

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the to the Philadelphians

Translated by Cyril Richardson

Greetings in the blood of Jesus Christ from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,” to the church of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at Philadelphia in Asia — an object of the divine mercy and firmly knit in godly unity. Yours is a deep, abiding joy in the Passion of our Lord; and by his overflowing mercy you are thoroughly convinced of his resurrection. You are the very personification of eternal and perpetual joy. This is especially true if you are at one with the bishop, and with 108the presbyters and deacons, who are on his side and who have been appointed by the will of Jesus Christ. By his Holy Spirit and in accordance with his own will he validated their appointment.

1 I well realize that this bishop of yours does not owe his ministry to his own efforts or to men. Nor is it to flatter his vanity that he holds this office which serves the common good. Rather does he owe it to the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I have been struck by his charming manner. By being silent he can do more than those who chatter. For he is in tune with the commandments as a harp is with its strings. For this reason I bless his godly mind, recognizing its virtue and perfection, and the way he lives in altogether godly composure, free from fitfulness and anger.

2 Since you are children of the light of truth, flee from schism and false doctrine. Where the Shepherd is, there follow like sheep. For there are many specious wolves who, by means of wicked pleasures, capture those who run God’s race. In the face of your unity, however, they will not have a chance.

3 Keep away from bad pasturage. Jesus Christ does not cultivate it since the Father did not plant it. Not that I found schism among you — rather had you been sifted. As many as are God’s and Jesus Christ’s, they are on the bishop’s side; and as many as repent and enter the unity of the church, they shall be God’s, and thus they shall live in Jesus Christ’s way. Make no mistake, my brothers, if anyone joins a schismatic he will not inherit God’s Kingdom. If anyone walks in the way of heresy, he is out of sympathy with the Passion.

4 Be careful, then, to observe a single Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and one cup of his blood that makes us one, and one altar, just as there is one bishop along with the presbytery and the deacons, my 109fellow slaves. In that way whatever you do is in line with God’s will.

5 My brothers, in my abounding love for you I am overjoyed to put you on your guard — though it is not I, but Jesus Christ. Being a prisoner for his cause makes me the more fearful that I am still far from being perfect. Yet your prayers to God will make me perfect so that I may gain that fate which I have mercifully been allotted, by taking refuge in the “Gospel,” as in Jesus’ flesh, and in the “Apostles,” as in the presbytery of the Church. And the “Prophets,” let us love them too, because they anticipated the gospel in their preaching and hoped for and awaited Him, and were

saved by believing on him. Thus they were in Jesus Christ's unity. Saints they were, and we should love and admire them, seeing that Jesus Christ vouched for them and they form a real part of the gospel of our common hope.

6 Now, if anyone preaches Judaism to you, pay no attention to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from one of the circumcision than Judaism from a Gentile. If both, moreover, fail to talk about Jesus Christ, they are to me tombstones and graves of the dead, on which only human names are inscribed. Flee, then, the wicked tricks and snares of the prince of this world, lest his suggestions wear you down, and you waver in your love. Rather, meet together, all of you, with a single heart. I thank my God that in my relations with you I have nothing to be ashamed of. No one can brag secretly or openly that I was the slightest burden to anyone. I trust, too, that none of those I talked to will need to take what I say as a criticism of them.

7 Some there may be who wanted in a human way to mislead me, but the Spirit is not misled, seeing it comes from God. For "it knows whence it comes and whither it goes," and exposes what is secret. When I was with you I cried out, raising my voice — it was God's voice — "Pay heed to the bishop, the presbytery, and the deacons." Some, it is true, suspected that I spoke thus because I had been told in advance that some of you were schismatics. But I swear by Him for whose cause I am a prisoner, that from no human channels did I learn this. It was the Spirit that kept on preaching in these words: "Do nothing apart from the bishop; keep your bodies as if they were God's temple; value unity; flee schism; imitate Jesus Christ as he imitated his Father."

8 I, then, was doing all I could, as a man utterly devoted to unity. Where there is schism and bad feeling, God has no place. The Lord forgives all who repent — if, that is, their repentance brings them into God's unity and to the bishop's council. I put my confidence in the grace of Jesus Christ. He will release you from all your chains.

I urge you, do not do things in cliques, but act as Christ's disciples. When I heard some people saying, "If I don't find it in the original documents, I don't believe it in the gospel," I answered them, "But it *is* written there." They retorted, "That's just the question." To my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the original documents. The inviolable archives are his cross and death and his resurrection and the faith that came by him. It is by these things and through your prayers that I want to be justified.

9 Priests are a fine thing, but better still is the High Priest who was entrusted with the Holy of Holies. He alone was entrusted with God's secrets. He is the door to the Father. Through it there enter Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the prophets and apostles and the Church. All these find their place in God's unity. But there is something special about the gospel — I mean the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his Passion and resurrection. The beloved prophets announced his coming; but the gospel is the crowning achievement forever. All these things, taken together, have their value, provided you hold the faith in love.

10 Thanks to your prayers and to the love that you have for me in Christ Jesus, news has reached me that the church at Antioch in Syria is at peace. Consequently, it would be a nice thing for you, as a church of God, to elect a deacon to go there on a mission, as God's representative, and at a formal service to congratulate them and glorify the Name. He who is privileged to perform such a

ministry will enjoy the blessing of Jesus Christ, and you too will win glory. If you really want to do this for God's honor, it is not impossible, just as some of the churches in the vicinity have already sent bishops; others presbyters and deacons.

11 Now about Philo, the deacon from Cilicia. He is well spoken of and right now he is helping me in God's cause, along with Rheus Agathopus — a choice person — who followed me from Syria and so has said good-bye to this present life. They speak well of you, and I thank God on your account that you welcomed them, as the Lord does you. I hope that those who slighted them will be redeemed by Jesus Christ's grace. The brothers in Troas send their love and greetings. It is from there that I am sending this letter to you by Burrhus. The Ephesians and Smyrnaeans have done me the honor of sending him to be with me. They in turn will be honored by Jesus Christ, on whom they have set their hope with body, soul, spirit, faith, love, and a single mind. Farewell in Christ Jesus, our common Hope.