



CLEMENT OF ROME c.100

This Clement could well have been the person mentioned in Philippians 4:3, a convert and disciple of Peter and Paul. After Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome, Clement became a bishop of the church there. Tradition says that he too was martyred about 100 A.D. by being cast into the sea tied to an anchor.

Not much detail is known about Clement of Rome, but some of his writings provide valuable insight into the early church. His letter to the church at Corinth may be the earliest document we have outside the New Testament. Remember how Paul had to write letters to the church at Corinth to deal with terrible problems tearing at the young church in that notoriously carnal city? Discord in Corinth had apparently flared up when a group of younger church members removed some of the older leaders; factions and petty arguments had developed around the two groups. Clement was writing to deal with the squabbles.

His letter is permeated with Scriptural references (at least 150 quotes from both the Old and New Testaments), and he skillfully wove the Scriptural quotes together to encourage the Corinthians to return to their holy calling. Clement warned that strife within the church is caused by envy and Scriptures show envy caused Cain to slay Abel, Joseph's brothers to sell him into bondage, Saul to pursue David. "Envy," he wrote, "has alienated wives from their husbands . . . has overthrown great cities and rooted up mighty nations." But the Scriptures also show that in every age the Lord will grant repentance to those who turn to him.

Clement reasoned that since none of our thoughts are hidden from God, we should seek to obey Him rather than follow the human leaders of any faction. Because we hope in the resurrection, we should live lives of purity and righteousness. For the Christian there is no reason for selfishness or self-promotion; Christians should work together in all harmony and peace. We can easily tend to idealize the early church and think that their fellowship was pure and untroubled. Clement reminds us they struggled with the same temptations we do. In fact his letter suggests that the deaths of the apostles Peter and Paul were probably brought about due to envy and strife among Christians. The historian Tacitus commented that there were occasions when some Christians were arrested based on information supplied by other Christians.

Clement's letter to the Corinthians continued to be read in the Corinthian church as a part of the liturgy for many years. The letter was popular among other churches throughout the ancient Roman world as well. Written by a man who had known Peter and Paul, who had a pastor's heart for all Christians, it was a great source of strength and guidance for the early churches.

The prayer at the conclusion of Clement's letter easily spans the centuries and becomes a prayer for Christians today: May God, who seeth all things, and who is the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh – who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a peculiar people – grant to every soul that calleth upon His glorious and holy Name, faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity, and sobriety, to the well-pleasing of His Name, through our High Priest and Protector, Jesus Christ, by whom be to Him glory, and majesty, and power, and honor, both now and forevermore. Amen.