

# THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP AND THE EPHESIANS

by Ignatius of Antioch

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*Ignatius's letters containing commendations and exhortations to preserve Christian unity, maintain respect for church authority, and bear with infirmities through love and prayer.*

20 Chapters

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## The Epistle Of Ignatius To Polycarp And The Ephesians

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## Introduction

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Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Polycarp, Bishop of the Church of the Smyrnæans, or rather, who has, as his own bishop, God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ: [wishes] abundance of happiness. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, and a witness for Jesus Christ, to Polycarp, Bishop of the Church of the Smyrnæans, or rather, who has, as his own bishop, God the Father, and Jesus Christ: [wishes] abundance of happiness.

## Chapter I.--Commendation and exhortation.

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Having obtained good proof that thy mind is fixed in God as upon an immoveable rock, I loudly glorify [His name] that I have been thought worthy [to behold] thy blameless face, [1063] which may I ever enjoy in God! I entreat thee, by the grace with which thou art clothed, to press forward in thy course, and to exhort all that they may be saved. Maintain thy position with all care, both in the flesh and spirit. Have a regard to preserve unity, than which nothing is better. Bear with all, even as the Lord does with thee. Support [1064] all in love, as also thou doest. Give thyself to prayer without ceasing. [1065] Implore additional understanding to what thou already hast. Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit. Speak to every man separately, as God enables thee. [1066] Bear the infirmities of all, as being a perfect athlete [in the Christian life]: where the labour is great, the gain is all the more. Having obtained good proof that thy mind is fixed in God as upon an immoveable rock, I loudly glorify [His name] that I have been thought worthy to behold thy blameless face, [1067] which may I ever enjoy in God! I entreat thee, by the grace with which thou art clothed, to press forward in thy course, and to exhort all that they may be saved. Maintain thy position with all care, both in the flesh and spirit. Have a regard to preserve unity, than which nothing is better. Bear with all even as the Lord does with thee. Support [1068] all in love, as also thou doest. Give thyself to prayer without ceasing. [1069] Implore additional understanding to what thou already hast. Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit. Speak to every man separately, as God enables thee. [1070] Bear the infirmities of all, as being a perfect athlete [in the Christian life], even as does the Lord of all. For says [the Scripture], "He Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." [1071] Where the labour is great, the gain is all the more.

## Chapter II.--Exhortations.

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If thou lovest the good disciples, no thanks are due to thee on that account; but rather seek by meekness to subdue the more troublesome. Every kind of wound is not healed with the same plaster. Mitigate violent attacks [of disease] by gentle applications. [1072] Be in all things "wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove." [1073] For this purpose thou art composed of both flesh and spirit, that thou mayest deal tenderly [1074] with those [evils] that present themselves visibly before thee. And as respects those that are not seen, [1075] pray that [God] would reveal them unto thee, in order that thou mayest be wanting in nothing, but mayest abound in every gift. The times call for thee, as pilots do for the winds, and as one tossed with tempest seeks for the haven, so that both thou [and those under thy care] may attain to God. Be sober as an athlete of God: the prize set before thee is immortality and eternal life, of which thou art also persuaded. In all things may my soul be for thine, [1076] and my bonds also, which thou hast loved. If thou lovest the good disciples, no thanks are due to thee on that account; but rather seek by meekness to subdue the more troublesome. Every kind of wound is not healed with the same plaster. Mitigate violent attacks [of disease] by gentle applications. [1077] Be in all things "wise as a serpent, and harmless always as a dove." [1078] For this purpose thou art composed of both soul and body, art both fleshly and spiritual, that thou mayest correct those [evils] that present themselves visibly before thee; and as respects those that are not seen, mayest pray that these should be revealed to thee, so that thou mayest be wanting in nothing, but mayest abound in every gift. The times call upon thee to pray. For as the wind aids the pilot of a ship, and as havens are advantageous for safety to a tempest-tossed vessel, so is also prayer to thee, in order that thou mayest attain to God. Be sober as an athlete of God, whose will is immortality and eternal life; of which thou art also persuaded. In all things may my soul be for thine, [1079] and my bonds also, which thou hast loved.

## Chapter III.--Exhortations.

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Let not those who seem worthy of credit, but teach strange doctrines, [1080] fill thee with apprehension. Stand firm, as does an anvil which is beaten. It is the part of a noble [1081] athlete to be wounded, and yet to conquer. And especially, we ought to bear all things for the sake of God, that He also may bear with us. Be ever becoming more zealous than what thou art. Weigh carefully 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 passible on our account; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes. Let not those who seem worthy of credit, but teach strange doctrines, [1082] fill thee with apprehension. Stand firm, as does an anvil which is beaten. It is the part of a noble [1083] athlete to be wounded, and yet to conquer. And especially we ought to bear all things for the sake of God, that He also may bear with us, and bring us into His kingdom. Add more and more to thy diligence; run thy race with increasing energy; weigh carefully the times. Whilst thou art here, be a conqueror; for here is the course, and there are the crowns. Look for Christ, the Son of God; who was before time, yet appeared in time; who was invisible by nature, yet visible in the flesh; who was impalpable, and could not be touched, as being without a body, but for our sakes became such, might be touched and handled in the body; who was impassible as God, but became passible for our sakes as man; and who in every kind of way suffered for our sakes.

## Chapter IV.--Exhortations.

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Let not widows be neglected. Be thou, after the Lord, their protector [1084] and friend. Let nothing be done without thy consent; neither do thou anything without the approval of God, which indeed thou dost not, inasmuch as thou art stedfast. Let your assembling together be of frequent [1085] occurrence: seek after all by name. [1086] Do not despise either male or female slaves, yet neither let them be puffed up with conceit, but rather let them submit themselves [1087] the more, for the glory of God, that they may obtain from God a better liberty. Let them not long to be set free [from slavery] at the public expense, that they be not found slaves to their own desires. Let not the widows be neglected. Be thou, after the Lord, their protector and friend. Let nothing be done without thy consent; neither do thou anything without the approval of God, which indeed thou doest not. Be thou stedfast. Let your assembling together be of frequent [1088] occurrence: seek after all by name. [1089] Do not despise either male or female slaves, yet neither let them be puffed up with conceit, but rather let them submit themselves [1090] the more, for the glory of God, that they may obtain from God a better liberty. Let them not wish to be set free [from slavery] at the public expense, that they be not found slaves to their own desires.

## Chapter V.--The duties of husbands and wives.

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Flee evil arts; but all the more discourse in public regarding them. [1091] Speak to my sisters, that they love the Lord, and be satisfied with their husbands both in the flesh and spirit. In like manner also, exhort my brethren, in the name of Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, even as the Lord the Church. [1092] If any one can continue in a state of purity, [1093] to the honour of Him who is Lord of the flesh, [1094] let him so remain without boasting. If he begins to boast, he is undone; and if he reckon himself greater than the bishop, he is ruined. But it becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honour of God. [1095] Flee evil arts; but all the more discourse in public regarding them. Speak to my sisters, that they love the Lord, and be satisfied with their husbands both in the flesh and spirit. In like manner also, exhort my brethren, in the name of Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, even as the Lord the Church. If any one can continue in a state of purity, [1096] to the honour of the flesh of the Lord, let him so remain without boasting. If he shall boast, he is undone; and if he seeks to be more prominent [1097] than the bishop, he is ruined. But it becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to the Lord, and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honour of God. [1098]

## Chapter VI.--The duties of the Christian flock.

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Give ye [1099] heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. My soul be for theirs [1100] that are submissive to the bishop, to the presbyters, and to the deacons, and may my portion be along with them in God! Labour together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep together; and awake together, as the stewards, and associates, [1101] and servants of God. Please ye Him under whom ye fight, and from whom ye receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as a complete panoply. Let your works be the charge [1102] assigned to you, that ye may receive a worthy recompense. Be long-suffering, therefore, with one another, in meekness, as God is towards you. May I have joy of you for ever! [1103] Give ye [1104] heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. My soul be for theirs [1105] that are submissive to the bishop, to the presbytery, and to the deacons: may I have my portion with them from God! Labour together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep together; and awake together, as the stewards, and associates, [1106] and servants of God. Please ye Him under whom ye fight, and from whom ye shall receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as a complete panoply. Let your works be the charge assigned to you, that you may obtain for them a most worthy [1107] recompense. Be long-suffering, therefore, with one another, in meekness, and God shall be so with you. May I have joy of you for ever! [1108]

## **Chapter VII.--Request that Polycarp would send a messenger to Antioch.**

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Seeing that the Church which is at Antioch in Syria is, as report has informed me, at peace, through your prayers, I also am the more encouraged, resting without anxiety in God, [1109] if indeed by means of suffering I may attain to God, so that, through your prayers, I may be found a disciple [of Christ]. [1110] It is fitting, O Polycarp, most blessed in God, to assemble a very solemn [1111] council, and to elect one whom you greatly love, and know to be a man of activity, who may be designated the messenger of God; [1112] and to bestow on him this honour that he may go into Syria, and glorify your ever active love to the praise of Christ. A Christian has not power over himself, but must always be ready for [1113] the service of God. Now, this work is both God's and yours, when ye shall have completed it to His glory. [1114] For I trust that, through grace, ye are prepared for every good work pertaining to God. Knowing, therefore, your energetic love of the truth, I have exhorted you by this brief Epistle. Seeing that the Church which is at Antioch in Syria is, as report has informed me, at peace, through your prayers, I also am the more encouraged, resting without anxiety in God, [1115] if indeed by means of suffering I may attain to God, so that, through your prayers, I may be found a disciple [of Christ]. It is fitting, O Polycarp, most blessed in God, to assemble a very solemn [1116] council, and to elect one whom you greatly love, and know to be a man of activity, who may be designated the messenger of God; [1117] and to bestow on him the honour of going into Syria, so that, going into Syria, he may glorify your ever active love to the praise of God. A Christian has not power over himself, but must always be ready for [1118] the service of God. Now, this work is both God's and yours, when ye shall have completed it. For I trust that, through grace, ye are prepared for every good work pertaining to God. Knowing your energetic love of the truth, I have exhorted you by this brief Epistle.

## Chapter VIII.--Let other churches also send to Antioch.

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Inasmuch as I have not been able to write to all the Churches, because I must suddenly sail from Troas to Neapolis, as the will [1119] [of the emperor] enjoins, [I beg that] thou, as being acquainted with the purpose [1120] of God, wilt write to the adjacent Churches, that they also may act in like manner, such as are able to do so sending messengers, [1121] and the others transmitting letters through those persons who are sent by thee, that thou [1122] mayest be glorified by a work [1123] which shall be remembered for ever, as indeed thou art worthy to be. I salute all by name, and in particular the wife of Epitropus, with all her house and children. I salute Attalus, my beloved. I salute him who shall be deemed worthy to go [from you] into Syria. Grace shall be with him for ever, and with Polycarp that sends him. I pray for your happiness for ever in our God, Jesus Christ, by whom continue ye in the unity and under the protection of God, [1124] I salute Alce, my dearly beloved. [1125] Fare ye well in the Lord. Inasmuch, therefore, as I have not been able to write to all Churches, because I must suddenly sail from Troas to Neapolis, as the will [1126] [of the emperor] enjoins, [I beg that] thou, as being acquainted with the purpose [1127] of God, wilt write to the adjacent Churches, that they also may act in like manner, such as are able to do so sending messenger, and the others transmitting letters through those persons who are sent by thee, that thou mayest be glorified by a work [1128] which shall be remembered for ever, as indeed thou art worthy to be. I salute all by name, and in particular the wife of Epitropus, with all her house and children. I salute Attalus, my beloved. I salute him who shall be deemed worthy to go [from you] into Syria. Grace shall be with him for ever, and with Polycarp that sends him. I pray for your happiness for ever in our God, Jesus Christ, by whom continue ye in the unity and under the protection of God. I salute Alce, my dearly beloved. [1129] Amen. Grace [be with you]. Fare ye well in the Lord.

## Introductory Note to the Syriac Version of the Ignatian Epistles

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When the Syriac version of the Ignatian Epistles was introduced to the English world in 1845, by Mr. Cureton, the greatest satisfaction was expressed by many, who thought the inveterate controversy about to be settled. Lord Russell made the learned divine a canon of Westminster Abbey, and the critical Chevalier Bunsen [1130] committed himself as its patron. To the credit of the learned, in general, the work was gratefully received, and studied with scientific conscientiousness by Lightfoot and others. The literature of this period is valuable; and the result is decisive as to the Curetonian versions at least, which are fragmentary and abridged, and yet they are a valuable contribution to the study of the whole case. The following is the original Introductory Notice: -- Some account of the discovery of the Syriac version of the Ignatian Epistles has been already given. We have simply to add here a brief description of the mss. from which the Syriac text has been printed. That which is named a by Cureton, contains only the Epistle to Polycarp, and exhibits the text of that Epistle which, after him, we have followed. He fixes its age somewhere in the first half of the sixth century, or before the year 550. The second ms., which Cureton refers to as b, is assigned by him to the seventh or eighth century. It contains the three Epistles of Ignatius, and furnishes the text here followed in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Romans. The third ms., which Cureton quotes as g, has no date, but, as he tells us, "belonged to the collection acquired by Moses of Nisibis in a.d.931, and was written apparently about three or four centuries earlier." It contains the three Epistles to Polycarp, the Ephesians, and the Romans. The text of all these mss. is in several passages manifestly corrupt, and the translators appear at times to have mistaken the meaning of the Greek original. [N.B. -- Bunsen is forced to allow the fact that the discovery of the lost work of Hippolytus "throws new light on an obscure point of the Ignatian controversy," i.e., the Sige in the Epistle to the Magnesians (cap. viii.); but his treatment of the matter is unworthy of a candid scholar.]

## Introduction

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[1131]Ignatius, who is [also called] Theophorus, to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, or rather, who has as his own bishop God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ: [wishes] abundance of happiness.

## Chapter I.--Commendation and exhortation. Syriac Version

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Because thy mind is acceptable to me, inasmuch as it is established in God, as on a rock which is immoveable, I glorify God the more exceedingly that I have been counted worthy of [seeing] thy face, which I longed after in God. Now I beseech thee, by the grace with which thou art clothed, to add [speed] to thy course, and that thou ever pray for all men that they may be saved, and that thou demand [1132] things which are befitting, with all assiduity both of the flesh and spirit. Be studious of unity, than which nothing is more precious. Bear with all men, even as our Lord beareth with thee. Show patience [1133] with all men in love, as [indeed] thou doest. Be stedfast in prayer. Ask for more understanding than that which thou [already] hast. Be watchful, as possessing a spirit which sleepeth not. Speak with every man according to the will of God. Bear the infirmities of all men as a perfect athlete; for where the labour is great, the gain is also great.

## Chapter II.--Exhortations.

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If thou lovest the good disciples only, thou hast no grace; [but] rather subdue those that are evil by gentleness. All [sorts of] wounds are not healed by the same medicine. Mitigate [the pain of] cutting [1134] by tenderness. Be wise as the serpent in everything, and innocent, with respect to those things which are requisite, even as the dove. For this reason thou art [composed] of both flesh and spirit, that thou mayest entice [1135] those things which are visible before thy face, and mayest ask, as to those which are concealed from thee, that they [too] may be revealed to thee, in order that thou be deficient in nothing, and mayest abound in all gifts. The time demands, even as a pilot does a ship, and as one who stands exposed to the tempest does a haven, that thou shouldst be worthy of God. Be thou watchful as an athlete of God. That which is promised to us is life eternal, which cannot be corrupted, of which things thou art also persuaded. In everything I will be instead [1136] of thy soul, and my bonds which thou hast loved.

## Chapter III.--Exhortations.

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Let not those who seem to be somewhat, and teach strange doctrines, strike thee with apprehension; but stand thou in the truth, as an athlete [1137] who is smitten, for it is [the part] of a great athlete to be smitten, and [yet] conquer. More especially is it fitting that we should bear everything for the sake of God, that He also may bear us. Be [still] more diligent than thou yet art. Be discerning of the times. Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times, Him who is invisible, Him who for our sakes became visible, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured everything in every form for our sakes.

## Chapter IV.--Exhortations.

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Let not the widows be overlooked; on account of [1138] our Lord be thou their guardian, and let nothing be done without thy will; also do thou nothing without the will of God, as indeed thou doest not. Stand rightly. Let there be frequent [1139] assemblies: ask every man [to them] by his name. Despise not slaves, either male or female; but neither let them be contemptuous, but let them labour the more as for the glory of God, that they may be counted worthy of a more precious freedom, which is of God. Let them not desire to be set free out of the common [fund], lest they be found the slaves of lust.

## **Chapter V.--The duties of husbands and wives.**

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Flee wicked arts; but all the more discourse regarding them. Speak to my sisters, that they love in our Lord, and that their husbands be sufficient for them in the flesh and spirit. Then, again, charge my brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, as our Lord His Church. If any man is able in power to continue in purity, [1140] to the honour of the flesh of our Lord, let him continue so without boasting; if he boasts, he is undone; if he become known apart from the bishop, he has destroyed himself. [1141] It is becoming, therefore, to men and women who marry, that they marry with the counsel of the bishop, that the marriage may be in our Lord, and not in lust. Let everything, therefore, be [done] for the honour of God.

## Chapter VI.--The duties of the Christian flock.

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Look ye to the bishop, that God also may look upon you. I will be instead of the souls of those who are subject to the bishop, and the presbyters, and the deacons; with them may I have a portion in the presence of God! Labour together with one another, act as athletes [1142] together, run together, suffer together, sleep together, rise together. As stewards of God, and of His household, [1143] and His servants, please Him and serve Him, that ye may receive from Him the wages [promised]. Let none of you be rebellious. Let your baptism be to you as armour, and faith as a spear, and love as a helmet, and patience as a panoply. Let your treasures be your good works, that ye may receive the gift of God, as is just. Let your spirit be long-suffering towards each other with meekness, even as God [is] toward you. As for me, I rejoice in you at all times.

## **Chapter VII.--Request that Polycarp would send a messenger to Antioch.**

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The Christian has not power over himself, but is [ever] ready to be subject to God. [1144]

## **Chapter VIII.--Let other churches also send to Antioch.**

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I salute him who is reckoned worthy to go to Antioch in my stead, as I commanded thee. [1145]

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