

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO HERO A DEACON OF ANTIOCH

by Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius's pastoral letter to a church deacon exhorting earnestness, moderation, proper duties, and preparation for future episcopal responsibility, emphasizing balance and Christian virtue.

11 Chapters

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The Epistle Of Ignatius To Hero A Deacon Of Antioch

Introduction

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Hero, the deacon of Christ, and the servant of God, a man honoured by God, and most dearly loved as well as esteemed, who carries Christ and the Spirit within him, and who is mine own son in faith and love: Grace, mercy, and peace from Almighty God, and from Christ Jesus our Lord, His only-begotten Son, "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from the present evil world," [1265] and preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom.

Chapter I.--Exhortations to earnestness and moderation.

I Exhort thee in God, that thou add [speed] to thy course, and that thou vindicate thy dignity. Have a care to preserve concord with the saints. Bear [the burdens of] the weak, that "thou mayest fulfil the law of Christ." [1266] Devote [1267] thyself to fasting and prayer, but not beyond measure, lest thou destroy thyself [1268] thereby. Do not altogether abstain from wine and flesh, for these things are not to be viewed with abhorrence, since [the Scripture] saith, "Ye shall eat the good things of the earth." [1269] And again, "Ye shall eat flesh even as herbs." [1270] And again, "Wine maketh glad the heart of man, and oil exhilarates, and bread strengthens him." [1271] But all are to be used with moderation, as being the gifts of God. "For who shall eat or who shall drink without Him? For if anything be beautiful, it is His; and if anything be good, it is His." [1272] Give attention to reading, [1273] that thou mayest not only thyself know the laws, but mayest also explain them to others, as the earnest servant [1274] of God. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier; and if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully." [1275] I that am in bonds pray that my soul may be in place of yours.

Chapter II.--Cautions against false teachers.

Every one that teaches anything beyond what is commanded, though he be [deemed] worthy of credit, though he be in the habit of fasting, though he live in continence, though he work miracles, though he have the gift of prophecy, let him be in thy sight as a wolf in sheep's clothing, [1276] labouring for the destruction of the sheep. If any one denies the cross, and is ashamed of the passion, let him be to thee as the adversary himself. "Though he gives all his goods to feed the poor, though he remove mountains, though he give his body to be burned," [1277] let him be regarded by thee as abominable. If any one makes light of the law or the prophets, which Christ fulfilled at His coming, let him be to thee as antichrist. If any one says that the Lord is a mere man, he is a Jew, a murderer of Christ.

Chapter III.--Exhortations as to ecclesiastical duties.

"Honour widows that are widows indeed." [1278] Be the friend of orphans; for God is "the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows." [1279] Do nothing without the bishops; for they are priests, and thou a servant of the priests. They baptize, offer sacrifice, [1280] ordain, and lay on hands; but thou ministerest to them, as the holy Stephen did at Jerusalem to James and the presbyters. Do not neglect the sacred meetings [1281] [of the saints]; inquire after every one by name. "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example to the believers, both in word and conduct." [1282]

Chapter IV.--Servants and women are not to be despised.

Be not ashamed of servants, for we possess the same nature in common with them. Do not hold women in abomination, for they have given thee birth, and brought thee up. It is fitting, therefore, to love those that were the authors of our birth (but only in the Lord), inasmuch as a man can produce no children without a woman. It is right, therefore, that we should honour those who have had a part in giving us birth. "Neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man," [1283] except in the case of those who were first formed. For the body of Adam was made out of the four elements, and that of Eve out of the side of Adam. And, indeed, the altogether peculiar birth of the Lord was of a virgin alone. [This took place] not as if the lawful union [of man and wife] were abominable, but such a kind of birth was fitting to God. For it became the Creator not to make use of the ordinary method of generation, but of one that was singular and strange, as being the Creator.

Chapter V.--Various relative duties.

Flee from haughtiness, "for the Lord resisteth the proud." [1284] Abhor falsehood, for says [the Scripture], "Thou shalt destroy all them that speak lies." [1285] Guard against envy, for its author is the devil, and his successor Cain, who envied his brother, and out of envy committed murder. Exhort my sisters to love God, and be content with their own husbands only. In like manner, exhort my brethren also to be content with their own wives. Watch over the virgins, as the precious treasures of Christ. Be long-suffering, [1286] that thou mayest be great in wisdom. Do not neglect the poor, in so far as thou art prosperous. For "by alms and fidelity sins are purged away." [1287]

Chapter VI--Exhortations to purity and caution.

Keep thyself pure as the habitation of God. Thou art the temple of Christ. Thou art the instrument of the Spirit. Thou knowest in what way I have brought thee up. Though I am the least of men, do thou seek to follow me, be thou an imitator of my conduct. I do not glory in the world, but in the Lord. I exhort Hero, my son; "but let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord." [1288] May I have joy of thee, my dear son, whose guardian may He be who is the only unbegotten God, and the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not believe all persons, do not place confidence in all; nor let any man get the better of thee by flattery. For many are the ministers of Satan; and "he that is hasty to believe is light of heart." [1289]

Chapter VII.--Solemn charge to Hero, as future bishop of Antioch.

Keep God in remembrance, and thou shalt never sin. Be not double-minded [1290] in thy prayers; for blessed is he who doubteth not. For I believe in the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in His only-begotten Son, that God will show me, Hero, upon my throne. Add speed, therefore, [1291] to thy course. I charge thee before the God of the universe, and before Christ, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and of the ministering ranks [of angels], keep in safety that deposit which I and Christ have committed to thee, and do not judge thyself unworthy of those things which have been shown by God [to me] concerning thee. I hand over to thee the Church of Antioch. I have commended you to Polycarp in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter VIII.--Salutations.

The bishops, Onesimus, Bitus, Damas, Polybius, and all they of Philippi (whence also I have written to thee), salute thee in Christ. Salute the presbytery worthy of God: salute my holy fellow-deacons, of whom may I have joy in Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit. Salute the people of the Lord, from the smallest to the greatest, every one by name; whom I commit to thee as Moses did [the Israelites] to Joshua, who was their leader after him. And do not reckon this which I have said presumptuous on my part; for although we are not such as they were, yet we at least pray that we may be so, since indeed we are the children of Abraham. Be strong, therefore, O Hero, like a hero, and like a man. For from henceforth thou shalt lead [1292] in and out the people of the Lord that are in Antioch, and so "the congregation of the Lord shall not be as sheep which have no shepherd." [1293]

Chapter IX.--Concluding salutations and instructions.

Salute Cassian, my host, and his most serious-minded partner in life, and their very dear children, to whom may "God grant that they find mercy of the Lord in that day," [1294] on account of their ministrations to us, whom also I commend to thee in Christ. Salute by name all the faithful in Christ that are at Laodicea. Do not neglect those at Tarsus, but look after them steadily, confirming them in the Gospel. I salute in the Lord, Maris the bishop of Neapolis, near Anazarbus. Salute thou also Mary my daughter, distinguished both for gravity and erudition, as also "the Church which is in her house." [1295] May my soul be in place of hers: she is the very pattern of pious women. May the Father of Christ, by His only-begotten Son, preserve thee in good health, and of high repute in all things, to a very old age, for the benefit of the Church of God! Farewell in the Lord, and pray thou that I may be perfected.

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