

# Letter of St. Ignatius to the Philadelphians

(Abridged, with mixed translation)

## Greeting

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Ignatius, who is also called "*Theophorus*", to the Church of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, which is at Philadelphia in Asia; a church which has found mercy and is of one mind with God and which unwaveringly rejoices in the Passion of Our Lord, filled with all mercy through His resurrection. I salute you in the Blood of Jesus Christ.

Your church is a source of everlasting joy, especially when her members are at one with the bishop, the presbyters and deacons, those who have been appointed in accordance with the wish of Jesus Christ, and whom He has, through His Holy Spirit, confirmed in loyalty.

## Chapter 1. Praise of the bishop

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Regarding your bishop I am informed that he holds the supreme office 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 the sweetness of his 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 to a harp.

## \* Chapter 2. Maintain union with the bishop

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Being born, then, of light and truth, shun division and bad doctrine. Where the shepherd is, you, being sheep, must follow. For there are many wolves that appear worthy of credit, who, by means of a pernicious pleasure, seek to capture those who are running towards God; but if you stand united, they will have no success.

## Chapter 3. Avoid schismatics

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Avoid the noxious weeds who are not the planting of the Father and who do not have Jesus Christ as their gardener. I did not find any division among you, but I did find that there had been a purge. Surely, all those that belong to God and Jesus Christ are those 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.

Do not be deceived, my brethren. If any man follows him that makes a schism in the Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If anyone chooses to be a dissenter, he severs all connection with the Passion of Christ.

## Chapter 4. Have but one Eucharist, etc

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Take care, then, to have but one Eucharist, for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to unite us with His Blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants. Thus you will conform in all your actions to the will of God.

## **Chapter 5. Pray for me**

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My brethren, my love for you overflows all bounds, and I seek to secure your safety. Yet it is not I that do it, but Jesus Christ.

\* I take refuge in the Gospel, which to me is Jesus in the flesh, and in the Apostles, represented by the presbytery of the Church. But let us also cherish the Prophets, because they 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 loveable and wonderful saints! Their merits are attested by Jesus Christ, and their message is part and parcel of the Gospel of our common hope.

## **Chapter 6. Do not accept Judaism**

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But if anyone preach the Jewish law to you, 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. Flee therefore the snares of the Prince of this world, for fear that you grow weak in your love. Rather, come together with an undivided heart.

## **\* Chapter 7. I have exhorted you to unity**

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For though some would have deceived me according to the flesh, the Spirit is not deceived for He proceeds from God and lays bare what is secret. I cried out while in your midst: *"Give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and deacons"*.

Now, some suspected me of having spoken this because I had previous knowledge of the division caused by some. But He is my witness, I did not learn this from any human source. No, it was the Spirit who kept preaching these words: *"Apart from the bishop do nothing, preserve yourselves as shrines of God; cherish unity, shun divisions, do as Jesus Christ did, for He too, did as the Father did"*

## **Chapter 8. The same continued**

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I therefore did what belonged to me, as a man devoted to unity. For where there is division and wrath, God does not dwell. To all them that repent, the Lord grants forgiveness, if they turn in penitence to the unity of God, and to communion with the bishop.

When I heard some saying, *"If I do not find it in the ancient Scriptures, I will not believe the Gospel"*, I said *"It is written"* and they answered me, *"That remains to be proved"*. But to me Jesus Christ is in the place of all that is ancient: His cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith of which He is the Author.

## **Chapter 9. The Old Testament is good: the New Testament is better**

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The priests indeed are good, but the High Priest is better; to whom the Holy Of Holies has been entrusted, and who alone has been trusted with the secrets of God. He is the

door of the Father, by which enter in Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the Church. All these have for their object the attaining to the unity of God. But the Gospel possesses something transcendent above the former way of things: the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, His passion and resurrection. For the beloved prophets told of His coming, but the Gospel is the imperishable fulfillment.

#### **\* Chapter 10. Congratulate the Antiochans on the close of the persecution**

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Since it was reported to me that the Church at Antioch possesses peace, it is proper that you, as a Church of God, appoint a deacon to go there as God's ambassador, and congratulate them when they are met together, and glorify the Name. Blessed is he who shall be deemed worthy of such a ministry; and you too shall be glorified. The nearest Churches have also sent presbyters and deacons and, in some cases, bishops.

#### **\* Chapter 11. Thanks and salutation**

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Philo the deacon of Cilicia, together with Rheus Agathopus, who has selflessly followed me from Syria, testify that you received them kindly, even as the Lord received you. But may those who dishonoured them be forgiven through the grace of Jesus Christ!

The love of the brethren at Troas salutes you. It is from here that I send this letter through the kindness of Burrhus, who was sent by the Ephesians and Smyrnæans to accompany me. These men will be honoured by the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they hope with body and soul and spirit and faith and love and unity! Farewell in Christ Jesus, our common hope.

