

The Letters of Ignatius

Modern English version · SermonIndex

Ignatius of Antioch · c. AD 105–115

Seven letters written by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, to churches in Asia Minor and Rome and to Polycarp, as he was taken under guard to Rome to be put to death. This is the shorter Greek form of the letters, which most scholars accept as genuine.

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To the Ephesians

Greeting

Eph. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the church in Ephesus in Asia, which is worthy of blessing. It has been blessed with greatness by the fullness of God the Father. Before the ages it was destined for lasting and unchanging glory forever. It is united and chosen through true suffering, by the will of the Father and of Jesus Christ our God. Abundant greetings in Jesus Christ and in blameless joy.

Translator's note. The letters are usually dated to the reign of the emperor Trajan, around AD 110, though some scholars argue for a somewhat later date. This letter's recipient church was led by a bishop named Onesimus (1.1.3). Some have wondered whether he is the Onesimus of Paul's letter to Philemon, but this cannot be shown and many scholars doubt it.

Chapter 1

Eph. 1.1 In God I welcomed your dearly loved name, which you possess by a righteous nature, in keeping with faith and love in Christ Jesus our Savior. You are imitators of God. Having rekindled, by the blood of God, the work that comes naturally to you, you have carried it out perfectly.

Translator's note. "The blood of God" is a bold phrase. It speaks of Christ's blood as God's blood. Compare [Acts 20:28](#), "the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Ignatius often calls Christ "our

God" (see the greeting above and 18.2 of this letter).

Eph. 1.2 For you heard that I had been brought in chains from Syria for the sake of the name and hope we share. You heard that I hoped, through your prayer, to be allowed to fight with the wild beasts at Rome, so that by attaining this I might be able to be a disciple. So you were eager to see me.

Eph. 1.3 Since, then, in the name of God I have received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus, a man of love beyond words and your bishop, I pray that you will love him in the way of Jesus Christ and that you will all be like him. For blessed is the one who has granted you, worthy as you are, to have such a bishop.

Chapter 2

Eph. 2.1 Now about my fellow servant Burrus, your godly deacon, who is blessed in all things: I pray that he may stay on with me, to the honor of you and of your bishop. Crocus too, who is worthy of God and of you, and whom I received as a living example of your love, has refreshed me in every way. May the Father of Jesus Christ refresh him in the same way. He has done this together with Onesimus, Burrus, Euplus, and Fronto, and in them I have seen all of you in love.

Eph. 2.2 May I always have joy in you, if I am worthy. So it is right to glorify in every way Jesus Christ, who has glorified you. Then, joined together in one obedience and submitting to the bishop and the council of elders, you may be made holy in all things.

Chapter 3

Eph. 3.1 I am not giving you orders as if I were somebody. For even though I am in chains for the name, I have not yet been made perfect in Jesus Christ. For now I am only beginning to be a disciple, and I speak to you as my fellow students. For I needed to be anointed by you with faith, correction, endurance, and patience.

Translator's note. "Anointed" translates a word used for rubbing oil on an athlete before a contest. Ignatius pictures his coming martyrdom as a contest.

Eph. 3.2 But since love does not let me stay silent about you, I have taken it on myself to urge you to be in step with the mind of God. For Jesus Christ, our undivided life, is the mind of the Father, just as the bishops, appointed to the ends of the earth, are in the mind of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

Eph. 4.1 So it is right for you to be in step with the mind of the bishop, as you already are. For your council of elders, which

deserves its good name and is worthy of God, is tuned to the bishop like strings to a lyre. So in your unity of mind and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung.

Translator's note. In Ignatius' letters the church has a threefold order: one bishop (episkopos), a council of presbyters (elders), and deacons. This is much stronger than the picture in 1 Clement, where overseers and elders seem to be the same group. Scholars debate what this shows about how church leadership developed in Syria and Asia Minor in the early second century. Ignatius himself treats the bishop as the center of unity in each local church. He does not speak of a bishop of Rome over other bishops.

Eph. 4.2 Each of you, too, must join in becoming one choir. Then, in harmony and agreement, taking your pitch from God in unity, you will sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father. So he will hear you and recognize, by your good deeds, that you are members of his Son. So it is good for you to be in blameless unity, so that you may always share in God.

Chapter 5

Eph. 5.1 For if in a short time I formed such a bond with your bishop, one that was not human but spiritual, how much more do I count you blessed! You are joined with him as the church is with Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is with the Father, so that all things may sound together in unity.

Eph. 5.2 Let no one be misled. If anyone is not inside the place of the altar, he lacks the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two has such power, how much more the prayer of the bishop and of the whole church!

Translator's note. "The bread of God" probably refers to the Eucharist (compare [John 6:33](#)). "The place of the altar" translates thysiasterion, literally "altar." Here it seems to stand for the gathered church around the bishop. "One or two" may recall [Matthew 18:19-20](#).

Eph. 5.3 So whoever does not come together with the rest is already proud and has separated himself. For it is written: "God opposes the proud." So let us be eager not to oppose the bishop, so that we may be submitting to God.

Translator's note. The quotation is from [Proverbs 3:34](#), also in [James 4:6](#) and [1 Peter 5:5](#).

Chapter 6

Eph. 6.1 The more anyone sees the bishop being silent, the more he should fear him. For everyone whom the master of the house sends to manage his household, we must receive as we would receive the one who sent him. So it is clear that we must look on the bishop as the Lord himself.

Translator's note. Compare Jesus' words in [Matthew 10:40](#) and [John 13:20](#): whoever receives the one he sends receives him.

Eph. 6.2 Onesimus himself highly praises your good order in God, that you all live according to truth and that no heresy lives among you. You do not even listen to anyone unless he speaks about Jesus Christ in truth.

Chapter 7

Eph. 7.1 For some are in the habit of carrying about the name with evil deceit while doing other things unworthy of God. You must avoid them like wild animals. For they are mad dogs that bite in secret. You must beware of them, because they are hard to cure.

Eph. 7.2 There is one physician, both fleshly and spiritual, born and unborn, God in a human being, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first able to suffer and then unable to suffer: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Translator's note. This is a very early creed-like statement, written in balanced pairs. "Unborn" means without origin, in his divinity. Ignatius is probably answering those who said Christ only seemed to have a real body and to suffer (docetism). He attacks this view more directly in Trallians 9-10 and Smyrnaeans 1-7.

Chapter 8

Eph. 8.1 So let no one deceive you, and indeed you are not deceived, since you belong wholly to God. For when no quarrel that could torment you has taken root among you, then you truly are living according to God. I am your humble servant, and I give myself as an offering for you Ephesians, a church famous through the ages.

Translator's note. "Humble servant" translates peripsema, literally "scrapings" or "what is wiped off." Paul uses the word in [1 Corinthians 4:13](#) ("the scum of all things"). By Ignatius' time it had become a humble way of saying "I am your lowly servant" or "I give myself for you."

Eph. 8.2 The fleshly cannot do spiritual things, nor the spiritual fleshly things, just as faith cannot do the things of unbelief nor unbelief the things of faith. But even what you do according to the flesh is spiritual, for you do everything in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 9

Eph. 9.1 I learned that some people from there passed through with bad teaching. You did not let them sow it among you. You stopped your ears so as not to receive what they were sowing. For you are stones of the Father's temple, prepared for the building of God the Father. You are lifted up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, with the Holy Spirit as the rope.

Your faith is the hoist that lifts you, and love is the road that leads up to God.

Translator's note. The crane (mechane) is an image from building work: the cross is the machine that raises believers like stones into God's temple. Compare [1 Peter 2:5](#) and [Ephesians 2:20-22](#).

Eph. 9.2 So you are all fellow travelers in a procession: bearers of God, bearers of the temple, bearers of Christ, bearers of holy things, adorned in every way with the commands of Jesus Christ. I rejoice in this, and I have been counted worthy to talk with you through what I write and to share your joy, because in your life as human beings you love nothing but God alone.

Translator's note. The words theophoroi, naophoroi, christophoroi and hagiophoroi ("God-bearers," "temple-bearers," and so on) play on Ignatius' own second name, Theophorus, which he uses at the opening of each letter. Synodoi ("fellow travelers") can also mean members of a procession. Together these words may recall the festival processions of Ephesus, in which images and sacred objects were carried through the city.

Chapter 10

Eph. 10.1 Pray without ceasing also for the rest of humanity, for there is hope that they may repent and find God. So let them at least become disciples by learning from your deeds.

Eph. 10.2 Be gentle in answer to their anger, humble in answer to their boasting, offer prayers in answer to their blasphemies, be firm in faith in answer to their error, be mild in answer to their savagery, and do not try to imitate them in return.

Eph. 10.3 Let us show ourselves to be their brothers by our gentleness. Let us be eager to imitate the Lord, competing to see who can suffer the most wrong, who can be cheated, who can be rejected. Then no weed of the devil will be found among you, but you will remain in all purity and self-control in Jesus Christ, in flesh and in spirit.

Translator's note. Compare [1 Corinthians 6:7](#), where Paul asks, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" He uses the same Greek verbs.

Chapter 11

Eph. 11.1 These are the last times. So let us be ashamed and fear God's patience, so that it does not become our judgment. Either let us fear the wrath to come or love the grace now at hand. Let it be one of the two. Only let us be found in Christ Jesus for true life.

Eph. 11.2 Apart from him let nothing seem right to you. In him I carry my chains, those spiritual pearls. In them may I rise again through your prayer, and may I always have a share in your prayer.

Then I will be found among the Christians of Ephesus, who have always been in agreement with the apostles by the power of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 12

Eph. 12.1 I know who I am and to whom I write. I am condemned, you are shown mercy. I am in danger, you are secure.

Eph. 12.2 You are the road that people pass along when they are being put to death on their way to God. You share in the mysteries with Paul, who was made holy, who was approved by testimony, who is rightly called blessed. May I be found in his footsteps when I reach God. He mentions you in every letter in Christ Jesus.

Translator's note. Paul worked in Ephesus for two to three years ([Acts 19:8-10](#); 20:31). "In every letter" is probably an exaggeration, though some read it as "throughout his letter." Ephesus is named in only a few of Paul's letters (for example [1 Corinthians 15:32](#); 16:8; [1 Timothy 1:3](#); [2 Timothy 1:18](#)), besides the letter we know as Ephesians.

Chapter 13

Eph. 13.1 So be eager to come together more often to give thanks to God and glorify him. For when you meet together often, the powers of Satan are overthrown, and his destructive work is broken by the harmony of your faith.

Translator's note. Son, Father, and Spirit are named together here, in that order rather than the later creedal order; compare [2 Corinthians 13:14](#) (13:13 in some Bibles), which also names Christ before God and the Holy Spirit.

Eph. 13.2 Nothing is better than peace, by which all warfare of heavenly and earthly beings is ended.

Chapter 14

Eph. 14.1 None of this will escape you if you have perfect faith and love toward Jesus Christ, which are the beginning and end of life. The beginning is faith, and the end is love. When the two come together in unity, it is God. All the other things that lead to goodness follow from them.

Eph. 14.2 No one who professes faith sins, and no one who has love hates. The tree is known by its fruit. In the same way, those who profess to belong to Christ will be seen by what they do. For the work is not a matter of what we profess now. It is a matter of being found in the power of faith to the end.

Translator's note. Compare [Matthew 7:16-20](#) and 12:33.

Chapter 15

Eph. 15.1 It is better to be silent and be real than to talk and not be real. Teaching is good if the teacher does what he says. So there is one Teacher, who spoke and it came to be. Even the things he did in silence are worthy of the Father.

Translator's note. "One Teacher" echoes [Matthew 23:8](#). "He spoke and it came to be" echoes [Psalm 33:9](#) (32:9 in the Greek Old Testament), where these words describe God creating the world.

Eph. 15.2 The one who truly has the word of Jesus can also hear his silence. Then he will be perfect: he will act through what he says and be known through his silence.

Eph. 15.3 Nothing escapes the Lord. Even our secrets are near him. So let us do everything as people in whom he lives, so that we may be his temples and he may be our God within us. This is truly so, and it will be made plain before our eyes. That is why we are right to love him.

Translator's note. The last clause is difficult in Greek ("from which we rightly love him"). It may mean that God's presence, now and when it is revealed, is the reason we love him, or that this will be shown by our love for him.

Chapter 16

Eph. 16.1 Do not be misled, my brothers: those who corrupt households will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Translator's note. Compare [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#) (which opens with the same words, "Do not be misled") and [Galatians 5:19-21](#). The Greek word *oikophthoroi* means literally "house-wreckers." It was used of those who ruin households, especially by adultery. Since Ignatius goes on to speak of false teaching, he may also have in mind those who upset Christian households (compare [Titus 1:11](#)).

Eph. 16.2 If those who do such things in the flesh have died, how much more will someone die who corrupts the faith of God by evil teaching, the faith for which Jesus Christ was crucified? Such a person has become filthy and will go into the unquenchable fire, and so will anyone who listens to him.

Translator's note. "Those who... have died" probably refers to judgments on sexual sin in the Old Testament, such as the one Paul recalls in [1 Corinthians 10:8](#) (compare [Numbers 25:1-9](#)). "Unquenchable fire" echoes Jesus' words in [Mark 9:43](#) and John the Baptist's in [Matthew 3:12](#).

Chapter 17

Eph. 17.1 For this reason the Lord took ointment on his head, so that he would breathe incorruption on the church. Do not be anointed with the stench of the teaching of the ruler of this age, so that he does not take you captive away from the life set before you.

Translator's note. The anointing on the head is the woman's anointing of

Jesus at Bethany as told in [Matthew 26:6-13](#) and [Mark 14:3-9](#). In [John 12:1-8](#) she anoints his feet. “The ruler of this age” is the devil. Compare [John 12:31](#) (“the ruler of this world”) and [1 Corinthians 2:6-8](#) (“the rulers of this age”). Ignatius sets the fragrant ointment against the “stench” of false teaching.

Eph. 17.2 Why do we not all become wise when we have received the knowledge of God, which is Jesus Christ? Why do we foolishly perish, not knowing the gift that the Lord truly sent?

Chapter 18

Eph. 18.1 My spirit is a humble offering for the cross, which is a stumbling block for unbelievers but for us salvation and eternal life. Where is the wise person? Where is the debater? Where is the boasting of those called intelligent?

Translator’s note. Compare [1 Corinthians 1:18-25](#). The questions echo [1 Corinthians 1:20](#), though Ignatius adapts them; “the intelligent” recalls [1 Corinthians 1:19](#). “A humble offering” translates the difficult Greek word *peripsema*, literally “scrapings” or “offscouring,” which Paul uses in [1 Corinthians 4:13](#) of the apostles being treated as the scum of the world; Ignatius uses it as a term of self-humbling devotion.

Eph. 18.2 For our God, Jesus the Christ, was carried in the womb by Mary according to God’s plan, from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized so that by his suffering he might cleanse the water.

Translator’s note. Ignatius lists the key facts of Christ’s coming in short, creed-like lines. “The seed of David and of the Holy Spirit” holds together Christ’s human descent and his divine origin. “Cleanse the water” probably means that Christ’s baptism and suffering made the water of Christian baptism pure.

Scripture: [John 7:42](#); [Romans 1:3](#); [2 Timothy 2:8](#)

Chapter 19

Eph. 19.1 The virginity of Mary and her giving birth escaped the notice of the ruler of this age, as did the death of the Lord. Three mysteries that cry out, which were done in the silence of God.

Translator’s note. The “three mysteries” are Mary’s virginity, her giving birth, and the Lord’s death. They are to be proclaimed aloud (“of a cry”), though God accomplished them quietly, hidden from the devil.

Eph. 19.2 How then was he made known to the ages? A star shone in heaven above all the stars. Its light was indescribable, and its newness caused astonishment. All the other stars, together with the sun and moon, formed a chorus around the star, but it surpassed them all in its light. There was turmoil over where this new thing, so unlike them, had come from.

Translator’s note. This is an early retelling of the star of Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:1-10](#)). The details about the other stars forming a chorus go

beyond the Gospel account.

Eph. 19.3 From this all magic was undone and every bond of evil disappeared. Ignorance was wiped out and the old kingdom was destroyed, when God appeared as a human being, bringing the newness of eternal life. What had been prepared by God now had its beginning. From then on everything was thrown into turmoil, because the abolition of death was being planned.

Chapter 20

Eph. 20.1 If Jesus Christ makes me worthy through your prayer, and it is his will, in the second little book that I plan to write to you I will explain further the plan that I began, concerning the new man Jesus Christ, in his faith and love, in his suffering and resurrection.

Translator's note. There is no evidence that Ignatius ever wrote this second letter to Ephesus. He was probably martyred in Rome soon afterward.

Eph. 20.2 This is especially so if the Lord reveals to me that all of you, each one by name, come together in common, in grace, in one faith and in Jesus Christ. According to the flesh he is of the family of David; he is the Son of Man and Son of God. Come together in this way so that you obey the bishop and the council of elders with an undistracted mind, breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote so that we do not die but live forever in Jesus Christ.

Translator's note. "Medicine of immortality" (pharmakon athanasias) is Ignatius' well-known name for the Eucharist. It is one of the earliest descriptions of the Lord's Supper outside the New Testament and shows the realistic way he thought of it. Compare his letter to the Smyrnaeans (chapter 7), where he says the Eucharist is "the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ."

Scripture: [Romans 1:3](#)

Chapter 21

Eph. 21.1 I am ready to give my life for you, and for those you sent to Smyrna for God's honor, from where I am writing to you. I thank the Lord and love Polycarp as I do you. Remember me, as Jesus Christ remembers you.

Translator's note. The word antipsychon means "a life given in exchange" or "ransom." It is used in 4 Maccabees of the martyrs' deaths. Ignatius uses it several times in his letters to express his devotion to the churches.

Eph. 21.2 Pray for the church in Syria, from where I am being taken in chains to Rome. I am the least of the believers there, though I have been counted worthy to bring honor to God. Farewell in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, our common hope.

To the Magnesians

Greeting

Magn. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the church blessed in the grace of God the Father in Christ Jesus our Savior, in whom I greet the church in Magnesia on the Meander and wish it abundant joy in God the Father and in Jesus Christ.

Translator's note. This is the letter to the church at Magnesia on the Meander, a town in western Asia Minor. Ignatius wrote it from Smyrna, where he met the Magnesians' bishop Damas and other leaders who came to see him.

Chapter 1

Magn. 1.1 Having learned how well-ordered your love for God is, I gladly decided to speak to you in the faith of Jesus Christ.

Magn. 1.2 For I have been counted worthy of a name most fitting for God, and in the chains I carry about I sing the praises of the churches. I pray that in them there may be union of the flesh and spirit of Jesus Christ, who is always our life; union of faith and love, which nothing surpasses; and, most important, union of Jesus and the Father. If we endure in him all the abuse of the ruler of this age and escape, we will reach God.

Chapter 2

Magn. 2.1 I was counted worthy to see you in the person of Damas, your bishop, who is worthy of God, and of your worthy elders Bassus and Apollonius, and of my fellow servant the deacon Zotion. May I have joy in him, because he is subject to the bishop as to the grace of God and to the council of elders as to the law of Jesus Christ.

Translator's note. In the Greek this sentence begins "Since..." but breaks off without finishing. It has been made a complete sentence here.

Chapter 3

Magn. 3.1 It is also right for you not to take advantage of the bishop's youth, but to give him all respect according to the power of God the Father. I have learned that even the holy elders have not taken advantage of his apparent youthfulness. As people wise in God, they give way to him, not really to him but to the Father of Jesus Christ, the bishop of all.

Translator's note. Damas was apparently a young man. "The bishop of all" is God the Father as the true overseer, so that yielding to the human bishop means yielding to God.

Magn. 3.2 So out of honor for the one who wanted us, it is right to obey without any pretense. Whoever deceives this bishop who is seen is not so much deceiving him as cheating the one who is unseen. In such a case a person must answer not to flesh but to God, who knows hidden things.

Chapter 4

Magn. 4.1 It is right not only to be called Christians but to be so. In the same way, some speak of the bishop but do everything without him. Such people do not seem to me to have a good conscience, because they do not meet in a valid way, as the commandment requires.

Chapter 5

Magn. 5.1 Since all things come to an end, and two things lie before us together, death and life, and each person will go to his own place:

Translator's note. "Go to his own place" echoes what [Acts 1:25](#) says of Judas. The choice between death and life set before us recalls [Deuteronomy 30:15-19](#).

Magn. 5.2 For there are two kinds of coin, one of God and one of the world, and each has its own stamp on it. In the same way the unbelievers bear the stamp of this world, while the believers bear in love the stamp of God the Father through Jesus Christ. Unless we willingly choose, through him, to die into his suffering, his life is not in us.

Translator's note. The image of coins and their stamp (charaktēr) draws on the idea that a coin's image shows whose it is. Compare Jesus' saying about Caesar's coin in [Mark 12:13-17](#).

Chapter 6

Magn. 6.1 Since I have seen your whole congregation in faith in the people mentioned above, and have loved them, I urge you: be eager to do everything in harmony with God. Let the bishop preside in the place of God, the elders in the place of the council of the apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, be entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the ages and appeared at the end of time.

Translator's note. This passage is often cited as an early picture of the three offices of bishop, elders, and deacons. Compare the similar teaching in his letters to the Trallians (chapter 3) and to the Smyrnaeans (chapter 8).

Magn. 6.2 So all of you, having taken on God's character, respect one another. Let no one look at his neighbor in a merely human way, but always love one another in Jesus Christ. Let there be

nothing among you that can divide you. Be united with the bishop and with those who preside, as a pattern and lesson of incorruption.

Chapter 7

Magn. 7.1 The Lord, being united with the Father, did nothing without him, either by himself or through the apostles. In the same way, you must do nothing without the bishop and the elders. Do not try to persuade yourselves that anything is right for you to do on your own. Instead, when you meet together, let there be one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope, in love and in blameless joy, which is Jesus Christ. Nothing is better than him.

Translator's note. Compare [John 5:19](#) and 8:28, where the Son does nothing by himself.

Magn. 7.2 All of you, hurry together as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from the one Father, is with the One, and returned to him.

Chapter 8

Magn. 8.1 Do not be led astray by strange teachings or by old myths that are useless. For if we are still living according to Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace.

Translator's note. In chapters 8–10 Ignatius is arguing against Christians who were urging Jewish observance (such as keeping the Sabbath) on the church. His target is these Christians, not Jewish people as such, though his language about “Judaism” is blunt. Many scholars point out that “Christianity” and “Judaism” had not yet separated as cleanly as these words suggest. Ignatius is the earliest writer known to use the word “Christianity” (*christianismos*), which appears in chapter 10.

Magn. 8.2 For the most divine prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. This is why they were persecuted. They were inspired by his grace so that the disobedient would be fully convinced that there is one God. He revealed himself through Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Word that came forth from silence, and who in every way pleased the one who sent him.

Translator's note. “His Word that came forth from silence” is a disputed phrase. Some Gnostic teachers (the Valentinians) spoke of a divine being called “Silence.” Some copies of this letter read instead “his eternal Word, not coming forth from silence,” probably a later change made to avoid that association. Most editors, including Lake, print “from silence.” Compare Ignatius’s mention of mysteries “wrought in the silence of God” in Ephesians 19.1.

Chapter 9

Magn. 9.1 If, then, those who lived in the old ways came to a new hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath but living by the Lord’s day, the day on which our life dawned through him and his death—which

some deny, though it is through this mystery that we received faith, and because of it we endure, so that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher—

Translator's note. “The Lord’s day” renders kyriakē, “the Lord’s [day],” meaning Sunday. The word “day” is not in the Greek, and some manuscripts add “life,” giving “living according to the Lord’s life.” Most scholars take it as Sunday, in line with [Revelation 1:10](#) and Didache 14.1.

Magn. 9.2 how could we live without him, whom even the prophets, being his disciples in the Spirit, looked for as their teacher? For this reason, the one they were rightly waiting for raised them from the dead when he came.

Translator's note. Compare [Matthew 27:52-53](#), where many bodies of the saints were raised at Jesus’ death.

Chapter 10

Magn. 10.1 So let us not be blind to his kindness. For if he were to act the way we do, we would be no more. So, having become his disciples, let us learn to live according to Christianity. For whoever is called by any name other than this does not belong to God.

Magn. 10.2 So put away the bad leaven, which has grown old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in him, so that no one among you goes bad, since you will be found out by your smell.

Translator's note. Compare [1 Corinthians 5:6-8](#), where Paul urges believers to clean out the old leaven.

Magn. 10.3 It is absurd to talk about Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not put its faith in Judaism; Judaism put its faith in Christianity, in which every tongue that believed in God was gathered together.

Translator's note. “Every tongue ... gathered together” may echo [Isaiah 66:18](#), where God says he will gather all nations and tongues.

Chapter 11

Magn. 11.1 I am saying this, my dear friends, not because I know that any of you are like this. But as one who is less than you, I want to warn you not to be caught on the hooks of empty opinion. Instead, be fully convinced about the birth, suffering, and resurrection that happened in the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate. These things were truly and surely done by Jesus Christ, our hope. May none of you ever be turned away from that hope.

Chapter 12

Magn. 12.1 May I have joy in you in everything, if I am worthy. For even though I am in chains, I am not equal to even one of you who are free. I know that you are not puffed up, for you have Jesus Christ in yourselves. And when I praise you, I know that you feel ashamed, as it is written: "The righteous man is his own accuser."

Chapter 13

Magn. 13.1 So be eager to be made firm in the teachings of the Lord and the apostles, so that everything you do may prosper in flesh and spirit, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit, in the beginning and in the end. Do this together with your most worthy bishop, with your council of elders, that well-woven spiritual crown, and with the godly deacons.

Magn. 13.2 Submit to the bishop and to one another, as Jesus Christ did to the Father, and the apostles to Christ and the Father, so that there may be a union both of flesh and spirit.

Chapter 14

Magn. 14.1 Knowing that you are full of God, I have encouraged you briefly. Remember me in your prayers so that I may reach God, and also the church in Syria, of which I am not worthy to be called a member. For I need your united prayer and love in God, so that the church in Syria may be counted worthy to be refreshed with dew through your church.

Chapter 15

Magn. 15.1 The Ephesians greet you from Smyrna, from where I am also writing to you. They are here for the glory of God, as you also are, and have comforted me in every way, together with Polycarp, the bishop of the Smyrnaeans. The other churches also greet you in honor of Jesus Christ. Farewell in God's harmony, having an undivided spirit, which is Jesus Christ.

To the Trallians

Greeting

Trall. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the holy church in Tralles in Asia. It is loved by God the Father of Jesus Christ, chosen and worthy of God, and at peace in flesh and spirit through the suffering of Jesus Christ, who is our hope through our resurrection to him. I greet this church in the fullness of God, in the manner of the apostles, and wish it abundant joy.

Translator's note. The Greek says only "in the fullness." Most translators take this to mean the fullness of God. "In the manner of the apostles"

| probably means a greeting like those that open the apostles' letters.

Chapter 1

Trall. 1.1 I have learned that you have a blameless mind that does not waver in endurance, not out of habit but by nature, as Polybius your bishop showed me. He came by the will of God and Jesus Christ to Smyrna and rejoiced with me in my chains in Christ Jesus so much that I saw your whole congregation in him.

Trall. 1.2 So when I received through him your godly good will, I gave glory to God, for I found you, as I had learned, to be imitators of God.

Chapter 2

Trall. 2.1 For when you submit to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to be living not in a merely human way but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that by believing in his death you may escape death.

Trall. 2.2 So it is necessary, as you already do, that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you also submit to the council of elders as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we will be found if we live in him.

Trall. 2.3 The deacons too, being servants of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, must please everyone in every way. For they are not servants of food and drink, but assistants of the church of God. So they must guard themselves from accusations as from fire.

Translator's note. "Mysteries" probably refers broadly to the saving truths of the faith, and perhaps also to the church's worship. Ignatius does not define the word. The word diakonos was commonly used of someone who waits at table. Ignatius may be saying that deacons are more than table-waiters. Compare [Acts 6:2](#), where the apostles speak of "serving tables."

Chapter 3

Trall. 3.1 In the same way, let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, just as they respect the bishop, who is an image of the Father, and the elders as God's council and as the band of apostles. Without these, no group can be called a church.

Trall. 3.2 I am convinced that this is how you are in these matters. For I have received a living example of your love, and I have it with me in your bishop. His very manner is a great lesson, and his gentleness is power. I think even the godless respect him.

Translator's note. "The godless" (atheoi) is the word the pagan world used of Christians. Here Ignatius turns it around and uses it of unbelievers.

Trall. 3.3 Because I love you, I am holding back, though I could

write more strongly on his behalf. I did not think that I, a condemned man, should give you commands like an apostle.

Chapter 4

Trall. 4.1 I have many thoughts in God, but I take my own measure so that I do not perish by boasting. For now I need to be more afraid and not pay attention to those who puff me up. Those who speak to me like this are a whip to me.

Trall. 4.2 For I long to suffer, but I do not know whether I am worthy. This envy is not obvious to many, but it fights against me all the more. So I need gentleness, by which the ruler of this age is overthrown.

| *Translator's note.* Compare [John 12:31](#), "the ruler of this world."

Chapter 5

Trall. 5.1 Am I not able to write to you about heavenly things? I am, but I am afraid I would do you harm, since you are infants. Forgive me for holding back. Otherwise you might be choked by what you cannot take in.

| *Translator's note.* Compare [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](#) and [Hebrews 5:12-14](#).

Trall. 5.2 For even I, though I am in chains and can understand heavenly things, the places of the angels, the ranks of the rulers, and things visible and invisible, am not for that reason already a disciple. We still lack much, if we are not to fall short of God.

| *Translator's note.* "Things visible and invisible" and the heavenly "rulers" may echo [Colossians 1:16](#).

Chapter 6

Trall. 6.1 So I urge you, though not I but the love of Jesus Christ: feed only on Christian food, and keep away from foreign plants, that is, heresy.

Trall. 6.2 These people mix Jesus Christ into their own teachings and make themselves seem trustworthy, like people giving a deadly poison mixed with honeyed wine. Someone who does not know takes it gladly, with a bad pleasure that ends in death.

Chapter 7

Trall. 7.1 So guard against such people. You will be able to do this if you are not puffed up and if you stay inseparable from God, Jesus Christ, the bishop, and the commands of the apostles.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek could also be read "inseparable from God Jesus Christ," that is, from Jesus Christ who is God. Ignatius often calls

| Jesus God, but the wording here is not certain.

Trall. 7.2 The one who is inside the sanctuary is clean, but the one who is outside the sanctuary is not clean. That is, whoever does anything apart from the bishop, the elders, and the deacons is not clean in conscience.

Chapter 8

Trall. 8.1 I am not saying this because I know of anything like this among you. I am warning you in advance, because you are dear to me and I foresee the devil's traps. So take up gentleness and renew yourselves in faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and in love, which is the blood of Jesus Christ.

Translator's note. Here Ignatius uses "flesh" and "blood" as pictures for faith and love. Elsewhere he speaks of the Eucharist as the flesh and blood of Christ (compare Ignatius' letters to the Romans, chapter 7, and to the Philadelphians, chapter 4).

Trall. 8.2 Let none of you hold anything against his neighbor. Do not give the pagans any excuse, so that God's people are not slandered because of a few foolish people. For, "Woe to the one through whom my name is blasphemed for nothing among some."

Translator's note. The quotation resembles [Isaiah 52:5](#) (quoted in [Romans 2:24](#)), but the "woe" is not in Isaiah. A similar "woe" saying appears in 2 Clement 13:2 and in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians 10:3, so Ignatius may be quoting a saying known in the churches.

Chapter 9

Trall. 9.1 So be deaf whenever anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was from the family of David, from Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died while those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth watched.

Translator's note. Chapters 9-10 are against docetism, the belief that Christ only seemed to be human and to suffer. Note the repeated word "truly" (alethos).

Trall. 9.2 He was also truly raised from the dead; his Father raised him. In the same way his Father will also raise us who believe in him, in Christ Jesus. Without him we do not have true life.

Chapter 10

Trall. 10.1 Some people who are godless, that is, unbelievers, say that he only seemed to suffer. But it is they who are only a seeming. If they are right, why am I in chains? Why do I even pray to fight with the wild beasts? Then I am dying for nothing, and what I say about the Lord is a lie.

Translator's note. The Greek wordplay is “to seem” (to dokein): they say Christ only seemed to suffer, but Ignatius says they themselves are only seeming.

Chapter 11

Trall. 11.1 So run from the evil offshoots that bear deadly fruit. If someone tastes it, he dies on the spot. For these are not a planting of the Father. If they were, they would appear as branches of the cross, and their fruit would be incorruptible. Through the cross, by his suffering, he calls you who are his members. A head cannot be born apart from its members, since God promises union, which is himself.

Translator's note. “Not a planting of the Father” echoes [Matthew 15:13](#): “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.”

Chapter 12

Trall. 12.1 I greet you from Smyrna, along with the churches of God who are here with me, who have refreshed me in every way, in flesh and spirit.

Trall. 12.2 My chains, which I carry around for the sake of Jesus Christ as I pray to reach God, urge you: continue in your harmony and in prayer with one another. It is right for each one of you, and especially the elders, to refresh the bishop, to the honor of the Father, of Jesus Christ, and of the apostles.

Trall. 12.3 I beg you to listen to me in love, so that my letter will not become a witness against you. Pray for me too, for I need your love, in the mercy of God, so that I may be counted worthy of the lot I am set on reaching, and not be found disqualified.

Translator's note. “Disqualified” (adokimos) is the word Paul uses in [1 Corinthians 9:27](#), where he fears that he himself might be disqualified.

Chapter 13

Trall. 13.1 The love of the Smyrnaeans and Ephesians greets you. Remember in your prayers the church in Syria. I come from there, though I am not worthy to be called one of them, since I am the least of them.

Translator's note. Ignatius' words may echo Paul in [1 Corinthians 15:8-9](#), who calls himself “the least of the apostles” and “not worthy to be called an apostle.”

Trall. 13.2 Farewell in Jesus Christ. Submit to the bishop as to the command, and likewise to the council of elders. And each of you, love one another with an undivided heart.

Trall. 13.3 My spirit is offered up for you, not only now but also

when I reach God. For I am still in danger. But the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ to fulfill my request and yours. May you be found blameless in him.

Translator's note. The verb (hagnizetai) means "is purified" or "is consecrated." Ignatius seems to mean that his life is being offered as a sacrifice on the readers' behalf. He uses the same expression in Ephesians 8:1.

To the Romans

Greeting

Rom. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the church that has received mercy in the greatness of the Father Most High and of Jesus Christ his only Son. It is loved and enlightened by the will of the one who willed everything that exists, according to the love of Jesus Christ our God. It presides in the region of the land of the Romans. It is worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy in purity, and presiding in love, named after Christ and named after the Father. I greet it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. To those who are united in flesh and spirit in every command of his, who are filled with the grace of God without wavering, and filtered clean from every foreign stain: abundant greetings, blamelessly, in Jesus Christ our God.

Translator's note. "Presiding in love" (prokathemene tes agapes) is a much-debated phrase. Catholic writers have taken it as evidence of Rome's leadership among the churches. Others take it to refer to Rome's outstanding love and service to other churches.

Chapter 1

Rom. 1.1 In answer to my prayer to God I have been granted to see your God-worthy faces, and I have been asking to receive even more. For as a prisoner in Christ Jesus I hope to greet you, if it is God's will that I be counted worthy to reach the end.

Translator's note. The Greek sentence is grammatically incomplete, and the exact sense of "asking to receive even more" is uncertain.

Rom. 1.2 The beginning is well arranged, if only I obtain grace to receive my lot without hindrance. For I am afraid of your love, that it may do me harm. It is easy for you to do what you want, but it is hard for me to reach God if you do not spare me.

Translator's note. Ignatius fears that the Roman Christians might use their influence to save him from execution. "Spare me" here seems to mean "hold back from interfering on my behalf."

Chapter 2

Rom. 2.1 For I do not want you to please people but to please God, as you do indeed please him. I will never have another such opportunity to reach God, and you could never have a better deed to your name than staying silent. For if you are silent about me, I am a word of God. But if you love my flesh, I will once again be a mere voice.

Translator's note. Ignatius means that if the Romans do not interfere, his death will be a clear word from God. If they do interfere, he will be only an empty sound.

Rom. 2.2 Give me nothing more than to be poured out as an offering to God while an altar is still ready, so that, becoming a choir in love, you may sing to the Father in Christ Jesus because God has counted the bishop of Syria worthy to be found in the west, having summoned him from the east. It is good to set like the sun, leaving the world for God, so that I may rise to him.

Translator's note. Compare [Philippians 2:17](#) and [2 Timothy 4:6](#), “poured out as an offering.” The “east” is Syria and the “west” is Rome. The Greek words for west and east also mean the setting and rising of the sun, which Ignatius plays on in the last sentence.

Chapter 3

Rom. 3.1 You have never begrudged anyone. You have taught others. And I want the things you command when you teach disciples to hold firm in my case too.

Rom. 3.2 Only pray that I may have strength, inside and out, so that I may not only speak but also will it, and may not only be called a Christian but actually be found to be one. For if I am found to be one, I can also be called one, and then truly be faithful when I am no longer seen in the world.

Rom. 3.3 Nothing that is visible is good. For our God Jesus Christ, now that he is in the Father, is seen all the more. Christianity is not a matter of persuasive words but of greatness, when it is hated by the world.

Translator's note. Ignatius is the earliest known writer to use the word “Christianity” (Christianismos). He also uses it in *Magnesians* 10 and *Philadelphians* 6.

Chapter 4

Rom. 4.1 I am writing to all the churches and instructing everyone that I die willingly for God, unless you hold me back. I urge you not to show me an untimely kindness. Let me be food for the beasts, through whom I can reach God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild animals so that I may be found pure bread of Christ.

Translator's note. This is probably the best-known passage in Ignatius.

Many readers see in the “pure bread” image a link between his coming death and the Eucharistic bread.

Rom. 4.2 Rather, coax the beasts so that they become my tomb and leave nothing of my body. Then, when I fall asleep in death, I will not be a burden to anyone. I will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ when the world no longer sees even my body. Plead with Christ for me that through these instruments I may be found a sacrifice.

Rom. 4.3 I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles; I am a condemned man. They were free; I am even now a slave. But if I suffer, I will be a freedman of Jesus Christ and will rise free in him. Now, in chains, I am learning to desire nothing.

Translator’s note. This is an early, though indirect, witness to the tradition that Peter and Paul had been in Rome.

Chapter 5

Rom. 5.1 From Syria to Rome I am fighting with beasts, by land and sea, night and day. I am chained to ten leopards, that is, a squad of soldiers, who only get worse when they are treated well. Their wrongs make me more of a disciple, but I am not justified by this.

Translator’s note. “I am not justified by this” echoes Paul’s words in [1 Corinthians 4:4](#).

Rom. 5.2 May I have the benefit of the beasts prepared for me, and I pray that they will be quick with me. I will even coax them to eat me quickly, not as with some whom they were too afraid to touch. And if they are unwilling and refuse, I will force them.

Rom. 5.3 Forgive me. I know what is good for me. Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible begrudge me my reaching Jesus Christ. Fire and cross, struggles with beasts, cuttings, tearings apart, scattering of bones, mangling of limbs, grinding of the whole body, the evil torments of the devil: let them come on me, only so that I may reach Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6

Rom. 6.1 The ends of the world and the kingdoms of this age will not help me at all. It is better for me to die for Christ Jesus than to rule the ends of the earth. I seek the one who died for us. I want the one who rose for us. My birth is upon me.

Translator’s note. Compare [Mark 8:36](#). “My birth” is a picture for martyrdom as being born into true life.

Rom. 6.2 Forgive me, brothers. Do not stop me from living. Do not wish me to die. Do not give to the world one who wants to belong to God, and do not deceive him with material things. Let me receive pure light. When I get there, I will be a human being.

Translator's note. Ignatius turns the words around. Martyrdom is the way into true life, and being kept alive in this world would be the real death.

Rom. 6.3 Let me be an imitator of the suffering of my God. If anyone has him in himself, let him understand what I want and sympathize with me, knowing what is pressing on me.

Chapter 7

Rom. 7.1 The ruler of this age wants to carry me off and destroy my purpose toward God. So let none of you who are there help him. Rather, be on my side, that is, on God's. Do not talk about Jesus Christ while you desire the world.

Rom. 7.2 Do not let envy live among you. Even if I am there and urge you myself, do not obey me. Obey instead what I am writing to you. For I am alive as I write, but I am in love with dying. My love has been crucified, and there is no fire in me that loves material things. There is living water speaking in me, saying from inside, "Come to the Father."

Translator's note. "My love" translates *erōs*, a word for passionate desire. The context suggests he means his earthly desire, and Lake translates "my lust." But Origen quoted the line as referring to Christ ("my Love is crucified").

Rom. 7.3 I take no pleasure in perishable food or the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David, and for drink I want his blood, which is love that cannot perish.

Translator's note. The "bread of God" and the blood as drink echo [John 6:32-58](#). Many readers see the Eucharist here; others think Ignatius is speaking more broadly of union with Christ after death. "Of the seed of David" echoes [Romans 1:3](#) and [2 Timothy 2:8](#).

Scripture: [John 7:42](#); [Romans 1:3](#)

Chapter 8

Rom. 8.1 I no longer want to live as human beings do. This will happen if you want it. Want it, so that you too may be wanted.

Rom. 8.2 I ask you in this short letter: believe me. Jesus Christ will make plain to you that I speak the truth. He is the mouth that cannot lie, through which the Father has spoken truly.

Rom. 8.3 Pray for me, that I may reach my goal. I did not write to you according to the flesh but according to the mind of God. If I suffer, it will be because you wished me well. If I am rejected, it will be because you hated me.

Chapter 9

Rom. 9.1 Remember in your prayers the church in Syria, which has God as its shepherd in my place. Jesus Christ alone will oversee it, and your love.

Translator's note. The church of Antioch has been left without its bishop. The verb translated “oversee” (episkopeō) is related to episkopos, “bishop,” so Ignatius is saying that Christ himself will be its bishop.

Rom. 9.2 I am ashamed to be counted among them, for I am not worthy, being the last of them and “one born out of time.” But I have been shown mercy to be someone, if I reach God.

Translator's note. The phrase “one born out of time” (ektroma, literally “miscarriage” or “stillborn”) is from [1 Corinthians 15:8](#), where Paul calls himself by it.

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 15:8](#)

Rom. 9.3 My spirit greets you, as does the love of the churches that welcomed me in the name of Jesus Christ, not as a mere passerby. For even churches that were not on my actual road went ahead of me from city to city.

Chapter 10

Rom. 10.1 I am writing this to you from Smyrna through the most blessed Ephesians. With me, along with many others, is also Crocus, a name dear to me.

Rom. 10.2 About those who went ahead of me from Syria to Rome for the glory of God, I believe you have heard. Tell them that I am near. For they are all worthy of God and of you. It is right for you to refresh them in every way.

Rom. 10.3 I wrote this to you on the ninth day before the Kalends of September. Farewell to the end, in the endurance of Jesus Christ.

Translator's note. “The ninth day before the Kalends of September” is August 24. The year is not stated.

To the Philadelphians

Greeting

Phld. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the church of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ in Philadelphia in Asia. This church has been shown mercy and is established in the harmony of God. It rejoices without wavering in the suffering of our Lord and is fully assured, with all mercy, in his resurrection. I greet it in the blood of Jesus Christ, which is eternal and lasting joy, especially if they are one with the bishop and with the elders and deacons who are with him, appointed in the mind of Jesus Christ. By his own will he has made them firm and secure through his Holy

Spirit.

Translator's note. This is the letter to the church at Philadelphia in western Asia Minor, now Alaşehir in Turkey. It is the same city whose church receives one of the letters in Revelation ([Revelation 3:7-13](#)).

Chapter 1

Phld. 1.1 I know that this bishop obtained the service that belongs to the whole community not from himself, nor through people, nor out of empty pride, but in the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am struck by his gentleness. By being silent, he can do more than those who talk empty.

Phld. 1.2 For he is in tune with the commandments as a lyre is with its strings. So my soul blesses his mind toward God, for I recognize that it is virtuous and perfect. I also bless his steadiness and his freedom from anger, in all the gentleness of the living God.

Chapter 2

Phld. 2.1 So, children of the light of truth, flee from division and bad teachings. Where the shepherd is, follow there like sheep.

Phld. 2.2 For many seemingly trustworthy wolves capture the runners in God's race with an evil pleasure. But they will have no place in your unity.

Chapter 3

Phld. 3.1 Keep away from bad plants that Jesus Christ does not cultivate, because they are not a planting of the Father. Not that I found division among you, but rather a filtering out.

Translator's note. "Filtering out" (apodiulismos) comes from a verb meaning to strain a liquid, as in [Matthew 23:24](#) ("strain out a gnat"). Ignatius probably means that the bad elements had already been strained out of the Philadelphian church. The church itself was not divided.

Scripture: [Matthew 15:13](#)

Phld. 3.2 For all who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the bishop. And all who repent and come to the unity of the church will also belong to God, so that they may live in accordance with Jesus Christ.

Phld. 3.3 Do not be misled, my brothers. If anyone follows someone who splits the church, he will not inherit the kingdom of God. If anyone lives by a different way of thinking, he does not accept the suffering of Christ.

Translator's note. "Do not be misled... will not inherit the kingdom of God" echoes Paul in [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](#).

Chapter 4

Phld. 4.1 So be eager to take part in one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup that unites us in his blood. There is one altar, just as there is one bishop together with the council of elders and the deacons, my fellow servants. Do this so that whatever you do, you do according to God.

Translator's note. "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving." Ignatius uses it as a name for the church's shared meal of the Lord's body and blood; the Didache (9:1) also uses the word as a name for the church's meal.

Chapter 5

Phld. 5.1 My brothers, I am overflowing with love for you, and in my great joy I watch over your safety. Yet it is not I but Jesus Christ. I am bound in him, and I fear all the more, since I am still unfinished. But your prayer will make me complete for God, so that I may attain the lot in which I was shown mercy. I take refuge in the gospel as in the flesh of Jesus, and in the apostles as in the council of elders of the church.

Phld. 5.2 We love the prophets too, because their message also pointed to the gospel, and they hoped in him and waited for him. By believing in him they were saved, being in the unity of Jesus Christ. They are holy people worthy of love and admiration, approved by Jesus Christ and counted together in the gospel of our common hope.

Chapter 6

Phld. 6.1 If anyone explains Judaism to you, do not listen to him. For it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from one who is uncircumcised. But if neither of them speaks about Jesus Christ, they are to me gravestones and tombs of the dead, on which only the names of people are written.

Translator's note. Some at Philadelphia were evidently urging Jewish practices. Ignatius's wording suggests that some of those doing so were themselves uncircumcised Gentiles. He also allows that a Jewish-born Christian may rightly teach the gospel. Compare his letter to the Magnesians, chapters 8–10.

Phld. 6.2 So flee the evil tricks and traps of the ruler of this age, so that you are not worn down by his scheme and made weak in love. But all of you come together with an undivided heart.

Phld. 6.3 I thank my God that I have a good conscience about you. No one can boast, either secretly or openly, that I was a burden to anyone in small or great matters. And I pray for all those among whom I spoke, that they will not turn my words into testimony against themselves.

Chapter 7

Phld. 7.1 Even if some wanted to deceive me by human means, the Spirit is not deceived, for it is from God. For it knows where it comes from and where it goes, and it exposes hidden things. I cried out while I was among you. I spoke in a loud voice, God's voice: "Pay attention to the bishop, the council of elders, and the deacons."

Translator's note. Compare [John 3:8](#) and [16:8](#), and [1 Corinthians 14:24-25](#), where prophecy lays bare the secrets of the heart. Ignatius claims to have spoken by the Spirit, which fits the early church's experience of prophecy.

Scripture: [Job 3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:10](#)

Phld. 7.2 Some suspected that I said this because I knew in advance about the division of some. But he in whom I am bound is my witness that I did not learn it from any human being. The Spirit was proclaiming, saying this: "Do nothing without the bishop. Keep your flesh as the temple of God. Love unity. Flee divisions. Be imitators of Jesus Christ, as he also was of his Father."

Chapter 8

Phld. 8.1 I did my part, as a man who is set on unity. But where there is division and anger, God does not live. The Lord forgives all who repent, if they repent and come to the unity of God and the council of the bishop. I trust in the grace of Jesus Christ, who will free you from every chain.

Phld. 8.2 I urge you to do nothing out of selfish ambition, but to act as those who have learned from Christ. For I heard some people say, "Unless I find it in the archives, I do not believe it in the gospel." When I said to them, "It is written," they answered me, "That is exactly the question." But for me the archives are Jesus Christ. The untouchable archives are his cross, his death, his resurrection, and the faith that comes through him. By these I want to be justified, through your prayer.

Translator's note. This passage is famous and hard to interpret. "The archives" (archeia) probably means the Old Testament Scriptures. The opponents would accept something in the gospel only if it could be proved from them. Ignatius answers that Christ himself is the final authority. The Greek can also be punctuated differently, so the opponents may be saying "unless I find it in the archives, that is, in the gospel." Some think "the gospel" here means a written Gospel. Scholars debate whether Ignatius knew written Gospels, and he nowhere names one.

Chapter 9

Phld. 9.1 The priests are good, but the High Priest who has been entrusted with the holy of holies is better. He alone has been

entrusted with the secrets of God. He is the door of the Father, through which Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, the apostles, and the church enter. All these lead into the unity of God.

Translator's note. The High Priest here is Christ, not a church officer. Compare [Hebrews 4:14-10:22](#) and [John 10:7-9](#).

Phld. 9.2 But the gospel has something special: the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, his suffering, and his resurrection. For the beloved prophets announced him, but the gospel is the completion of incorruption. All things together are good, if you believe in love.

Chapter 10

Phld. 10.1 It has been reported to me that the church in Antioch in Syria is at peace, in answer to your prayer and because of the compassion you have in Christ Jesus. So it is right for you, as a church of God, to appoint a deacon to go there as an ambassador of God. He is to rejoice with them now that they are united again and to glorify the name.

Translator's note. Ignatius does not say what had troubled the church at Antioch. "At peace" may mean that persecution had ended or that division within the church had been healed. Scholars disagree.

Phld. 10.2 Blessed in Jesus Christ is the one who will be counted worthy of this service, and you will be glorified. If you are willing, it is not impossible for you to do it for the sake of the name of God, just as the nearest churches sent bishops, and others sent elders and deacons.

Chapter 11

Phld. 11.1 As for Philo, the deacon from Cilicia, a man of good reputation, who is now serving me in the word of God, and Rheus Agathopus, a chosen man who is following me from Syria and has said goodbye to this life: they bear witness for you that you received them, just as the Lord received you. I too thank God on your behalf. May those who dishonored them be redeemed by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Phld. 11.2 The love of the brothers in Troas greets you. I am writing to you from there by the hand of Burrus, whom the Ephesians and Smyrnaeans sent with me as a mark of honor. The Lord Jesus Christ will honor them. They hope in him in flesh, soul, and spirit, in faith, love, and harmony. Farewell in Christ Jesus, our common hope.

Translator's note. Burrus is the deacon of Ephesus whom Ignatius praises in his letter to the Ephesians ([Ephesians 2:1](#)).

To the Smyrnaeans

Greeting

Smyrn. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the church of God the Father and of the beloved Jesus Christ, which has been shown mercy in every gift, is filled with faith and love, and lacks no gift; a church most worthy of God and a bearer of holiness; the church in Smyrna in Asia: abundant greetings in a blameless spirit and in the word of God.

Translator's note. This is the letter to the church at Smyrna. Like the Letter to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, it was written from Troas. It contains some of Ignatius's most direct answers to the teaching that Christ only seemed to be human (docetism).

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:7](#)

Chapter 1

Smyrn. 1.1 I glorify Jesus Christ, the God who has made you wise in this way. For I saw that you are made firm in unshakable faith, as if nailed to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ in flesh and spirit, and settled in love by the blood of Christ. You are fully convinced about our Lord that he is truly from the family of David according to the flesh, Son of God by the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin, baptized by John so that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him,

Translator's note. Compare [Romans 1:3-4](#) (descended from David according to the flesh, Son of God in power) and [Matthew 3:15](#).

Scripture: [Romans 1:3](#); [Matthew 3:15](#)

Smyrn. 1.2 truly nailed in the flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch. We come from its fruit, that is, from his God-blessed suffering. He was nailed there so that through the resurrection he might raise a banner for all ages for his holy and faithful people, whether among Jews or among the nations, in the one body of his church.

Translator's note. "Raise a banner" echoes Isaiah's language about God lifting up a signal for the nations (compare [Isaiah 5:26](#) and 11:12). "One body" recalls [Ephesians 2:16](#).

Chapter 2

Smyrn. 2.1 He suffered all these things for us so that we might be saved. He truly suffered, just as he truly raised himself. It is not as some unbelievers say, that he only seemed to suffer. It is they who only seem to exist. And it will happen to them just as they think: they will be bodiless and like demons.

Translator's note. The phrase "raised himself" is unusual, since most New

Testament passages say that God raised Jesus (for example [Acts 2:24](#) and [Galatians 1:1](#)). Compare [John 2:19](#) and 10:17-18, where Jesus speaks of raising himself or taking up his life again.

Chapter 3

Smyrn. 3.1 For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection.

Smyrn. 3.2 When he came to those with Peter, he said to them: "Take hold of me, touch me, and see that I am not a bodiless demon." And at once they touched him and believed, being closely joined with his flesh and spirit. For this reason they also despised death, and were found to be above death.

Translator's note. This saying is not found in the canonical Gospels, though it is close to [Luke 24:39](#), where Jesus says "a spirit does not have flesh and bones." Eusebius quotes it but says he does not know where it came from. Jerome links it to the Gospel of the Hebrews, and Origen links similar words to a writing called the Teaching of Peter. The real source is unknown.

Smyrn. 3.3 After the resurrection he ate and drank with them as a being of flesh, though he was spiritually united with the Father.

Translator's note. Compare [Luke 24:41-43](#) and [Acts 10:41](#).

Chapter 4

Smyrn. 4.1 I urge these things on you, dear friends, knowing that you already think this way. But I am warning you in advance against beasts in human form. You must not only refuse to welcome them, but if possible not even meet them. Only pray for them, in the hope that they may somehow repent. That is difficult, but Jesus Christ, our true life, has power over it. For if these things were done by our Lord only in appearance, then I am also in chains only in appearance. And why have I given myself up to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? Because to be near the sword is to be near God, and to be among the wild beasts is to be with God. Only let it be in the name of Jesus Christ! I endure all things so that I may suffer with him, for he who became the perfect man gives me strength.

Translator's note. "Only in appearance" translates the Greek to *dokein*, "to seem." Ignatius is opposing teachers who said that Christ only seemed to have a body and to suffer. Later writers called this view "Docetism," from the same Greek word.

Scripture: [Philippians 4:13](#)

Chapter 5

Smyrn. 5.1 Some deny him out of ignorance, or rather, they have been denied by him, for they are advocates of death rather than of

the truth. The prophecies did not persuade them, nor the law of Moses, nor even the gospel up to now, nor the sufferings each of us has endured.

Smyrn. 5.2 For they think the same way about our sufferings. What good does it do me if someone praises me but blasphemes my Lord by not confessing that he bore real flesh? Whoever says this has completely denied him, and is himself carrying a corpse.

Translator's note. Ignatius makes a wordplay: those who will not confess that Christ was a “flesh-bearer” (sarkophoros) are themselves “corpse-bearers” (nekrophoros). They are spiritually dead.

Smyrn. 5.3 Since their names are the names of unbelievers, I did not think it right to write them down. In fact, I would rather not even mention them until they repent and turn to the suffering of Christ, which is our resurrection.

Chapter 6

Smyrn. 6.1 Let no one be deceived. Even heavenly beings and the glory of the angels and rulers, visible and invisible, if they do not believe in the blood of Christ, face judgment too. Let the one who can take it take it. Let no position make anyone proud, for the whole matter is faith and love, and nothing is preferred to these.

Translator's note. “Let the one who can take it take it” echoes [Matthew 19:12](#).

Smyrn. 6.2 Take note of those who hold different opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ that has come to us, and see how opposed they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love: none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the distressed, none for the prisoner or the one released from prison, none for the hungry or thirsty.

Chapter 7

Smyrn. 7.1 They stay away from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ. This is the flesh that suffered for our sins and that the Father in his kindness raised up. So those who speak against the gift of God die in their arguing. It would be better for them to love, so that they might also rise.

Translator's note. Ignatius links two things here. These teachers deny that Christ had real flesh, so they will not confess that the Eucharist is his flesh. Their lack of love for the needy (6.6.2) comes from the same error. Some scholars think “to love” (agapan) may also hint at taking part in the community’s love feast (agape).

Smyrn. 7.2 It is right to keep away from such people and not to speak about them either in private or in public. Instead, pay attention to the prophets, and especially to the gospel, in which

Christ's suffering has been made known to us and his resurrection fully accomplished. But flee from divisions as the beginning of evils.

Chapter 8

Smyrn. 8.1 All of you, follow the bishop as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and follow the council of elders as you would the apostles. Respect the deacons as you would God's command. Let no one do anything that belongs to the church without the bishop. Only that Eucharist should be considered valid which is led by the bishop or by someone he authorizes.

Smyrn. 8.2 Wherever the bishop appears, let the congregation be there, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. It is not permitted to baptize or hold a love feast without the bishop. But whatever he approves is also pleasing to God, so that everything you do may be safe and sure.

Translator's note. The "love feast" (agape) was a shared community meal of early Christians. [Jude 12](#) also mentions such love feasts.

Chapter 9

Smyrn. 9.1 It is reasonable now for us to come to our senses while we still have time to repent toward God. It is good to know God and the bishop. The one who honors the bishop is honored by God. The one who does anything behind the bishop's back serves the devil.

Smyrn. 9.2 So let everything overflow for you in grace, for you are worthy. You refreshed me in every way; may Jesus Christ refresh you. You loved me when I was absent and when I was present. God is your reward. If you endure all things for his sake, you will reach him.

Chapter 10

Smyrn. 10.1 You did well to receive Philo and Rheus Agathopus as deacons of God. They followed me for the sake of God's word. They also thank the Lord for you, because you refreshed them in every way. Nothing of this will be lost to you.

Translator's note. Philo is called a deacon from Cilicia in Ignatius's letter to the Philadelphians (11.1), so "deacons" is likely meant here and not just "servants" in a general sense.

Smyrn. 10.2 My spirit is offered for you, and so are my chains. You did not look down on them or feel ashamed of them. Neither will Jesus Christ, our perfect hope, be ashamed of you.

Translator's note. "Offered for you" translates antipsychon, literally "a life given in exchange." Ignatius uses this word several times in his letters (for example Ephesians 21.1 and Polycarp 2.3; 6.1) to describe his coming death as an offering on behalf of the churches.

Chapter 11

Smyrn. 11.1 Your prayer has reached the church in Antioch in Syria. I come from there, bound in chains most fitting for God, and I greet everyone. Yet I am not worthy to belong to that church, for I am the least of its members. Still, by God's will I was counted worthy. This was not because I know of any merit in myself, but by the grace of God. I pray that this grace may be given to me in full, so that through your prayer I may reach God.

Smyrn. 11.2 So that your work may be complete both on earth and in heaven, it is right for your church, for the honor of God, to appoint an ambassador of God. That person should go to Syria and rejoice with them that they are at peace, that they have recovered their proper greatness, and that their life as a church body has been restored to them.

Translator's note. Ignatius had learned that his church in Antioch was now at peace. Scholars debate whether this was peace after persecution or after internal conflict. He makes similar requests in his letters to the Philadelphians (10) and to Polycarp (7).

Smyrn. 11.3 So it seemed to me a thing worthy of God to send one of your members with a letter, to join them in giving glory for the calm that came to them from God, and that through your prayer they have now reached harbor. As you are perfect, think perfect things. For if you want to do well, God is ready to provide for it.

Chapter 12

Smyrn. 12.1 The love of the brothers in Troas greets you. I am writing to you from Troas through Burrus, whom you and your brothers the Ephesians sent with me, and who has refreshed me in every way. I wish everyone would imitate him, for he is a model of service to God. Grace will repay him in every way.

Smyrn. 12.2 I greet the bishop, who is worthy of God, the godly council of elders, and my fellow servants the deacons. I greet each one of you and all of you together, in the name of Jesus Christ, in his flesh and blood, and in his suffering and his resurrection, which was both of the flesh and of the spirit, in unity with God and with you. Grace, mercy, peace, and endurance to you always.

Chapter 13

Smyrn. 13.1 I greet the households of my brothers with their wives and children, and the virgins who are called widows. Farewell in the power of the Father. Philo, who is with me, greets you.

Translator's note. The phrase "virgins who are called widows" is puzzling. It may mean that the church's recognized group of "widows" (compare [1 Timothy 5:3-16](#)) included some women who had never married. The exact

| meaning is debated.

Smyrn. 13.2 I greet the household of Tavia, and I pray that she may be firmly established in faith and love, both of the flesh and of the spirit. I greet Alce, a name dear to me, and Daphnus, who is beyond compare, and Eutecnus, and everyone by name. Farewell in the grace of God.

To Polycarp

Greeting

Pol. Gr. Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Polycarp, bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans, or rather one who has God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as his overseer: abundant greetings.

Translator's note. The Greek word for "bishop" (episkopos) means "overseer." Ignatius plays on it: Polycarp is the overseer, yet he himself is "overseen" by God and Christ.

Chapter 1

Pol. 1.1 I welcome your godly mind, which is set as firmly as on an immovable rock. I give great glory to God that I was counted worthy to see your blameless face. May I have joy of it in God!

Pol. 1.2 I urge you, by the grace with which you are clothed, to press on in your race and to urge everyone to be saved. Do full justice to your office with all care, both of the flesh and of the spirit. Be concerned for unity, for nothing is better. Carry everyone, as the Lord carries you. Put up with everyone in love, as you are already doing.

Pol. 1.3 Give yourself to ceaseless prayers. Ask for more understanding than you have. Stay awake, keeping a spirit that never sleeps. Speak to people one by one in God's manner. Bear the illnesses of all like a perfect athlete. Where there is more toil, there is great gain.

Chapter 2

Pol. 2.1 If you love good disciples, you deserve no credit. Rather, with gentleness bring the more troublesome ones into order. Not every wound is healed by the same dressing. Ease flare-ups with soothing compresses.

Translator's note. "You deserve no credit" echoes Jesus' words in [Luke 6:32](#), "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?" The Greek uses the same word (charis).

Pol. 2.2 Be wise as a serpent in everything and always innocent as

a dove. This is why you are both flesh and spirit: so that you may deal gently with the things that are visible to you. Ask that the unseen things be revealed to you, so that you lack nothing and have every gift in abundance. The present time needs you, just as pilots need winds and a storm-tossed sailor needs a harbor, in order to reach God. Be sober, as God's athlete. The prize is incorruption and eternal life, of which you are convinced. In every way I give myself for you, I and my chains, which you loved.

Translator's note. "I give myself for you" translates a strong word (antipsychon), literally "a life given in exchange." Ignatius uses it as an expression of deep devotion.

Chapter 3

Pol. 3.1 Do not let those who seem trustworthy but teach something different frighten you. Stand firm like an anvil being struck. It belongs to a great athlete to be beaten and still win. Above all, we must endure everything for God's sake, so that he too may endure us.

Pol. 3.2 Be more eager than you are. Learn to read the times. Look for the one who is above time, timeless, invisible, who became visible for us, who cannot be touched, who cannot suffer, who became able to suffer for us, who in every way endured for us.

Translator's note. Ignatius describes Christ as timeless, invisible and unable to suffer, yet made visible and able to suffer for our sake. Compare the similar contrast in the letter to the Ephesians, 1.7.2 (Ephesians 7.2).

Chapter 4

Pol. 4.1 Widows should not be neglected. After the Lord, you must be their protector. Let nothing be done without your approval, and do nothing yourself without God, as indeed you do not. Stand firm.

Pol. 4.2 Let meetings be held more often. Seek out everyone by name.

Pol. 4.3 Do not look down on slaves, men or women. But do not let them be puffed up either. Let them serve all the more for the glory of God, so that they may receive from God a better freedom. Let them not desire to be set free at the expense of the church's common fund, so that they are not found to be slaves of desire.

Translator's note. This passage suggests that churches sometimes used common funds to buy the freedom of slaves. Ignatius warns slaves against setting their hearts on this. Compare [1 Corinthians 7:20-24](#).

Chapter 5

Pol. 5.1 Flee from evil practices, or rather preach about them. Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in

flesh and spirit. In the same way, instruct my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives as the Lord loves the church.

Translator's note. Compare [Ephesians 5:25](#).

Pol. 5.2 If anyone is able to remain in chastity to honor the flesh of the Lord, let him remain so without boasting. If he boasts, he is lost. If it becomes known to anyone beyond the bishop, he is ruined. It is right for men and women who marry to be united with the bishop's approval, so that the marriage may be according to the Lord and not according to desire. Let everything be done for God's honor.

Translator's note. The phrase "if it becomes known beyond the bishop" can also be read "if he is regarded more highly than the bishop." Either way, Ignatius warns that celibacy must not become a source of pride.

Chapter 6

Pol. 6.1 Pay attention to the bishop, so that God may also pay attention to you. I give my life for those who are subject to the bishop, the elders, and the deacons. May my portion be with them in God. Work hard together, struggle together, run together, suffer together, rest together, and rise together, as God's stewards, attendants, and servants.

Translator's note. Here the Greek switches to the plural "you." Although the letter is addressed to Polycarp, Ignatius now speaks to the whole church at Smyrna.

Pol. 6.2 Please the one under whom you serve as soldiers, for from him you also receive your pay. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism serve as your weapons, your faith as your helmet, your love as your spear, and your endurance as your full armor. Let your works be your deposits, so that you may receive the back pay you have earned. So be patient with one another in gentleness, as God is with you. May I always have joy in you.

Translator's note. Ignatius uses Latin army words written in Greek letters: "deserter" (desertor), "deposits" (deposita), and "back pay" (accepta). Part of a Roman soldier's pay was held in deposit and paid out to him when he was discharged. Ignatius pictures good works as savings stored up with God.

Chapter 7

Pol. 7.1 I have been told that, through your prayer, the church in Antioch of Syria is at peace. Because of this I too have become more cheerful, free from worry in God, if only I may reach God through suffering, so that I may be found your disciple in the resurrection.

Translator's note. The Greek reads literally "so that I may be found in your resurrection a disciple." It may mean "your disciple in the resurrection" or "a disciple when you are raised." The exact sense is

| uncertain.

Pol. 7.2 It is right, Polycarp, most blessed by God, to call a council most fitting to God and to appoint someone whom you love dearly and who is tireless, who can be called God's courier. Honor him with this task, so that he may go to Syria and glorify your tireless love for the glory of God.

Pol. 7.3 A Christian has no authority over himself, but gives his time to God. This is God's work, and yours too, when you complete it. For I trust in grace that you are ready for the good deeds that are fitting for God. Because I know how earnest you are for the truth, I have encouraged you in only a few lines.

Chapter 8

Pol. 8.1 I have not been able to write to all the churches, because I must suddenly sail from Troas to Neapolis, as God's will commands. So you, as one who has the mind of God, must write to the churches on the road ahead of me, so that they too may do the same. Those who are able should send messengers on foot, and the others should send letters by the people you send, so that you may be glorified by an everlasting work, as you deserve.

Translator's note. In his own letter to the Philippians (13.1-2), Polycarp says he is sending them the letters of Ignatius that Ignatius sent to him, along with others he had. Many scholars think this was the beginning of the collection of Ignatius' letters.

Pol. 8.2 I greet everyone by name, including the wife of Epitropus with her whole household and her children. I greet my dear Attalus. I greet the one who will be counted worthy to go to Syria. Grace will be with him always, and with Polycarp who sends him.

Translator's note. The Greek says only "the [woman] of Epitropus." Epitropus may be a personal name, or it may be a title meaning "the procurator" (a government official), as Lightfoot suggested; the woman may also have been his widow rather than his wife.

Pol. 8.3 I pray that you may always be well in our God Jesus Christ. May you remain in him, in the unity and oversight of God. I greet Alce, a name dear to me. Farewell in the Lord.

Translator's note. Ignatius also greets Alce in his letter to the Smyrnaeans (13.2) with the same words.

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