

# St. Ignatius of Antioch

## Letter to the to the Magnesians

*Translated by Cyril Richardson*

Every good wish in God the Father and in Jesus Christ from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,” to the church at Magnesia on the Maeander. In Christ Jesus, our Saviour, I greet your church which, by reason of its union with him, is blessed with the favor of God the Father.

**1** I was delighted to hear of your well-disciplined and godly love; and hence, impelled by faith in Jesus Christ, I decided to write to you. Privileged as I am to have this distinguished and godly name, I sing the praises of the churches, even while I am a prisoner. I want them to confess that Jesus Christ, our perpetual Life, united flesh with spirit. I want them, too, to unite their faith with love — there is nothing better than that. Above all, I want them to confess the union of Jesus with the Father. If, with him to support us, we put up with all the spite of the prince of this world and manage to escape, we shall get to God.

**2** Yes, I had the good fortune to see you, in the persons of Damas<sup>95</sup> your bishop (he’s a credit to God!), and of your worthy presbyters, Bassus and Apollonius, and of my fellow slave, the deacon Zotion. I am delighted with him, because he submits to the bishop as to God’s grace, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ.

**3** Now, it is not right to presume on the youthfulness of your bishop. You ought to respect him as fully as you respect the authority of God the Father. Your holy presbyters, I know, have not taken unfair advantage of his apparent youthfulness, but in their godly wisdom have deferred to him — nay, rather, not so much to him as to the Father of Jesus Christ, who is everybody’s bishop. For the honor, then, of him who loved us, we ought to obey without any dissembling, since the real issue is not that a man misleads a bishop whom he can see, but that he defrauds the One who is invisible. In such a case he must reckon, not with a human being, but with God who knows his secrets.

**4** We have not only to be called Christians, but to *be* Christians. It is the same thing as calling a man a bishop and then doing everything in disregard of him. Such people seem to me to be acting against their conscience, since they do not come to the valid and authorized services.

**5** Yes, everything is coming to an end, and we stand before this choice — death or life — and everyone will go “to his own place.” One might say similarly, there are two coinages, one God’s, the other the world’s. Each bears its own stamp — unbelievers that of this world; believers, who are spurred by love, the stamp of God the Father through Jesus Christ. And if we do not willingly die in union with his Passion, we do not have his life in us.

**6** I believed, then, that I saw your whole congregation in these people I have mentioned, and I loved you all. Hence I urge you to aim to do everything in godly agreement. Let the bishop preside

in God's place, and the presbyters take the place of the apostolic council, and let the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ who was with the Father from eternity and appeared at the end .

Taking, then, the same attitude as God, you should all respect one another. Let no one think of his neighbor in a carnal way; but always love one another in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Do not let there be anything to divide you, but be in 96accord with the bishop and your leaders. Thus you will be an example and a lesson of incorruptibility.

**7** As, then, the Lord did nothing without the Father (either on his own or by the apostles) because he was at one with him, so you must not do anything without the bishop and presbyters. Do not, moreover, try to convince yourselves that anything done on your own is commendable. Only what you do together is right. Hence you must have one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope, dominated by love and unsullied joy — that means you must have Jesus Christ. You cannot have anything better than that.

Run off — all of you — to one temple of God, as it were, to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father, while still remaining one with him, and returned to him.

**8** Do not be led astray by wrong views or by outmoded tales that count for nothing. For if we still go on observing Judaism, we admit we never received grace. The divine prophets themselves lived Christ Jesus' way. That is why they were persecuted, for they were inspired by his grace to convince unbelievers that God is one, and that he has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, who is his Word issuing from the silence and who won the complete approval of him who sent him.

**9** Those, then, who lived by ancient practices arrived at a new hope. They ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord's Day, on which our life as well as theirs shone forth, thanks to Him and his death, though some deny this. Through this mystery we got our faith, and because of it we stand our ground so as to become disciples of Jesus Christ, our sole teacher. How, then, can we live without him when even the prophets, who were his disciples by the Spirit, awaited him as their teacher? He, then, whom they were rightly expecting, raised them from the dead, when he came.

**10** We must not, then, be impervious to his kindness. Indeed, were he to act as we do, we should at once be done for. Hence, now we are his disciples, we must learn to live like Christians — to be sure, whoever bears any other name does not belong to God. Get rid, then, of the bad yeast — it has grown stale and 97sour — and be changed into new yeast, that is, into Jesus Christ. Be salted in him, so that none of you go bad, for your smell will give you away. It is monstrous to talk Jesus Christ and to live like a Jew. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity. People of every tongue have come to believe in it, and so been united together in God.

**11** I do not write in this way, my dear friends, because I have heard that any of you are like that. Rather do I, well aware of my humble position, want to caution you ahead, lest you fall a prey to stupid ideas, and to urge you to be thoroughly convinced of the birth, Passion, and resurrection, which occurred while Pontius Pilate was governor. Yes, all that was actually and assuredly done by Jesus Christ, our Hope. God forbid that any of you should lose it!

**12** I want to be glad about you ever so much, if, that is, I deserve to be. For though I am a prisoner, I cannot compare with one of you who are free. I realize that you are not conceited, for you have Jesus Christ within you. And more, I know you are self-conscious when I praise you, just as Scripture says, “The upright man is his own accuser.”

**13** Make a real effort, then, to stand firmly by the orders of the Lord and the apostles, so that “whatever you do, you may succeed” in body and soul, in faith and love, in Son, Father, and Spirit, from first to last, along with your most distinguished bishop, your presbytery (that neatly plaited spiritual wreath!), and your godly deacons. Defer to the bishop and to one another as Jesus Christ did to the Father in the days of his flesh, and as the apostles did to Christ, to the Father, and to the Spirit. In that way we shall achieve complete unity.

**14** I realize you are full of God. Hence I have counseled you but briefly. Remember me in your prayers, that I may get to God. Remember too the church in Syria — I do not deserve to be called a member of it. To be sure, I need your united and holy prayers and your love, so that the church in Syria may have the privilege of being refreshed by means of your church.

**15** The Ephesians greet you from Smyrna. I am writing to you from there. Like you, they came here for God’s glory and have revived me considerably, as has Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. The other churches also send their greetings to you in honor of Jesus Christ. Farewell — be at one with God, for you possess an unbreakable spirit, which is what Jesus Christ had.