

Polycarp to the Philippians

A Translation

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Preface

The writings of early Christianity known collectively as the “Apostolic Fathers” continue to fascinate me, and the text of Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* is no exception. This letter is steeped in the language of the New Testament, and many phrases echo the words of the New Testament text. It is a very interesting read.

As with my earlier translation of the *Didache*,¹ I have consulted existing translations (Lake, Lightfoot, Holmes, and Ehrman) and lexica (BDAG, Louw and Nida, LSJ, Spicq) along the way and they have been most helpful. Additionally, several notes on matters of translation, textual criticism and cross references to the New Testament have been added. Much like myself, this translation is a work in progress. I hope to revise it at some point, in particular with an eye to matters of punctuation and paragraphing.

It is my prayer that those who read this translation will find it useful, and will be able to get a glimpse into the thought and practice of those earliest days of the Christian church, and be encouraged by the steadiness and grace of our Lord.

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1 <http://www.supakoo.com/rick/ricoblog/2009/11/05/ANewTranslationOfTheDidache.aspx>

On the Latin Portions

Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* is preserved in Greek through §8. All available Greek sources likely trace back to a single exemplar, which is missing the text from the middle of §9.2 onward. Eusebius is to be thanked for the preservation of the balance of chapter 9 and also for chapter 13, except the final sentence which is only extant in Latin.² Thus two portions are only extant in Latin editions. These portions are §§10–12 and §§13.2b–14.

I have not yet had opportunity to study Latin, so I am not able to directly translate these portions. Instead, I have included the translation of these portions from Kirsopp Lake's edition of the Apostolic Fathers, making slight changes along the way. These changes are only intended to remove some of Lake's archaic language. Additionally, some comparison has been made between Lake's edition and that of Holmes and also of Ehrman; where it appeared to me that a change needed to be made, I made it.

On Translation Philosophy

Regarding translation philosophy, my hope is to be readable yet somewhat transparent to the underlying Greek text. Thus some places may be awkward to the English reader, yet this awkwardness hopefully points to phrase, clause and discourse structures in the original. I have used [square brackets] to indicate where English words are supplied to assist in the translation. Similarly, {curly braces} indicate either an idiom or where a series of Greek words was smoothed into something not immediately transparent. In all {curly brace} instances, the underlying “literal” text is provided in a footnote.

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² See Holmes 277 and Ehrman 1:329 for further details on the available manuscript witnesses.

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Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Holy Martyr, to the Philippians

Polycarp and the presbyters with him, to the church of God, the one temporarily residing in Philippi. Mercy to you and peace from God the all-powerful and Jesus Christ our Savior be multiplied.

§ 1

I rejoice with you greatly in our Lord Jesus Christ, having welcomed the replicas of true love and having sent on their way, as was incumbent upon you, those confined by chains fitting for saints which are the crowns of those truly chosen by God and our Lord. 2 And because of the secure root of our faith, being proclaimed from ancient times, {still continues}³ and bears fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured because of our sins to reach even death, whom God raised up having loosed the birth pains of Hades.⁴ 3 In whom, not having seen, you believe with joy inexpressible and glorious,⁵ which many long to experience, knowing that by grace you have been saved, not by works,⁶ but the will of God through Jesus Christ.

§ 2

Therefore {prepare yourselves}.⁷ Serve God in reverence and truth,⁸ leaving behind empty, fruitless talk and the deception of the crowd, believing in the one who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory⁹ and a throne at his right hand, to whom all things in heaven and earth are subject, whom every breathing thing worships, who is coming as judge of the living and dead,¹⁰ whose blood God will require from those who disobey him. 2 But the one who raised him from the dead also will raise us¹¹ if we do his will and follow in his

3 Literally “until now continues”

4 [XR] Ac 2.24

5 [XR] 1Pe 1.8

6 [XR] Eph 2.8–9

7 Literally, “gird up your loins”

8 [XR] 1Pe 1.18 (cf. Ps 2.11)

9 [XR] 1Pe 1.21

10 [XR] Ac 10.42

11 [XR] 2Co 4.14

commandments and love the things he loved—refraining from all unrighteousness, greediness, love of money, evil speech, [and] false witness, not paying back evil for evil or abuse for abuse¹² or blow for blow or curse for curse, ³ but remembering what the Lord said when he taught: Do not judge so that you may not be judged; forgive and then you will be forgiven; show mercy so that you will be shown mercy; with what measure you measure out it will be measured again to you;¹³ and that blessed [are] the poor and those being persecuted for the sake of righteousness; for theirs is the kingdom of God.¹⁴

§ 3

Brothers, I write these things to you concerning righteousness {not on my own initiative},¹⁵ but because you requested [it] of me. ² For neither I nor another like me is able to follow after the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was with you in the presence of the people at that time, he taught the word of truth accurately and reliably, who also being absent he wrote letters to you regarding which, if you examine [them], you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith given to you, ³ which is the mother of all of us,¹⁶ while hope follows after [and] the love which [is] for God and Christ and for the neighbor goes before. For if {anyone is in their company},¹⁷ he has fulfilled the commandment of righteousness, for he who has love is a long way from all sin.

§ 4

But the beginning of all difficulty [is] the love of money.¹⁸ ¹⁹ Knowing, therefore, that we have brought nothing into the world, and neither are we able to take anything out,²⁰ let us arm ourselves with the weapons of righteousness and let us teach ourselves first to follow in the commandment of the Lord. ² Then also [teach]²¹ your wives [to walk]²² in the faith given to them, and in love and in purity, feeling affection for their own husbands in all fidelity and loving all others equally in all chastity,²³ and to instruct their children with the instruction of the fear of God. ³ The widows, being sensible concerning the faith of the Lord, interceding unceasingly for everyone, being far removed from all slander, evil speech, false witness, love of money, and every kind of evil, knowing that they are an altar of God, and that each [sacrifice]²⁴ is examined for blemishes and nothing {escapes his notice},²⁵ neither reasonings nor thoughts nor any secrets of the heart.

12 [XR] 1Pe 3.9

13 [XR] Mt 7.1–2

14 [XR] Mt 5.10 (cf. Mt 5.3)

15 Literally, “not myself having permitted”

16 [XR] Ga 4.26

17 Literally “anyone these within may be”

18 [TR] On this phrase, note the translation of this phrase within BDAG’s entry for *χαλεπος*: “everything that is acrimonious begins with love of money.”

19 [XR] 1Ti 6.10

20 [XR] 1Ti 6.7

21 [TR] Here “teach” is supplied from the verb of the previous clause.

22 [TR] Here “to walk” is supplied based on the verbs in the previous clause, which are implied in this dependent adverbial clause.

23 [LX] See BDAG on *εγκρατεια* for the sense of “chastity” used here.

24 [TR] Here “sacrifice” is supplied based on the sacrifice/offering language of the present context.

25 Literally “escapes notice of him”

§ 5

Understanding, therefore, that God is not mocked,²⁶ we ought to walk in a manner worthy of his commandment and glory. 2 Likewise, deacons [must be]²⁷ blameless in the presence of his righteousness, as servants of God and Christ and not of people, not slanderers, not insincere, not lovers of money, self-controlled in all things, compassionate, careful, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all. If we please him in this present age, we will receive also that which is to come, just as he promised us, to raise us from the dead, and that if we conduct our lives in a manner worthy of him, we will also reign with him,²⁸ if indeed we have faith. 3 Likewise also, the younger men [must be]²⁹ blameless in all things; above all being concerned about purity and holding themselves in check from all evil. For [it is] good to abstain from sinful passions in the world because all sinful passion wages war against the spirit,³⁰ and neither the sexually immoral, nor the passive homosexual partner, nor the dominant homosexual partner will inherit the kingdom of God;³¹ nor those who engage in perversity. Therefore it is necessary to refrain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ. The virgins³² must conduct themselves with a blameless and pure conscience.

§ 6

And the presbyters [must] also [be]³³ compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, caring for all sick, neglecting neither widow or orphan or poor but always taking thought for the good before God and people,³⁴ refraining from all anger, partiality, unjust judgment, being far removed from all love of money, not quickly believing against anyone, not relentless in judgment, understanding that we are all debtors [in the matter of] sin. 2 Therefore if we ask the Lord to forgive us, we are obligated to forgive also, for we are before the eyes of the Lord and God, and we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and each must give an account of oneself.³⁵ 3 So then, let us serve him with fear and all reverence, just as he himself has commanded, as did the apostles who proclaimed the gospel to us, and the prophets who publicly proclaimed the coming of our Lord. [Let us be]³⁶ enthusiasts concerning the good, refraining from those who cause [others] to stumble and the false brothers and those bearing the name of the Lord in hypocrisy, who mislead foolish people.

§ 7

For everyone who does not confess [that] Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist,³⁷ and whoever does not confess the testimony of the cross s from the devil, and whoever twists the sayings of the Lord for one's own

26 [XR] Ga 6.7

27 [TR] The implied verb “must be” is supplied from the larger context.

28 [XR] 2Ti 2.12

29 [TR] The implied verb “must be” is supplied from the larger context.

30 [XR] 1Pe 2.11; cf. Ga 5.17

31 [XR] 1Co 6.9, 10

32 [LX] The widest sense of the word is that of “young woman” or “maiden”; however the context here indicates that “virgins” is more appropriate.

33 [TR] The implied verb “must be” is supplied from the larger context.

34 [XR] 2Co 8.21

35 [XR] Ro 14.10, 12

36 [TR] “Let us be” is supplied based on the larger context.

37 [XR] 1Jn 4.2–3

sinful passions, and says [that there is] neither resurrection or judgment, this one is the firstborn of Satan. 2 Therefore, leaving behind the idle speculation³⁸ of the crowd and their false teachings, let us turn back to the word which was delivered to us from the beginning, being self-controlled with regard to prayer³⁹ and being persistent in fasts, making petitions of the all-seeing God to lead us not into temptation,⁴⁰ just as the Lord said, “The spirit [is] indeed willing, but the flesh [is] weak.”⁴¹

§ 8

Therefore we should persevere unceasingly in our hope and down payment of our righteousness, which is Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree,⁴² who committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth,⁴³ but because of us, in order that we might live in him, endured all things. 2 Therefore let us be imitators of his endurance, and if we should suffer because of his name, we should glorify him. For this [is] the example he set for us in himself, and this we have believed.

§ 9

Therefore I urge all of you to obey the word of righteousness and {to practice endurance to the limit},⁴⁴ which you also saw {with your own eyes},⁴⁵ not only in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus,⁴⁶ but also in others {from your number},⁴⁷ and in Paul himself, and the other apostles. 2 Having confidence that {none of them ran in vain},^{48 49} but in faith and righteousness, and that they are with the Lord in the place {which they are due},⁵⁰ who they also suffered with. {For they did not love the present age},^{51 52} but the one who died {on our behalf}⁵³ and on account of us was raised up by God.

§ 10

[§§10–12 are only extant in Latin]

Stand fast therefore in these things and follow the example of the Lord, firm and unchangeable in faith,⁵⁴ loving

38 [LX] On “idle speculation”, see the BDAG entry for ματιοτης.

39 [XR] 1Pe 4.7

40 [XR] Mt 6.13

41 [XR] Mk 14.38; Mt 26.41

42 [LX] While the lexical value “cross” fits best the context due to the New Testament allusion, the translation “tree” best fits the specific context, again due to the implicit allusion to 1Pe 2.24.

43 [XR] 1Pe 2.22, 24

44 Literally “to practice all endurance”

45 Literally “with eyes”

46 [LX] This Rufus is likely not either Rufus mentioned in the New Testament (Mk 15.21; Ro 16.13).

47 Literally “the ones from you”

48 Literally “these all not in vain ran”

49 [XR] Php 2.16

50 Literally “are due they”

51 Literally “not for the present they loved age”

52 [XR] 2Ti 4.10

53 Literally “on behalf of us”

54 [XR] 1Co 15.58

the brotherhood,⁵⁵ cherishing one another, joined together in the truth, giving way to one another in the gentleness of the Lord, despising no one. 2 When you can do good do not defer it, for charity sets free from death. All of you be subject one to the other,⁵⁶ having your conversation blameless among the Gentiles, that you may receive praise for your good works⁵⁷ and the Lord may not be blasphemed in you. 3 But woe to him through whom the name of the Lord is blasphemed. Therefore teach self-control to all and show it forth in your own lives.

§ 11

I am deeply sorry for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, that he so little understands the place which was given to him. I advise, therefore, that you keep from love of money, and be pure and truthful. Keep yourselves from all evil. 2 For how may he who cannot attain self-control in these matters preach it to another?⁵⁸ If any man does not abstain from love of money he will be polluted by idolatry, and shall be judged as if he were among the Gentiles who know not the judgment of God.⁵⁹ Or do we “not know that the saints shall judge the world”⁶⁰ as Paul teaches? 3 But I have neither perceived nor heard any such thing among you, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who are praised in the beginning of his epistle. For concerning you he boasts in all the churches⁶¹ who then alone had known the Lord, for we had not yet known him. 4 Therefore, brothers, I am deeply sorry for him⁶² and for his wife, may the Lord grant them true repentance. Therefore you yourselves should also be moderate in this matter, and do not regard such people as enemies,⁶³ but call them back as fallible and straying members, that you may make whole the body of you all. For in doing this you edify yourselves.

§ 12

For I am confident that you are well versed in the Scriptures, and nothing is hid from you; but to me this is not granted. Only, as it is said in these Scriptures, “be angry but do not sin,”⁶⁴ and “do not let the sun go down on your anger.”⁶⁵ Blessed is the one who remembers this, and I believe that it is so with you. 2 Now may God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal Priest himself, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, build you up in faith and truth, and in all gentleness, and without wrath, and in patience, and in longsuffering, and endurance, and purity, and may he give you a share and place with his saints, and to us with you, and to all under heaven who shall believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead. 3 Pray for all the saints.⁶⁶ Pray also for the kings, and for magistrates, and princes, and for those who persecute you and hate you,⁶⁷

55 [XR] 1Pe 2.17

56 [XR] Eph 5.21

57 [XR] 1Pe 2.12

58 [XR] 1Ti 3.5

59 [XR] Jer 5.4

60 [XR] 1Co 6.2

61 [XR] 2Th 1.4

62 [TR] The pronoun “him” refers to Valens, not to Paul.

63 [XR] 2Th 3.15

64 [XR] Eph 4.26, quoting Ps 4.5

65 [XR] Eph 4.26

66 [XR] 1Ti 2.1

67 [XR] Mt 5.44

and for the enemies of the cross⁶⁸ that your fruit may be evident among all people,⁶⁹ that you may be perfected in him.

[§§10–12 are only extant in Latin]

§ 13

Both you and Ignatius have written me that if anyone should depart into Syria, he should also take along the letters from you, which I will do if I have suitable opportunity, either myself or the one whom I send to represent us and also {to represent you}.⁷⁰ 2 We have sent to you, just as you requested, the letters of Ignatius which were sent to us by him, and others, as many as we had {in our possession}.⁷¹ They are appended to this letter, from which you will be able to benefit greatly, for they contain faith and endurance and all edification which pertains⁷² to our Lord. Let us know anything further which you have heard about Ignatius himself and those who are with him.⁷³

§ 14

[§14 is only extant in Latin]

I have written this to you by Crescens, whom I commended to you when I was present, and now commend again. For he has behaved blamelessly among us, and I believe that he will do the same with you. His sister shall be commended to you when she comes to you. Farewell in the Lord Jesus Christ in grace, with all who are yours. Amen.

68 [XR] Php 3.18

69 [XR] 1Ti 4.15

70 Literally “on behalf of you”

71 Literally “with us”

72[LX] For this lexical value and gloss, see BDAG entry on ἀνήκω, sense 1.

73[TX] The entire last sentence of 13.2 is only extant in Latin editions.