

The Third Epistle of the Same St. Ignatius⁶⁷⁹

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.



679 Another inscription is, "The Third Epistle."

Chapter 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.

Chapter 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.⁶⁸⁰

680 Literally, "in life."

Chapter 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 matter⁶⁸¹] of persuasion; but Christianity is great when the world hateth it.

681 The meaning is probably similar to that expressed in chap. xiv. of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Chapter 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,⁶⁸² that I may be found the pure bread of God. Provoke ye greatly⁶⁸³ 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 are⁶⁸⁴ 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.

682 Literally, "I am ground."

683 Literally, "with provoking, provoke."

684 Literally, "they are who are."

Chapter 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;⁶⁸⁵ 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,⁶⁸⁶ 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.⁶⁸⁷ Let no one⁶⁸⁸ 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 bones, and crushing of the whole body, harsh torments of the devil—let these come upon me, but⁶⁸⁹ only let me be accounted worthy of Jesus Christ.



685 Literally, “by their injury.”

686 Literally, “and not as that which is afraid of some other men.” So Cureton translates, but remarks that the passage is evidently corrupt. The reference plainly is to the fact that the beasts sometimes refused to attack their intended victims. See the case of Blandina, as reported by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, v. 1.).

687 Cureton renders interrogatively, “What is expedient for me?” and remarks that “the meaning of the Syriac appears to be, ‘I crave your indulgence to leave the knowledge of what is expedient for me to my own conscience.’”

688 Literally, “nothing.”

689 Literally, “and.”

Chapter VI.

The pains of the birth stand over against me.⁶⁹⁰

690 The Latin version translates the Greek here, "He adds gain to me."

Chapter 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.

Chapter IX.⁶⁹¹

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.

⁶⁹² [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 strong⁶⁹³ in the patience of Jesus Christ our God.

Here end the three Epistles of Ignatius, bishop and martyr.⁶⁹⁴

691 Chap. viii. of the Greek is entirely omitted in the Syriac.

692 The following passage is not found in this Epistle in the Greek recensions, but forms, in substance, chaps. iv. and v. of the Epistle to the Trallians. Diverse views are held by critics as to its proper place, according to the degree of authority they ascribe to the Syriac version. Cureton maintains that this passage has been transferred by the forger of the Epistle to the Trallians, "to give a fair colour to the fabrication by introducing a part of the genuine writing of Ignatius; while Hefele asserts that it is bound by the "closest connection" to the preceding chapter in the Epistle to the Trallians.

693 Or, as in the Greek, "Fare ye well, to the end."

694 [N.B.—The aphoristic genius of Ignatius seems to be felt by his Syrian abbreviator, who reduces whole chapters to mere maxims.]