

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF THE SAME ST. IGNATIUS TO THE EPHESES

IGNATIUS

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Ignatius, who is [also called] Theophorus, to the Church which has received grace through the greatness of the Father Most High; to her who presideth in the place of the region of the Romans, who is worthy of God, and worthy of life, and happiness, and praise, and remembrance, and is worthy of prosperity, and presideth in love, and is perfected in the law of Christ unblameable: [wishes] abundance of peace.

CHAP. I.

FROM of old have I prayed to God, that I might be counted worthy to behold your faces which are worthy of God: now, therefore, being bound in Jesus Christ, I hope to meet you and salute you, if it be the will [of God] that I should be accounted worthy to the end. For the beginning is well arranged, if I be counted worthy to attain to the end, that I may receive my portion, without hindrance, through suffering. For I am in fear of your love, lest it should injure me. As to you, indeed, it is easy for you to do whatsoever ye wish; but as to me, it is difficult for me to be accounted worthy of God, if indeed ye spare me not.

CHAP. II.

For there is no other time such as this, that I should be accounted worthy of God; neither will ye, if ye be silent, [ever] be found in a better work than this. If ye let me alone, I shall be the word of God; but if ye love my flesh, again am I [only] to myself a voice. Ye cannot give me anything more precious than this, that I should be sacrificed to God, while the altar is ready; that ye may be in one concord in love, and may praise God the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord, because He has deemed a bishop worthy to be God's, having called him from the east to the west. It is good that I should set from the world in God, that I may rise in Him to life.(2)

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CHAP. III.

Ye have never envied any man. Ye have taught others. Only pray ye for strength to be given to me from within and from without, that I may not only speak, but also may be willing, and that I may not merely be called a Christian, but also may be found to be [one]; for if I am found to be [so], I may then also be called [so]. Then [indeed] shall I be faithful, when I am no longer seen in the world. For there is nothing visible that is good. The work is not [a matter(3)] of persuasion; but Christianity is great when the world hateth it.

CHAP. IV.

I write to all the Churches, and declare to all men, that I willingly die for the sake of God, if so be that ye hinder me not. I entreat of you not to be [affected] towards me with a love which is unseasonable. Leave me to become [the prey of] the beasts, that by their means I may be accounted worthy of God. I am the wheat of God, and by the teeth of the beasts I shall be ground,(4) that I may be found the pure bread of God. Provoke ye greatly(5) the wild beasts, that they may be for me a grave, and may leave nothing of my body, in order that, when I have fallen asleep, I may not be a burden upon any one. Then shall I be in truth a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world seeth not even my body. Entreat of our Lord in my behalf, that through these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God. I do not, like Peter and Paul, issue orders unto you. They are(6) apostles, but I am one condemned; they indeed are free, but I am a slave, even until now. But if I suffer, I shall be the freed-man of Jesus Christ, and I shall rise in Him from the dead, free. And now being in bonds, I learn to desire nothing.

CHAP. V.

From Syria, and even unto Rome, I am cast among wild beasts, by sea and by land, by night and by day, being bound between ten leopards, which are the band of soldiers, who, even when I do good to them, all the more do evil unto me. I, however, am the rather instructed by their injurious treatment;(1) but not on this account am I justified to myself. I rejoice in the beasts which are prepared for me, and I pray that they may in haste be found for me; and I will provoke them speedily to devour me, and not be as those which are afraid of some other men,(2) and will not approach them: even should they not be willing to approach me, I will go with violence against them. Know me from myself what is expedient for me.(3) Let no one(4) envy me of those things which are seen and which are not seen, that I should be accounted worthy of Jesus Christ. Fire, and the cross, and the beasts that are prepared, cutting off of the limbs, and scattering of the hones, and crushing of the whole body, harsh torments of the devil let these come upon me, but(5) only let me be accounted worthy of Jesus Christ.

CHAP. VI.

The pains of the birth stand over against me.(6)

CHAP. VII.

And my love is crucified, and there is no fire in me for another love. I do not desire the food of corruption, neither the lusts of this world. I seek the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ; and I seek His blood, a drink which is love incorruptible.

CHAP. IX.(7)

My spirit saluteth you, and the love of the Churches which received me as the name of Jesus Christ; for those also who were near to [my] way in the flesh, preceded me in every city.

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(8)[Now therefore, being about to arrive shortly in Rome, I know many things in God; but I keep myself within measure, that I may not perish through boasting: for now it is needful for me to fear the more, and not pay regard to those who puff me up. For they who say such things to me scourge me; for I desire to suffer, but I do not know if I am worthy. For zeal is not visible to many, but with me it has war. I have need, therefore, of meekness, by which the prince of this world is destroyed. I am able to write to you of heavenly things, but I fear lest I should do you an injury. Know me from myself. For I am cautious lest ye should not be able to receive [such knowledge], and should be perplexed. For even I, not because I am in bonds, and am able to know heavenly things, and the places of angels, and the stations of the powers that are seen and that are not seen, am on this account a disciple; for I am far short of the perfection which is worthy of God.] Be ye perfectly strong(9) in the patience of Jesus Christ our God.

Here end the three Epistles of Ignatius, bishop and martyr.