

2 Clement

Modern English version · SermonIndex

Anonymous · c. AD 100–160 (debated)

The oldest surviving Christian sermon outside the New Testament. Despite its traditional title it was not written by Clement of Rome, and its real author is unknown.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Brothers, we must think of Jesus Christ as we think of God, as of the judge of the living and the dead. We must not think little of our salvation.

1.2 When we think little of him, we also hope to receive little. Those who listen as though these were small matters are sinning. We also sin if we do not know where we were called from, by whom, and to what place, and how much Jesus Christ endured for our sake.

1.3 What return, then, will we give him, or what fruit worthy of what he has given us? And how much do we owe him in holy devotion?

1.4 He gave us light. Like a father, he called us sons. He saved us when we were perishing.

1.5 What praise, then, or what repayment will we give him for what we have received?

1.6 Our minds were crippled. We worshiped stones, wood, gold, silver, and bronze, the works of men, and our whole life was nothing but death. We were wrapped in darkness and our eyes were full of fog, but by his will we have thrown off that cloud and have received our sight.

1.7 He had mercy on us, and in his compassion he saved us. He saw the great error and ruin in us, and that we had no hope of salvation except from him.

1.8 He called us when we did not exist, and he willed that we

should come into being out of nothing.

Chapter 2

2.1 “Rejoice, you barren woman who has not given birth; break out and shout, you who have not been in labor, for the children of the desolate woman are more than those of the woman who has a husband.” When he said, “Rejoice, you barren woman who has not given birth,” he meant us, for our church was barren before it was given children.

Translator’s note. This is [Isaiah 54:1](#), also quoted by Paul in [Galatians 4:27](#). The author reads “the barren woman” as the church, which was largely Gentile. “The woman who has a husband” is probably the Jewish people, “those who seemed to have God” (2:3), though he does not name them.

2.2 When he said, “Shout, you who have not been in labor,” he means this: we should offer our prayers to God sincerely and not lose heart like women in labor.

2.3 When he said, “the children of the desolate woman are more than those of the woman who has a husband,” he meant that our people seemed to be abandoned by God, but now that we have believed we have become more numerous than those who seemed to have God.

2.4 Another Scripture also says: “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Translator’s note. [Matthew 9:13](#); [Mark 2:17](#). This is one of the earliest places where a saying from the Gospels is called “Scripture.”

2.5 This means that those who are perishing must be saved.

2.6 It is a great and marvelous thing to hold up not what is standing, but what is falling.

2.7 So Christ also wanted to save what was perishing, and he saved many, coming and calling us when we were already perishing.

Chapter 3

3.1 He has shown us such great mercy. First of all, we who are living do not sacrifice to dead gods or worship them; instead, through him we have come to know the Father of truth. What, then, is true knowledge of the Father, if not refusing to deny the one through whom we came to know him?

3.2 He himself says: “Whoever confesses me before people, I will confess him before my Father.”

Translator’s note. [Matthew 10:32](#); [Luke 12:8](#).

3.3 This, then, is our reward, if we confess the one through whom we were saved.

3.4 How do we confess him? By doing what he says, not disobeying his commandments, and honoring him not only with our lips but with our whole heart and our whole mind.

3.5 He also says in Isaiah: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 29:13](#), also quoted by Jesus in [Matthew 15:8](#) and [Mark 7:6](#).

Scripture: [Matthew 15:8](#); [Mark 7:6](#)

Chapter 4

4.1 So let us not only call him Lord, for that will not save us.

4.2 He says: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will be saved, but the one who does righteousness.”

Translator’s note. Compare [Matthew 7:21](#). There the saying ends “will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father.” The author’s wording differs, either quoted from memory or taken from another source.

4.3 So then, brothers, let us confess him by our actions: by loving one another, by not committing adultery, not slandering one another, and not being envious, but by being self-controlled, merciful, and good. We ought also to share one another’s sufferings and not love money. By these deeds let us confess him, and not by their opposites.

4.4 We must not fear people more than God.

4.5 For this reason, if you do these things, the Lord said: “Even if you are gathered with me in my bosom, if you do not keep my commandments, I will cast you out and say to you, ‘Depart from me, I do not know where you come from, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Translator’s note. This saying as a whole is not found in the four Gospels, and its source is unknown. Its closing words echo [Matthew 7:23](#) and [Luke 13:25-27](#).

Chapter 5

5.1 So, brothers, let us leave behind our stay as foreigners in this world and do the will of the one who called us, and let us not be afraid to depart from this world.

5.2 The Lord says: “You will be like lambs in the midst of wolves.”

5.3 Peter answered him: “What if the wolves tear the lambs apart?”

5.4 Jesus said to Peter: “After they are dead, the lambs should not fear the wolves. And you, do not fear those who kill you and can do nothing to you. Fear the one who, after you are dead, has power over soul and body to throw them into the fire of Gehenna.”

Translator’s note. “Gehenna” is the place of final punishment, often translated “hell.”

5.5 Know, brothers, that our stay in this world, in this flesh, is small and short, but the promise of Christ is great and marvelous: rest in the coming kingdom and eternal life.

5.6 What can we do to obtain them, except to live in holiness and righteousness, to treat these worldly things as foreign to us, and not to desire them?

5.7 By desiring to acquire these things, we fall away from the way of righteousness.

Chapter 6

6.1 The Lord says: “No servant can serve two masters.” If we want to serve both God and money, it will do us no good.

Translator’s note. The saying is from [Luke 16:13](#) (compare [Matthew 6:24](#)). The word for “servant” (oiketes) matches Luke’s wording.

6.2 “For what does it profit someone to gain the whole world and lose his soul?”

Translator’s note. Compare [Matthew 16:26](#), [Mark 8:36](#), and [Luke 9:25](#).

6.3 This age and the age to come are two enemies.

6.4 This age speaks of adultery, corruption, love of money, and deceit, but the age to come renounces these things.

6.5 We cannot be friends of both. We must renounce this age and hold fast to the one to come.

6.6 We think it is better to hate the things here, because they are small, short-lived, and perishable, and to love the things there, the good things that never perish.

6.7 If we do the will of Christ, we will find rest. But if we do not, if we disobey his commandments, nothing will rescue us from eternal punishment.

6.8 The Scripture also says in Ezekiel that even if Noah, Job, and Daniel were to rise up, they would not save their children in the captivity.

Translator’s note. The reference is to [Ezekiel 14:14–20](#), quoted loosely. In Ezekiel, these three men would save only themselves and not their sons or daughters. The words “rise up” and “in the captivity” are the author’s own paraphrase.

6.9 If even such righteous men cannot save their children by their own righteousness, with what confidence will we enter the kingdom of God if we do not keep our baptism pure and undefiled? Or who will be our advocate if we are not found to have holy and righteous deeds?

Translator's note. The word rendered "kingdom" is *basileion*, which in classical Greek usually means a royal palace, but in early Christian writings it can also mean "kingdom." "Advocate" translates *parakletos*.

Chapter 7

7.1 So, my brothers, let us compete, knowing that the contest is at hand. Many sail to the contests for perishable prizes, but not all are crowned, only those who have trained hard and competed well.

Translator's note. The picture recalls Paul's athletic image in [1 Corinthians 9:24-25](#). "Sail to" may suggest travelling by sea to the great games, such as the Isthmian Games near Corinth, but this is uncertain.

7.2 So let us compete, so that all of us may be crowned.

7.3 Let us run the straight course, the contest that does not perish. Let many of us sail to it and compete, so that we may also be crowned. And if we cannot all be crowned, let us at least come close to the crown.

7.4 We must know that if someone competing in a perishable contest is caught cheating, he is flogged, removed, and thrown out of the stadium.

7.5 What do you think? What will someone suffer who cheats in the contest for what cannot perish?

7.6 Of those who have not kept the seal, it says, "Their worm will not die and their fire will not be put out, and they will be a spectacle to all flesh."

Translator's note. "The seal" here means baptism (compare 6.9 and 8.6). The quotation is from [Isaiah 66:24](#), words also echoed by Jesus in [Mark 9:48](#).

Scripture: [Mark 9:48](#)

Chapter 8

8.1 So while we are on earth, let us repent.

8.2 We are clay in the hand of the craftsman. When a potter makes a vessel and it is twisted or broken in his hands, he forms it again. But if he has already put it into the fiery furnace, he can do nothing more for it. So we too, while we are in this world, should repent with all our heart of the evil we have done in the flesh, so that we may be saved by the Lord while we have time to repent.

Translator's note. The image recalls [Jeremiah 18:1-6](#), where the potter reshapes a spoiled vessel. The point about the kiln is the author's own addition.

8.3 For once we have left this world, we can no longer confess or repent there.

8.4 So, brothers, if we do the will of the Father, keep the flesh pure, and keep the commandments of the Lord, we will receive eternal life.

8.5 The Lord says in the Gospel: "If you have not kept what is small, who will give you what is great? I tell you, the one who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much."

Translator's note. This is close to [Luke 16:10-12](#), but the wording differs and the saying is introduced as from "the Gospel." The author seems to be quoting from memory or from a gospel text slightly different from ours.

8.6 So what he is saying is this: keep the flesh pure and the seal spotless, so that we may receive eternal life.

Chapter 9

9.1 Let none of you say that this flesh is not judged and does not rise again.

9.2 Think: in what were you saved, and in what did you receive your sight, if not in this flesh?

Translator's note. "Received your sight" picks up the author's earlier picture of conversion as blind people coming to see (compare 1.6).

9.3 So we must guard the flesh as a temple of God.

Translator's note. Compare [1 Corinthians 3:16](#) and 6:19.

9.4 As you were called in the flesh, you will also come in the flesh.

9.5 If Christ, the Lord who saved us, was first spirit and became flesh and so called us, then we also will receive our reward in this flesh.

Translator's note. "First spirit" is the author's way of speaking of Christ's existence before he became flesh (compare [John 1:14](#)). His wording is simpler than later theological language and should not be pressed too far.

9.6 So let us love one another, so that we may all come into the kingdom of God.

9.7 While we have time to be healed, let us give ourselves to God our healer, giving him something in return.

9.8 What should we give in return? Repentance from a sincere heart.

9.9 For he knows all things beforehand and knows what is in our

hearts.

9.10 So let us give him praise, not only from the mouth but also from the heart, so that he will receive us as sons.

9.11 For the Lord said: “These are my brothers: those who do the will of my Father.”

Translator’s note. Compare [Matthew 12:50](#), [Mark 3:35](#), and [Luke 8:21](#). The wording does not match any of them exactly.

Chapter 10

10.1 So, my brothers, let us do the will of the Father who called us, so that we may live. Let us pursue virtue instead, and leave behind wickedness as the forerunner of our sins. Let us flee from ungodliness, so that evil does not overtake us.

10.2 For if we are eager to do good, peace will pursue us.

10.3 This is why a person cannot find it: people bring in human fears, and prefer the enjoyment of the present to the promise to come.

Translator’s note. The Greek of this sentence is difficult and may be damaged; it shifts from “a person” to “they.” It seems to mean that people who give way to human fears, and prefer present pleasure to God’s promise, cannot find the peace just mentioned.

10.4 They do not know how great the torment is that comes with present enjoyment, and what delight belongs to the promise to come.

10.5 If they were the only ones doing this, it could be put up with. But as it is, they keep on teaching evil to innocent souls. They do not know that they will receive a double judgment, both they and those who listen to them.

Chapter 11

11.1 So let us serve God with a pure heart, and we will be righteous. But if we do not serve him, because we do not believe the promise of God, we will be miserable.

11.2 The prophetic word also says: “Miserable are the double-minded, those who doubt in their heart, who say, ‘We heard these things long ago, even in the time of our fathers, and yet we have waited day after day and have seen none of them.’”

Translator’s note. The source of this quotation is not known. It closely resembles 1 Clement 23:3–4, which also goes on to the picture of the vine, so both may be quoting the same lost writing. The quotation continues through 11.4.

11.3 Fools! Compare yourselves to a tree. Take a vine: first it sheds its leaves, then a bud appears, then the unripe grape, and then the ripe bunch.

11.4 So too my people have had turmoil and afflictions, but afterward they will receive the good things.”

11.5 So, my brothers, let us not be double-minded, but hope and endure, so that we may also receive the reward.

11.6 For the one who promised to give each person repayment for his deeds is faithful.

11.7 If we do righteousness before God, we will enter his kingdom and receive the promises that no ear has heard, no eye has seen, and that have not entered the human heart.

| *Translator’s note.* Compare [1 Corinthians 2:9](#), which echoes [Isaiah 64:4](#).

| *Scripture:* [1 Corinthians 2:9](#)

Chapter 12

12.1 So let us wait for the kingdom of God hour by hour, in love and righteousness, since we do not know the day of God’s appearing.

12.2 When the Lord himself was asked by someone when his kingdom would come, he said: “When the two are one, and the outside is like the inside, and the male with the female is neither male nor female.”

| *Translator’s note.* This saying of Jesus is not in our four Gospels. A similar saying appears in the Gospel of Thomas (saying 22). Clement of Alexandria quotes a version from the Gospel of the Egyptians. We cannot treat it as Scripture. In the next sections the author gives his own plain explanation of it.

12.3 The two are one when we tell each other the truth, and in two bodies there is one soul without pretense.

12.4 By “the outside like the inside” he means this: the inside is the soul, and the outside is the body. Just as your body is visible, so let your soul be plain in your good works.

12.5 By “the male with the female, neither male nor female,” he means this: that when a brother sees a sister, he should have no thought of her as a woman, nor she of him as a man.

12.6 If you do this, he says, the kingdom of my Father will come.

Chapter 13

13.1 So, brothers, let us repent now at last. Let us be sober and set

on what is good, for we are full of great foolishness and wickedness. Let us wipe away our earlier sins, and let us be saved by repenting with all our heart. Let us not be people-pleasers. And let us want to please by our righteousness not only ourselves but also those outside the church, so that the name is not blasphemed because of us.

13.2 The Lord says: “My name is blasphemed continually among all the nations,” and again: “Woe to the one through whom my name is blasphemed.” How is it blasphemed? In that you do not do what I want.

Translator’s note. The first saying is from [Isaiah 52:5](#) (in the Greek Old Testament). The second is not found in our Bible, though a similar saying appears in Ignatius, To the Trallians 8.2.

13.3 For when the nations hear the oracles of God from our mouth, they marvel at them as beautiful and great. But then they learn that our deeds are not worthy of the words we speak, and they turn from wonder to blasphemy, saying it is a myth and a delusion.

13.4 When they hear from us that God says, “It is no credit to you if you love those who love you, but it is a credit to you if you love your enemies and those who hate you,” they marvel at such extraordinary goodness. But when they see that not only do we not love those who hate us, we do not even love those who love us, they laugh at us, and the name is blasphemed.

Translator’s note. The saying resembles [Luke 6:32-35](#) and [Matthew 5:44-46](#), though the wording is not exactly that of either Gospel.

Chapter 14

14.1 So, brothers, if we do the will of God our Father, we will belong to the first church, the spiritual one, which was created before the sun and moon. But if we do not do the will of the Lord, we will fall under the Scripture that says: “My house has become a den of robbers.” So let us choose to belong to the church of life, so that we may be saved.

Translator’s note. A similar idea appears in the Shepherd of Hermas (Vision 2.4.1), where the church is said to have been created first of all, before the world. The quotation is from [Jeremiah 7:11](#), as used by Jesus in [Matthew 21:13](#).

14.2 I do not think you are unaware that the living church is the body of Christ. For the Scripture says: “God made man male and female.” The male is Christ, the female is the church. And the books and the apostles say that the church does not belong to the present but has existed from the beginning. For it was spiritual, as our Jesus was also, but he was revealed in the last days to save us.

Translator’s note. The Greek word translated “from the beginning” (anōthen) can also mean “from above.” The subject of “was revealed”

could grammatically be the church, but the purpose clause “to save us” fits Jesus.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:27](#)

14.3 The church, being spiritual, was made visible in the flesh of Christ. This shows us that whoever of us guards it in the flesh and does not corrupt it will receive it back in the Holy Spirit. For this flesh is a copy of the Spirit, and no one who corrupts the copy will share in the original. So what he means, brothers and sisters, is this: guard the flesh, so that you may share in the Spirit.

Translator’s note. The author argues from a comparison. The flesh is the “copy” (antitypos), and the Spirit is the “original” (authentikon). The practical point, drawn out in 14.4, is that whoever abuses the body abuses the church.

14.4 If we say that the flesh is the church and the Spirit is Christ, then whoever has abused the flesh has abused the church. Such a person will not share in the Spirit, which is Christ.

Translator’s note. The author speaks of “the Spirit” as Christ here. Compare 9.5, where Christ was “first spirit” and then became flesh. Later Christian teaching distinguished more carefully between the Son and the Holy Spirit.

14.5 So great is the life and immortality this flesh can share in when the Holy Spirit is joined to it that no one can describe or tell what the Lord has prepared for his chosen ones.

Translator’s note. The last words echo [1 Corinthians 2:9](#) (“what God has prepared for those who love him”).

Chapter 15

15.1 I do not think the advice I have given about self-control is of little value. Whoever follows it will not regret it, but will save both himself and me, who advised him. For it is no small reward to turn a wandering and perishing soul back to be saved.

15.2 For this is the repayment we can give to God who made us, if the one who speaks and the one who listens both speak and listen with faith and love.

15.3 So let us stay firm, righteous and holy, in what we have believed, so that we may pray with confidence to the God who says, “While you are still speaking, I will say, ‘Here I am.’”

Translator’s note. The quotation is from [Isaiah 58:9](#) (compare [Isaiah 65:24](#)).

15.4 For this saying is a sign of a great promise, for the Lord says that he is more ready to give than the one who asks is to ask.

15.5 Since we share in such great kindness, let us not begrudge ourselves so many good things. For as much joy as these words

bring to those who do them, so much condemnation they bring to those who disobey.

Chapter 16

16.1 So, brothers and sisters, since we have been given no small opportunity to repent, let us turn, while we have time, to the God who has called us, while we still have someone who welcomes us.

16.2 For if we renounce these pleasures and overcome our soul by refusing to carry out its evil desires, we will share in the mercy of Jesus.

16.3 Know that the day of judgment is already coming like a burning furnace. Some of the heavens will melt, and the whole earth will be like lead melting in a fire. Then the secret and the open deeds of people will be made plain.

Translator's note. This echoes [Malachi 4:1](#) and [Isaiah 34:4](#) and [2 Peter 3:10-12](#), though it is not an exact quotation of any of them.

16.4 Giving to the poor, then, is good as repentance for sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but giving to the poor is better than both. "Love covers a multitude of sins," and prayer from a good conscience rescues from death. Blessed is everyone found full of these things, for giving to the poor lifts the weight of sin.

Translator's note. Here the author goes beyond Scripture. The Bible does not rank fasting above prayer. His teaching that almsgiving lightens sin is closer to Tobit 12:8-9 and Sirach 3:30, books not in the Protestant Bible, than to the New Testament.

Scripture: [1 Peter 4:8](#)

Chapter 17

17.1 Let us then repent with our whole heart, so that none of us is lost. For if we have commands to turn people away from idols and teach them, how much more should a soul that already knows God not be allowed to perish?

17.2 So let us help one another and lead back those who are weak toward what is good, so that we may all be saved, turning one another around and warning one another.

17.3 Let us not seem to believe and pay attention only now, while the elders are urging us. When we go home, let us also remember the Lord's commands and not be dragged away by the desires of the world. Let us come here more often and try to make progress in the Lord's commands, so that we may all be of one mind and be gathered together for life.

Translator's note. "The elders" are the presbyters of the church, who here exhort the congregation.

17.4 For the Lord said, “I am coming to gather all the nations, tribes, and languages.” By this he means the day of his appearing, when he will come and redeem each of us according to his works.

Translator’s note. The quotation is from [Isaiah 66:18](#).

17.5 The unbelievers will see his glory and his power, and they will be astonished when they see the kingdom of the world in the hands of Jesus. They will say, “Woe to us, for it was you, and we did not know it, and we did not believe, and we did not obey the elders who told us about our salvation.” “Their worm will not die and their fire will not be put out, and they will be a spectacle to all flesh.”

Translator’s note. The last quotation is from [Isaiah 66:24](#), the same verse quoted in 7.6.

Scripture: [Isaiah 66:24](#)

17.6 He is speaking of that day of judgment, when they will see those among us who lived ungodly lives and twisted the commandments of Jesus Christ.

17.7 But the righteous, who have done well, endured torments, and hated the pleasures of the soul, will see how those who went astray and denied Jesus by their words or their deeds are punished with terrible torments in unquenchable fire. Then they will give glory to their God and say, “There will be hope for the one who has served God with his whole heart.”

Chapter 18

18.1 So let us also be among those who give thanks, who have served God, and not among the ungodly who are being judged.

18.2 I myself am a complete sinner and have not yet escaped temptation, but am still in the midst of the devil’s tools. Even so, I am eager to pursue righteousness, so that I might have the strength at least to come near it, since I fear the judgment to come.

Chapter 19

19.1 So, brothers and sisters, now that the God of truth has spoken, I am reading you an appeal to pay attention to what is written, so that you may save both yourselves and the one who is reading to you. As my payment I ask you to repent with your whole heart, and so give yourselves salvation and life. If we do this, we will set a goal for all the young who want to devote themselves to godliness and to the goodness of God.

Translator’s note. The author says “I am reading to you,” which suggests the sermon was read aloud in a gathering of believers. It is often regarded as the oldest complete Christian sermon surviving outside the New Testament.

19.2 Let us not be unhappy and angry, foolish as we are, when someone warns us and turns us from wrongdoing to righteousness. Sometimes we do wicked things without realizing it, because of the double-mindedness and unbelief in our hearts, and our minds are darkened by empty desires.

Translator's note. The related adjective “double-minded” (dipsychos) appears in [James 1:8](#) and 4:8. It means a divided heart that wavers between God and the world, not simply intellectual doubt.

19.3 So let us practice righteousness so that we are saved in the end. Blessed are those who obey these commands. Even if they suffer for a short time in this world, they will gather the immortal fruit of the resurrection.

19.4 So let the godly person not be sad if he is miserable in the present time. A blessed time is waiting for him. He will live again above with the fathers and rejoice in an age without sorrow.

Chapter 20

20.1 Do not let this trouble your minds either: that we see the unrighteous growing rich while the servants of God are hard pressed.

20.2 So let us have faith, brothers and sisters. We are competing in the contest of the living God and training in this present life, so that we may be crowned in the life to come.

20.3 None of the righteous has received a quick reward; each one waits for it.

20.4 For if God paid the righteous their reward right away, we would immediately be practicing business and not reverence for God. We would seem to be righteous while chasing profit instead of godliness. For this reason divine judgment punishes a spirit that is not righteous and weighs it down with chains.

Translator's note. This last sentence is obscure. The Greek verb is in the past tense, but it may be a general statement (a “gnomic” past) rather than a reference to a specific event.

20.5 To the only invisible God, the Father of truth, who sent out to us the Savior and founder of immortality, through whom he also revealed to us the truth and the heavenly life, to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Translator's note. The ancient title that follows in the manuscripts is “Of Clement, to the Corinthians, the second letter.” The attribution to Clement is almost certainly wrong, and the work is a sermon rather than a letter. Most scholars think it was written by an unknown author sometime in the second century.

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