

# Saint Clement of Rome

## Biographical Information:

- First Century Bishop of Rome
- Tertulian claims that Clement was ordained by Peter
- There is debate about whether he was the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Rome
- Details of his death and reign are uncertain. Apocryphal text suggests that he was martyred by Emperor Trajan around the year 100 by being tied to an anchor and tossed into the Black Sea
- Wrote an Epistle to Corinth which is believed to be the earliest written work from a church father that is not included in the New Testament
- Recognized as a saint by Lutherans, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglicans

## First Epistle of Clement:

### Context

The congregation at Corinth deposed several of their bishops without moral cause, causing conflict within their church.

### Content

1. Opens by commending the Corinthians on their virtuous behavior prior to their schism. This suggests that Paul's influence on the Corinthians was successful for decades.
2. Clement claims that the Corinthian's virtuous behavior has given way to envy. He uses Old Testament figures to exemplify the consequences and danger of letting envy take hold.

“You see, brethren, how envy and jealousy led to the murder of a brother (Cain and Abel). Through envy, also, our father Jacob fled from the face of Esau his brother. Envy made Joseph be persecuted unto death, and to come into bondage. Genesis xxxvii Envy compelled Moses to flee from the face of Pharaoh king of Egypt, when he heard these words from his fellow-countryman, Who made you a judge or a ruler over us? Will you kill me, as you killed the Egyptian yesterday? Exodus 2:14 On account of envy, Aaron and Miriam had to make their abode without the camp. Numbers 12:14-15 Envy brought down Dathan and Abiram alive to Hades, through the sedition which they excited against God's servant Moses. Numbers 16:33 Through envy, David not only underwent the hatred of foreigners, but was also persecuted by Saul king of Israel.”

3. He transitions into modern examples, suggesting that Peter and Paul “the most righteous pillars” were put to death because of others' envy and jealousy.
4. Clement urges the Corinthians to repent and restore the bishops to their rightful position

“These things, beloved, we write unto you, not merely to admonish you of your duty, but also to remind ourselves. For we are struggling on the same arena, and the same conflict is assigned to both of us. Wherefore let us give up vain and fruitless cares, and approach to the glorious and venerable rule of our holy calling. Let us attend to what is good, pleasing, and acceptable in the sight of Him who formed us. Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious that blood is to God which, having been shed for our salvation, has set the grace of repentance before the whole world. Let us turn to every age that has passed, and learn that, from generation to generation, the Lord has granted a place of repentance to all such as would be converted unto Him. Noah preached repentance, and as many as listened to him were saved. Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites; Jonah iii but they, repenting of their sins, propitiated God by prayer, and obtained salvation, although they were aliens [to the covenant] of God.”

5. Clement urges the Corinthians to proceed with humility, using Christ as the chief example and then referencing Elisha, Elijah, Ezekial, Abraham, Job, and David as other humble servants

6. Clement establishes God as the ultimate authority of peace and harmony in the universe:

“The heavens, revolving under His government, are subject to Him in peace. Day and night run the course appointed by Him, in no wise hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the companies of the stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their prescribed limits, and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to His will, brings forth food in abundance, at the proper seasons, for man and beast and all the living beings upon it, never hesitating, nor changing any of the ordinances which He has fixed. The unsearchable places of abysses, and the indescribable arrangements of the lower world, are restrained by the same laws. The vast unmeasurable sea, gathered together by His working into various basins, never passes beyond the bounds placed around it, but does as He has commanded. For He said, Thus far shall you come, and your waves shall be broken within you. Job 38:11 The ocean, impassable to man and the worlds beyond it, are regulated by the same enactments of the Lord. The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, peacefully give place to one another. The winds in their several quarters fulfil, at the proper time, their service without hindrance. The ever-flowing fountains, formed both for enjoyment and health, furnish without fail their breasts for the life of men. The very smallest of living beings meet together in peace and concord. All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony; while He does good to all, but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions

through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and majesty for ever and ever.  
Amen.”

7. Clement gives direction on how to best obey God and live according to his will/establishes total dominion:

“Let us reflect how near He is, and that none of the thoughts or reasonings in which we engage are hid from Him. It is right, therefore, that we should not leave the post which His will has assigned us. Let us rather offend those men who are foolish, and inconsiderate, and lifted up, and who glory in the pride of their speech, than [offend] God. Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; let us esteem those who have the rule over us; let us honour the aged among us; let us train up the young men in the fear of God; let us direct our wives to that which is good. Let them exhibit the lovely habit of purity [in all their conduct]; let them show forth the sincere disposition of meekness; let them make manifest the command which they have of their tongue, by their manner of speaking; let them display their love, not by preferring one to another, but by showing equal affection to all that piously fear God. Let your children be partakers of true Christian training; let them learn of how great avail humility is with God — how much the spirit of pure affection can prevail with Him — how excellent and great His fear is, and how it saves all those who walk in it with a pure mind. For He is a Searcher of the thoughts and desires [of the heart]: His breath is in us; and when He pleases, He will take it away.”

8. Clement suggests that we cling to what is good and avoid all evil. He also affirms notion of Sola Fide:

“Seeing, therefore, that we are the portion of the Holy One, let us do all those things which pertain to holiness, avoiding all evil-speaking, all abominable and impure embraces, together with all drunkenness, seeking after change, all abominable lusts, detestable adultery, and execrable pride. For God, [says the Scripture], resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Let us cleave, then, to those to whom grace has been given by God. Let us clothe ourselves with concord and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all whispering and evil-speaking, being justified by our works, and not our words. For [the Scripture] says, He that speaks much, shall also hear much in answer. And does he that is ready in speech deem himself righteous? Blessed is he that is born of woman, who lives but a short time: be not given to much speaking. Let our praise be in God, and not of ourselves; for God hates those that commend themselves. Let testimony to our good deeds be borne by others, as it was in the case of our righteous forefathers. Boldness, and arrogance, and audacity belong to those that are accursed of God; but moderation, humility, and meekness to such as are blessed by Him.”

“Whosoever will candidly consider each particular, will recognise the greatness of the gifts which were given by him. For from him have sprung the priests and all the Levites

who minister at the altar of God. From him also [was descended] our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh. Romans 9:5 From him [arose] kings, princes, and rulers of the race of Judah. Nor are his other tribes in small glory, inasmuch as God had promised, Your seed shall be as the stars of heaven. All these, therefore, were highly honoured, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but through the operation of His will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

9. Good works as evidence of justification, but not the means of justification:

“What shall we do, then, brethren? Shall we become slothful in well-doing, and cease from the practice of love? God forbid that any such course should be followed by us! But rather let us hasten with all energy and readiness of mind to perform every good work. For the Creator and Lord of all Himself rejoices in His works. For by His infinitely great power He established the heavens, and by His incomprehensible wisdom He adorned them. He also divided the earth from the water which surrounds it, and fixed it upon the immovable foundation of His own will. The animals also which are upon it He commanded by His own word into existence. So likewise, when He had formed the sea, and the living creatures which are in it, He enclosed them [within their proper bounds] by His own power. Above all, with His holy and undefiled hands He formed man, the most excellent [of His creatures], and truly great through the understanding given him — the express likeness of His own image. For thus says God: Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness. So God made man; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:26-27 Having thus finished all these things, He approved them, and blessed them, and said, Increase and multiply. Genesis 1:28 We see, then, how all righteous men have been adorned with good works, and how the Lord Himself, adorning Himself with His works, rejoiced. Having therefore such an example, let us without delay accede to His will, and let us work the work of righteousness with our whole strength.”

10. Christ as our Leader:

“Let us then, men and brethren, with all energy act the part of soldiers, in accordance with His holy commandments. Let us consider those who serve under our generals, with what order, obedience, and submissiveness they perform the things which are commanded them. All are not prefects, nor commanders of a thousand, nor of a hundred, nor of fifty, nor the like, but each one in his own rank performs the things commanded by the king and the generals. The great cannot subsist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture in all things, and thence arises mutual advantage. Let us take our body for an example. The head is nothing without the feet, and the feet are nothing without the head; yea, the very smallest members of our

body are necessary and useful to the whole body. But all work harmoniously together, and are under one common rule for the preservation of the whole body.”

#### 11. Preservation and order of Church bodies:

“These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behooves us to do all things in [their proper] order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times. He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things, being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable unto Him. Those, therefore, who present their offerings at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed; for inasmuch as they follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not. For his own peculiar services are assigned to the high priest, and their own proper place is prescribed to the priests, and their own special ministrations devolve on the Levites. The layman is bound by the laws that pertain to laymen.”

“The apostles have preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus says the Scripture in a certain place, I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.”

“Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ, in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties.

Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure [from this world]; for they have no fear lest any one deprive them of the place now appointed them. But we see that you have removed some men of excellent behaviour from the ministry, which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honour.”

12. Clement argues that their recent sin is worse than what Paul dealt with:

“Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you. But that inclination for one above another entailed less guilt upon you, inasmuch as your partialities were then shown towards apostles, already of high reputation, and towards a man whom they had approved. But now reflect who those are that have perverted you, and lessened the renown of your far-famed brotherly love. It is disgraceful, beloved, yea, highly disgraceful, and unworthy of your Christian profession, that such a thing should be heard of as that the most steadfast and ancient church of the Corinthians should, on account of one or two persons, engage in sedition against its presbyters. And this rumour has reached not only us, but those also who are unconnected with us; so that, through your infatuation, the name of the Lord is blasphemed, while danger is also brought upon yourselves.”

13. A call to prayer for those who have fallen into sin:

“Let us then also pray for those who have fallen into any sin, that meekness and humility may be given to them, so that they may submit, not unto us, but to the will of God. For in this way they shall secure a fruitful and perfect remembrance from us, with sympathy for them, both in our prayers to God, and our mention of them to the saints. Let us receive correction, beloved, on account of which no one should feel displeased. Those exhortations by which we admonish one another are both good [in themselves], and highly profitable, for they tend to unite us to the will of God.”

14. Submission to God being the only real solution:

“You therefore, who laid the foundation of this sedition, submit yourselves to the presbyters, and receive correction so as to repent, bending the knees of your hearts. Learn to be subject, laying aside the proud and arrogant self-confidence of your tongue. For it is better for you that you should occupy a humble but honourable place in the flock of Christ, than that, being highly exalted, you should be cast out from the hope of His people.”

“Let us, therefore, flee from the warning threats pronounced by Wisdom on the disobedient, and yield submission to His all-holy and glorious name, that we may stay our trust upon the most hallowed name of His majesty. Receive our counsel, and you

shall be without repentance. For, as God lives, and as the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost live — both the faith and hope of the elect, he who in lowliness of mind, with instant gentleness, and without repentance has observed the ordinances and appointments given by God— the same shall obtain a place and name in the number of those who are being saved through Jesus Christ, through whom is glory to Him for ever and ever. Amen.”