

# Irenaeus and the Beginning of the Church in Her Western Outposts

by J.B. Galloway

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*J.B. Galloway's sermon explores the life and theological contributions of Irenaeus, emphasizing his role in the early Church and the importance of the Holy Spirit in spiritual life.*

**Scripture:** Romans 8:13, 1 Corinthians 2:6, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:23

**Topics:** "Church History", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

J.B. Galloway delves into the life and teachings of Irenaeus, an influential Church Father in the West who combated Gnostic teachings. Irenaeus, born around A.D. 130, emphasized the importance of perfect righteousness, the distinction between the spiritual and the carnal, and the preservation and sanctification of body, soul, and spirit. He highlighted the fruits of the Spirit as evidence of true salvation and the necessity of the Spirit's work in transforming individuals into spiritual beings.

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## Transcript

With Irenaeus we are introduced to the church in the West. For some time Christian missions had been flourishing on the banks of the Rhone. Polycarp sent Pthinus into Celtic Gaul. When he suffered death in the persecutions of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 177, Irenaeus became the bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons, France). Irenaeus was born about A.D. 130, probably in Smyrna. As a youth he heard Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. So he was just a step from the apostles. For a time he taught at Rome and then went to Gaul, where he became bishop of Lyons. He became one of the leading Church Fathers in the West. The remainder of his life was spent in the administration of his see. The bishop at Rome was trying to enforce uniformity in the Church on the paschal solemnities, and Irenaeus warned him that such a policy would rend the Church. His warning had the desired results. His greatest work was his *Against Heresies*. The full title of this work as he designated it was, *A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge Falsely So-called*. This was written to combat the Gnostic teachings. He was well acquainted with these errors and answered them ably. There is much in the first part of his *Against Heresies* that is almost unintelligible and uninteresting to us, but in the last part of it there is much sound, valuable exposition of the Scriptures. Little is known about the last days of Irenaeus, but there is a fifth century tradition that he suffered martyrdom in the persecutions of Septimius Severus in A.D. 202.

Irenaeus On Holiness

In his Against Heresies, Book 4, chapter 16, in writing on perfect righteousness, he says:

The Holy Spirit as a wise Artist uses circumcision as a sign of the work of the Spirit in our flesh. "For we have been counted," Says the Apostle Paul, "all the day long as sheep for the slaughter"; that is consecrated to God, and administering continually to our faith and persevering in it, and abstaining from all avarice, and not acquiring treasures on earth.

#### Some Spiritual, Others Carnal

In Book 5, chapter 6, he shows that those who have the outpouring of the Spirit are the perfect and spiritual and that others are carnal.

For this reason does the apostle declare, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," terming those persons perfect who have received the Spirit of God. In like manner we do hear many brethren in the church, who possess spiritual gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God, whom also the apostles term spiritual, they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual. For if anyone take away the Substance of the flesh, that is, the handiwork of God, and understand that which is purely spiritual, such then would be a spiritual man, but would be the spirit of man, or the spirit of God. But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to God's handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being carnal.

#### Preserved and Sanctified

Thus in the First Epistle of Thessalonians, "Now the God of peace sanctify you perfectly, and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." Now what was the object in praying for these three—that is, the soul, body and spirit might be preserved to the coming of the Lord, unless he was aware of the future reintegration and union of the three, and that they should be heirs of one and the same salvation? For this cause also he declares that those are perfect who present unto the Lord the three (component parts) without offense. These, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is, that faith which is directed towards God, and maintaining righteous dealings with respect with their neighbors.

#### The Fruits of the Spirit

In Book 6, chapter 11, in treating the difference between the actions of the carnal and spiritual persons and showing that the cleansing of the Spirit is a spiritual one and not that of the flesh, he says:

And then again he [Paul in Gal. 5] proceeds to tell us of the spiritual actions which vivify a man, that is, the engrafting of the Spirit, thus saying, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, benignity, faith, meekness, continence, chastity: against these there is no law." As, therefore, he who has gone forward to the better things, and hath brought forth the fruit of the Spirit, is saved altogether because of the communion of the Spirit; so also he who has continued in the works of the flesh, being truly reckoned carnal, because he did not receive the Spirit of God, shall not have power to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

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