Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians

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Table of Contents

1 The Philippians' Faith....2
2 The Virtue of Meekness....3
3 Paul's Epistle and His Faith....5
4 Godliness....6
5 Blameless Deacons and the Unmarried....7
6 The Duties of Presbyters....9
7 Gnostic Heretics, Fasting, and Prayer....10
8 Persevere in Hope and Patience....11
9 Examples of Patience....12
10 Gently Restore....13
11 An Example of Restoration ~ Valens....14
12 Fruit of the Spirit....15
13 Concerning the Epistles....16
14 Conclusion....17

1 The Philippians' Faith

Polycarp, and the presbyters, to the Church of God at Philippi: mercy and peace to you from God Almighty, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because you have followed the lifestyle of true love [as God has shown us]. You have accompanied those who were bound in chains, which are the fitting ornaments of saints, and are indeed the diadems of the true elect of God and our Lord. You still continue in that strong root of your faith, spoken of in the days of old [Philippians 1:5]. You bring forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for our sins, but whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the bands of Hades.

> In whom, though now you do not see Him, you believe, and believing, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.
> (1 Peter 1:8)

Many desire to enter into this joy, knowing that

> by grace you are saved, not of works,
> (Ephesians 2:8-9)

but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

2 The Virtue of Meekness

Therefore, girding up your loins, serve the Lord in fear and truth, as those who have forsaken the vain, empty talk, and error of the multitude, and

> believed in Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and gave Him glory,
> (1Peter 1:21)

and a throne at His right hand. All things in heaven and on earth are subject to Him and every spirit serves Him. He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead. His blood will God require of those who do not obey Him. But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise us up also, if we do His will, and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness,

> not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing,
> (1Peter 3:9)

or blow for blow, or cursing for cursing, but being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching:

> Judge not, that you will not be judged;
> (Matthew 7:1)

> forgive, and you shall be forgiven;
> (Matthew 6:12, 14; Luke 6:37)

> be merciful, that you may obtain mercy;
> (Luke 6:36)

> with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again; (Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:38)

and finally,

Polycarp to Philippi

> Blessed are the poor, and those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God. (Matthew 5:3, 10; Luke 6:20)

3 Paul’s Epistle and His Faith

These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor anyone else, could come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. When he was among you, he accurately and continually taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, will build you up in that faith which has been given to you.

This faith, preceded by love towards God, Christ, and our neighbor, and followed by hope,

> is the mother of us all. (Galatians 4:26)

Whoever inwardly possesses these graces, has fulfilled the command of righteousness, since

> he that has love is far from all sin.
> (Compare to 1 Peter 4:8)

4 Godliness

> But the love of money is the root of all evils. (1 Timothy 6:10)

Therefore, know that

> as we brought nothing into the world, so we can carry nothing out," (1 Timothy 6:7)

> let us arm ourselves with the armor of righteousness; (Ephesians 6:11)

First, let us teach ourselves to walk in the commandments of the Lord. Next, teach your wives to walk in the faith given to them, and in love and purity tenderly loving their own husbands in all truth and loving all others equally in all chastity; and to train up their children in the knowledge and fear of God. Teach the widows to be discreet in respect to the faith of the Lord, praying continually for all, being far from all slandering, evil-speaking, false-witnessing, love of money, and every kind of evil; knowing that they are the altar of God, that He clearly sees all things, and that nothing is hid from Him, neither reasonings, nor reflections, nor any of their heart's secrets.

5 Blameless Deacons and the Unmarried

Knowing, then, that

> God is not mocked, (Galatians 6:7)

we ought to walk worthy of His commandments and glory.

Deacons, in like manner, should be blameless before the face of His righteousness, as being the servants of God and Christ, and not of men. They must not be slanderers, double-tongued, or lovers of money, but temperate in all things, compassionate, industrious, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all. If we please Him in this present world, we shall receive also the future world, according as He has promised to us that He will raise us again from the dead. And that if we live worthily of Him,

> we shall also reign together with Him,
> (2 Timothy 2:12)

provided only we believe. [1]

Young men, in like manner, should also be blameless in all things, being especially careful to preserve purity, and keeping themselves in, as with a bridle, from every kind of evil. For it is well that they should be cut off from the lusts that are in the world, since

> every lust wars against the spirit; (1 Peter 2:11)

and

> neither fornicators, nor effeminate[2], nor abusers of themselves with mankind, shall inherit the kingdom of God, (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

[1] Compare rest of 2 Timothy 2:12 has “if we deny him, he also will deny us” with “provided we only believe.”
[2] Gender fluid

nor those who do things inconsistent and unbecoming.[3] Therefore, we must abstain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ.

The virgins also must walk in a blameless[4] and pure conscience.

[3] The Greek used for “becoming” here is “prepo” (G4241). It means to look moral in dress, actions, speech, and teaching; be virtuous, the opposite of indecent, or inelegant. The KJV uses the words: Excess of riot, unruly, disorderly, unseemly, and shame(fully) to describe not being “becoming.” Paul defines this in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 as basing our actions on another’s conscience. Polycarp quotes 2 Corinthians 8:21 in chapter 6, and gives it the same meaning.

[4] Live in such a way that you cannot be blamed for causing someone to fall.

6 The Duties of Presbyters

Presbyters must be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always

> providing for that which is becoming[5] in the sight of God and man; (2 Corinthians 8:21)

abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unjust judgment; keeping far off from all covetousness, not quickly accepting an evil report against anyone, not severe in judgment, knowing that we are all under a debt of sin. If we ask the Lord to forgive us, we ought to forgive ourselves also; for we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and

> we must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, and
> everyone must give an account of himself.
> (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

We must then serve Him in fear, and with all reverence, just as He Himself has commanded, as the apostles recorded in the Gospels.

We must study the prophets, who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord.

We must be zealous in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offence, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord, and draw away vain men into error.

[5] Same Greek work used in chapter 5 for “becoming.”

7 Gnostic Heretics, Fasting, and Prayer

> Whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ *is come* in the flesh,[6] is antichrist; (1 John 4:3)

and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross,[7] is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts by saying that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan. Therefore, forsake the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning. We must

> watch unto prayer, (1 Peter 4:7)

persevere in fasting, and to earnestly and humbly pray to the all-seeing God

> not to lead us into temptation,
> (Matthew 6:13; Matthew 26:41)

because, as the Lord has said:

> The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38)

[6] One Christ who incarnated, the opposite of a “christ consciousness.” Also, that He is coming back in the flesh.

[7] Jesus physically suffered and died on the cross, the opposite of the gnostic teaching that He only appeared to do so.

8 Persevere in Hope and Patience

We must continually persevere in our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ,

> who bore our sins in His own body on the tree,
> (1 Peter 2:24)

> who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth,
> (1 Peter 2:22)

but endured all things for us, that we might live in Him. We must then be imitators of His patience; and if we suffer for His name’s sake, we glorify Him. For He has given to us this example in Himself, and we have believed in Him.

9 Examples of Patience

Therefore, I exhort you all to obey the word of righteousness, and to be patient, as you have seen us do. Not only us but the blessed Ignatius, Zosimus, and Rufus, others among yourselves, Paul himself, and the rest of the apostles. Be assured that all these have not run the race in vain, but in faith and righteousness, are now in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they did not love this present world, but Him who died for us. And for our sakes, God raised Him from the dead.

10 Gently Restore

Therefore, stand fast in these things and follow the example of the Lord. Be firm and unchangeable in the faith, loving the brotherhood, and being attached to one another, joined together in the truth, exhibiting the meekness[8] of the Lord in your close fellowship with one another, and despising no one. When you can do good, do not wait, because

> alms delivers from death. (Tobit 4:10, 12:9)

All of you should be subject one to another,

> having your conduct blameless among the Gentiles,
> (1 Peter 2:12)

that you may receive praise for your good works, and the Lord may not be blasphemed through you. But woe to him by whom

> the name of the Lord is blasphemed! (Isaiah 52:5)

Teach the seriousness of this to everyone, and make sure to show it through your own conduct.

[8] Not judging, but Biblically exhort and rebuke, See Galatians 6:1

11 An Example of Restoration ~ Valens

I am greatly grieved for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, because he so little understood the place that was given him. Therefore, I exhort you to abstain from covetousness, be chaste, be truthful, and

> abstain from every form of evil.
> (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

For if a man cannot govern himself in such matters, how can he teach them to others? If a man does not keep himself from greed, he shall be defiled by idolatry, and be judged as a heathen. But who of us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord?

> Do we not know that the saints shall judge the world
> (1 Corinthians 6:2)

as Paul teaches? But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul labored, and who are mentioned at the beginning of his Epistle. For he boasts about you in all those churches which alone then knew the Lord, while we at Smyrna had not yet known Him. Therefore brethren, I am deeply grieved for Valens and his wife. May the Lord grant them true repentance! Please be patient regarding this matter, and

> do not count such as enemies, (2 Thessalonians 3:15)

but call them back as suffering and straying members, that you may save your whole body. This is the only way that will edify the entire church body.[9]

[9] If they are believers trapped in sin and do not repent and return, the church in Philippi suffers, and so does the entire church.

12 Fruit of the Spirit

For I trust that you are well-versed in the Sacred Scriptures, and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet granted.[10] It is declared then in these Scriptures,

> Be angry, and sin not, (Ephesians 4:26a)

and,

> Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.
> (Ephesians 4:26b)

Blessed is he who remembers this, which I believe to be the case with you. But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith, truth, in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity.[11] May He bestow on you the lot and portion of His saints, on us also, and on all who are under heaven, who shall believe in our Lord

> Jesus Christ, and in His Father, who raised Him from the dead. (Galatians 1:1)

Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings, rulers, princes, for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all, and that you may be perfect in Him.

[10] Being under persecution prevents you from venting your anger properly, you must take the persecution silently or someone may get killed.
[11] Compare to Galatians 5 (fruit of the Spirit) and 2 Peter 1 (confirming your election).

13 Concerning the Epistles

Both you[12] and Ignatius wrote to me, asking that if anyone traveled into Syria, he should bring your letters with him. I will attend to this request if I find a fitting opportunity, either personally, or through someone else acting on my behalf, that your desire may be fulfilled. The epistles that Ignatius wrote to us[13], and the rest of his epistles that we have, we will send to you, as you requested. They are attached to this epistle, and by them you will profit greatly; for they teach about faith, patience, and all the things that lead to edification in our Lord. If you have any more verified information about Ignatius, and those that were with him, please send it to us.[14]

[12] ? Who the pastor of Philippi was at this time is unknown.
[13] The epistles of Ignatius to Polycarp and to Smyrna.
[14] The desire to know more about Ignatius and what happened to him shows this was written after Ignatius' martyrdom, but not too far away from that date because Polycarp had a letter Ignatius had written to him.

14 Conclusion

These things I have written to you by Crescens,[15] whom up to the present time I have recommended unto you, and still do recommend. For he has acted blamelessly among us, and I believe also among you. Moreover, hold his sister in esteem when she comes to you. Be safe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with you all. Amen.

[15] This may or may not be the same Crescens of 1 Timothy 4:10.