



The Epistles of Pope St. Clement I

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The Church of Corinth had been led by a few violent spirits into a sedition against its rulers. No appeal seems to have been made to Rome, but a letter was sent in the name of the Church of Rome by St. Clement to restore peace and unity. He begins by explaining that his delay in writing has been caused by the sudden calamities which, one after another, had just been falling upon the Roman Church. The reference is clearly to the persecution of Domitian. The former high reputation of the Corinthian Church is recalled, its piety and hospitality, its obedience and discipline. Jealousy had caused the divisions; it was jealousy that led Cain, Esau, etc., into sin, it was jealousy to which Peter and Paul and multitudes with them fell victims. The Corinthians are urged to repent after the example of the Patriarchs, and to be humble like Christ himself. Let them observe order, as all creation does. A curious passage on the Resurrection is somewhat of an interruption in the sequence: all creation proves the Resurrection, and so does the phoenix, which every five hundred years consumes itself, that its offspring may arise out of its ashes (23-6). Let us, Clement continues, forsake evil and approach God with purity, clinging to His blessing, which the Patriarchs so richly obtained, for the Lord will quickly come with His rewards, let us look to Jesus Christ, our High-Priest, above the angels at the right hand of the Father (36). Discipline and subordination are necessary as in an army and in the human body, while arrogance is absurd for man is nothing. The Apostles foresaw feuds, and provided for a succession of bishops and deacons; such, therefore cannot be removed at pleasure. The just have always been persecuted. Read St. Paul's first epistle to you, how he condemns party spirit. It is shocking that a few should disgrace the Church of Corinth. Let us beg for pardon; nothing is more beautiful than charity; it was shown by Christ when He gave His Flesh for our flesh, His Soul for our souls; by living in this love, we shall be in the number of the saved through Jesus Christ, by Whom is glory to God for ever and ever, Amen (58). But if any disobey, he is in great danger; but we will pray that the Creator may preserve the number of His elect in the whole world.--Here follows a beautiful Eucharistic prayer (59-61). The conclusion follows: "We have said enough, on the necessity of repentance, unity, peace, for we have been speaking to the faithful, who have deeply studied the Scriptures, and will understand the examples pointed out, and will follow them. We shall indeed be happy if you obey. We have sent two venerable messengers, to show how great is our anxiety for peace among you" (62-4). "Finally may the all-seeing God and Master of Spirits and Lord of all flesh, who chose the Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him for a peculiar people, grant unto every soul that is called after His excellent and holy Name faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, temperance, chastity, and soberness, that they may be well-pleasing unto His Name through our High Priest and Guardian. Jesus Christ, through whom unto Him be glory and majesty, might and honour, both now and for ever and ever, Amen. Now send ye back speedily unto us our messengers Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Bito, together with Fortunatus also, in peace and with joy, to the end that they may the more quickly report the peace and concord which is prayed for and earnestly desired by us, that we also may the more speedily rejoice over your good order. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and with all men in all places who have been called by God and through Him, through whom is glory and honour, power and greatness and eternal dominion, unto Him, from the ages past and for ever and ever. Amen." (64-5.)

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