
1 Clement

The work known as *1 Clement* is actually a letter from “the church of God that resides in Rome to the church of God that resides in Corinth.”¹ The actual author was early said, probably correctly, to be Clement, one of the bishops of Rome. The date of the letter was probably in the closing years of the decade of the 90s of the first century. The occasion for the letter was once more a matter of division in the church at Corinth, a problem addressed in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, only this time the problem was specifically the removal of some of the elders at the instigation of the younger members of the congregation. Their motive is not stated, although modern scholars offer several speculations. Clues within the letter do not go beyond an assumed spirit of jealousy and rebellion. The letter appeals to Paul’s analogy of the church to the human body of many members, each necessary for the harmonious

1. *1 Clement* prologue.

working of the whole.² The following passages are valuable for their testimony to the early organizational structure of the church and testimony that this was of divine and apostolic origin. *First Clement* agrees with other early sources that each congregation was led by a plurality of those called presbyters (elders) or bishops (used interchangeably in the second passage) assisted by deacons (contrast Ignatius, below). The second passage makes incidental reference to the image of the local church as a flock of sheep belonging to Christ.

1 Clement 42.1–5

42.1–5. The apostles were given the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent from God. 2. Christ therefore is from God, and the apostles are from Christ. They both, therefore, came in good order from the will of God. 3. When they received his commands, were fully convinced by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and having placed their faith in the word of God, the apostles went out with the full assurance of the Holy Spirit, preaching the gospel that the kingdom of God is about to come. 4. They preached in every district and every city, and they appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, as bishops and deacons of those who were going to believe. 5. . . . For thus the Scripture says somewhere, “I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.”³

1 Clement 44.1–6

44.1–6. Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that

2. *1 Clem.* 37.5.

3. An otherwise unattested reading of Isa 60:17, which in the Greek says, “I will give your rulers in peace and your bishops [overseers] in righteousness.”

there would be strife concerning the name of the episcopate. 2. For this reason, therefore, and having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those we mentioned above, and afterward they gave the rule that if these should die, other tested men should succeed to their ministry. 3. The men, therefore, who have been appointed by the apostles or afterward by other eminent men with the consent of the whole church and who have ministered blamelessly to the flock of Christ humbly, quietly, and unselfishly, men who have been well testified to by all for many years—these men we do not consider it just to expel from their ministry. 4. For it will be no small sin to us if we expel from the episcopate those who have offered the gifts blamelessly and in a holy manner. 5. Blessed are those presbyters who have died previously and had a fruitful and perfect departure. For they have no fear that someone will remove them from their established place. 6. For we see that you have removed some who have conducted themselves well from the ministry that has been blamelessly distinguished by them.