

The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians

Polycarp and the presbyters with him to the church of God that sojourns at Philippi: may mercy and peace from God Almighty and Jesus Christ our Savior be yours in abundance.

1. I greatly rejoice with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because you welcomed the representations of the true love and, as was proper for you, helped on their way those men confined by chains suitable for saints, which are the diadems of those who are truly chosen by God and our Lord; (2) and because your firmly rooted faith, renowned from the earliest times, still perseveres and bears fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured for our sins, facing even death, “whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of Hades.” (3) “Though you have not seen him, you believe in him with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (which many desire to experience), knowing that “by grace you have been saved, not because of works,” but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

2. “Therefore prepare for action and serve God in fear” and truth, leaving behind the empty and meaningless talk and the error of the crowd, and “believing in him who raised” our Lord Jesus Christ “from the dead and gave him glory” and a throne at his right hand; to whom all things in heaven and on earth were subjected, whom every breathing creature serves, who is coming as “Judge of the living and the dead,” for whose blood God will hold responsible those who disobey him. (2) But “he who raised him from the dead will raise us also,” if we do his will and follow his commandments and love the things he loved, while avoiding every kind of unrighteousness, greed, love of money, slander and false testimony; “not repaying evil for evil or insult for insult” or blow for blow or curse for curse, (3) but instead remembering what the Lord said as he taught: “Do not judge, that you may not be judged; forgive, and you will be forgiven; show mercy, that you may be shown mercy; with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you”; and “blessed are the poor and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

3. I am writing you these comments about righteousness, brothers, not on my own initiative but because you invited me to do so. (2) For neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time, accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters; if you study them carefully, you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith that has been given to you, (3) “which is the mother of us all,” while hope follows and love for God and Christ and for our neighbor leads the way. For if anyone is occupied with these, he has fulfilled the commandment of righteousness, for one who has love is far from all sin.

4. “But the love of money is the beginning of all troubles.” Knowing, therefore, that “we brought nothing into the world, nor can we take anything out,” let us arm ourselves with “the weapons of righteousness” and let us first teach ourselves to follow the commandment of the Lord. (2) Then instruct your wives to continue in the faith delivered to them and in love and purity, cherishing their own husbands in all fidelity and loving all others equally in all chastity, and to instruct the children with instruction that leads to the fear of God. (3) The widows must think soberly about the faith of the Lord and pray unceasingly for everyone and stay far away from all malicious talk, slander, false testimony, love of money, and any kind of evil, knowing that they are God’s altar, and that all sacrifices are carefully inspected and nothing escapes him, whether thoughts or intentions or “secrets of the heart.”

5. Knowing, therefore, that “God is not mocked,” we ought to live in a manner that is worthy of his commandment and glory. (2) Similarly, deacons must be blameless in the presence of his righteousness, as deacons of God and Christ and not of men: not slanderers, not insincere, not lovers of money, self-controlled in every respect, compassionate, diligent, acting in accordance with the truth of the Lord, who became “a servant of all.” If we please him in this present world, we will receive the world to come as well, inasmuch as he promised to raise us from the dead and that if we prove to be citizens worthy of him, “we will also reign with him”— if, that is, we continue to believe.

(3) Similarly, the younger men must be blameless in all things; they should be concerned about purity above all, reining themselves away from all evil. For it is good to be cut off from the sinful desires in the world, because every “sinful desire wages war against the spirit,” and “neither fornicators nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals will inherit the kingdom of God,” nor those who do perverse things. Therefore one must keep away from all these things and be obedient to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ. The young women must maintain a pure and blameless conscience.

6. The presbyters, for their part, must be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, visiting all the sick, not neglecting a widow, orphan, or poor person, but “always aiming at what is honorable in the sight of God and of men,” avoiding all anger, partiality, unjust judgment, staying far away from all love of money, not quick to believe things spoken against anyone, nor harsh in judgment, knowing that we are all in debt with respect to sin. (2) Therefore if we ask the Lord to forgive us, then we ourselves ought to forgive, for we are in full view of the eyes of the Lord and God, and we must “all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,” and “each one must give an account of himself.” (3) So, then, let us serve him with fear and all reverence, just as he himself has commanded, as did the apostles, who preached the gospel to us, and the prophets, who announced in advance the coming of our Lord. Let us be eager with regard to what is good, and avoid those who tempt others to sin and false brothers and those who bear the name of the Lord hypocritically, who lead foolish men astray.

7. For everyone “who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist”; and whoever does not acknowledge the testimony of the cross “is of the devil”; and whoever twists the sayings of the Lord to suit his own sinful desires and claims that there is neither resurrection nor judgment—well, that person is the first-born of Satan. (2) Therefore let us leave behind the worthless speculation of the crowd and their false teachings, and let us return to the word delivered to us from the beginning; let us be self-controlled with respect to prayer and persevere in fasting, earnestly asking the all-seeing God “to lead us not into temptation,” because, as the Lord said, “the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.”

8. Let us, therefore, hold steadfastly and unceasingly to our hope and the guarantee of our righteousness, who is Christ Jesus, “who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree,” “who committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth”; instead, for our sakes he endured all things, in order that we might live in him. (2) Let us, therefore, become imitators of his patient endurance, and if we should suffer for the sake of his name, let us glorify him. For this is the example he set for us in his own person, and this is what we have believed.

9. I urge all of you, therefore, to obey the teaching about righteousness and to exercise unlimited endurance, like that which you saw with your own eyes not only in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus but also in others from your congregation and in Paul himself and the rest of the apostles; (2) be assured that all these “did not run in vain” but in faith and righteousness, and that they are now in the place due them with the Lord, with whom they also suffered together. For they did not “love the present world,” but him who died on our behalf and was raised by God for our sakes.

10. Stand fast, therefore, in these things and follow the example of the Lord, firm and immovable in faith, loving the brotherhood, cherishing one another, united in the truth, giving way to one another in the gentleness of the Lord, despising no one. (2) When you are able to do good, do not put it off, because “charity delivers from death.” All of you be subject to one another, and maintain an irreproachable standard of conduct among the Gentiles, so that you may be praised for your good deeds and the Lord may not be blasphemed because of you. (3) But woe to him through whom the name of the Lord is blasphemed. Therefore teach to all the self-control by which you yourselves live.

11. I have been deeply grieved for Valens, who once was a presbyter among you, because he so fails to understand the office that was entrusted to him. I warn you, therefore: avoid love of money, and be pure and truthful. “Avoid every kind of evil.” (2) But how can a man who is unable to control himself in these matters preach self-control to someone else? If a man does not avoid love of money, he will be polluted by idolatry, and will be judged as one of the Gentiles, who are ignorant of the Lord’s judgment. “Or do we not know that the saints will judge the world,” as Paul teaches? (3) But I have not observed or heard of any such thing among you, in whose midst the blessed Paul labored, and who were his letters of recommendation in the beginning. For he boasts about you in all the churches—those alone, that is, which at that time had come to know the Lord, for we had not yet come to know him. (4) Therefore, brothers, I am deeply grieved for him and for his wife; may the Lord grant them true repentance. You, therefore, for your part must be reasonable in this matter, “and do not regard” such people “as enemies,” but, as sick and straying members, restore them, in order that you may save your body in its entirety. For by doing this you build up one another.

12. For I am convinced that you are all well trained in the sacred Scriptures and that nothing is hidden from you (something not granted to me). Only, as it is said in these Scriptures, “be angry but do not sin,” and “do not let the sun set on your anger.” Blessed is the one who remembers this, which I believe to be the case with you.

(2) Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High Priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth and in all gentleness and in all freedom from anger and forbearance and steadfastness and patient endurance and purity, and may he give to you a share and a place among his saints, and to us with you, and to all those under heaven who will yet believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead. (3) Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings and powers and rulers, and for those who persecute and hate you, and for

the enemies of the cross, in order that your fruit may be evident among all people, that you may be perfect in him.

13. Both you and Ignatius have written me that if anyone is traveling to Syria, he should take your letter along also. This I will do, if I get a good opportunity, either myself or the one whom I will send as a representative, on your behalf as well as ours. (2) We are sending to you the letters of Ignatius that were sent to us by him together with any others that we have in our possession, just as you requested. They are appended to this letter; you will be able to receive great benefit from them, for they deal with faith and patient endurance and every kind of spiritual growth that has to do with our Lord. As for Ignatius himself and those with him, if you learn anything more definite, let us know.

14. I am writing these things to you via Crescens, whom I recently commended to you and now commend again, for his conduct while with us has been blameless, and I believe that it will be likewise with you. And you will consider his sister to be commended when she comes to you. Farewell in the Lord Jesus Christ in grace, you and all those with you. Amen.