

Homily 1

by Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome reflects on his existential struggles and the transformative message of the Gospel he encounters through Barnabas.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, John 14:6, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Faith Formation", "Christian Apologetics"

Description

Clement of Rome, a Roman citizen, reflects on his boyhood questions about life, death, and existence, leading him to seek answers from philosophers but finding only uncertainty and doubt. He contemplates the idea of immortality, the purpose of life, and the existence of God, feeling perplexed and in search of truth. Eventually, he hears about the good news of Jesus Christ spreading in Judæa and Rome, prompting him to seek out the true Prophet and find answers to his deepest questions. Upon meeting Peter, a disciple of Jesus, Clement is convinced of the truth of prophecy and expresses unshakable faith in the teachings he has received.

Transcript

CHAPTER 1. BOYISH QUESTIONINGS

I Clement, being a Roman citizen, even from my earliest youth was able to live chastely, my mind from my boyhood drawing away the lust that was in me to dejection and distress. For I had a habit of reasoning--how originating I know not--making frequent cogitations concerning death: When I die, shall I neither exist, nor shall any one ever have any remembrance of me, while boundless time bears all things of all men into forgetfulness? And shall I then be without being, or acquaintance with those who are; neither knowing nor being known, neither having been nor being? And has the world ever been made? And was there anything before it was made? For if it has been always, it shall also continue to be; but if it has been made, it shall also be dissolved. And after its dissolution, shall there ever be anything again, unless, perhaps, silence and forgetfulness? Or perhaps something shall be which is not possible now to conceive.

CHAPTER 2. GOOD OUT OF EVIL

As I pondered without ceasing these and such like questions--I know not whence arising--I had such bitter grief, that, becoming pale, I wasted away; and, what was most terrible, if at any time I wished to drive away this meditation as unprofitable, my suffering became all the more severe; and I grieved over this, not

knowing that I had a fair inmate, even my thought, which was to be to me the cause of a blessed immortality, as I afterwards knew by experience, and gave thanks to God, the Lord of all. For it was by this thought, which at first afflicted me, that I was compelled to come to the search and the finding of things; and then I pitied those whom at first, through ignorance, I ventured to call blessed.

CHAPTER 3. PERPLEXITY

From my boyhood, then, being involved in such reasonings, in order to learn something definite, I used to resort to the schools of the philosophers. But nought else did I see than the setting up and the knocking down of doctrines, and strifes, and seeking for victory, and the arts of syllogisms, and the skill of assumptions; and sometimes one opinion prevailed,--as, for example, that the soul is immortal, and sometimes that it is mortal. If, therefore, at any time the doctrine prevailed that it is immortal, I was glad; and when the doctrine prevailed that it is mortal, I was grieved. And again, I was the more disheartened because I could not establish either doctrine to my satisfaction. However, I perceived that the opinions on subjects under discussion are taken as true or false, according to their defenders, and do not appear as they really are. Perceiving, therefore, now that the acceptance does not depend on the real nature of the subjects discussed, but that opinions are proved to be true or false, according to ability of those who defend them, I was still more than ever at a loss in regard of things. Wherefore I groaned from the depth of my soul. For neither was I able to establish anything, nor could I shake off the consideration of such things, though, as I said before, I wished it. For although I frequently charged myself to be at peace, in some way or other thoughts on these subjects, accompanied with a feeling of pleasure, would come into my mind.

CHAPTER 4. MORE PERPLEXITY

And again, living in doubt, I said to myself, Why do I labour in vain, when the matter is clear, that if I lose existence when I die, it is not fitting that I should distress myself now while I do exist? Wherefore I shall reserve my grief till that day, when, ceasing to exist, I shall not be affected with grief. But if I am to exist, what does it profit me now to distress myself gratuitously? And immediately after this another reasoning assailed me; for I said, Shall I not have something worse to suffer than that which distresses me now, if I have not lived piously; and shall I not be delivered over, according to the doctrines of some philosophers, to Pyriphlegethon and Tartarus, like Sisyphus, or Tityus, or Ixion, or Tantalus, and be punished for ever in Hades? But again I replied, saying: But there are no such things as these. Yet again I said: But if there be? Therefore, said I, since the matter is uncertain, the safer plan is for me rather to live piously. But how shall I be able, for the sake of righteousness, to subdue bodily pleasures, looking, as I do, to an uncertain hope? But I am neither fully persuaded what is that righteous thing that is pleasing to God, nor do I know whether the soul is immortal or mortal. Neither can I find any well-established doctrine, nor can I abstain from such debates.

CHAPTER 5. A RESOLUTION

What, then, am I to do, unless this? I shall go into Egypt, and I shall become friendly with the hierophants of the shrines, and with the prophets; and I shall seek and find a magician, and persuade him with large bribes to effect the calling up of a soul, which is called necromancy, as if I were going to inquire of it concerning some business. And the inquiry shall be for the purpose of learning whether the soul is immortal. But the answer of the soul that it is immortal shall not give me the knowledge from its speaking or my hearing, but only from its being seen; so that, seeing it with my very eyes, I may have a

self-sufficient and fit assurance, from the very fact of its appearing, that it exists; and never again shall the uncertain words of hearing be able to overturn the things which the eyes have made their own. However, I submitted this very plan to a certain companion who was a philosopher; and he counselled me not to venture upon it, and that on many accounts. For if, said he, the soul shall not listen to the magician, you will live with an evil conscience, as having acted against the laws which forbid the doing of these things. But if it shall listen to him, then, besides your living with an evil conscience, I think that matters of piety will not be promoted to you on account of your making this attempt. For they say that the Deity is angry with those who disturb souls after their release from the body. And I, when I heard this, became indeed more backward to undertake such a thing, but I did not abandon my original plan; but I was distressed, as being hindered in the execution of it.

CHAPTER 6. TIDINGS FROM JUDÆA

And, not to discuss such matters to you in a long speech, while I was occupied with such reasonings and doings, a certain report, taking its rise in the spring-time, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, gradually grew everywhere, and ran through the world as truly the good tidings of God, being unable to stifle the counsel of God in silence. Therefore it everywhere became greater and louder, saying that a certain One in Judæa, beginning in the spring season, was preaching to the Jews the kingdom of the invisible God, and saying that whoever of them would reform his manner of living should enjoy it. And in order that He might be believed that He uttered these things full of the Godhead, He wrought many wonderful miracles and signs by His mere command, as having received power from God. For He made the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the lame to walk, raised up the bowed down, drove away every disease, put to flight every demon; and even scabbed lepers, by only looking on Him from a distance, were sent away cured by Him; and the dead being brought to Him, were raised; and there was nothing which He could not do. And as time advanced, so much the greater, through the arrival of more persons, and the stronger grew--I say not now the report, but--the truth of the thing; for now at length there were meetings in various places for consultation and inquiry as to who He might be that had appeared, and what was His purpose.

CHAPTER 7. THE GOSPEL IN ROME

And then in the same year, in the autumn season, a certain one, standing in a public place, cried and said, Men of Rome, hearken. The Son of God has come in Judæa, proclaiming eternal life to all who will, if they shall live according to the counsel of the Father, who has sent Him. Wherefore change your manner of life from the worse to the better, from things temporal to things eternal; for know ye that there is one God, who is in heaven, whose world ye unrighteously dwell in before His righteous eyes. But if ye be changed, and live according to His counsel, then, being born into the other world, and becoming eternal, ye shall enjoy His unspeakable good things. But if ye be unbelieving, your souls, after the dissolution of the body, shall be thrown into the place of fire, where, being punished eternally, they shall repent of their unprofitable deeds. For every one, the term of repentance is the present life. I therefore, when I heard these things, was grieved, because no one among so great multitudes, hearing such an announcement, said: I shall go into Judæa, that I may know if this man who tells us these things speaks the truth, that the Son of God has come into Judæa, for the sake of a good and eternal hope, revealing the will of the Father who sent Him. For it is no small matter which they say that He preaches: for He asserts that the souls of some, being themselves immortal, shall enjoy eternal good things; and that those of others, being thrown into unquenchable fire, shall be punished for ever.

CHAPTER 8. DEPARTURE FROM ROME

While I spoke thus concerning others, I also lectured myself, saying, Why do I blame others, being myself guilty of the very same crime of heedlessness? But I shall hasten into Judæa, having first arranged my affairs. And when I had thus made up my mind, there occurred a long time of delay, my worldly affairs being difficult to arrange. Therefore, meditating further on the nature of life, that by involving men in hope it lays snares for those who are making haste, yea, and how much time I had been robbed of while tossed by hopes, and that we men die while thus occupied, I left all my affairs as they were, and sped to Portus; and coming to the harbour, and being taken on board a ship, I was borne by adverse winds to Alexandria instead of Judæa; and being detained there by stress of weather, I consorted with the philosophers, and told them about the rumour and the sayings of him who had appeared in Rome. And they answered that indeed they knew nothing of him who had appeared in Rome; but concerning Him who was born in Judæa, and who was said by the report to be the Son of God, they had heard from many who had come from thence, and had learned respecting all the wonderful things that He did with a word.

CHAPTER 9. PREACHING OF BARNABAS

And when I said that I wished I could meet with some one of those who had seen Him, they immediately brought me to one, saying, There is one here who not only is acquainted with Him, but is also of that country, a Hebrew, by name Barnabas, who says that he himself is one of His disciples; and hereabouts he resides, and readily announces to those who will the terms of His promise. Then I went with them; and when I came, I stood listening to his words with the crowd that stood round him; and I perceived that he was speaking the truth not with dialectic art, but was setting forth simply and without preparation what he had heard and seen the manifested Son of God do and say. And even from the crowd who stood around him he produced many witnesses of the miracles and discourses which he narrated.

CHAPTER 10. CAVILS OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

But while the multitudes were favourably disposed towards the things that he so artlessly spoke, the philosophers, impelled by their worldly learning, set upon laughing at him and making sport of him, upbraiding and reproaching him with excessive presumption, making use of the great armoury of syllogisms. But he set aside their babbling, and did not enter into their subtle questioning, but without embarrassment went on with what he was saying. And then one of them asked, Wherefore it was that a gnat, although it be so small, and has six feet, has wings also; while an elephant, the largest of beasts, is wingless, and has but four feet? But he, after the question had been put, resuming his discourse, which had been interrupted, as though he had answered the question, resumed his original discourse, only making use of this preface after each interruption: We have a commission only to tell you the words and the wondrous doings of Him who sent us; and instead of logical demonstration, we present to you many witnesses from amongst yourselves who stand by, whose faces I remember, as living images. These sufficient testimonies it is left to your choice to submit to, or to disbelieve. But I shall not cease to declare unto you what is for your profit; for to be silent were to me a loss, and to disbelieve is ruin to you. But indeed I could give answers to your frivolous questions, if you asked them through love of truth. But the reason of the different structure of the gnat and elephant it is not fitting to tell to those who are ignorant of the God of all.

CHAPTER 11. CLEMENT'S ZEAL

When he said this, they all, as in concert, set up a shout of laughter, trying to silence him and put him out, as a barbarous madman. But I, seeing this, and seized, I know not how, with enthusiasm, could no longer

keep silence with righteous indignation, but boldly cried out, saying, Well has God ordained that His counsel should be incapable of being received by you, foreseeing you to be unworthy, as appears manifestly to such of those who are now present as have minds capable of judging. For whereas now heralds of His counsel have been sent forth, not making a show of grammatical art, but setting forth His will in simple and in artificial words, so that whosoever hear can understand what is spoken, and not with any invidious feeling, as though unwilling to offer it to all; you come here, and besides your not understanding what is for your advantage, to your own injury you laugh at the truth, which, to your condemnation, consorts with the barbarians, and which you will not entertain when it visits you, by reason of your wickedness and the plainness of its words, lest you be convicted of being merely lovers of words, and not lovers of truth and lovers of wisdom. How long will you be learning to speak, who have not the power of speech? For many sayings of yours are not worth one word. What, then, will your Grecian multitude say, being of one mind, if, as he says, there shall be a judgment? Why, O God, did You not proclaim to us Your counsel? Shall you not, if you be thought worthy of an answer at all, be told this? I, knowing before the foundation of the world all characters that were to be, acted towards each one by anticipation according to his deserts without making it known; but wishing to give full assurance to those who have fled to me that this is so, and to explain why from the beginning, and in the first ages, I did not suffer my counsel to be publicly proclaimed; I now, in the end of the world, have sent heralds to proclaim my will, and they are insulted and flouted by those who will not be benefited, and who wilfully reject my friendship. Oh, great wrong! The preachers are exposed to danger even to the loss of life, and that by the men who are called to salvation.

CHAPTER 12. CLEMENT'S REBUKE OF THE PEOPLE

And this wrongful treatment of my heralds would have been against all from the beginning, if from the beginning the unworthy had been called to salvation. For that which is now done wrongfully by these men serves to the vindication of my righteous foreknowledge, that it was well that I did not choose from the beginning to expose uselessly to public contempt the word which is worthy of honour; but determined to suppress it, as being honourable, not indeed from those who were worthy from the beginning--for to them also I imparted it--but from those, and such as those, unworthy, as you see them to be,--those who hate me, and who will not love themselves. And now, give over laughing at this man, and hear me with respect to his announcement, or let any one of the hearers who pleases answer. And do not bark like vicious dogs, deafening with disorderly clamour the ears of those who would be saved, ye unrighteous and God-haters, and perverting the saving method to unbelief. How shall you be able to obtain pardon, who scorn him who is sent to speak to you of the Godhead of God? And this you do towards a man whom you ought to have received on account of his good-will towards you, even if he did not speak truth.

CHAPTER 13. CLEMENT INSTRUCTED BY BARNABAS

While I spoke these words, and others to the same effect, there arose a great excitement among the crowd; and some as pitying Barnabas, sympathized with me; but others, being senseless, terribly gnashed their teeth against me. But, as the evening had already come, I took Barnabas by the hand, and by force conducted him, against his will, to my lodging, and constrained him to remain there, lest some one might lay hands on him. And having spent several days, and instructed me briefly in the true doctrine, as well as he could in a few days, he said that he should hasten into Judæa for the observance of the festival, and also because he wished for the future to consort with those of his own nation.

CHAPTER 14. DEPARTURE OF BARNABAS

But it plainly appeared to me that he was disconcerted. For when I said to him, Only set forth to me the words which you have heard of the Man who has appeared, and I will adorn them with my speech, and preach the counsel of God; and if you do so, within a few days I will sail with you, for I greatly desire to go to the land of Judæa, and perhaps I shall dwell with you all my life;--when he heard this, he answered: If you wish to inquire into our affairs, and to learn what is for your advantage, sail with me at once. But if you will not, I shall now give you directions to my house, and that of those whom you wish to meet, that when you choose to come you may find us. For I shall set out tomorrow for my home. And when I saw that he could not be prevailed upon, I went with him as far as the harbour; and having learned of him the directions which he had promised to give me for finding the dwellings, I said to him, Were it not that tomorrow I am to recover a debt that is due to me, I should straightway set sail with you. But I shall soon overtake you. And having said this, and having given him in charge to those who commanded the ship, I returned grieving, remembering him as an excellent and dear friend.

CHAPTER 15. INTRODUCTION TO PETER

But having spent some days, and not having been able to recover the whole debt, for the sake of speed I neglected the balance, as being a hindrance, and myself also set sail for Judæa, and in fifteen days arrived at Cæsarea Stratonis. And when I had landed, and was seeking for a lodging, I learned that one named Peter, who was the most esteemed disciple of the Man who had appeared in Judæa, and had done signs and wonders, was going to have a verbal controversy next day with Simon, a Samaritan of Gitthi. When I heard this, I begged to be shown his lodging; and as soon as I learned it, I stood before the door. And those who were in the house, seeing me, discussed the question who I was, and whence I had come. And, behold, Barnabas came out; and as soon as he saw me he embraced me, rejoicing greatly, and weeping. And he took me by the hand, and conducted me to where Peter was, saying to me, This is Peter, of whom I told you as being the greatest in the wisdom of God, and I have spoken to him of you continually. Therefore enter freely, for I have told him your excellent qualities, without falsehood; and, at the same time, have disclosed to him your intention, so that he himself also is desirous to see you. Therefore I offer him a great gift when by my hands I present you to him. Thus saying, he presented me, and said, This, O Peter, is Clement.

CHAPTER 16. PETER'S SALUTATION

Then the blessed man, springing forward as soon as he heard my name, kissed me; and making me sit down, straightway said, You acted nobly in entertaining Barnabas, a herald of the truth, to the honour of the living God, being magnanimously not ashamed, nor fearing the resentment of the rude multitude. Blessed shall you be. For as you thus with all honour entertained the ambassador of the truth, so also truth herself shall constitute you, who are a stranger, a citizen of her own city. And thus you shall greatly rejoice, because you have now lent a small favour; I mean the kindness of good words. You shall be heir of blessings which are both eternal and cannot possibly be taken from you. And do not trouble yourself to detail to me your manner of life; for the veracious Barnabas has detailed to us everything relating to you, making favourable mention of you almost every day. And in order that I may tell to you briefly, as to a genuine friend, what is in hand, travel with us, unless anything hinders you, partaking of the words of truth which I am going to speak from city to city, as far as Rome itself. And if you wish to say anything, speak on.

CHAPTER 17. QUESTIONS PROPOUNDED

Then I set forth my purpose from the beginning, and how I had spent myself upon difficult questions, and all the things that I disclosed to you at the outset, so that I need not write the same things again. Then I said, I hold myself in readiness to journey with you; for this, I know not how, I gladly wish. However, I wish first to be convinced concerning the truth, that I may know whether the soul is mortal or immortal; and whether, if it is eternal, it is to be judged concerning the things which it has done here. Also, whether there is anything that is righteous and well-pleasing to God; and whether the world was made, and for what end it was made; and whether it shall be dissolved; and if it shall be dissolved, whether it shall be made better, or shall not be at all. And not to mention them in detail, I said that I wished to learn these things, and things consequent upon these. And to this he answered: I shall shortly convey to you, O Clement, the knowledge of the things that are; and even now listen.

CHAPTER 18. CAUSES OF IGNORANCE

The will of God has been kept in obscurity in many ways. In the first place, there is evil instruction, wicked association, terrible society, unseemly discourses, wrongful prejudice. Thereby is error, then fearlessness, unbelief, fornication, covetousness, vainglory; and ten thousand other such evils, filling the world as a quantity of smoke fills a house, have obscured the sight of the men inhabiting the world, and have not suffered them to look up and become acquainted with God the Creator from the delineation of Himself which He has given, and to know what is pleasing to Him. Wherefore it behooves the lovers of truth, crying out inwardly from their breasts, to call for aid, with truth-loving reason, that some one living within the house which is filled with smoke may approach and open the door, so that the light of the sun which is without may be admitted into the house, and the smoke of the fire which is within may be driven out.

CHAPTER 19. THE TRUE PROPHET

Now the Man who is the helper I call the true Prophet; and He alone is able to enlighten the souls of men, so that with our own eyes we may be able to see the way of eternal salvation. But otherwise it is impossible, as you also know, since you said a little while ago that every doctrine is set up and pulled down, and the same is thought true or false, according to the power of him who advocates it; so that doctrines do not appear as they are, but take the appearance of being or not being truth or falsehood from those who advocate them. On this account the whole business of religion needed a true prophet, that he might tell us things that are, as they are, and how we must believe concerning all things. So that it is first necessary to test the prophet by every prophetic sign, and having ascertained that he is true, thereafter to believe him in every thing, and not to sit in judgment upon his several sayings, but to receive them as certain, being accepted indeed by seeming faith, yet by sure judgment. For by our initial proof, and by strict inquiry on every side, all things are received with right reason. Wherefore before all things it is necessary to seek after the true Prophet, because without Him it is impossible that any certainty can come to men.

CHAPTER 20. PETER'S SATISFACTION WITH CLEMENT

And, at the same time, he satisfied me by expounding to me who He is, and how He is found, and holding Him forth to me as truly to be found, showing that the truth is more manifest to the ear by the discourse of the prophet than things that are seen with the eye; so that I was astonished, and wondered that no one sees those things which are sought after by all, though they lie before him. However, having written this discourse concerning the Prophet by his order, he caused the volume to be dispatched to you from Cæsarea Stratonis, saying that he had a charge from you to send his discourses and his acts year by

year. Thus, on the very first day, beginning only concerning the prophet of the truth, he confirmed me in every respect; and then he spoke thus: Henceforth give heed to the discussions that take place between me and those on the other side; and even if I come off at a disadvantage, I am not afraid of your ever doubting of the truth that has been delivered to you, knowing well that I seem to be beaten, but not the doctrine that has been delivered to us by the Prophet. However, I hope not to come off in our inquiries at a disadvantage with men who have understanding--I mean lovers of truth, who are able to know what discourses are specious, artificial, and pleasant, and what are unartificial and simple, trusting only to the truth that is conveyed through them.

CHAPTER 21. UNALTERABLE CONVICTION

When he had thus spoken, I answered: Now do I thank God; for as I wished to be convinced, so He has vouchsafed to me. However, so far as concerns me, be you so far without anxiety that I shall never doubt; so much so, that if you yourself should ever wish to remove me from the prophetic doctrine, you should not be able, so well do I know what I have received. And do not think that it is a great thing that I promise you that I shall never doubt; for neither I myself, nor any man who has heard your discourse concerning the Prophet, can ever doubt of the true doctrine, having first heard and understood what is the truth of the prophetic announcement. Wherefore have confidence in the God-willed dogma; for every art of wickedness has been conquered. For against prophecy, neither arts of discourses, nor tricks of sophisms, nor syllogisms, nor any other contrivance, can prevail anything; that is, if he who has heard the true Prophet really is desirous of truth, and does not give heed to anything else under pretext of truth. So that, my lord Peter, be not disconcerted, as though you had presented the greatest good to a senseless person; for you have presented it to one sensible of the favour, and who cannot be seduced from the truth that has been committed to him. For I know that it is one of those things which one wishes to receive quickly, and not to attain slowly. Therefore I know that I should not despise, on account of the quickness with which I have got it, what has been committed to me, what is incomparable, and what alone is safe.

CHAPTER 22. THANKSGIVING

When I had thus spoken, Peter said: I give thanks to God, both for your salvation and for my satisfaction. For I am truly pleased to know that you apprehend what is the greatness of prophecy. Since, then, as you say, if I myself should ever wish--which God forbid--to transfer you to another doctrine, I shall not be able to persuade you, begin from tomorrow to attend upon me in the discussions with the adversaries. And tomorrow I have one with Simon Magus. And having spoken thus, and he himself having partaken of food in private, he ordered me also to partake; and having blessed the food, and having given thanks after being satisfied, and having giving me an account of this matter, he went on to say: May God grant you in all things to be made like unto me, and having been baptized, to partake of the same table with me. And having thus spoken, he enjoined me to go to rest; for now indeed my bodily nature demanded sleep.

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