

# The Early Church

AD 30-450

# Ignatius of Antioch



- Born between AD 30-35 and thought to have died somewhere around AD 107-110.
- Thought to have been born in Ephesus and a disciple of the Apostle John
- Appointed bishop of Antioch, an important city in the early church

- In 106/107, he was arrested by the Roman government and brought from Antioch to Rome to be executed
- He traveled with 10 Roman guards, whom he likened to 'savage leopards'
- While on his journey to Rome, he was able to meet with churches and leaders; he ended up writing 7 letters that have become influential in understanding early church history

# Ignatius – Trip to Rome

He was martyred in Rome



- Known route
- Conjectured route

Ignatius was arrested in Antioch where he was bishop

# The 7 Letters

- Ephesians
- Magnesians
- Trallians
- Romans
- Philadelphians
- Smyrneans
- Polycarp

## Other Important Christian Writings from this Era

- The *Didache*
- The Shepherd of Hermas
- Letter from Clement of Rome
- Letter from Polycarp
- Apologies and Writings from Justin Martyr

# 3 Major Themes

- The unity of the local church
- The holding fast to truth and rejection of heresies
- The ability to remain steadfast in the face of persecution, especially his own martyrdom

# The Unity of the Local Church

“[take] your pitch from God [so that] you may sing in unison with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, in order that he may both hear you and, on the basis of what you do well, acknowledge that you are members of his Son”

- Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians

# The Unity of the Local Church

One of the keys to preserving unity is consistent corporate worship.

“When you meet frequently, the powers of Satan are confounded, and in the face of your corporate faith his maleficence crumbles.”

- Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians

# The Unity of the Local Church

Another key to preserving unity is to submit to the leaders of the church.

- Bishop
- Presbyter
- Deacon

# Other Views of Early Church Leadership

- The NT seems to use the terms for bishop (*episkopos*) and elder/presbyter (*presbuteros*) interchangeably
- Polycarp wrote about the qualifications of presbyters and deacons
- Clement of Rome referenced bishops and deacons
- The *Didache* also mentions only bishops and deacons

# Holding Fast to Truth & Rejecting Heresies

For Ignatius and the other Church Fathers, the call to unity is not a call to embrace every group and every teaching.

# Rejecting Heresies

## Doceticism

- False teaching that denied the humanity of Jesus
- Taught that the sufferings of Christ were not genuine and denied the death of Christ
- In his letters, Ignatius stresses the truth of the incarnation and the reality of Jesus' sufferings and death

# Rejecting Heresies

## Ebionism

- A Jewish sect that emphasized the authority of the Hebrew Bible
- Believed that God adopted Jesus at his baptism
- Taught that Christians must obey the Mosaic Law
- "It is outrageous to utter the name of Jesus Christ and live in Judaism."

# Holding Fast to Truth

One of the keys to holding fast to sound doctrine was to submit to church leadership.

# Holding Fast to Truth

Early Christians quickly saw Scripture as the authority of the Church and used it to distinguish true doctrine from heresy.

- Paul's letters were seen as authoritative and inspired by God
- The four Gospels were circulated and seen as accurate accounts of Jesus' life
- By the end of the 2nd century, Christians had in practice a collection of New Testament Scriptures

# Persecution and Martyrdom

For Ignatius, his own sufferings and impending death were a way of testifying to the reality of Christ's sufferings and death.

“Earthly longings have been crucified and in me there is left no spark of desire for mundane things, but only a murmur of living water that whispers within me, ‘Come to the Father’.”

# An Unhealthy View of Martyrdom?

“‘What fills me with fear,’ he tells these politically influential believers at Rome, ‘is your own kindly feeling for me.’ It might be easy for them to intervene to get Ignatius released, but this will only make it more difficult for Ignatius ‘to get to God’. He thus urges the Roman Christians, ‘keep your lips sealed’. If they do, then they will enable Ignatius to become ‘a word of God’.” - Michael Haykin

# An Unhealthy View of Martyrdom?

“The only petition I would have you put forward on my behalf,’ he asks them, ‘is that I may be given sufficient inward and outward strength to be as resolute in will as in words.’ Again, near the end of the letter he pleads with them, ‘Intercede for me that I may have my wish.’”

- Michael Haykin

# An Unhealthy View of Martyrdom?

“It is the hope of this world’s prince to get hold of me and undermine my resolve, set as it is upon God. Pray let none of you lend him any assistance, but take my part instead, for it is the part of God. Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips, and the world in your heart; do not cherish thoughts of grudging me my fate. Even if I were to come and implore you in person, do not yield to my pleading; keep your compliance for this written entreaty instead.”

# A Healthy View of Remaining Faithful in Persecution

“In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be civilized; do not be eager to imitate them . . . [instead] let us be eager to be imitators of the Lord, to see who can be the more wronged, who the more cheated, who the more rejected, in order that no weed of the devil may be found among you.”

# A Healthy View of Remaining Faithful in Persecution

“Christianity is greatest [most like Jesus] when it is hated by the world.”

# 3 Major Themes

- The unity of the local church
- The holding fast to truth and rejection of heresies
- The ability to remain steadfast in the face of persecution, especially his own martyrdom

# Discussion Questions

- How important do you think submission to church leadership is? With so many examples of power being abused, do you think calls for submission to leadership are still wise?
- Do you think Christians in America have a healthy or unhealthy view of persecution? How could we grow in this area?

