

Homily 16

by Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome's Homily 16 explores the theological debate between the unity of God and the existence of multiple gods through a dialogue between Peter and Simon.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4

Topics: "Gods Nature", "Faith Defense"

Description

Clement of Rome preaches a powerful sermon on the unity of God, as Simon challenges Peter's belief in one God by citing Scriptures that seemingly support the existence of many gods. Peter skillfully defends the unity of God by pointing out Scriptures that emphasize His oneness and supremacy over all. The discussion delves into the nature of God, the shape of man in relation to God, and the character of God as patient and just. Despite Simon's attempts to sow doubt, Peter stands firm in his faith, urging the crowds to stay true to the teachings that purify the soul.

Transcript

CHAPTER 1. SIMON WISHES TO DISCUSS WITH PETER THE UNITY OF GOD

At break of day Peter went out, and reaching the place where he was wont to discourse, he saw a great multitude assembled. At the very time when he was going to discourse, one of his deacons entered, and said: Simon has come from Antioch, starting as soon as it was evening, having learned that you promised to speak on the unity of God; and he is ready, along with Athenodorus the Epicurean, to come to hear your speech, in order that he may publicly oppose all the arguments ever adduced by you for the unity of God. Just as the deacon said this, lo! Simon himself entered, accompanied by Athenodorus and some other friends. And before Peter spoke at all, he took the first word, and said:--

CHAPTER 2. THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED

I heard that you promised yesterday to Faustus to prove this day, giving out your arguments in regular order, and beginning with Him who is Lord of the universe, that we ought to say that He alone is God, and that we ought neither to say nor to think that there are other gods, because he that acts contrary to this will be punished eternally. But, above all, I am truly amazed at your madness in hoping to convert a wise man, and one far advanced in years, to your state of mind. But you will not succeed in your designs; and all the more that I am present, and can thoroughly refute your false arguments. For perhaps, if I had not been present, the wise old man might have been led astray, because he has no critical acquaintance with the

books publicly believed in amongst the Jews. At present I shall omit much, in order that I may the more speedily refute that which you have promised to prove. Wherefore begin to speak what you promised to say before us, who know the Scriptures. But if, fearing our refutation, you are unwilling to fulfil your promise in our presence, this of itself will be sufficient proof that you are wrong, because you did venture to speak in the presence of those who know the Scriptures. And now, why should I wait till you tell me, when I have a most satisfactory witness of your promise in the old man who is present? And, saying this, he looked to my father, and said: Tell me, most excellent of all men, is not this the man who promised to prove to you today that God is one, and that we ought not to say or think that there is any other god, and that he who acts contrary to this will be punished eternally, as committing the most heinous sin? Do you, then, refuse to reply to me?

CHAPTER 3. THE MODE OF THE DISCUSSION

And our father said: Well might you have demanded testimony from me, Simon, if Peter had first denied that he had made the promise. But now I shall feel no shame in saying what I am bound to say. I think that you wish to enter on the discussion inflamed with anger. Now this is a state of mind in which it is improper for you to speak and for us to listen to you; for we are no longer being helped on to the truth. but we are watching the progress of a contest. And now, having learned from Hellenic culture how those who seek the truthought to act, I shall remind you. Let each of you give an exposition of his own opinion, and let the right of speech pass from the one to the other. For if Peter alone should wish to expound his thought, but you should be silent as to yours, it is possible that some argument adduced by you might crush both your and his opinion; and both of you, though defeated by this argument, would not appear defeated, but only the one who expounded his opinion; while he who did not expound his, though equally defeated, would not appear defeated, but would even be thought to have conquered. And Simon answered: I will do as you say; but I am afraid lest you do not turn out a truth-loving judge, as you have been already prejudiced by his arguments.

CHAPTER 4. THE PREJUDICES OF FAUSTUS RATHER ON THE SIDE OF SIMON THAN ON THAT OF PETER

Our father answered: Do not compel me to agree with you without any exercise of my judgment in order that I may seem to be a truth-loving judge; but if you wish me to tell you the truth, my prepossessions are rather the side of your opinions. And Simon said:How is this the case, when you do not know what my opinions are? And our father said: It is easy to know this, and I will tell you how. You promised that you would convict Peter of error in maintaining the unity of God; but if one undertakes to convict of error him who maintains the unity of God. it is perfectly plain that he, as being in the right, does not hold the same opinion. For if he holds the same opinion as the man who is thoroughly in error, then he himself is in error; but if he gives his proofs holding opposite opinions, then he is in the right. Not well then do you assert that he who maintains the unity of God is wrong, unless you believe that there are many gods. Now I maintain that there are many gods. Holding, therefore, the same opinion as you before the discussion, I am prepossessed rather in your favour. For this reason you ought to have no anxiety in regard to me, but Peter ought, for I still hold opinions contrary to his. And so after your discussion I hope that, as a truth-loving judge, who has stripped himself of his prepossessions, I shall agree to that doctrine which gains the victor. When my father said this, a murmur of applause burst insensibly from the multitudes because my father had thus spoken.

CHAPTER 5. PETER COMMENCES THE DISCUSSION

Peter then said: I am ready to do as the umpire of our discussion has said; and straight-way without any delay I shall set forth my opinion in regard to God. I then assert that there is one God who made the heavens and the earth, and all things that are in them. And it is not right to say or to think that there is any other. And Simon said: But I maintain that the Scriptures believed in amongst the Jews say that there are many gods, and that God is not angry at this, because He has Himself spoken of many gods in His Scriptures.

CHAPTER 6. SIMON APPEALS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT TO PROVE THAT THERE ARE MANY GODS

For instance, in the very first words of the law, He evidently speaks of them as being like even unto Himself. For thus it is written, that, when the first man received a commandment from God to eat of every tree that was in the garden, but not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent having persuaded them by means of the woman, through the promise that they would become gods, made them look up; and then, when they had thus looked up, God said, 'Behold, Adam has become as one of us.' When, then, the serpent said, 'You shall be as gods,' he plainly speaks in the belief that gods exist; all the more as God also added His testimony, saying, 'Behold, Adam has become as one of us.' The serpent, then, who said that there are many gods, did not speak falsely. Again, the scripture, 'You shall not revile the gods, nor curse the rulers of your people,' points out many gods whom it does not wish even to be cursed. But it is also somewhere else written, 'Did another god dare to enter and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, as did I the Lord God?' When He says, 'Did another God dare?' He speaks on the supposition that other gods exist. And elsewhere: 'Let the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth perish;' as if those who had made them were not to perish. And in another place, when it says, 'Take heed to yourself lest you go and serve other gods whom your fathers knew not,' it speaks as if other gods existed whom they were not to follow. And again: 'The names of other gods shall not ascend upon your lips.' Here it mentions many gods whose names it does not wish to be uttered. And again it is written, 'Your God is the Lord, He is God of gods.' And again: 'Who is like unto You, O Lord, among the Gods?' And again: 'God is Lord of gods.' And again: 'God stood in the assembly of gods: He judges among the gods.' Wherefore I wonder how, when there are so many passages in writing which testify that there are many gods, you have asserted that we ought neither to say nor to think that there are many. Finally, if you have anything to say against what has been spoken so distinctly, say it in the presence of all.

CHAPTER 7. PETER APPEALS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT TO PROVE THE UNITY OF GOD

And Peter said: I shall reply briefly to what you have said. The law, which frequently speaks of gods, itself says to the Jewish multitude, 'Behold, the heaven of heavens is the Lord's your God, with all that therein is;' implying that, even if there are gods, they are under Him, that is, under the God of the Jews. And again: 'The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath, and there is none other except Him.' And somewhere else the Scripture says to the Jewish multitude, 'The Lord your God is God of gods;' so that, even if there are gods, they are under the God of the Jews. And somewhere else the Scripture says in regard to Him, God, the great and true, who regards not persons, nor takes reward, He executes the judgment of the fatherless and widow.' The Scripture, in calling the God of the Jews great and true, and executing judgment, marked out the others as small, and not true. But also somewhere else the Scripture says, 'As I live, says the Lord, there is no other God but me. I am the first, I am after this; except me there is no God.' And again: 'You shall fear the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.' And again: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord.' And many passages besides seal with an oath that God is one, and except Him there is no God. Whence I wonder how, when so many passages testify

that there is one God, you say that there are many.

CHAPTER 8. SIMON AND PETER CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION

And Simon said: My original stipulation with you was that I should prove from the Scriptures that you were wrong in maintaining that we ought not to speak of many gods. Accordingly I adduced many written passages to show that the divine Scriptures themselves speak of many gods. And Peter said: Those very Scriptures which speak of many gods, also exhorted us, saying, 'The names of other gods shall not ascend upon your lips.' Thus, Simon, I did not speak contrary to what was written. And Simon said: Do you, Peter, listen to what I have to say. You seem to me to sin in speaking against them, when the Scripture says, 'You shall not revile the gods, nor curse the rulers of your people.' And Peter said: I am not sinning, Simon, in pointing out their destruction according to the Scriptures; for thus it is written: 'Let the gods who did not make the heavens and the earth perish.' And He said thus, not as though some had made the heavens and were not to perish, as you interpreted the passage. For it is plainly declared that He who made them is one in the very first part of Scripture: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And it did not say, 'the gods.' And somewhere else it says, 'And the firmament shows His handiwork.' And in another place it is written, 'The heavens themselves shall perish, but You shall remain for ever.'

CHAPTER 9. SIMON TRIES TO SHOW THAT THE SCRIPTURES CONTRADICT THEMSELVES

And Simon said: I adduced clear passages from the Scriptures to prove that there are many gods; and you, in reply, brought forward as many or more from the same Scriptures, showing that God is one, and He the God of the Jews. And when I said that we ought not to revile gods, you proceeded to show that He who created is one, because those who did not create will perish. And in reply to my assertion that we ought to maintain that there are gods, because the Scriptures also say so, you showed that we ought not to utter their names, because the same Scripture tells us not to utter the names of other gods. Since, then, these very Scriptures say at one time that there are many gods, and at another that there is only one; and sometimes that they ought not to be reviled, and at other times that they ought; what conclusion ought we to come to in consequence of this, but that the Scriptures themselves lead us astray?

CHAPTER 10. PETER'S EXPLANATION OF THE APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS OF SCRIPTURE

And Peter said: They do not lead astray, but convict and bring to light the evil disposition against God which lurks like a serpent in each one. For the Scriptures lie before each one like many divers types. Each one, then, has his own disposition like wax, and examining the Scriptures and finding everything in them, he moulds his idea of God according to his wish, laying upon them, as I said, his own disposition, which is like wax. Since, then, each one finds in the Scriptures whatever opinion he wishes to have in regard to God, for this reason he, Simon, moulds from them the forms of many gods, while we moulded the form of Him who truly exists, coming to the knowledge of the true type from our own shape. For assuredly the soul within us is clothed with His image for immortality. If I abandon the parent of this soul, it also will abandon me to just judgment, making known the injustice by the very act of daring; and as coming from one who is just, it will justly abandon me; and so, as far as the soul is concerned, I shall, after punishment, be destroyed, having abandoned the help that comes from it. But if there is another god, first let him put on another form, another shape, in order that by the new shape of the body I may recognise the new god. But if he should change the shape, does he thereby change the substance of the soul? But if he should change it also, then I am no longer myself, having become another both in shape and in substance. Let

him, therefore, create others, if there is another. But there is not. For if there had been, he would have created. But since he has not created, then let him, as nonexistent, leave him who is really existent. For he is nobody, except only in the opinion of Simon. I do not accept of any other god but Him alone who created me.

CHAPTER 11. GENESIS 1:26 APPEALED TO BY SIMON

And Simon said: Since I see that you frequently speak of the God who created you, learn from me how you are impious even to him. For there are evidently two who created, as the Scripture says: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Now 'let us make,' implies two or more; certainly not one only.

CHAPTER 12. PETER'S EXPLANATION OF THE PASSAGE

And Peter answered: One is He who said to His Wisdom, 'Let us make a man.' But His Wisdom was that with which He Himself always rejoiced as with His own spirit. It is united as soul to God, but it is extended by Him, as hand, fashioning the universe. On this account, also, one man was made, and from him went forth also the female. And being a unity generically, it is yet a duality, for by expansion and contraction the unity is thought to be a duality. So that I act rightly in offering up all the honour to one God as to parents. And Simon said: What then? Even if the Scriptures say that there are other gods, will you not accept the opinion?

CHAPTER 13. THE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES INTENDED TO TRY THOSE WHO READ THEM

And Peter answered: If the Scriptures or prophets speak of gods, they do so to try those who hear. For thus it is written: 'If there arise among you a prophet, giving signs and wonders, and that sign and wonder shall then come to pass, and he say to you, Let us go after and worship other gods which your fathers have not known, ye shall not hearken to the words of that prophet; let your hands be among the first to stone him. For he has tried to turn you from the Lord your God. But if you say in your heart, How did he do that sign or wonder? You shall surely know that he who tried you, tried you to see if you fear the Lord your God.' The words 'he who tried you, tried you,' have reference to the earliest times; but it appears to be otherwise after the removal to Babylon. For God, who knows all things, would not, as can be proved by many arguments, try in order that He Himself might know, for He fore-knows all things. But, if you like, let us discuss this point, and I shall show that God foreknows. But it has been proved that the opinion is false that He does not know, and that this was written to try us. Thus we, Simon, can be led astray neither by the Scriptures nor by any one else; nor are we deceived into the admission of many gods, nor do we agree to any statement that is made against God.

CHAPTER 14. OTHER BEINGS CALLED GODS

For we ourselves also know that angels are called gods by the Scriptures,--as, for instance, He who spoke at the bush, and wrestled with Jacob,--and the name is likewise applied to Him who is born Emmanuel, and who is called the mighty God. Yea, even Moses became a god to Pharaoh, though in reality he was a man. The same is the case also with the idols of the Gentiles. But we have but one God, one who made creation and arranged the universe, whose Son is the Christ. Obeying Christ, we learn to know what is false from the Scriptures. Moreover, being furnished by our ancestors with the truths of the Scriptures, we know that there is only one who has made the heavens and the earth, the God of the Jews, and of all who

choose to worship Him. Our fathers, with pious thought, setting down a fixed belief in Him as the true God, handed down this belief to us, that we may know that if any thing is said against God, it is a falsehood. I shall add this remark over and above what I need say: If the case be not as I have said, then may I, and all who love the truth, incur danger in regard to the praise of the God who made us.

CHAPTER 15. CHRIST NOT GOD, BUT THE SON OF GOD

When Simon heard this, he said: Since you say that we ought not to believe even the prophet that gives signs and wonders if he say that there is another god, and that you know that he even incurs the penalty of death, therefore your teacher also was with reason cut off for having given signs and wonders. And Peter answered: Our Lord neither asserted that there were gods except the Creator of all, nor did He proclaim Himself to be God, but He with reason pronounced blessed him who called Him the Son of that God who has arranged the universe. And Simon answered: Does it not seem to you, then, that he who comes from God is God? And Peter said: Tell us how this is possible; for we cannot affirm this, because we did not hear it from Him.

CHAPTER 16. THE UNBEGOTTEN AND THE BEGOTTEN NECESSARILY DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER

In addition to this, it is the peculiarity of the Father not to have been begotten, but of the Son to have been begotten; but what is begotten cannot be compared with that which is unbegotten or self-begotten. And Simon said: Is it not the same on account of its origin? And Peter said: He who is not the same in all respects as some one, cannot have all the same appellations applied to him as that person. And Simon said: This is to assert, not to prove. And Peter said: Why, do you not see that if the one happens to be self-begotten or unbegotten, they cannot be called the same; nor can it be asserted of him who has been begotten that he is of the same substance as he is who has begotten him? Learn this also: The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance, but they are not gods. But if they are gods, then in this way the souls of all men, both those who have died, and those who are alive, and those who shall come into being, are gods. But if in a spirit of controversy you maintain that these also are gods, what great matter is it, then, for Christ to be called God? For He has only what all have.

CHAPTER 17. THE NATURE OF GOD

We call Him God whose peculiar attributes cannot belong to the nature of any other; for, as He is called the Unbounded because He is boundless on every side, it must of necessity be the case that it is no other one's peculiar attribute to be called unbounded, as another cannot in like manner be boundless. But if any one says that it is possible, he is wrong; for two things boundless on every side cannot co-exist, for the one is bounded by the other. Thus it is in the nature of things that the unbegotten is one. But if he possesses a figure, even in this case the figure is one and incomparable. Wherefore He is called the Most High, because, being higher than all, He has the universe subject to Him.

CHAPTER 18. THE NAME OF GOD

And Simon said: Is this word 'God' His ineffable name, which all use, because you maintain so strongly in regard to a name that it cannot be given to another? And Peter said: I know that this is not His ineffable name, but one which is given by agreement among men; but if you give it to another, you will also assign to this other that which is not used; and that, too, deliberately. The name which is used is the forerunner of

that which is not used. In this way insolence is attributed even to that which has not yet been spoken, just as honour paid to that which is known is handed on to that which has not yet been known.

CHAPTER 19. THE SHAPE OF GOD IN MAN

And Simon said: I should like to know, Peter, if you really believe that the shape of man has been moulded after the shape of God. And Peter said: I am really quite certain, Simon, that this is the case. And Simon said: How can death dissolve the body, impressed as it has thus been with the greatest seal? And Peter said: It is the shape of the just God. When, then, the body begins to act unjustly, the form which is in it takes to flight, and thus the body is dissolved, by the shape disappearing, in order that an unjust body may not have the shape of the just God. The dissolution, however, does not take place in regard to the seal, but in regard to the sealed body. But that which is sealed is not dissolved without Him who sealed it. And thus it is not permitted to die without judgment. And Simon said: What necessity was there to give the shape of such a being to man, who was raised from the earth? And Peter said: This was done because of the love of God, who made man. For while, as far as substance is concerned, all things are superior to the flesh of man,--I mean the ether, the sun, the moon, the stars, the air, the water, the fire--in a word, all the other things which have been made for the service of man,--yet, though superior in substance, they willingly endure to serve the inferior in substance, because of the shape of the superior. For as they who honour the clay image of a king have paid honour to the king himself, whose shape the clay happens to have, so the whole creation with joy serves man, who is made from earth, looking to the honour thus paid to God.

CHAPTER 20. THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Behold, then, the character of that God to whom you, Simon, wish to persuade us to be ungrateful, and the earth continues to bear you, perhaps wishing to see who will venture to entertain similar opinions to yours. For you were the first to dare what no other dared: you were the first to utter what we first heard. We first and alone have seen the boundless long-suffering of God in bearing with such great impiety as yours, and that God no other than the Creator of the world, against whom you have dared to act impiously. And yet openings of the earth took not place, and fire was not sent down from heaven and went not forth to burn up men, and rain was not poured out, and a multitude of beasts was not sent from the thickets, and upon us ourselves the destructive wrath of God did not begin to show itself, on account of one who sinned the sin, as it were, of spiritual adultery, which is worse than the carnal. For it is not God the Creator of heaven and earth that in former times punished sins, since now, when He is blasphemed in the highest degree, He would inflict the severest punishment. But, on the contrary, He is long-suffering, calls to repentance, having the arrows which end in the destruction of the impious laid up in His treasures, which He will discharge like living animals when He shall sit down to give judgment to those that are His. Wherefore let us fear the just God, whose shape the body of man bears for honour.

CHAPTER 21. SIMON PROMISES TO APPEAL TO THE TEACHING OF CHRIST; PETER DISMISSES THE MULTITUDES

When Peter said this, Simon answered: Since I see you skilfully hinting that what is written in the books against the framer of the world does not happen to be true, tomorrow I shall show, from the discourses of your teacher, that he asserted that the framer of the world was not the highest God. And when Simon said this, he went out. But Peter said to the assembled multitudes: If Simon can do no other injury to us in regard to God, he at least prevents you from listening to the words that can purify the soul. On Peter

saying this, much whispering arose amongst the crowds, saying, What necessity is there for permitting him to come in here, and utter his blasphemies against God? And Peter heard, and said, Would that the doctrines against God which are intended to try men went no further than Simon! For there will be, as the Lord said, false apostles, false prophets, heresies, desires for supremacy, who, as I conjecture, finding their beginning in Simon, who blasphemes God, will work together in the assertion of the same opinions against God as those of Simon. And saying this with tears, he summoned the multitudes to him by his hand; and when they came, he laid his hands upon them and prayed, and then dismissed them, telling them to come at an earlier hour next day. Saying this, and groaning, he entered and went to sleep, without taking food.

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