

The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians

Excerpt 1^{*}

Introduction, Praise, the Problem of Envy, & the Call to Repentance

The Church of God that sojourns at Rome.

To the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied.

Owing, dear brothers, to the sudden and successive calamitous events that have happened to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points regarding which you consulted us — and especially to that shameful and detestable sedition, utterly abhorrent to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-confident persons have kindled to such a pitch of frenzy that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be universally loved, is greatly blasphemed. For who ever dwelt even for a short time among you and did not prove your all-virtuous faith? Who did not admire the sobriety and moderation of your godliness in Christ? Who did not proclaim the magnificence of your habitual hospitality? And who did not rejoice over your perfect and well-grounded knowledge? For you did all things without respect of persons and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who had the rule over you and giving all fitting honor to the elders among you. You enjoined young men to be of a sober and serious mind; you instructed your wives to do all things with a blameless, becoming, and pure conscience, loving their husbands as in duty bound; and you taught them that, living in the rule of obedience, they should manage their

household affairs becomingly and be in every respect marked by discretion.

Moreover, you were all distinguished by humility and were in no respect puffed up with pride but yielded obedience rather than extorted it and were more willing to give than to receive. Content with the provision that God had made for you and carefully attending to His words, you embraced in your bowels His doctrine, and His sufferings were before your eyes. Thus, a profound and abundant peace was given to you all, and you had an insatiable desire for doing good, while a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all. Full of holy designs, you did, with true earnestness of mind and a godly confidence, stretch forth your hands to God Almighty, beseeching Him to be merciful unto you, if you had been guilty of any involuntary transgression. Day and night, you were anxious for the whole brotherhood, that the number of God's elect might be saved with mercy and a good conscience. You were sincere and uncorrupted and forgetful of injuries between one another. Every kind of faction and schism was abominable in your sight. You mourned over the transgressions of your neighbors; their deficiencies you deemed your own. You never grudged any act of kindness, being "ready to every good work."¹ Adorned by a thoroughly virtuous and religious life, you did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and ordinances of the Lord were written upon the tablets of your hearts.²

Every kind of honor and enlargement was bestowed upon you, and then was fulfilled what is written, "My beloved did eat and drink and

^{*}The entire letter can be read here:
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ii.ii.html>

¹ Titus 3:1

² Proverbs 7:3

was enlarged and became fat and kicked.”³ Hence flowed emulation and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and disorder, war and captivity. So the worthless rose up against the honored, those of no reputation against such as were renowned, the foolish against the wise, and the young against those advanced in years. For this reason, righteousness and peace are now far departed from you, inasmuch as everyone who abandons the fear of God and is become blind in His faith neither walks in the ordinances of His appointment nor acts a part becoming a Christ⁴ but walks after his own wicked lusts, resuming the practice of an unrighteous and ungodly envy, by which death itself entered into the world.⁵

For thus it is written: “And it came to pass after certain days that Cain brought of the fruits of the earth a sacrifice unto God. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his sheep and of the fat thereof. And God had respect to Abel and to his offerings, but Cain and his sacrifices He did not regard. And Cain was deeply grieved, and his countenance fell. And God said to Cain, ‘Why are you grieved? and why is your countenance fallen? If you offer rightly but do not divide rightly have you not sinned? Be at peace; your offering returns to you, and you shall again possess it.’ And Cain said to Abel his brother, ‘Let us go into the field.’ And it came to pass, while they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.”⁶ You see, brothers, how envy and jealousy led to the murder of a brother. 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. 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?”⁷ Because of envy, Aaron and Miriam had to make their

abode outside the camp.⁸ Envy brought down Dathan and Abiram alive to Hades, through the sedition that they excited against God’s servant Moses.⁹ Through envy, David not only underwent the hatred of foreigners but also was persecuted by Saul king of Israel.

But not to dwell upon ancient examples, let us come to the most recent of those who have been spiritual athletes. Let us take the noble examples furnished in our own generation. Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars [of the Church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the good apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, 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. Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity,¹⁰ compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the good reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world and come to the extreme limit of the west,¹¹ and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.¹² Thus was he removed from the world and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience.

To these men who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of the elect, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example. Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircae, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, have reached to the steadfast course of faith, and though weak in body, received a noble reward. Envy has alienated wives from their

³ Deuteronomy 32:15

⁴ that is, “a Christian”

⁵ See Wisdom 2:24

⁶ Genesis 4:3-8

⁷ Exodus 2:14

⁸ Numbers 12:14-15 (In the passage itself, only Miriam is said to have been put outside the camp.)

⁹ Numbers 16:33

¹⁰ Seven imprisonments of Paul are not recorded in the New Testament.

¹¹ possibly Spain or even Britain

¹² most likely the prefects Tigellinus and Sabinus, under Emperor Nero

husbands, and changed that saying of our father Adam, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."¹³ Envy and strife have overthrown great cities and rooted up mighty nations.

These things, beloved, we write to you, not merely to admonish you of your duty, but also to remind ourselves. For we are struggling in the same arena, and the same conflict is assigned to both of us. Therefore 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 who would be converted to Him. Noah preached repentance, and as many as listened to him were saved. Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites, but they, repenting of their sins, propitiated God by prayer and obtained salvation, although they were aliens [to the covenant] of God.

The ministers of the grace of God have, by the Holy Spirit, spoken of repentance, and the Lord of all things has himself declared with an oath regarding it: "'As I live,' says the Lord, 'I desire not the death of the sinner, but rather his repentance,'"¹⁴ adding, moreover, this gracious declaration: "Repent, O house of Israel, of your iniquity. Say to the children of My people, 'Though your sins reach from earth to heaven, I and though they be redder than scarlet, and blacker than sackcloth, yet if You turn to Me with your whole heart, and say, "Father!" I will listen to you, as to a holy people.'"¹⁵ And in another place He speaks thus: "Wash yourselves and become clean; put away the wickedness of your souls from before my eyes;

cease from your evil ways and learn to do well; seek out judgment, deliver the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and see that justice is done to the widow; and come and let us reason together." He declares, "Though your sins be like crimson, I will make them white as snow; though they be like scarlet, I will whiten them like wool. And if you be willing and obey Me, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and will not hearken unto Me, the sword shall devour you, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things."¹⁶ Desiring, therefore, that all His beloved should be partakers of repentance, He has, by His almighty will, established [these declarations].

¹³ Genesis 2:23

¹⁴ Ezekiel 33:11

¹⁵ Ezekiel 28:30 and Isaiah 1:18 seem to be mixed together here by Clement.

¹⁶ Isaiah 1:16-20