

# The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians

## Excerpt 3\*

### Repentance, Forgiveness, and Love

Let us, therefore, with all haste, remove this [state of things]; and let us fall down before the Lord and beseech Him with tears, that He — becoming merciful — would be reconciled to us and restore us to our former seemly and holy practice of brotherly love. For [such conduct] is the gate of righteousness, which is set open for the attainment of life, as it is written, “Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go in by them and will praise the Lord: this is the gate of the Lord: the righteous shall enter in by it.”<sup>1</sup> Although, therefore, many gates have been set open, yet this gate of righteousness is that gate in Christ by which blessed are all they that have entered in and have directed their way in holiness and righteousness, doing all things without disorder. Let a man be faithful; let him be powerful in the utterance of knowledge; let him be wise in judging of words; let him be pure in all his deeds. Yet the more he seems to be superior to others [in these respects], the more humble-minded ought he to be and to seek the common good of all — and not merely his own advantage.

Let him who has love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ. Who can describe the bond of the love of God? What man is able to tell the excellence of its beauty, as it ought to be told? The height to which love exalts is unspeakable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a multitude of sins.<sup>2</sup> Love bears all things, is long-suffering in all things. There is nothing base, nothing arrogant in love. Love admits of no schisms; love gives rise to no seditions; love does all things in harmony.<sup>3</sup> By love have all the elect of God been made perfect; without love nothing is well-pleasing to God. In love has the

Lord taken us to Himself. On account of the Love he bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God — His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls.

You see, brothers, how great and wonderful a thing is love, and that there is no declaring its perfection. Who is fit to be found in it, except such person as God has granted to render so? Let us pray, therefore, and implore of His mercy, that we may live blameless in love, free from all human partialities for one above another. All the generations from Adam even unto this day have passed away; but those who, through the grace of God, have been made perfect in love, now possess a place among the godly and shall be made manifest at the visitation of the kingdom of Christ. For it is written, “Enter into your secret chambers for a little time, until my wrath and fury pass away; and I will remember a good day, and will raise you up out of your graves.”<sup>4</sup> Blessed are we, beloved, if we keep the commandments of God in the harmony of love, that so through love our sins may be forgiven us. For it is written, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not impute to him and in whose mouth there is no guile.”<sup>5</sup> This blessedness comes upon those who have been chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Let us therefore implore forgiveness for all those transgressions that —through any [suggestion] of the Adversary<sup>6</sup> — we have committed. And those who have been the leaders of sedition and disagreement ought to look to the common hope. For such as live in fear and love would rather that they themselves

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\*The entire letter can be read here:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ii.ii.html>

<sup>1</sup> Ps 118:19-20

<sup>2</sup> See Jas 5:20; 1 Pe 4:8.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Co 13.

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<sup>4</sup> Is 26:20

<sup>5</sup> Ps 32:1-2

<sup>6</sup> that is, “Satan”

than their neighbors should be involved in suffering. And they prefer to bear blame themselves, rather than have the concord that has been well and righteously handed down to us suffer. For it is better that a man should acknowledge his transgressions than that he should harden his heart, as the hearts of those were hardened who stirred up sedition against Moses the servant of God and whose condemnation was made known. For they went down alive into Hades, and death swallowed them up.<sup>7</sup> Pharaoh with his army and all the princes of Egypt and the chariots with their riders were sunk in the depths of the Red Sea and perished for no other reason than that their foolish hearts were hardened after so many signs and wonders had been wrought in the land of Egypt by Moses the servant of God.

The Lord, brothers, stands in need of nothing; and He desires nothing of any one, except that confession be made to Him. For, says the elect David, "I will confess unto the Lord, and that will please Him more than a young bull that has horns and hoofs. Let the poor see it and be glad."<sup>8</sup> And again he says, "Offer to God the sacrifice of praise and pay your vows to the Most High. And call on Me in the day of your trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."<sup>9</sup> For "the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit."<sup>10</sup>

You understand, brothers, you understand well the Sacred Scriptures, and you have looked very earnestly into the oracles of God. Call then these things to your remembrance. When Moses went up into the mount and abode there with fasting and humiliation forty days and forty nights, the Lord said to him, "Moses, Moses, get thee down quickly from here; for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have committed iniquity. They have quickly departed from the way in which I commanded them to walk and have made themselves molten images." And the Lord said to him, "I

have spoken to you once and again, saying, 'I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people.' Let Me destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make you a great and wonderful nation and one much more numerous than this." But Moses said, "Far be it from You, Lord. Pardon the sin of this people, or else blot me also out of the book of the living."<sup>11</sup> Oh mighty love! Oh insuperable perfection! The servant speaks freely to his Lord and asks forgiveness for the people, or begs that he himself might be wiped out along with them.

Who then among you is noble-minded? who compassionate? who full of love? Let him declare, "If on my account sedition and disagreement and schisms have arisen, I will depart; I will go away to wherever you desire, and I will do whatever the multitude commands. Only let the flock of Christ live on terms of peace with the elders set over it." He that acts this way shall procure to himself great glory in the Lord, and every place will receive him. For "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."<sup>12</sup> These things they who live a godly life that is never to be repented of both have done and always will do.

To bring forward some examples from among the heathen: Many kings and princes, in times of pestilence, when they had been instructed by an oracle, have given themselves up to death, in order that by their own blood they might deliver their fellow-citizens [from destruction]. Many have gone forth from their own cities, so that sedition might be brought to an end within them. We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price that they received for themselves they might provide food for others. Many women also, being strengthened by the grace of God, have performed numerous manly exploits. The blessed Judith, when her city was besieged, asked of the elders

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<sup>7</sup> See Num 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ps 69:31-32

<sup>9</sup> Ps 50:14-15

<sup>10</sup> Ps 51:17

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<sup>11</sup> See Ex 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ps 24:1

permission to go forth into the camp of the strangers, and, exposing herself to danger, she went out of the love that she bore for her country and people then besieged. And the Lord delivered Holofernes into the hands of a woman.<sup>13</sup> Esther also, being perfect in faith, exposed herself to no less danger, in order to deliver the twelve tribes of Israel from impending destruction. For with fasting and humiliation she entreated the everlasting God, who sees all things. And He, perceiving the humility of her spirit, delivered the people for whose sake she had encountered peril.

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 to 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, so that no one should feel displeased. Those exhortations by which we admonish one another are both good [in themselves] and highly profitable, for they unite us to the will of God. For thus says the holy Word, “The Lord has severely chastened me yet has not given me over to death.”<sup>14</sup> “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”<sup>15</sup> “The righteous,” it says, “shall chasten me in mercy and reprove me; but let not the oil of sinners make fat my head.”<sup>16</sup> And again he says, “Blessed is the man whom the Lord reprove, and reject not the warning of the Almighty. For He causes sorrow and again restores [to gladness]; He wounds, and His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles; yes, in the seventh no evil shall touch you. In famine He shall rescue you from death, and in war He shall free thee from the hand of the sword. From the scourge of the tongue will He hide you, and you shall not fear when evil comes. You shall laugh at the unrighteous and the wicked and shall not be afraid of the beasts

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<sup>13</sup>See Judith.

<sup>14</sup>Ps 143:18

<sup>15</sup>Prov 3:12

<sup>16</sup>Ps 141:5

of the field. For the wild beasts shall be at peace with thee. Then shall you know that your house is in peace, and the habitation of your tabernacle shall not fail. You shall know also that your seed shall be great, and your children like the grass of the field. And you shall come to the grave like ripened corn that is reaped in its season, or like a heap of the threshing-floor that is gathered together at the proper time.”<sup>17</sup> You see, beloved, that protection is afforded to those that are chastened by the Lord; for since God is good, He corrects us, that we may be admonished by His holy chastisement.

You, therefore, who laid the foundation of this sedition, submit yourselves to the elders and receive correction 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 be found small and esteemed in the flock of Christ than that — being highly exalted — you should be cast out from His hope. For thus speaks all-virtuous Wisdom: “Behold, I will bring forth to you the words of My Spirit, and I will teach you My speech. Since I called and you did not hear, I held forth My words, and you regarded them not but set aside My counsels and yielded not at My reproofs. Therefore, I, too, will laugh at your destruction; yes, I will rejoice when ruin comes upon you and when sudden confusion overtakes you, when overturning presents itself like a tempest or when tribulation and oppression fall upon you. For it shall happen that when you call upon Me, I will not hear you; the wicked shall seek Me, and they shall not find Me. For they hated wisdom and did not choose the fear of the Lord; nor would they listen to My counsels, but despised My reproofs. Therefore, they shall eat the fruits of their own way, and they shall be filled with their own ungodliness.”<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>

May God, who sees all things and who is the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh —

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<sup>17</sup>Job 5:17-26

<sup>18</sup>Prov 1:23-31

<sup>19</sup>The text that follows is lost.

who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a peculiar people — grant to every soul who calls 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.

Send back quickly to us in peace and with joy our messengers to you, Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Bito, with Fortunatus<sup>20</sup>, that they may the sooner announce to us the peace and harmony we so earnestly desire and long for [among you], and that we may the more quickly rejoice over the good order re-established among you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and with all everywhere that are the called of God through Him, by whom be to Him glory, honor, power, majesty, and an eternal throne from the ages to the ages of ages. Amen.

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<sup>20</sup>See 1 Co 16:17.