

(Epistle) to the Trallians

by Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius' epistle to the Trallians emphasizes unity in the Church, submission to leadership, and the importance of sound doctrine against heresy.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 1 Peter 5:5, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Church Unity", "Heresy Warning"

Description

Ignatius of Antioch writes a letter to the holy Church in Tralles, commending their unblameable and sincere faith, urging them to be subject to their bishop and deacons, and emphasizing the importance of unity and love within the Church. He warns against the dangers of heresy and the snares of the devil, encouraging them to remain steadfast in their faith in Jesus Christ's true suffering, death, and resurrection. Ignatius concludes with greetings and prayers for the Church, highlighting the need for continued harmony, prayer, and love among believers.

Transcript

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the holy Church which is at Tralles, in Asia, beloved of God, the Father of Jesus Christ, elect, and worthy of God, possessing peace through the flesh, and blood, and passion of Jesus Christ, who is our hope, through our rising again to Him,[1] which also I salute in its fulness,[2] and in the apostolical character,[3] and wish abundance of happiness.

CHAP. I.--ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR EXCELLENCE.

I know that ye possess an unblameable and sincere mind in patience, and that not only in present practice,[5] but according to inherent nature, as Polybius your bishop has shown me, who has come to Smyrna by the will of God and Jesus Christ, and so sympathized in the joy which I, who am bound in Christ Jesus, possess, that I beheld your whole multitude in him. Having therefore received through him the testimony of your good-will, according to God, I gloried to find you, as I knew you were, the followers of God.

CHAP. II.--BE SUBJECT TO THE BISHOP, ETC.

For, since ye are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, in order, by believing in His death, ye may escape from death. It is therefore necessary that, as ye indeed do, so without the bishop ye should do nothing, but

should also our hope, in whom, if we live, we shall be found in Him. It behoves you also, in every way, to please the deacons, who are [ministers] of the mysteries of Christ Jesus; for they are not ministers of meat and drink, but servants of the Church of God. They are bound, therefore, to avoid all grounds of accusation [against them], as they would a burning fire. Let them, then, prove themselves to be such.

CHAP. III.--HONOUR THE DEACONS, etc.

In like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment(2) of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the sanhedrin of God, and assembly of the apostles. Apart from these, there is no Church.(4) Concerning all this, I am persuaded that ye are of the same opinion. For I have received the manifestations of your love, and still have it with me, in your bishop, whose very appearance is highly instructive,(6) and his meekness of itself a power; whom I imagine even the ungodly must reverence, seeing they are (7) also pleased that I do not spare myself. But shall I, when permitted to write on this point, reach such a height of self-esteem, that though being a condemned(8) man, I should issue commands to you as if I were an apostle?

CHAP. IV.--I HAVE NEED OF HUMILITY.

I have great knowledge in God,(9) but I restrain myself, lest, I should perish through boasting. For now it is needful for me to be the more fearful; and not give heed to those that puff me up. For they that speak to me [in the way of commendation] scourge me. For I do indeed desire to suffer, but I know not if I be worthy to do so. For this longing, though it is not manifest to many, all the more vehemently assails me.(13) I therefore have need of meekness, by which the prince of this world is brought to nought.

CHAP. V.--I WILL NOT TEACH YOU PROFOUND DOCTRINES.

Am I not able to write to you of heavenly things? But I fear to do so, lest I should inflict injury on you who are but babes [in Christ]. Pardon me in this respect, lest, as not being able to receive [such doctrines], ye should be strangled by them. For even I, though I am bound [for Christ], yet am not on that account able to understand heavenly things, and the places(4) of the angels, and their gatherings under their respective princes, things visible and invisible. Without reference to such abstruse subjects, I am still but a learner [in other respects(5)]; for many things are wanting to us, that we come not short of God.

CHAP. VI.--ABSTAIN FROM THE POISON OF HERETICS.

I therefore, yet not I, but the love of Jesus Christ, entreat you that ye use Christian nourishment only, and abstain from herbage of a different kind; I mean heresy. For those(7) [that are given to this] mix(11) up Jesus Christ with their own poison, speaking things which are unworthy of credit, like those who administer a deadly drug in sweet wine, which he who is ignorant of does greedily(13) take, with a fatal pleasure(14) leading to his own death.

CHAP. VII.--THE SAME CONTINUED.

Be on your guard, therefore, against such persons. And this will be the case with you if you are not puffed up, and continue in intimate union with(17) Jesus Christ our God, and the bishop, and the enactments of the apostles. He that is within the altar is pure, but(2) he that is without is not pure; that is, he who does anything apart from the bishop, and presbytery, and deacons,(4) such a man is not pure in his conscience.

CHAP. VIII.--BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST THE SNARES OF THE DEVIL.

Not that I know there is anything of this kind among you; but I put you on your guard, inasmuch as I love you greatly, and foresee the snares of the devil. Wherefore, clothing(11) yourselves with meekness, be ye renewed(12) in faith, that is the flesh of the Lord, and in love, that is the blood of Jesus Christ. Let no one of you cherish any grudge against his neighbour. Give no occasion to the Gentiles, lest by means of a few foolish men the whole multitude [of those that believe] in God be evil spoken of. For, "Woe to him by whose vanity my name is blasphemed among any."(17)

CHAP. IX.--REFERENCE TO THE HISTORY OF CHRIST.

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with(18) Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.

CHAP. X.--THE REALITY OF CHRIST'S PASSION.

But if, as some that are without God, that is, the unbelieving, say, that He only seemed to suffer (they themselves only seeming to exist), then why am I in bonds? Why do I long to be exposed to the wild beasts? Do I therefore die in vain?(9) Am I not then guilty of falsehood(10) against [the cross of] the Lord?

CHAP. XI.--AVOID THE DEADLY ERRORS OF THE DOCETAE.

Flee, therefore, those evil offshoots [of Satan], which produce death-bearing fruit, whereof if any one tastes, he instantly dies. For these men are not the planting of the Father. For if they were, they would appear as branches of the cross, and their fruit would be incorruptible. By it(9) He calls you through His passion, as being His members. The head, therefore, cannot be born by itself, without its members; God, who is [the Saviour] Himself, having promised their union.(10)

CHAP. XII.--CONTINUE IN UNITY AND LOVE.

I salute you from Smyrna, together with the Churches of God which are with me, who have refreshed me in all things, both in the flesh and in the spirit. My bonds, which I carry about with me for the sake of Jesus Christ (praying that I may attain to God), exhort you. Continue in harmony among yourselves, and in prayer with one another; for it becomes every one of you, and especially the presbyters, to refresh the bishop, to the hon-our of the Father, of Jesus Christ, and of the apostles. I entreat you in love to hear me, that I may not, by having written, be a testimony against you. And do ye also pray for me, who have need of your love, along with the mercy of God, that I may be worthy of the lot for which I am destined, and that I may not be found reprobate.

CHAP. XIII.--CONCLUSION.

The love of the Smyrnaeans and Ephesians salutes you. Remember in your prayers the Church which is in Syria, from which also I am not worthy to receive my appellation, being the last(1) of them. Fare ye well in Jesus Christ, while ye continue subject to the bishop, as to the command [of God], and in like manner to the presbytery. And do ye, every man, love one another with an undivided heart. Let my spirit be sanctified(2) by yours, not only now, but also when I shall attain to God. For I am as yet exposed to danger. But the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ to fulfil both mine and your petitions: in whom may ye be

found unblameable.

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