

I Clement

From:

The colony of the Church of God at Rome

To:

The colony of the Church of God at Corinth, called and made holy by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ

All grace and peace to you from God Almighty, through Jesus Christ.

The Corinthians' Previous Good Record

1. Due to the recent troubles we have encountered here in Rome, we have been delayed in being able to address the problems that have led to the dispute in your community, specifically the breach in your unity. Make no mistake, such division just stinks—it is unholy and incompatible with the way God's chosen people should be. Apparently, there have been a few hotheads who have ended up inflaming everybody to the point where the reputation of the Church in Corinth is being dragged through the mud. There used to be a time that whenever anyone spent any time with you, they just marveled at your hospitality, your generosity, and your wisdom and knowledge. Your elders were respected, your young men were taught to be take the faith seriously, and your young women were taught devotion, purity, and how to properly manage their households.

2. Your community was known for its humility, its refusal to bully anyone, and its dedication to giving rather than trying to take anything. You were dedicated to the words of Christ. You treasured them and constantly kept his suffering on behalf of others as your prime example to imitate. Because of that, your reward was a constant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and your own holiness then was poured out on others too. Instead of browbeating anyone who screwed up and sinned, you cried out to God for mercy and extended mercy as well. You never held any grudges and you refused to let your community be divided. You were always living out your heavenly citizenship.

The Sinfulness of Jealousy

3. But as soon as your community grew and numbers were up, you all got lazy, and jealous of each other, and before you knew it, divisions and arguments started springing up. And who was the cause of all this? Certain young fools in the community who let their baser instincts get the best of them. These idiots have rejected and overthrown the wisdom of the long-respected elders, and now all your righteousness and peace are out the door. It seems Christians in Corinth no longer fear God. They don't follow the commandments and certainly aren't living as citizens of Christ! Everyone is consumed with the sin of envy and are acting out of the baser desires of their own hearts.

4. But just look at Scripture. What do you find? Why did Cain kill Abel? Jealousy! Why did Jacob have to flee from Esau? Jealousy! Why did Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery? Jealousy! Why did Moses flee from Pharaoh? Jealousy! Aaron and Miriam were kicked out of the camp because of jealousy. Dathan and Abiram were put to death because of their jealousy. David was persecuted by Saul—why? Jealousy!

5. Or just look at Christians from our own time. Even the good apostles Peter and Paul had to both endure countless trials, imprisonments, beatings—you name it—because people were jealous of them. Still, they both endured to the end, bearing witness to Christ up to the point of their death. They are the kind of people Christians should be emulating.

6. Many more Christians have also lived holy lives and have undergone hardships that have been brought on by jealousy. Just recently, some of our Christian women were forced to dress up and play the parts of those mythological characters, Danaids and Dirces, in the arena before they were tortured and killed. Why? Because the pagans were jealous of the life they had in Christ. Pagan husbands have divorced their Christian wives because of jealousy. Yes, jealousy has destroyed great cities and uprooted mighty nations. *And that is what you have let take root in your community!*

It's Not Too Late to Repent

7. Now, I don't want this to come across as me just condemning you, my friends. We all have the same conflict in the same arena (as those martyrs have been). So, let's all turn away from all these barren fancies of our self-inflated egos and turn to the holy Rule of our Tradition, so we can find out what is good and pleasing in the eyes of our Creator. Let's focus on the Blood of Christ and reflect on how that precious that Blood is in God's eyes. It was shed for our salvation and opened the door to grace and repentance of all mankind. Every generation has been given a chance to repent, and there are those in every generation who do, in fact, repent and turn to God. A few listened to Noah and were saved. The people of Nineveh listened to Jonah, repented of their sins, and were saved—and they weren't even Israelites! They were pagans!

8. You can search the Scriptures and find on almost every page that the Lord Himself, through the Holy Spirit, has called for people to repent and has offered grace and salvation. "I desire repentance," "Wash yourselves clean and put away your evil from my eyes," "Come, let us reason." It is clear that He desires repentance from everyone.

The Exemplary Obedience of the Saints

9-12. So, let's bow down to God and seek His glorious will for us. Let's stop fighting with each other and causing so many divisions—they will only end in death. Just think about all those examples in Scripture of obedience: Enoch was obedient and saved from death; because of Noah's obedience, God made him the herald of a new birth for the world; Abraham was God's friend; Lot's hospitality saved him from Sodom's destruction; even Rahab the prostitute was saved because of her faith and hospitality. The spies told her to hang a scarlet cord from her house as a sign for the Israelites to spare her and her family. That scarlet cord foreshadows the redemption that comes to all who put their trust and hope in God, through the blood of the Lord. So not only did Rahab serve as an example of faith, but that action was prophetic as well.

An Appeal to Renounce Their Stubbornness and Schism

13. So, please, let's drop all the arrogance attitude, acquire a little humility, stop the stupid quarrelling, and actually do what the Bible tells us to do instead. Don't brag about your own wisdom but boast in the Lord instead. Remember that our Lord Jesus told us to be merciful toward each other so that we too can receive mercy from others.

14-15. It is more important to obey God than to follow people who are constantly causing trouble and stirring up all these stinking rivalries. This is a big deal. We are endangering our own lives if we choose to let ourselves be manipulated by people who are dead set on causing strife and division and diverting us from doing what is right. Reject all that and show kindness to each other, in the same sweet spirit of tenderness as our Maker showed to us. Trust me, those transgressors who have caused so much hostility and division will be held to account. Your task, though, should be to work for peace. Be devoted to those who are genuinely working for peace, not just those who pay lip service to it.

The Humility of Christ and the Saints

16. Christ belongs to the humble and lowly of heart, not with those who are arrogantly exalting themselves over the rest of Christ's flock. The Lord Jesus Christ didn't come in some sort of haughty show of self-importance. He came in humility and self-abasement. Just read Isaiah 53! He was humble, accepted

humiliation and affliction, and never responded in kind. He bore the blows, and because of that, he brought peace and deliverance and healing. It is by *his wounds* that we are healed, not by his inflicting wounds on others. Thus, he should be our example to emulate.

17-18. Scripture is filled with other examples of this sort of humility as well. So many saints absorbed the blows of affliction as examples for us: Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Abraham, Job, yes, David too. He realized that the kind of sacrifice God wants isn't necessarily burnt offerings, but rather the sacrifice of a broken spirit. God will never scorn a broken and humbled heart.

Harmony and Cooperation is Even Taught to us by Nature Itself

19. Remember, it is precisely because of the humble submissiveness of all those examples from previous generations that we today are in the position where we are. They paved the way for faith in Christ, so we should make sure we stay tapped into that glorious heritage. Let's do all we can to get back to the kind of humility and tranquility that they displayed in their own lives. Let's see with the eyes of the spirit that this kind of orderliness and harmony marks all of God's creation.

20. Look to the heavens. They humbly go about their orderly courses, all in harmony with one another. Look at the earth. Season after season, it continues to bear fruit in harmonious fashion with every cycle of the seasons. The same hold true for the way the sea continues in its prescribed function decreed by God. All of it is ruled by the ordinances of the Lord. The seasons, the winds, the rivers and streams, all of it under the decree of the Lord.

21-22. Therefore, my friends, we should all be mindful of the Lord's decrees and strive to live in humble obedience to them. And that is why we should be respectful to those whom the Lord has set over us and honor the elders of the Church. That is why we should properly train up our young people to fear God and live lives of submissiveness, self-restraint, and holiness, without showing favoritism to anyone. That is what all true God-fearing people should do. That is the way we should be instructing our children. If we commit to do this, we will continue to have hope in Christ, through His Holy Spirit,

There are No Grounds for Doubting the Resurrection

23. Now, the Father is full of mercy and shows compassion to those who fear Him, but let's be clear. He will not put up with such indecision and inward doubting of his great and glorious gifts. He will surely come, and come quickly, without warning, to His temple.

24. The future resurrection is coming. The Lord has given us proof of that future resurrection by making Jesus Christ the firstfruits of the resurrection with his own resurrection of the dead. Because he was raised, we can be confident that we too will be raised. But just look around, there are signs in nature that point to a future resurrection. Look at day and night, where the day passes away, the night comes in, and then the day rises up again. Look at all the fruit of the earth. How does that happen? A sower sows seed that gets buried in the ground, where it decays. But then it rises up from its decay, springs up, and produces its fruit.

25-26. I've even heard of a strange portent that happens in Arabia. There is this bird known as a phoenix that can live for 500 years. And when its time to die draws near, it makes a nest for itself out of frankincense, myrrh, and other spices. When the time comes, it enters into the nest to die, but then its decaying flesh breeds a small grub, which is then nourished by the moisture of the dead bird and eventually grows wings. When it reaches full growth, it then carries the bones of its predecessor to the land of Arabia in Egypt, to the city of Heliopolis, drops off the bones at the altar of the Sun, then returns home. So, if the Creator can make use of this bird to serve as a sign of our future resurrection, we should take it to heart and be confident of our own future resurrection.

27. And so, since we have this hope, let's commit ourselves to each other and remain true to His word, His righteousness, and His judgements, and let's rekindle our faith in Him.

An Exhortation to Amendment of Life

28-29. Since God sees and hears everything, let's all come before Him with awe and do away with all of this hateful and destructive fondness for causing trouble in the Church. There's nowhere His hand can't go to catch us and punish us for our divisive behavior, so let's resolve to find shelter in His mercy and lift up undefiled hands to Him in love for the grace and compassion that the Father has shown.

30. So, since we as the Church are God's own special portion, let's not refuse any possible means of sanctification. Let's all just throw away all of the slander, all the unclean sexual acts, the drinking, rioting, lusting, fornication—all those prideful things that are an abomination. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And what is the mark of Christian humility? To attach ourselves to men who have received this grace, to clothe ourselves in a mutual tolerance of each other's views, and to cultivate humility and self-restraint, avoiding gossip and all that unholy bitching about each other. Let's earn our justification with actual deeds, not mere words. Let's stop this tendency to praise ourselves—let God do that. The people who are always asserting themselves and bragging about how self-assured they are—they are the ones who are actually cursed by God. Blessing comes to those who are considerate of others and who are unassuming and quiet.

31-32. Let's emulate the faith of those like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If we do, we will receive the blessing that comes about because of faith. We'll never be justified by our own efforts, or our own wisdom, understanding, godliness, or anything we do by ourselves. We can only be justified through the faith that Almighty God alone has offered from the beginning of time. Glory be to Him forever and ever. Amen!

Still, Faith Must Always Go Hand in Hand with Works

33-34. Of course, what I mean by having faith isn't just sitting back and doing nothing. To the contrary, it means making every effort to exercise Christian love, and that means, quite frankly, working at it. And that's okay, because the Lord of the Universe Himself is an Architect who delights in working! Not only has He created the entire universe, but He has also made mankind in His own image. And that means we, as His people, have some work to do—that's how we display His image. So let's make every effort to obey His will and let's put all our energies into doing the work of righteousness. A true workman who both works and takes delight in his work can always approach his employer with confidence. It is the lazy and idle worker who can't look his boss in the face. So let's devote ourselves to being good workers who participate in the works of God.

35. The gifts of God are incredible. We've already received some of them. Some of them, though not yet received, we can comprehend. Still some more that we cannot begin to comprehend are still awaiting for us. So let's do our best to wait patiently for God so that we can receive His promised gifts. Let's strive to do all we can that is in accordance with His perfect will, everything that is pleasing and acceptable to Him. We have to utterly renounce wickedness, quarrelling, and divisions. People who push these things, regardless of whatever they might say, are detestable to God. They prove themselves to be wicked by reviling their brothers and rejecting God's instruction.

36. God provides the way of salvation to those who give an offering of praise and glorify Him in what they do. This is what Jesus our High Priest did, and through him we can see, if only partially, the peerless perfection of the face of God. It is through Christ that the eyes of our hearts are opened and our dim understanding unfolds like a flower to the sunlight. Through Christ, the Lord gives us a taste of the wisdom of eternity. Christ indeed is the splendor of God's majesty.

Unity and Cooperation for the Common Good

37-39. Make no mistake. We are engaged in spiritual warfare, my friends. Our elders and bishops are our commanders and generals who convey the battle-plans and direction from our king. Others in the Church

are like colonels, captains, or maybe just enlisted men. It doesn't matter, because we are all also one body—the Body of Christ, and every member is valuable and serves a purpose. Still, we take our marching orders from the elders. To go against them is to engage in insubordination and mutiny. Rather, we need to all work together as the one Body of Christ, with everyone using his spiritual gifts for the common good of the entire body. The strong shouldn't ignore the weak; the weak should respect the strong; the rich should care for the poor; and the poor should thank God for those who supply their needs. Wisdom should be shown through our works, and modesty should let others do the talking for him. It is men who are stupid, and positively arrogant in their own stupidity, who make a habit of mocking and ridiculing us just so they can make themselves look important. Let's not be like them.

The Church's Liturgy and Leadership Must Be Respected

40. This is why it is so important to maintain the strict order and method in our performance of the liturgy, just like the Master has prescribed it for these times and seasons. He commanded that the offering of our gifts and our public services should not be done in a haphazard fashion, but rather to be done at fixed times and hours. He also laid out, by His Supreme will, where it should be performed and by which persons. If we adhere to His commands and do it at the appointed times, our offerings and service will be acceptable.

41. Just like the high priest and the Levitical priesthood had their own proper services assigned to be done in a particular way at particular times, so too are we to participate in our own Eucharist to God, with each one of us keeping to his own degree. We are to have a clear conscience as we offer our gifts and service in the way the Lord laid out. And just consider that in the Levitical priestly duties, failure to do the service in conformity with God's will, was punishable by death. Since our services as Christians reflect a fuller knowledge, we should take note that we put ourselves in even more peril if we fail to conform to God's prescribed order.

42. We must remember that the Gospel that was given to the Apostles for us came from the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was sent from God. Therefore, he received his commission from God, just as the Apostles received theirs from Christ. So, after being convinced of his resurrection, they went out in the full assurance of the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's coming kingdom. And as they did that, they made converts and, after instructing them and testing them, they appointed some to be bishops and deacons for the believers in the future.

43-44. That means that our elders, bishops, and deacons have ultimately been appointed in succession all the way back to the Apostles themselves. Our ability to point to this apostolic succession is just like how Moses had to settle disputes when the tribal chiefs challenged him for the privilege of being Israel's leader. He had them lay out their staffs in the Tabernacle and the one staff that budded designated that the tribe of Moses and Aaron was chosen by God to serve in the priesthood. For us, the apostolic succession designates who is appointed by God to serve as bishops, deacons, and elders. For that reason, it simply is not right for these men to be ejected from their ministry—ultimately, they have been appointed by the Apostles themselves and have been chosen in full consent of the Church. Yet this is exactly what has happened in Corinth!

Opposition to God's Ministers is Wrong

45. If you are going to be stubborn and hot-headed, at least be stubborn and hot-headed about the things that will lead to salvation. If you just look at the sacred Scriptures, the very voice of the Holy Spirit, you'll know that nothing in them is contrary to justice and nothing in them is false. You're not going to find any stories about pious men evicting righteous men in them. Sure, the righteous were often persecuted, but it was always at the hands of wicked men. It was impious men who threw the righteous into prison. It was lawless men who stoned them. It was jealous criminals who murdered them.

Do you think the men who had Daniel thrown into the lions' den really feared God? Do you think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace by honorable seeking to please God? Really? Of course not! The people who did those things were villains, criminals, and ungodly men who didn't realize that God is the guardian and protector of all those who serve His Holy Name.

46. So, don't associate with those kinds of people. Keep company with the innocent and upright—they are God's chosen ones. Why in the world are there so many quarrels and divisions among you? Don't we all have the same God and the same Christ? Isn't the same Spirit of grace shed upon us all? Don't we all have the same calling in Christ? So why are we ripping Christ's body apart? Have we lost all sense and reason? It is because of your disunity that many people have been led astray. And despite all the discouragement and doubt that your divisions have sown in people's minds, you just keep right on doing it! Why?

47. Go and read Paul's letter to your church again. What did he say in those early days? He warned you against divisions. He repeatedly told you that he, and Peter, and Apollos were all on the same time and were all inspired by the Spirit! At least they were godly apostles and men of the highest repute. Look at the men who have seduced you now into divisions—they pale in comparison! They're nothing like Peter, Paul, and Apollos! It is beyond shameful, and completely unworthy of your Christian training, that you've let the reputation of your loyal and ancient church in Corinth be dragged through the mud—all because of one or two individuals who are at odds with the clergy. Because of that, you have brought the name of the Lord into disrespect in the eyes of those who don't share our faith and have heard about what has happened with you. Because of you, those people are further away from salvation. For that matter, your own souls are in peril as well!

The Blessedness of Christian Love

48. To the point, you need to stop this. You need to repent, ask for forgiveness, and stop this. You need to reconcile and bring everyone back into the honorable and virtuous relationships with each other. That is where the gate of righteousness is found. I want every one of you to be a true believer, capable of explaining the secrets of Christian revelation, critically thinking about what he hears, and practicing a pattern of virtue in everything he does. And the better his reputation, the more humble he should strive to become. And more than anything, he should be concerned with the good of the community more than his own personal desires.

49-50. If you have true Christian love, you are to show it by living out the commandments of Christ. That means loving your neighbor—it is patient, kind, and covers over a multitude of sins. It doesn't know of any divisions, and it doesn't promote discord. God's saints are made perfect through love, and without love, nothing is pleasing to God. It was because of His love for us that God sent Jesus and that Jesus gave his blood for us—his flesh for our flesh, his life for our lives. If you have true Christian love, your lives will reflect that. So, rededicate yourselves to living in love with each other and maintain that love for each other.

A Final Appeal

51-53. Let's start by asking for forgiveness for all the misdeeds that the Adversary moved us to commit. Those men who sowed this division should rethink what they've done and ask themselves if it really has promoted the common Hope we all share. If they really are living in the fear and love of God, they'll renounce what they've done and once again embrace the Tradition of harmony and peace that has been handed down to us from the beginning. It is far better to admit your faults than to harden your heart. Look what happened to Pharaoh when he hardened his heart against Moses and God! Egypt suffered plagues and then Pharaoh was eventually drowned in the Red Sea! Listen to David instead, who talks about how God desires a sacrifice of a contrite spirit. Or consider Moses again, after the Hebrews sinned with the golden calf—he should true love by boldly speaking to the Lord and demanding pardon for them. He was willing to die with them. Be like that—forgive sins, ask for forgiveness for your own, and heal your sins and divisions.

54-55. A truly noble-minded and compassionate man who truly loves the community will volunteer to leave the community or do anything the community asks if he was the cause of any division or disorder. He'll say, "I'll do anything the appointed clergy and community want in order maintain peace." Anyone who does that will be blessed in Christ. Anyone who does that is a true citizen of heaven. This kind of noble behavior can be seen among the heathen from time to time as well. Sometimes noble kings offer their own lives for the welfare of their people. You see this in the Scriptures as well with numerous women like Judith and Esther. They put the lives of others ahead of their own welfare.

56. Likewise, we should plead for those who have fallen from grace and pray that they humble themselves and surrender to the will of God. Let us all accept correction without resentment. Mutual admonition goes a long way. It is wholly good and beneficial for everyone, and it leads to conformity with the will of God. God disciplines those whom He loves so we can find mercy through His holy correction.

57. As for the troublemakers among you—if you were at the root of these divisions, you need to submit yourselves to the clergy, bend the knees of your heart, and accept correction. Learn a little humility and stop being such arrogant loudmouths. It will be much better for you to be lowly but respected members of Christ's flock, than to be masquerading as prominent leaders who are, in reality, cast out of every hope of Christ. It's your choice: humble submission that leads to life, or arrogance and division that leads to destruction.

58-59. Let's all show obedience to His all-holy and glorious Name, so that we can escape the doom that God's Wisdom has pronounced upon the ungodly, and instead live in the trust and reliance of the most sacred Name of His majesty. As far as the God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit lives, the man who keeps His commandments and humbly considers others more than himself will surely be counted with the number of those saved through Jesus Christ. But let's be clear—if any of you refuse to listen to what we've said here, know that your guilt will put you in great peril. You are flirting with disaster. As for us, we will do whatever we need to do to be innocent of that kind of rebellion. We will continually pray to the Creator of all things to be counted among His elect. He has called us out of darkness into light, from ignorance to the clear knowledge of the glory of His Name. That is where we want to stay.

A Liturgical Intercession

60-61. Teach us, O Lord, to hope in your Name. You are the source of all creation, so open the eyes of our hearts to know you. You bring down the proud and raise up the humble. You scatter the plots of the peoples and care for the afflicted. You are the one who brought to light the everlasting fabric of the universe and created the world of men. You have been faithful throughout generations, so we ask for your mercy and pray that you absolve us of our sins and offences, from our errors and shortcomings. Direct our paths, deliver us from hate without cause, and grant peace to not only us, but to all of mankind. We pray for our leaders that you have granted authority. Guide them and grant them health and peace, harmony and security. You are the Eternal King, and through Jesus Christ the High Priest and Guardian of our souls, we offer up our praises. Through Christ may there be glory and majesty to you, both now and throughout the ages of ages. Amen.

Epilogue

62-64. We have written this letter to you in Corinth to detail the useful aids for everyone to advance in godliness and righteousness: belief, repentance, true Christian love, self-discipline, discretion, perseverance. So, remember your duty to earn the holiness and approval of Almighty God by living lives of decency, truthfulness, patient endurance, and an unflinching consideration for others. This is how our forefathers won approval—by their humility toward both God and their fellow man. So, in light of all those godly men, we have a duty to submit to their teaching and examples. So please, take to heart everything we've written through the Holy Spirit, respond with peace and harmony, and put an end to your divisions.

In conclusion, may the all-seeing God, the Ruler of spirits and Lord of all flesh, who has chosen the Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him ourselves to be a people for His possession, grant to everyone called by His glorious and holy Name with such faith and fear, peace and patience, forbearance and self-restraint, and purity and sobriety, that they be pleasing to His Name, through our High Priest and Protector Jesus Christ, by whom be glory, majesty, might, and honor to Him both now and forever, world without end. Amen!

Postscript

65. As a practical matter, make sure you send our messengers, Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Vito (both from Caesar's household), and Fortunatus, back to us in peace and joy. We want them to be able to give us the good news of peace and unity among you. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and with everyone everywhere whom God has called by Him. Indeed, through Christ be glory and honor to God, with might, majesty, and everlasting dominion from now into the ages of ages. Amen!