
Ἰγνατιος Προς Πολυκαρπον † THE LETTER OF IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP

INTRODUCTION

The Greek and English texts here presented are based on those published in: “*The Apostolic Fathers, Volume 1*, Lake, Kirsopp, editor. (London: William Heinemann Ltd.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).” These were gleaned from the [Scaife Viewer website](#) (numerous minor corrections have been made). We also present the 1891 translation by J.B. Lightfoot (published posthumously) in a [separate file](#), as also the [Greek text](#) of Lightfoot’s transcription. Significant differences between the published Lake texts and Lightfoot’s are noted. On the sources of the texts presented, and their accuracy, please refer to the notes in [this document](#).

The *Letter to Polycarp* (the addressee was the incumbent bishop of Smyrna) contains exhortations about morally correct behaviour and warnings against false doctrines. Ignatius also rejoices at the fact that his home church of Antioch is now ‘at peace’ (possibly having resolved a recent dispute); he requests that Polycarp send letters to various churches in Asia Minor, asking them to send letters of congratulation to Antioch, which Polycarp seems to have done in his letter to the Philippians.

The major manuscripts for Ignatius’ Letter to Polycarp are as follows:

1. *Codex Mediceus Laurentius* (11th Century) – the only extant Greek text of the original letters.
2. A Latin version: *Codex Caiensis* 395 – translated from a Greek text that closely matches the above and represents an important witness to restore corrupt or missing Greek text (but it also includes the six spurious letters of the *Long Recension*).
3. The Syriac Abridgement of the Greek (possibly from the 4th/5th Century); there are also Syriac fragments of the Greek original.
4. Armenian manuscripts – almost certainly translated from the Syriac, rather than from the Greek original.
5. A “Long Recension” in Greek: An interpolation of the Greek original, with the addition of six spurious letters. Constructed by an unknown writer, probably in the late 4th Century. This is generally considered of secondary importance.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

The *Letter Polycarp* is one of seven epistles attributed to Ignatius that are widely considered to be authentic. It is clear that the letter was written shortly before the martyrdom of Ignatius but it is uncertain when precisely this martyrdom occurred. Tradition places the event in the reign of Trajan, who was emperor of Rome from 98 to 117 CE. While many scholars accept the traditional dating of Ignatius' martyrdom under Trajan, others have argued for a somewhat later date, suggesting 135-145 CE. The letter was written from Alexandria Troas (8:1), on a stopover during Ignatius’ transportation from Antioch to Rome.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον - Προλογος

¹ Ἰγνάτιος, ὁ καὶ Θεοφόρος, Πολυκάρπῳ ἐπισκόπῳ ἐκκλησίας Σμυρναίων, μᾶλλον ἐπισκοπημένῳ ὑπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, πλεῖστα χαίρειν.

IGN. POLYCARP – PROLOGUE

¹ Ignatius, who is also Theophorus, to Polycarp, who is bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans, or rather has for his bishop God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, abundant greeting.

IGN. POLYCARP PROLOGUE

¹ Lightfoot lacks κυρίου before Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 1

¹ Ἀποδεχόμενός σου τὴν ἐν θεῷ γνώμην ἠδρασμένην ὡς ἐπὶ πέτραν ἀκίνητον, ὑπερδοξάζω, καταξιωθείς τοῦ προσώπου σου τοῦ ἀμώμου, οὗ ὀναίμην ἐν θεῷ. ² παρακαλῶ σε ἐν χάριτι ἢ ἐνδέδυσαι, προσθεῖναι τῷ δρόμῳ σου καὶ πάντα παρακαλεῖν, ἵνα σώζωνται. ἐκδίκηει σου τὸν τόπον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιμελείᾳ σαρκικῇ τε καὶ πνευματικῇ· τῆς ἐνώσεως φρόντιζε, ἥς οὐδὲν ἄμεινον. πάντα βάσταζε, ὡς καὶ σὲ ὁ κύριος· πάντων ἀνέχου ἐν ἀγάπῃ, ὥσπερ καὶ ποιεῖς. ³ προσευχαῖς σχόλαζε ἀδιαλείπτως· αἰτοῦ σύνεσιν πλείονα ἥς ἔχεις· γρηγόρει ἀκοίμητον πνεῦμα κεκτημένος. τοῖς κατ' ἄνδρα κατὰ ὁμοίθειαν θεοῦ λάλει· πάντων τὰς νόσους βάσταζε ὡς τέλειος ἀθλητῆς. ὅπου πλείων κόπος, πολὺ κέρδος.

IGN. POLYCARP 1

¹ Welcoming your godly mind that is fixed as if on immovable rock, I glory exceedingly that it was granted me to see your blameless face wherein I would have joy in God. ² I exhort you to press forward on your course in the grace with which you are clothed and to exhort all men to gain salvation. Vindicate your office with all diligence, of the flesh and spirit. Care for unity; for, there is nothing better. Help all men, as the Lord also helps you; suffer all men in love, as you indeed do. ³ Be diligent with unceasing prayer. Entreat for wisdom greater than you have; be watchful and keep the spirit from slumbering. Speak to each individually after the manner of God. Bear the sicknesses of all as a perfect athlete. Where the toil is greatest is the gain great.

IGN. POLYCARP 1

¹ In place of 'it was granted', Lightfoot has 'it has been vouchsafed'.

² Lightfoot lacks the commas after ἐνδέδυσαι & παρακαλεῖν but adds one after σου.

³ Lightfoot adds a comma after βάσταζε and has an *ano teleia* in place of a full stop after ἀθλητῆς. 'Athlete' was, both then and later, a favourite name for Christians who strove to excel in virtue, especially in ascetic practices.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 2

¹ Καλούς μαθητάς ἐάν φιλήσ, χάρις σοι οὐκ ἔστιν· μᾶλλον τοὺς λοιμοτέρους ἐν πραότητι ὑπότασσε. οὐ πᾶν τραῦμα τῆ αὐτῆ ἐμπλάστρω θεραπεύεται. τοὺς παροξυσμοὺς ἐμβροχαῖς παῦε. ² φρόνιμος γίνου ὡς ὁ ὄφης ἐν ἅπασιν καὶ ἀκέραιος εἰς ἀεὶ ὡς ἡ περιστέρα. διὰ τοῦτο σαρκικὸς εἶ καὶ πνευματικὸς, ἵνα τὰ φαινόμενά σου εἰς πρόσωπον κολακεύης· τὰ δὲ ἀόρατα αἴτει ἵνα σοι φανερωθῆ, ὅπως μηδενὸς λείπη καὶ παντὸς χαρίσματος περισσεύης. ³ ὁ καιρὸς ἀπαιτεῖ σε, ὡς κυβερνήται ἀνέμους καὶ ὡς χειμαζόμενος λιμένα, εἰς τὸ θεοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν. νῆφε, ὡς θεοῦ ἀθλητῆς· τὸ θέμα ἀφθαρσία καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος, περὶ ἧς καὶ σὺ πέπεισαι. κατὰ πάντα σου ἀντίψυχον ἐγὼ καὶ τὰ δεσμά μου, ἃ ἠγάπησας.

IGN. POLYCARP 2

¹ If you love good disciples, it is no credit to you; rather, bring to subjection by your gentleness the more troublesome. Not all wounds are healed by the same plaster. Relieve convulsions by fomentations. ² Be prudent as the serpent in all things and pure as the dove always. For this, you consist of flesh and spirit, that you may humour the things that appear visibly; but pray that the invisible things may be revealed to you, that you may lack nothing and abound in every gift. ³ The time calls on you to reach God, as pilots require wind and a storm-tossed sailor a harbour. Be sober as God's athlete. The prize is immortality and eternal life, of which you have been persuaded. In all things, I am devoted to you, I and my bonds, which you loved.

IGN. POLYCARP 2

¹ Lightfoot has an *ano teleia* in place of the full stop after *θεραπεύεται*.

² *Codex Mediceus* omits the *ὁ* but the parallelism with *ἡ περιστέρα* shows that this is only an accident.

³ The general meaning of this passage is fairly clear but the details are hopelessly obscure; possibly, something has dropped out of the text.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 3

¹Οἱ δοκοῦντες ἀξιόπιστοι εἶναι καὶ ἑτεροδιδασκαλοῦντες μή σε καταπλησέτωσαν. στήθι ἐδραῖος ὡς ἄκμων τυπτόμενος. μεγάλου ἐστὶν ἀθλητοῦ τὸ δέρεσθαι καὶ νικᾶν. μάλιστα δὲ ἕνεκεν θεοῦ πάντα ὑπομένειν ἡμᾶς δεῖ, ἵνα καὶ αὐτὸς ἡμᾶς ὑπομείνῃ. ²πλέον σπουδαῖος γίνου οὐ εἶ. τοὺς καιροὺς καταμάνθανε. τὸν ὑπὲρ καιρὸν προσδόκα, τὸν ἄχρονον, τὸν ἀόρατον, τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς ὀρατόν, τὸν ἀψηλάφητον, τὸν ἀπαθῆ, τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς παθητόν, τὸν κατὰ πάντα τρόπον δι' ἡμᾶς ὑπομείναντα.

IGN. POLYCARP 3

¹ Let not those that seem plausible but teach strange doctrine overthrow you. Stand firm as an anvil that is smitten. The task of great athletes is to suffer punishment and yet conquer. But especially must we endure all things for God's sake, that he also may endure us. ² Be more diligent than you are. Mark the seasons. Await him who is above seasons, timeless, invisible, who became visible for our sake, who cannot be touched, who cannot suffer, who accepted suffering for our sake, who in every way endured for our sake.

IGN. POLYCARP 3

¹ Lightfoot has τὸ in brackets.

² Lightfoot has an *ano teleia* in place of the full stop after καταμάνθανε.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 4

¹ Χῆραι μὴ ἀμελείσθωσαν· μετὰ τὸν κύριον σὺ αὐτῶν φροντιστῆς ἔσο. μηδὲν ἄνευ γνώμης σου γινέσθω μηδὲ σὺ ἄνευ θεοῦ τι πράσσει, ὅπερ οὐδὲ πράσσεις· εὐστάθει.
² πυκνότερον συναγωγαὶ γινέσθωσαν· ἐξ ὀνόματος πάντας ζήτει. ³ δούλους καὶ δούλας μὴ ὑπερηφάνει· ἀλλὰ μηδὲ αὐτοὶ φυσιοῦσθωσαν, ἀλλ' εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πλέον δουλευέτωσαν, ἵνα κρεῖττονος ἐλευθερίας ἀπὸ θεοῦ τύχωσιν. μὴ ἐράτωσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινῶν ἐλευθεροῦσθαι, ἵνα μὴ δοῦλοι εὐρεθῶσιν ἐπιθυμίας.

IGN. POLYCARP 4

¹ Let not widows be neglected. Be yourself their protector after the Lord. Let nothing be done without your consent and do nothing without God, as indeed you do nothing; stand fast.
² Let the meetings be more numerous. Seek all by their name.
³ Do not despise slaves, either men or women; yet do not let them be puffed up but let them rather endure slavery to the glory of God, that they may obtain a better freedom from God. Let them not desire to be set free at public expense, lest they be found slaves of lust.

IGN. POLYCARP 4

- ¹ Before *τι πράσσει*, Lightfoot adds *γνώμης*.
² Lightfoot adds *'men'* after *'all'*.
³ In place of *'despise'*, Lake has *'be haughty to'*.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 5

¹ Τὰς κακοτεχνίας φεῦγε, μᾶλλον δὲ περὶ τούτων ὁμιλίαν ποιῶ. ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς μου προσλάλει, ἀγαπᾶν τὸν κύριον καὶ τοῖς συμβίοις ἀρκεῖσθαι σαρκὶ καὶ πνεύματι. ὁμοίως καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου παράγγελλε ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀγαπᾶν τὰς συμβίους ὡς ὁ κύριος τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. ² εἴ τις δύναται ἐν ἀγνείᾳ μένειν εἰς τιμὴν τῆς σαρκὸς τοῦ κυρίου, ἐν ἀκαυχησίᾳ μενέτω. ἐὰν καυχῆσθαι, ἀπώλετο, καὶ ἐὰν γνωσθῆ πλεον τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, ἔφθαρται. πρέπει δὲ τοῖς γαμοῦσι καὶ ταῖς γαμουμέναις μετὰ γνώμης τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τὴν ἔνωσιν ποιῆσθαι, ἵνα ὁ γάμος ᾗ κατὰ κύριον καὶ μὴ κατ' ἐπιθυμίαν. πάντα εἰς τιμὴν θεοῦ γινέσθω.

IGN. POLYCARP 5

¹ Flee from evil arts but rather preach against them. Speak to my sisters that they love the Lord and be content with their husbands in flesh and in spirit. In the same way, enjoin on my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives as the Lord loved the Church. ² If anyone can remain in chastity to the honour of the flesh of the Lord, let him do so without boasting. If he boasts, he is lost, and if it is known except to the bishop, he is polluted. But it is right for men and women who marry to be united with the consent of the bishop, that the marriage be according to the Lord and not according to lust. Let all things be done to the honour of God.

IGN. POLYCARP 5

¹ Throughout his works, Lightfoot capitalises Κύριον and its various derivative forms.

² Lightfoot has an *ano teleia* in place of the full stop after μενέτω.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 6

¹ Τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ προσέχετε, ἵνα καὶ ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀντίψυχον ἐγὼ τῶν ὑποτασσομένων τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ, πρεσβυτέρους, διακόνους καὶ μετ' αὐτῶν μοι τὸ μέρος γένοιτο σχεῖν ἐν θεῷ. συγκοπιᾶτε ἀλλήλοις, συναθλεῖτε, συντρέχετε, συμπάσχετε, συγκοιμᾶσθε, συνεγείρεσθε ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμοι καὶ πάρεδροι καὶ ὑπηρέται. ² ἀρέσκετε ᾧ στρατεύεσθε, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ τὰ ὀψώνια κομίζεσθε· μή τις ὑμῶν δεσέρτωρ εὐρεθῆ. τὸ βάπτισμα ὑμῶν μενέτω ὡς ὄπλα, ἡ πίστις ὡς περικεφαλαία, ἡ ἀγάπη ὡς δόρυ, ἡ ὑπομονή ὡς πανοπλία. τὰ δεπόσιτα ὑμῶν τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν, ἵνα τὰ ἄκκεπτα ὑμῶν ἄξια κομίσθησθε. μακροθυμήσατε οὖν μετ' ἀλλήλων ἐν πραότητι, ὡς ὁ θεὸς μεθ' ὑμῶν. ὀναίμην ὑμῶν διὰ παντός.

IGN. POLYCARP 6

¹ Listen to the bishop, so God may also listen to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons; and may it be mine to have my lot with them in God. Work with one another, struggle together, run together, suffer together, rest together, rise up together as God's stewards, assessors, and ministers. ² Please him in whose army you serve, from whom you receive your pay; let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism remain as your arms, your faith as a helmet, your love as a spear, your patience as your panoply; let your works be your deposits that you may receive the back-pay due to you. So, be patient with one another in gentleness, as God is with you. May I have joy in you always.

IGN. POLYCARP 6

¹ Lightfoot places the 2nd instance of τῷ in brackets. Lake has 'servants' in place of 'ministers', here following Lightfoot.

² The use of Latin words is remarkable: δεσέρτωρ = *desertor*, δεπόσιτα = *deposita*, and ἄκκεπτα = *accepta*. It was the custom in the Roman army to pay soldiers only half of any gratuities allowed them; the other half was deposited in a regimental savings bank and was paid out to each soldier when, and if, he was honourably discharged from the service.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 7

¹ Ἐπειδὴ ἡ ἐκκλησία ἡ ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῆς Συρίας εἰρηνεύει, ὡς ἐδηλώθη μοι, διὰ τὴν προσευχὴν ὑμῶν, κἀγὼ εὐθυμότερος ἐγενόμην ἐν ἀμεριμνίᾳ θεοῦ, ἔάνπερ διὰ τοῦ παθεῖν θεοῦ ἐπιτύχω, εἰς τὸ εὐρεθῆναί με ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει ὑμῶν μαθητὴν.

² πρέπει, Πολύκαρπε θεομακαριστότατε, συμβούλιον ἀγαγεῖν θεοπρεπέστατον καὶ χειροτονῆσαί τινα, ὃν ἀγαπητὸν λίαν ἔχετε καὶ ἄοκνον, ὃς δυνήσεται θεοδρόμος καλεῖσθαι τοῦτον καταξιῶσαι, ἵνα πορευθεῖς εἰς Συρίαν δοξάσῃ ὑμῶν τὴν ἄοκνον ἀγάπην εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ. ³ Χριστιανὸς ἑαυτοῦ ἐξουσίαν οὐκ ἔχει, ἀλλὰ θεῷ σχολάζει. τοῦτο τὸ ἔργον θεοῦ ἐστὶν καὶ ὑμῶν, ὅταν αὐτὸ ἀπαρτίσητε. πιστεύω γὰρ τῇ χάριτι, ὅτι ἔτοιμοί ἐστε εἰς εὐποιΐαν θεῷ ἀνήκουσαν. εἰδὼς ὑμῶν τὸ σύντονον τῆς ἀληθείας, δι' ὀλίγων ὑμᾶς γραμμάτων παρεκάλεσα.

IGN. POLYCARP 7

¹ Since the church in Antioch has peace through your prayers, as has been reported to me, I was myself the more encouraged in the freedom from care given by God, if I may reach God through suffering, that I may be found a disciple at the resurrection. ² You ought, Polycarp, most blessed of God, to summon a godly council and elect someone who is very dear to you and zealous, who can be called God's courier; appoint him to go to Syria to glorify your zealous love to the glory of God. ³ A Christian has no power over himself but gives his time to God. This is the work of God, and yours also, when you complete it. For, I believe in the grace of God that you are ready to do the good deeds that are proper for God. I exhort you by no more than these few lines; for, I recognise your fervour for the truth.

IGN. POLYCARP 7

¹ For διὰ τὴν προσευχὴν, here following *Codex Mediceus* (and Lake), the *Latin* text and the *Long Recension* (and Lightfoot) have διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς. For ἀναστάσει, here following *Codex Mediceus* and the *Latin* text, the *Long Recension* and the *Armenian* text (and Lightfoot) have αἰτήσει.

² Lightfoot lacks the comma after τινα and ends the verse with a full stop in place of the *ano teleia*.

³ Lightfoot lacks the comma after ἀληθείας.

Ιγν. Πολυκαρπον 8

¹ Ἐπεὶ πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις οὐκ ἠδυνήθην γράψαι διὰ τὸ ἐξαίφνης πλεῖν με ἀπὸ Τρωάδος εἰς Νεάπολιν, ὡς τὸ θέλημα προστάσσει, γράψεις ταῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἐκκλησίαις, ὡς θεοῦ γνώμην κεκτημένος, εἰς τὸ καὶ αὐτοὺς τὸ αὐτὸ ποιῆσαι, (οἱ μὲν δυνάμενοι πεζοὺς πέμψαι, οἱ δὲ ἐπιστολὰς διὰ τῶν ὑπό σου πεμπομένων, ἵνα δοξασθῆτε αἰωνίῳ ἔργῳ,) ὡς ἄξιος ὢν.
² ἀσπάζομαι πάντας ἐξ ὀνόματος καὶ τὴν τοῦ Ἐπιτρόπου σὺν ὄλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν τέκνων. ἀσπάζομαι Ἄτταλον τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου. ἀσπάζομαι τὸν μέλλοντα καταξιῶσθαι τοῦ εἰς Συρίαν πορεύεσθαι. ἔσται ἡ χάρις μετ' αὐτοῦ διὰ παντὸς καὶ τοῦ πέμποντος αὐτὸν Πολυκάρπου. ³ ἔρρωσθαι ὑμᾶς διὰ παντὸς ἐν θεῷ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ εὐχόμαι, ἐν ᾧ διαμείνητε ἐν ἐνότητι θεοῦ καὶ ἐπισκοπῇ. ἀσπάζομαι Ἄλκην, τὸ ποθητόν μοι ὄνομα. ἔρρωσθε ἐν κυρίῳ.

IGN. POLYCARP 8

¹ Since I could not write to all the churches because of my sudden sailing from Troas to Neapolis, as the will of God enjoins, you shall write as one with the mind of God to the churches ahead of me, that they shall treat me in the same way (let those who are able send messengers and the others send letters by those you send, that you may be glorified by a memorable deed), as is worthy of you. ² I greet all by name and the wife of Epitropus with her whole household and her children. I greet my beloved Attalus. I greet him who shall be appointed to go to Syria. Grace will be with him through all, and with Polycarp, who sends him. ³ I bid you farewell always in our God, Jesus Christ; may you remain in him in the unity and care of God. I greet Alce, a name very dear to me. Farewell in the Lord.

IGN. POLYCARP 8

- ¹ After the opening Ἐπεὶ, *Codex Mediceus* and the *Latin* text add οὖν; here, we follow the Long Recension and the *Armenian* text. The combination of singular and plural in the last sentence is very strange; the *Latin* text has all singular and the *Armenian* all plurals.
- ² Lightfoot starts a new paragraph with this verse and, accordingly, opens with an uppercase *alpha*. In place of 'Epitropus', Lake has 'the Procurator'.
- ³ Throughout his works, Lightfoot capitalises *Κυρίῳ* and its various derivative forms.