glory of God, they should render all the better service, that they may obtain from God a better freedom. They should not pine for release at the expense of the community; otherwise, they turn out to be slaves of unruly appetites.

*** Chapter 5. The duties of husbands and wives**

Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in body and soul. In like manner, exhort my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives as the Lord loves the Church.

If anyone is able to remain in a state of purity, to the honour of Him who is Lord of the flesh, let him continue without boasting. The moment he boasts, he is lost; and if he reckons himself greater than the bishop, he is undone.

For those who contemplate marriage, it is proper to enter the union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God and not just after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honour of God.

Chapter 6. The duties of the flock

Give heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. Labour together; strive together; run together; suffer together; rest together and rise together. You are stewards in God's house, members of His household and His servants.

Please Him under whom you fight, from Whom you receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism be your armour; your faith be your helmet; your love be your spear; your patience as a complete panoply. Your deposits should be your works that you may receive your savings to the exact amount.

To sum up: be long-suffering towards one another and gentle, as God is with you. May you be my joy always!

*** Chapter 7. Request that Polycarp would send a messenger to Antioch**

Since I have been informed that the Church at Antioch is, through your prayer, at peace, I also gather fresh courage, carefree and confident in God.

It is fitting, my dear God-blessed Polycarp, to assemble a council invested with the splendor of God and appoint someone who is dear to you and untiring in zeal, who may be designated the messenger of God. This man will have the honour bestowed upon

him to go into Syria, and glorify your ever active love to the praise of Christ. A Christian is not his own master; his time belongs to God and he must always be ready to serve.

Chapter 8. Let other churches also send to Antioch

Because of my sudden embarkation from Troas for (NEE-A-PO-LIS) Neapolis, 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, sending letters and messengers if they are able.

I salute all by name, especially the widow of (EP-I-TRO-PUS) Epitropus, with all her family and children. I salute my dear (A-TAL-US) Attalus. I salute the man who will have the honour of going to Syria. God's grace will forever be with him, and with Polycarp who sends him.

I say goodbye to you all forever in Jesus Christ our God, through whom I wish you to be united with God. My greetings to Alice, that most dear friend of mine. Farewell in the Lord.

