

CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

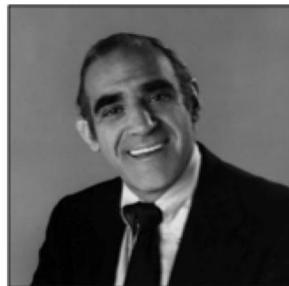
Chapter 2

The Earliest Extra-Biblical Christian Writings 1 Clement

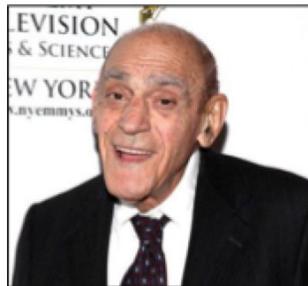
On the morning I was set to send this to the printer, I awakened earlier than planned. Those are nice mornings. They give me a chance to get more done before most of the world expects you to be awake.

I got up, had my quiet time, and then took a nice hot cup of mint tea, pulled out my computer, and began to catch up on the daily news. An article that caught my attention was entitled: “Celebrities you probably thought were dead (but aren't).”¹ My curiosity got the best of me, and I clicked on the article. It had photographs and brief information quips about 24 stars that no one hears about much anymore, but are still alive.

A number of them were “old” when I was a kid. I had seen Olivia de Havilland (1916-present) in the 1939 film *Gone With the Wind*, but I saw it in the 1970’s. Likewise, Doris Day (1924-present) received her Academy Award nomination for Best Actress the year before I was born, though I certainly knew of her growing up. The ones that really jolted me, however, were the ones from my teenage years. Abe Vigoda (1921-present) for his memorable roles in the *Godfather* and televisions *Taxi*, for example. Abe didn’t look *that* much different, though he had certainly aged.



Abe Vigoda 1974



Abe Vigoda c. 2015

¹ Houston Chronicle, January 9, 2015. <http://www.chron.com/entertainment/movies-tv/gallery/Oldest-living-screen-stars-83198.php>.

The intervening forty years on Abe can certainly be seen, but it is still easy to recognize the man.

The reason this stuck out to me is because of the following study on Clement of Rome. Clement was a Roman bishop who wrote on behalf of the Roman church to the church at Corinth around 95AD, some forty years after Paul's letters to the same Corinthian church. While we cannot know how many Corinthians received both Paul's and Clement's letters, we do get a good snapshot of the church, forty years later! Armed with Paul's letter and then with Clement's we get a great before and after photo of the Corinthians!

BACKGROUND

As discussed previously, a pivot point in the history of the church involved the death of the apostles. While the earliest days of the New Testament church believed the return of Jesus to be an "any day event," over time it became apparent that such might not be God's plan. As John wrote in the last produced of the gospels, there was never a promise that any apostle would live until the second coming. As the apostles passed, there were huge questions for the church:

1. Who is in charge?
2. How do all the churches stay united?
3. Who decides doctrine?
4. Who decides right and wrong?
5. What about the renegade churches?
6. What about the renegade teaching?

The answers to these questions are rooted in Scripture, but many of them are answered more fully through the life of the church, through church history. We see Paul appointing elders² in the churches he established (Acts 14:23). We also read of Paul teaching about the office and role of deacons³ in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

² The Greek for "elder" is *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος) from which we get "Presbyterian." The word in general Greek would refer to one who is older, however, in the synagogues and in churches, as well as in more formal Greek settings or organizations, it took on the special significance of one who had a leadership role over others in the group.

³ The Greek for "deacon" is *diakonos* (διάκονος) from which we get the word "deacon." In general Greek life, it referred to "one who gets something done at the behest of a superior or as an assistant to another. It could refer in this sense to a courier, or an agent, for example. In the New Testament church it referenced a role of those set aside for a "special ministerial service in a Christian community." "διάκονος," Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (U. of Chi. 1979), 2d Ed.

Paul also wrote to the Philippian church singling out the overseers⁴ and deacons (Phil. 1:1). We see that the offices of elder and overseer seem synonymous for Paul based on Acts 20 where Paul calls the Ephesian “elders” to himself, calling them also “overseers” (Acts 20:17, 28). In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul explained the qualifications for those filling the role of overseer.

As for instructions to the young congregations of the New Testament, we can read of Paul and others instructing those young churches through teaching, example, and letters. Many of our New Testament epistles are letters written by Paul giving clear teaching, edification, and instruction to such churches. A great example useful in our study on 1 Clement are the letters we call First and Second Corinthians. These were letters Paul wrote to address certain circumstances, problems, and needs for the church in Corinth.

We also can glean through the pages of the New Testament that others would teach from one church base, and then move to another, edifying and teaching the congregations. Priscilla and Aquila, for example, were based in Rome (Acts 18:2; Rom. 16:3), working with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:2) and teaching in Ephesus (Acts 18:26, where they helped another Jewish itinerant teacher named Apollos better understand “the way of God” (Acts 18:26).

Once the apostles were gone, however, how did the church continue to learn? Who were its teachers and what was their authority? Did each congregation stand on its own, or did they work together and find unity across geographical boundaries? These questions are answered easily by studying the earliest writings of the church outside of Scripture.

There are a number of ancient Christian letters and books that date back as far as some of the later New Testament books. These are not alternate scriptures. They are various kinds of writings that include training materials for new Christians, letters to churches addressing current problems and issues, news reports on what happened to certain leaders and others, argumentative defenses of the faith and orthodoxy, commentaries and sermons, and even (by 330AD) a book on church history!

From these writings, we glean a lot. We learn what the church was doing, its conflicts and problems, what the church considered Scripture, and more. We will

⁴ The Greek for “overseer” is *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος) from which we get “Episcopal.” In general Greek usage, it referred to “one who has a definite function or fixed office of guardianship and related activity within a group.” Within the church, it became an office of those who “served as *overseer* or *supervisor*, with special interest in guarding the apostolic tradition.” “ἐπίσκοπος,” Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (U. of Chi. 1979), 2d Ed.

study many of these in turn, but first, we will closely examine 1 Clement and the Didache (pronounced *di-da-kay*).⁵

These writings are particularly important because they reflect the larger problems and concerns of the church after the deaths of the apostles. These writings show the predominant needs of the church included a stronger moral, corporate, and devotional life. They also reflect the growing interaction of the leadership in the various churches.

1 CLEMENT

Background to 1 Clement

Most scholars date the writing of the letter we call First Clement⁶ within a few years of 95-96AD. This dating means that First Clement was written roughly the same time as the Revelation of John. Clement was the bishop over the house churches at Rome.⁷ Another early bishop of Lyon named Irenaeus (c.120-200AD), a prolific writer we will study later, cited Clement as “allotted the bishopric” in Rome.⁸ Irenaeus added,

This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles.⁹

⁵ A great many of these writings, including 1 Clement and *The Didache* are termed writings of the “Apostolic Fathers.” The term, coined in the late 1600’s, is used in different ways to refer to early Christian writers. Generally, it refers to the “fathers” of the church that were either personally familiar with the Apostles or at least taught consistently with the apostolic message.

⁶ We call this letter “First Clement” because there is a second early church letter called “Second Clement.” Most recognize that 2 Clement was written by someone else as much as 65 years later than 1 Clement.

⁷ At this stage in church history, the church met mostly in homes as opposed to “church buildings” like we think of today. Certainly, the churches may have met outside or at other facilities, but most church meetings were held in homes. Out of necessity, then, oversight issues were very different than they are today. The house churches could only “hold” so many people. The number of homes in use must have been great in certain areas like Rome.

⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, at 3:3.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Based upon this, along with a few other arguments, a set of scholars think it likely that the Clement who was the Roman bishop writing 1 Clement was also the Clement Paul referenced as a “fellow worker” in Philippians 4:3.¹⁰

The word Irenaeus used for “bishop” and “bishopric” is the root *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος), noted earlier and generally translated as “overseer.” It is the term Paul used to describe the role of the elders in the church at Ephesus in Acts 18.

Clement wrote the letter to the church at Corinth, the same church that Paul had written to just 40 some odd years earlier. Clement did not identify himself as the author, but history is clear that the letter is his.¹¹ Clement wrote at a time when the early church historians thought John was still alive in Asia Minor (Ephesus area). We know that in Clement’s area (Rome) as well as that of Corinth, there are still church leaders alive whom the Apostles appointed (1 Clement 42-44).

We do not know Clement’s age at the time he wrote. Similarly, we do not know whether Clement had personally known Paul or Peter, both of whom had died in Rome about 30 years before Clement wrote. While scholars differ on whether Clement knew Paul, all must concede that Paul heavily influenced Clement. Clement’s letter closely imitates the style, language, and message of Paul. In fact, in the 2nd century, Clement of Alexandria cites 1 Clement as Scripture. The Orthodox Church itself never accepted 1 Clement as inspirational on par with our scriptural writings. Hence, it is a useful read of what a godly man¹² and a key church leader had to say on some early church issues, but it is not in our Bibles.

How does 1 Clement fit in secular history?

As discussed earlier, Clement most likely wrote around 95-96AD, which was during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. Most scholars agree that Domitian was a persecutor of the church on a significant scale. It is clear that the letter reflects persecution in Rome on such a scale that the Roman church was

¹⁰ Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others write about Clement as the bishop of Rome. The early writings about Clement differ in detail and provide alternate stories about whether he personally knew any of the apostles. Some say he did; others differ.

¹¹ Some scholars believe that the letter is from the Roman leadership in a broader sense than just Clement, and that Clement was merely the one chosen to reduce the leadership’s thoughts to writing. This is a minority view.

¹² Early lists of the Roman church leaders, including Irenaeus, usually place Clement as the third bishop at Rome (the first bishops after the apostles were Linus and Cletus aka Anencletus). Augustine and Tertullian listed Clement as the second bishop. The bishops at Rome are not called “popes” until later.

delayed in responding to the situation in Corinth (1 Clem. 1:1; 7:1). We see other echoes and references to this time of persecution in John's Revelation (Rev. 2:10; 6:9, etc.).

Eusebius (c.325AD) noted that even secular historians recorded the martyrdoms under Domitian. Domitian did not cavalierly martyr all brought before him, however. About 70 years after Domitian (c.165AD), Hegesippus wrote of a non-martyrdom that occurred to the earthly great-nephews of Jesus under Domitian. As recorded by Eusebius, Hegesippus wrote,

Of the family of the Lord there were still living the grandchildren of Jude, who is said to have been the Lord's brother according to the flesh... They were brought to the Emperor Domitian... And he asked them...how much property they had.... And both of them answered that they had a piece of land which contained only thirty-nine acres, and from which they raised their taxes and supported themselves by their own labor... And when they were asked concerning Christ and his kingdom, of what sort it was and where and when it was to appear, they answered that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly and angelic one, which would appear at the end of the world, when he should come in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and to give unto every one according to his works. Upon hearing this, Domitian did not pass judgment against them, but, despising them as of no account, he let them go.¹³

While we do not know the full extent of Domitian's persecutions,¹⁴ much of early church history equates the severity of the persecutions as equal to or greater than Nero's, under whose authority Paul and Peter were martyred.

Why did Clement write?

1 Clement is what scholars term an "occasional letter." By that scholars are confirming that there was an occasion, or circumstances, events, or other reasons that prompted the letter. A fair question to ask is, "what was going on that caused Clement to write this letter?"

¹³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.20.

¹⁴ In this short time, Christianity had already penetrated all levels of society. Flavia Domitilla was a niece of Emperor Domitian. According to Jerome, Flavia's uncle exiled her to the island of Ponza because of her faith, where she died. One of Rome's most extensive catacombs ("Catacomb of Domitilla") started with a Christian cemetery on the land of Flavia Domitilla. Some of our best early Christian artwork is found in these tombs.

Irenaeus set out the circumstances as follows:

In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome dispatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition, which it had lately received from the apostles.¹⁵

While we cannot be 100% certain that Irenaeus had it right, his reporting makes a lot of sense in reading the letter.

Clement wrote because the Corinthian church was up to its old tricks (or old problems!). As early as 50AD, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, he addressed problems of splits and factions within the church. Clement wrote addressing a variant of the same beast rearing its head. Divisions were again front and center for the Corinthian church. This time, though, the divisions took on a new face. The problems were not so much one group "of Apollos," "of Peter," or "of Paul," as when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. When Clement wrote, the church leadership and structure itself was under attack. It is apparent from reading 1 Clement that some of the young men in the church seem to have revolted and taken over the church and its leadership (1 Clem. 3:3; 44:6; 47:6). We do not know exactly what occurred there. Much like studying the New Testament letters, we are listening to what seems like one side of a phone call and trying to figure out what the other side is saying.

The church in Rome did not simply send this letter to the Corinthian church, but also sent mediators to help the church and give reports back to Rome (1 Clem. 63:3; 65:1). This was a real and concerted effort to reach beyond the boundaries of Rome and bring godly direction into a wayward church. While we do not know how the church at Corinth responded, we can consider it likely that the response was good. The letter did not disappear, but was copied over and over, and held in such high regard that a few early Christians considered it Scripture.

What does Clement say?

There are a number of important passages in 1 Clement for students of the Bible as well as students of church history. We can consider the passages in four categories: those containing important factual material for church history, those containing personal instruction, those containing church instruction, and those

¹⁵ 3 Irenaeus 3:3.

giving theological insight into the faith. Of course this is an overview, not an exhaustive treatment.

- Factual Material

From a broad perspective, it is important to notice how much New Testament scripture Clement either quotes or references. Many passages show both the Roman church and the Corinthian church has a great awareness of and respected the authority of much of our New Testament today. This is especially notable since all of the New Testament books were not completed by this time (The Gospel of John and the Revelation were written within a few years of 1 Clement).

We can readily see Clement using the gospels of Matthew and Luke as well as multiple letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and Hebrews. Consider:

A Brief Selection of Clement’s Use of New Testament Passages

Gospels	“Show mercy , that you may receive mercy; forgive that you may be forgiven... With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” 1 Clem 13:2	“The merciful...shall receive mercy.” “If you forgive others... your heavenly Father will also forgive you” “With the measure you use it will be measured to you” Mt. 5:7; 6:14; 7:2; Lk 6:38
Acts	“More glad to give than to receive” 1 Clem 2:1	“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35
1 Corinthians	“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord” 1 Clem 13:1	“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17*
Philippians	“What did [Paul] first write you in the ‘beginning of the gospel’” 1 Clem 47:2	“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel...” Phil 4:15
Titus	“You...were ‘ready for every good work’” 1 Clem 2:7	“Remind them...to be ready for every good work” Tit. 3:5
1 Peter	“Love unites us with God; covers a multitude of sins” 1 Clem 49:5	“Keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” 1 Pet. 4:8

* Both Paul and Clement are quoting from Jeremiah 9:23-24

One fascinating passage of 1 Clement closely resembles Paul’s famous “love passage” from 1 Corinthians, but with a distinct set of words defining and explaining love. In modern parlance, we might equate it to a sequel of

a movie or the second verse of a song. It clearly echoes the first, but with another angle:

Love endures all things, is patient in all things. There is nothing coarse, nothing arrogant in love. Love knows nothing of schisms, love leads no rebellions, love does everything in perfect harmony. In love all the elect of God were made perfect; without love nothing is pleasing to God. In love the Master received us. Because of the love he had for us, Jesus Christ our Lord, in accordance with God's will, gave his blood for us, and his flesh for our flesh, and his life for our life (1 Clem. 49:5-6).

In multiple sections we see Clement's use and reliance on the Book of Hebrews. In 1 Clement 1:36, we have a passage fully dependent upon Hebrews 1 including the particular Psalms used in proclaiming Jesus. Consider the two sections, Hebrews first:

Heb. 1:3-13 [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." ...

And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

1 Clem. 36:2-5 [Jesus], being the radiance of his majesty, is as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent. For so it is written: "He makes his angels winds and his ministers flames of fire." But of his Son, the Master spoke thus: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the Gentiles for your

inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.”
And again he says to him: “Sit at my right hand, until I make
your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Clement also makes use of the listed “heroes of the faith” found in Hebrews 11. Clement takes the heroes and selects those that best fit his purpose (Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Rahab) setting out their actions that should serve as an example to the Corinthians (1 Clem. 9-12).

A fair deduction from Clement’s usage of the Gospels, Acts, the writings of Paul, and the book of Hebrews is that the post-apostolic church found authority and answers (a measuring rule for the church) in the writings of the Apostles and others carrying apostolic imprimatur (Luke, Hebrews, Mark). Once the Apostles were gone, it makes sense that the church would try to gather their writings and teachings into a coherent form that could be shared by the many congregations and believers around the known world.

Not surprisingly, 1 Clement shows a church extremely well versed in Old Testament books as well. Over and over Clement quotes from the Old Testament, including, at one point, twelve straight verses out of Isaiah 53, a core Messianic prophecy (*Cf.*, Isa. 53:1-12 and 1 Clem. 16:3-14). Clement also continually uses Old testament stories as examples for how the Corinthians should behave, including Cain and Abel, Joseph, Moses and Pharaoh, Aaron and Miriam, Dathan and Abiram, Saul and David in chapter four alone. Later, Clement uses Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Job, in chapter 17. In chapter 31, Clement uses Jacob and Laban, the twelve tribes of Israel singling out the Levites as priests, and more.

It is not surprising to see that Clement considered and taught that the Scriptures were inspired. We read that the Holy Spirit gave the Scriptures (45:2). The apostles were authoritative because “they received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus, in turn “was sent forth from God,” establishing in Clement’s mind a clear link between the teaching of the apostles and God (1 Clem. 42:1).

There is more factual material of note in Clement than the usage of Scripture. 1 Clement has the earliest recitation of the death of Peter and Paul in Rome under the reign of Nero (5:4-7). This same passage confirms that Paul finally made it to Spain in his missionary efforts, as he planned (Romans 15:28):

Peter endured not one or two, but numerous labors and when
he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of

glory due to him. Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom.

Some of the interesting “factual” material is actually non-factual! By that, we mean there are passages in Clement that by today’s standards are wrong. Clement wrote in chapter 25 about something quite bizarre. Clement evidently believed in the story of the Phoenix, which we know to be mythical.

Let us consider that wonderful sign [of the resurrection] which takes place in...Arabia. There is a certain bird which is called a phoenix. This is the only one of its kind, and lives five hundred years. And when the time of its death draws near, it builds itself a nest of frankincense, and myrrh, and other spices, into which...it enters and dies. But as the flesh decays a certain kind of worm is produced, which, being nourished by the juices of the dead bird, brings forth feathers. Then, when it has acquired strength, it takes up that nest in which are the bones of its parent, and bearing these it passes from the land of Arabia into Egypt... And, in open day, flying in the sight of all men, it places them on the altar of the sun, and having done this, hastens back to its former abode. The priests then inspect the registers of the dates, and find that it has returned exactly as the five hundredth year was completed.¹⁶

Clement then questioned why it should seem remarkable that God would resurrect Christians (“those who have piously served him in the assurance engendered by honest faith”) when he bothers to resurrect a bird!¹⁷

¹⁶ Some might equate this to teachers and preachers today who tell stories taken from the Internet without ever verifying them!

¹⁷ In the process, Clement wrongly references Psalm 92:12 as supporting his views. Psalm 92:12 reads, “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.” In Greek, the word “*phoinix*” (φοῖνιξ) can mean either a “palm tree” or a “phoenix” bird. The Hebrew of Psalm 92 makes clear that the writer is referencing a palm tree, but Clement clearly was working from a Greek Old Testament and misunderstood the word as the Phoenix bird.

- Personal Instruction

It is interesting to see how 1 Clement frames the problems in the Corinthian church. The letter begins by reciting the great piety and accomplishments of the church. The Corinthians had a reputation for a “most excellent and steadfast faith” with “magnanimous Christian piety,” and “magnificent hospitality.” They “lived in accordance with the laws of God,” submitting themselves to their leaders, “and giving honor to the older men” as was due. Clement added,

Moreover, you were all humble and free from arrogance, submitting rather than demanding submission, more glad to give than to receive, and content with the provisions which God supplies... Thus a profound and rich peace was given to all, together with an insatiable desire to do good, and an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit (1 Clem. 1:2-3:2).

But 1 Clement turns a very sharp corner, contrasting the Corinthians of history with the Corinthians of the moment. The passage is also very illustrative of Clement’s usage of the Old Testament, lacing quotations into the letter.

All glory and growth were given to you, and then that which is written was fulfilled: “My beloved ate and drank and was enlarged and grew fat and kicked” [Dt. 32:15]. From this came jealousy and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and anarchy, war and captivity. So men were stirred up: “Those without honor against the honored,” those of no repute against the highly reputed, the foolish against the wise, “the young against the elders” [Isa. 3:5]. For this reason “righteousness” and peace “stand at a distance” [Isa. 59:14], while each one has abandoned the fear of God and become nearly blind with respect to faith in Him, neither walking according to the laws of His commandments nor living according with his duty toward Christ (1 Clem. 3:1-4).

In light of the Corinthian situation, it is not surprising to see that Clement stressed God’s desire for repentance (1 Clem. 7–8). He wrote that they were to follow this repentance with obedience (1 Clem. 10-12). In 15:1, Clement urged the church to:

Unite with those who devoutly practice peace, not with those who hypocritically wish for peace.

It is in this sense that Clement went through Isaiah 53 in great detail emphasizing the Christian's need for humility.

1 Clement not only wrote of humility, but modeled it as well. Nowhere in the letter do we read of Clement individually or of the Roman church self-aggrandizing. Clement is not even mentioned by name. Instead Clement pointed out that the blunt and somewhat harsh indictment of the Corinthians' failures was written not simply to "admonish" the Corinthians, but also to "remind" Clement and the Roman church.

For we are in the same arena, and the same contest awaits us. Thus let us abandon empty and futile thoughts, and let us conform to the glorious and holy rule of our tradition; indeed let us note what is good and pleasing and what is acceptable in the sight of him who made us. Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is to his Father (1 Clem. 7:1-3).

Clement also offered specific instructions to women and children in chapter 21. He wanted women to be guided "toward that which is good" with "a sincere desire to be gentle." Children were to learn how "strong" (meaning essential or important) humility is before God and what "pure love is able to accomplish."

As we think of this wise man so clearly influenced by Paul, who ministered in a church in transition, grappling with issues of a delayed second coming, a second generation of leadership, and a vacuum of authority, we find a passage of great trust and faith. Reminiscent of Paul ("the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it!" 1 Thess. 5:24), Clement writes that God:

Will do all things when he wills, and as he wills, and none of these things decreed by him will fail. (27:5)

These are strong words of faith by someone in the midst of great persecution. The Roman church was suffering "sudden and repeated misfortunes and reverses" (1 Clem. 1:1). Certainly history, as well as Scripture, has born out the truth of Clement's confidence.

Clement also posed to the Corinthians a question echoing Paul from Romans 6:1.¹⁸ Clement asked, “What, then, are we to do, brethren? Shall we rest from doing good?...May the Master never permit that this should happen!” (33:1)

Clement, so well versed in scripture himself, urged the Corinthians to read the Old Testament as a source to teach the “ways of blessings” (31:1). This echoes Paul’s messages in Romans 15:4 (“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us”) and I Corinthians 10:11 (“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us”).

- Church Instruction

Clement used a number of approaches to get the church to respond to his plea for the restoration of the bishops and the return to a united church. We read of Clement’s gentle instruction in holiness as a basis for the church’s diligence in following those leaders chosen through the normal progression of the church, rather than the younger usurpers.

Let us therefore be humble, brothers, laying aside all arrogance and conceit and foolishness and anger, and let us do what is written... Most of all, let us remember the words of the Lord Jesus, which he spoke as he taught gentleness and patience... Therefore it is right and holy, brothers, that we should be obedient to God rather than follow those who in arrogance and unruliness have set themselves up as leaders in abominable jealousy (1 Clem. 13:1-14:1)

Even in spite of Clement’s clear abhorrence of the actions of the usurpers, while urging the church not to follow them, he still wants the church to treat them with love and compassion.

Let us be kind to them, in accordance with the compassion and tenderness of him who made us (1 Clem. 14:3).

For Clement, the offices of bishop and deacon were not simply conveniences; they were deliberate choices set up for the church in perpetuity.

¹⁸ Rom. 6:1, “What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so grace may increase? By no means!”

Our apostles likewise knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife over the bishop's office. For this reason, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the officials mentioned earlier [bishops and deacons] and afterwards they gave the offices a permanent character; that is, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry...For it will be no small sin for us, if we depose from the bishop's office those who have offered the gifts blamelessly and in holiness (1 Clem. 44:1-4).

Clement uses a brilliant montage of Old Testament examples to support his point that while the believer can expect suffering, the suffering is *not to come from the hands of other believers!*

Was Daniel cast into the lions' den by those who feared God? Or were Ananias, Azarias, and Mishael [aka Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] shut up in the fiery furnace by those devoted to the magnificent and glorious worship of the Most High? Who, then, were the people who did these things? Abominable men, full of all wickedness, who were stirred up to such a pitch of wrath that they tortured cruelly those who served God with a holy and blameless resolve (1 Clem. 45:7).

No doubt this passage shook up the church. The church was to support, love and encourage each other, not let jealousy and selfish ambition dictate actions that damaged and hurt others.

Clement also harkened back to Paul's earlier missive to the Corinthians concerning their errors in dividing the church, but in a slightly surprising way. Paul had chided the church for divisions along the lines of those who followed "Peter," or "Apollos," or "Paul."

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas ["Peter"]," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Clement wants the church to understand their current divisions are sins that are much more disturbing than four decades earlier. At least the divisions in Paul's day were following apostles!

Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to you in the beginning of the gospel? Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit about himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had split into factions. Yet that splitting into factions brought less sin upon you, for you were partisans of highly reputed apostles [Paul and Peter] and of a man approved by them [Apollos]. In contrast now think about those who have perverted you and diminished the respect due your renowned love for the brotherhood. It is disgraceful, dear friends, yes, utterly disgraceful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ, that it should be reported that the well-established and ancient church of the Corinthians, because of one or two persons, is rebelling against its elders (1 Clem. 47:1-6).

This jolting pronouncement leaves those in Corinth little place to hide, failing an outright rebellion against the church at large or repentance.

- Theological Insight

Clement had a good grasp of the role of faith and works. Modeling Paul's teaching in Romans,¹⁹ Clement explained our salvation comes not from "ourselves" or "our wisdom" or "any works we perform in holiness of heart," but "through the faith" which was God's sanctifying means "from the beginning of time" (1 Clem. 32:4).

Clement understood that salvation was rooted firmly in the blood of Jesus. Jesus' blood offered the opportunity to turn to Jesus in repentance to all of humanity.

The blood of Christ...being poured out for our salvation, it won for the whole world the grace of repentance (1 Clem. 7:4).

¹⁹ Actually, we see Paul make this very same point in most of his writings! (See Eph. 2:8-10, etc.)

Clement clearly saw value in the role of prayer for the church. It is reflected in the devoted prayer at the end of the letter as well as in the introductory passages.²⁰ For several chapters at the end of the letter, Clement prays in first person plural directly to God in a passage laden with theological awareness.

The “name” of God is seen as “the primal source of all creation” (1 Clem. 59:3). God is creator and God’s nature is reflected in nature itself. Through his works, God has “revealed the everlasting structure of the world” (1 Clem. 60:1). This is a structure today we call the “laws of nature,” but Clement termed them, “the ordinances of the Master” (1 Clem. 20:8). As such, by God’s ordinances, the seasons are orderly, the winds behave as winds, water fulfills the role of water, and all things of nature, from the smallest to the largest, act in accordance to the laws and principles God has set out (1 Clem. 20:6-11). As such, they all reflect the glory of God the Creator (1 Clem. 20:12).

God “alone is Highest among the high, and remains Holy among the holy.” He takes direct action and interest in the world of people. “You humble the pride of the proud; you destroy the plans of the nations; you exalt the humble and humble the exalted” (1 Clem. 59:3).”

God not only comes to the assistance of people, but has chosen those who have answered the call of Christ, coming readily to their aid.

You alone are the Benefactor of spirits and the God of all flesh, who looks into the depths, who scans the works of man; the Helper of those who are in peril, the Savior of those in despair; the Creator and Guardian of every spirit, who multiplies the nations upon the earth, and from among all of them have chosen those who love you through Jesus Christ, your beloved Servant (1 Clem. 59:3).

²⁰ Clement begins “...to those who are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” While this is not a prayer, Clement’s choice of words echoes the language of the Lord’s Prayer. In the Greek of the Lord’s Prayer, are the two early lines, “Our Father in heaven, *hallowed* be your name” and “your *will* be done.” The italicized words in Greek are the same words used by Clement in calling the Corinthians “sanctified” (“hallowed”) by God’s “will.” For a church that likely recited the Lord’s Prayer multiple times each day, (something we will discern from the upcoming study of *The Didache*), it is significant that Clement saw the church as an expression of the holiness of God’s name and the doing of God’s will on earth.

Accordingly, Clement readily calls upon God to be their “Helper and Protector.”

God is “faithful throughout all generations, righteous in your judgments,” and yet he readily forgives sins and injustices in his mercy and compassion (1 Clem 60:1). This is done through the work of Jesus Christ who is “high priest and guardian of our souls” (1 Clem. 61:3).²¹ Jesus’ blood was “poured out for our salvation” (1 Clem. 7:4). Jesus, whom Clement terms, “the majestic scepter of God” (1 Clem. 16:2), bore our sins and suffered pain for our sake (1 Clem. 16:4).

Clement traced his faith back to the apostles who were “fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Clem. 42:3).

Clement understood the role of the Holy Spirit as providing “firm assurance” inspiring the preaching and mission work of the apostles (1 Clem. 42:3). It was the Holy Spirit that gave the Scriptures (1 Clem. 45:2). Paul’s writings were “in the Spirit” (1 Clem. 47:3).

CONCLUSION

Did it work? What happened to the Corinthians? We have writings from 70 years later that indicate the Corinthians heeded the counsel of Clement. The insurrection ended and the church was still reading his letter!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Mt. 5:9).

Jesus did not bless the peace talkers; he blessed the peacemakers. The Corinthians were suffering from believers who had lost sight of this important injunction of Jesus. Clement and the leadership at Rome had not, however, and they went to great lengths to write a thorough and carefully constructed letter, going even further and sending church members to help bring peace to a congregation racked with dissension. I want to be a peacemaker in each circle of influence God gives me.

²¹ Elsewhere, Clement refers to Jesus as the “High Priest of our offerings, the Guardian and Helper of our weakness” (1 Clem. 36:1)

2. *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you”* (Heb. 13:17).

This admonition is tough in 21st century America. We live in a land of fierce independence and self-reliance. Yet this is a Scriptural instruction. We are to honor and walk under the leadership God has in place in his church, as that leadership acknowledges and honors God in leading.

3. *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Rarely will you read anything so thoroughly laced with Scriptural quotations, references, and paraphrases as 1 Clement. The wisdom of the author who produced the letter was clearly a wisdom borne from years of study in the Scriptures. Most people today, if stripped of the Internet and modern concordances, would be hard pressed to use so much Scripture in a letter like that. We should be inspired and resolve to read and commit to memory more Scripture, which brings us to this week’s homework!

HOME WORK

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. Last week we memorized 1 John 1:1-2. This week we have 1 John 1:3-4. We provided all four verses below for your help!

1John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.