

Homily 4

by Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome's Homily 4 addresses the dangers of false teachings through the story of Simon the magician and emphasizes the importance of prioritizing God's mission and discerning truth from custom.

Scripture: Psalm 25:5, Proverbs 23:23, John 8:32, John 14:6, John 16:13, Ephesians 6:14, 2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Spiritual Deception", "Repentance"

Description

Clement of Rome preaches about the encounter with Simon the magician, who spreads lies and mischief, challenging the authority of Peter. Bernice shares disturbing details about Simon's deceptive practices, causing concern for the salvation of many souls. Despite the fear and danger posed by Simon's powers, Clement emphasizes the need to seek truth and discernment, highlighting the contrast between the teachings of the Greeks with their immoral gods and the pious doctrine of the Jews centered on repentance and judgment.

Transcript

CHAPTER 1. BERNICE'S HOSPITALITY

Thus I Clement, departing from Cæsarea Stratonis, together with Nicetas and Aquila, entered into Tyre of Phœnicia; and according to the injunction of Peter, who sent us, we lodged with Bernice, the daughter of Justa the Canaanitess. She received us most joyfully; and striving with much honour towards me, and with affection towards Aquila and Nicetas, and speaking freely as a friend, through joy she treated us courteously, and hospitably urged us to take bodily refreshment. Perceiving, therefore, that she was endeavouring to impose a short delay upon us, I said: You do well, indeed, to busy yourself in fulfilling the part of love; but the fear of our God must take the precedence of this. For, having a combat on hand on behalf of many souls, we are afraid of preferring our own ease before their salvation.

CHAPTER 2. SIMON'S PRACTICES

For we hear that Simon the magician, being worsted at Cæsarea in the discussion with our lord Peter, immediately hastened hither, and is doing much mischief. For he is slandering Peter, in opposition to truth, to all the adversaries, and stealing away the souls of the multitude. For he being a magician, calls him a magician; and he being a deceiver, proclaims him as a deceiver. And although in the discussions he was beaten in all points, and fled, yet he says that he was victorious; and he constantly charges them that they ought not to listen to Peter,--as if, forsooth, he were anxious that they may not be fascinated by a terrible

magician.

CHAPTER 3. OBJECT OF THE MISSION

Therefore our lord Peter, having learned these things, has sent us to be investigators of the things that have been told him; that if they be so, we may write to him and let him know, so that he may come and convict him face to face of the accusations that he has uttered against him. Since, therefore, danger on the part of many souls lies before us, on this account we must neglect bodily rest for a short time; and we would learn truly from you who live here, whether the things which we have heard be true. Now tell us particularly.

CHAPTER 4. SIMON'S DOINGS

But Bernice, being asked, said: These things are indeed as you have heard; and I will tell you other things respecting this same Simon, which perhaps you do not know. For he astonishes the whole city every day, by making spectres and ghosts appear in the midst of the market-place; and when he walks abroad, statues move, and many shadows go before him, which, he says, are souls of the dead. And many who attempted to prove him an impostor he speedily reconciled to him; and afterwards, under pretence of a banquet, having slain an ox, and given them to eat of it, he infected them with various diseases, and subjected them to demons. And in a word, having injured many, and being supposed to be a god, he is both feared and honoured.

CHAPTER 5. DISCRETION THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

Wherefore I do not think that any one will be able to quench such a fire as has been kindled. For no one doubts his promises; but every one affirms that this is so. Wherefore, lest you should expose yourselves to danger, I advise you not to attempt anything against him until Peter come, who alone shall be able to resist such a power, being the most esteemed disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. For so much do I fear this man, that if he had not elsewhere been vanquished in disputing with my lord Peter, I should counsel you to persuade even Peter himself not to attempt to oppose Simon.

CHAPTER 6. SIMON'S DEPARTURE

Then I said: If our lord Peter did not know that he himself alone can prevail against this power, he would not have sent us before him with orders to get information secretly concerning Simon, and to write to him. Then, as evening had come on, we took supper, and went to sleep. But in the morning, one of Bernice's friends came and said that Simon had set sail for Sidon, and that he had left behind him Appion Pleistonices, --a man of Alexandria, a grammarian by profession, whom I knew as being a friend of my father; and a certain astrologer, Annubion the Diospolitan, and Athenodorus the Athenian, attached to the doctrine of Epicurus. And we, having learned these things concerning Simon, in the morning wrote and dispatched a letter to Peter, and went to take a walk.

CHAPTER 7. APPION'S SALUTATION

And Appion met us, not only with the two companions just named, but with about thirty other men. And as soon as he saw me, he saluted and kissed me, and said, This is Clement, of whose noble birth and liberal education I have often told you; for he, being related to the family of Tiberius Cæsar, and equipped with all Grecian learning, has been seduced by a certain barbarian called Peter to speak and act after the manner of the Jews. Wherefore I beg of you to strive together with me for the setting of him right. And in your

presence I now ask him. Let him tell me, since he thinks that he has devoted himself to piety, whether he is not acting most impiously, in forsaking the customs of his country, and falling away to those of the barbarians.

CHAPTER 8. A CHALLENGE

I answered: I accept, indeed, your kindly affection towards me, but I take exception to your ignorance. For your affection is kindly, because you wish to continue in those customs which you consider to be good. But your inaccurate knowledge strives to lay a snare for me, under the guise of friendship. Then said Appion: Does it seem to you to be ignorance, that one should observe the customs of his fathers, and judge after the manner of the Greeks? Then I answered: It behooves one who desires to be pious not altogether to observe the customs of his fathers; but to observe them if they be pious, and to shake them off if they be impious. For it is possible that one who is the son of an impious father, if he wishes to be pious, should not desire to follow the religion of his father. Then answered Appion: What then? Do you say that your father was a man of an evil life? Then said I: He was not of an evil life, but of an evil opinion. Then Appion: I should like to know what was his evil apprehension. Then said I: Because he believed the false and wicked myths of the Greeks. Then Appion asked: What are these false and evil myths of the Greeks? Then I said: The wrong opinion concerning the gods, which, if you will bear with me, you shall hear, with those who are desirous to learn.

CHAPTER 9. UNWORTHY ENDS OF PHILOSOPHERS

Wherefore, before beginning our conversation, let us now withdraw into some quieter place, and there I shall converse with you. And the reason why I wish to speak privately is this, because neither the multitude, nor even all the philosophers, approach honestly to the judgment of things as they are. For we know many, even of those who pride themselves on their philosophy, who are vainglorious, or who have put on the philosopher's robe for the sake of gain, and not for the sake of virtue itself; and they, if they do not find that for which they take to philosophy, turn to mockery. Therefore, on account of such as these, let us choose some place fit for private conference.

CHAPTER 10. A COOL RETREAT

And a certain one amongst them--a rich man, and possessing a garden of evergreen plants --said: Since it is very hot, let us retire for a little from the city to my gardens. Accordingly they went forth, and sat down in a place where there were pure streams of cool water, and a green shade of all sorts of trees. There I sat pleasantly, and the others round about me; and they being silent, instead of a verbal request made to me, showed by their eager looks to me that they required the proof of my assertion. And therefore I proceeded to speak thus:--

CHAPTER 11. TRUTH AND CUSTOM

There is a certain great difference, O men of Greece, between truth and custom. For truth is found when it is honestly sought; but custom, whatsoever be the character of the custom received, whether true or false, is strengthened by itself without the exercise of judgment; and he who has received it is neither pleased with it as being true, nor grieved with it as false. For such an one has believed not by judgment, but by prejudice, resting his own hope on the opinion of those who have lived before him on a mere chance. And it is not easy to cast off the ancestral garment, though it be shown to himself to be wholly foolish and ridiculous.

CHAPTER 12. GENESIS

Therefore I say that the whole learning of the Greeks is a most dreadful fabrication of a wicked demon. For they have introduced many gods of their own, and these wicked, and subject to all kinds of passion; so that he who wishes to do the like things may not be ashamed, which belongs to a man, having as an example the wicked and unquiet lives of the mythological gods. And through his not being ashamed, such an one affords no hope of his repenting. And others have introduced fate, which is called genesis, contrary to which no one can suffer or do anything. This, therefore, also is like to the first. For any one who thinks that no one has anything to do or suffer contrary to genesis easily falls into sin; and having sinned, he does not repent of his impiety, holding it as his apology that he was borne on by genesis to do these things. And as he cannot rectify genesis, he has no reason to be ashamed of the sins he commits.

CHAPTER 13. DESTINY

And others introduce an unforeseeing destiny, as if all things revolved of their own accord, without the superintendence of any master. But thus to think these things is, as we have said, the most grievous of all opinions. For, as if there were no one superintending and fore-judging and distributing to every one according to his deserving, they easily do everything as they can through fearlessness. Therefore those who have such opinions do not easily, or perhaps do not at all, live virtuously; for they do not foresee the danger which might have the effect of converting them. But the doctrine of the barbarous Jews, as you call them, is most pious, introducing One as the Father and Creator of all this world, by nature good and righteous; good, indeed, as pardoning sins to those who repent; but righteous, as visiting to every one after repentance according to the worthiness of his doings.

CHAPTER 14. DOCTRINE ACCORDING TO GODLINESS.

This doctrine, even if it also be mythical, being pious, would not be without advantage for this life. For every one, in expectation of being judged by the all-seeing God, receives the greater impulse towards virtue. But if the doctrine be also true, it withdraws him who has lived virtuously from eternal punishment, and endows him with eternal and unspeakable blessings from God.

CHAPTER 15. WICKEDNESS OF THE GODS

But I return to the foremost doctrine of the Greeks, that which states in stories that there are gods many, and subject to all kinds of passions. And not to spend much time upon things that are clear, referring to the impious deeds of every one of those who are called gods, I could not tell all their amours; those of Zeus and Poseidon, of Pluto and Apollo, of Dionysus and Hercules, and of them all singly. And of these you are yourselves not ignorant, and have been taught their manners of life, being instructed in the Grecian learning, that, as competitors with the gods, you might do like things.

CHAPTER 16. WICKEDNESS OF JUPITER

But I shall begin with the most royal Zeus, whose father Kronos, having, as you say, devoured his own children, and having shorn off the members of his father Uranus with a sickle of adamant, showed to those who are zealous for the mysteries of the gods an example of piety towards parents and of love towards children. And Jupiter himself bound his own father, and imprisoned him in Tartarus; and he also punishes the other gods. And for those who wish to do things not to be spoken of, he begot Metis, and devoured her. But Metis was seed; for it is impossible to devour a child. And for an excuse to abusers of themselves

with mankind, he carries away Ganymedes. And as a helper of adulterers in their adultery, he is often found an adulterer. And to those who wish to commit incest with sisters, he sets the example in his intercourse with his sisters Hera and Demeter, and the heavenly Aphrodite, whom some call Dodona. And to those who wish to commit incest with their daughters, there is a wicked example from his story, in his committing incest with Persephone. But in myriads of instances he acted impiously, that by reason of his excessive wickedness the fable of his being a god might be received by impious men.

CHAPTER 17. THEIR MAKERS ARE LIKE UNTO THEM.

You will hold it reasonable for ignorant men to be moderately indignant at these fancies. But what must we say to the learned, some of whom, professing themselves to be grammarians and sophists, affirm that these acts are worthy of gods? For, being themselves incontinent, they lay hold of this mythical pretext; and as imitators of the gods, they practise unseemly things with freedom.

CHAPTER 18. SECOND NATURE

On this account, they who live in the country sin much less than they do, not having been indoctrinated in those things in which they have been indoctrinated who dare do these things, having learned from evil instruction to be impious. For they who from their childhood learn letters by means of such fables, while their soul is yet pliant, engraft the impious deeds of those who are called gods into their own minds; whence, when they are grown up, they ripen fruit, like evil seeds cast into the soul. And what is worst of all, the rooted impurities cannot be easily cut down, when they are perceived to be bitter by them when they have attained to manhood. For every one is pleased to remain in those habits which he forms in childhood; and thus, since custom is not much less powerful than nature, they become difficult to be converted to those good things which were not sown in their souls from the beginning.

CHAPTER 19. WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS.

Wherefore it behooves the young not to be satisfied with those corrupting lessons, and those who are in their prime should carefully avoid listening to the mythologies of the Greeks. For lessons about their gods are much worse than ignorance, as we have shown from the case of those dwelling in the country, who sin less through their not having been instructed by Greeks. Truly, such fables of theirs, and spectacles, and books, ought to be shunned, and if it were possible, even their cities. For those who are full of evil learning, even with their breath infect as with madness those who associate with them, with their own passions. And what is worst, whoever is most instructed among them, is so much the more turned from the judgment which is according to nature.

CHAPTER 20. FALSE THEORIES OF PHILOSOPHERS

And some of those amongst them who even profess to be philosophers, assert that such sins are indifferent, and say that those who are indignant at such practices are senseless. For they say that such things are not sins by nature, but have been proscribed by laws made by wise men in early times, through their knowing that men, through the instability of their minds, being greatly agitated on these accounts, wage war with one another; for which reason, wise men have made laws to proscribe such things as sins. But this is a ridiculous supposition. For how can they be other than sins, which are the cause of tumults, and murders, and every confusion? For do not shortcomings of life and many more evils proceed from adultery?

CHAPTER 21. EVILS OF ADULTERY

But why, it is said, if a man is ignorant of his wife's being an adulteress, is he not indignant, enraged, distracted? Why does he not make war? Thus these things are not evil by nature, but the unreasonable opinion of men make them terrible. But I say, that even if these dreadful things do not occur, it is usual for a woman, through association with an adulterer, either to forsake her husband, or if she continue to live with him, to plot against him, or to bestow upon the adulterer the goods procured by the labour of her husband; and having conceived by the adulterer while her husband is absent, to attempt the destruction of that which is in her womb, through shame of conviction, and so to become a child-murderer; or even, while destroying it, to be destroyed along with it. But if while her husband is at home she conceives by the adulterer and bears a child, the child when he grows up does not know his father, and thinks that he is his father who is not; and thus he who is not the father, at his death leaves his substance to the child of another. And how many other evils naturally spring from adultery! And the secret evils we do not know. For as the mad dog destroys all that he touches, infecting them with the unseen madness, so also the hidden evil of adultery, though it be not known, effects the cutting off of posterity.

CHAPTER 22. A MORE EXCELLENT WAY

But let us pass over this now. But this we all know, that universally men are beyond measure enraged on account of it, that wars have been waged, that there have been overthrows of houses, and captures of cities, and myriads of other evils. On this account I betook myself to the holy God and law of the Jews, putting my faith in the well-assured conclusion that the law has been assigned by the righteous judgment of God, and that the soul must at some time receive according to the desert of its deeds.

CHAPTER 23. WHITHER SHALL I GO FROM YOUR PRESENCE?

When I had thus spoken, Appion broke in upon my discourse. What! said he; do not the laws of the Greeks also forbid wickedness, and punish adulterers? Then said I: Then the gods of the Greeks, who acted contrary to the laws, deserve punishment. But how shall I be able to restrain myself, if I suppose that the gods themselves first practised all wickednesses as well as adultery, and did not suffer punishment; whereas they ought the rather to have suffered, as not being slaves to lust? But if they were subject to it, how were they gods? Then Appion said: Let us have in our eye not the gods, but the judges; and looking to them, we shall be afraid to sin. Then I said: This is not fitting, O Appion: for he who has his eye upon men will dare to sin, in hope of escaping detection; but he who sets before his soul the all-seeing God, knowing that he cannot escape His notice, will refrain from sinning even in secret.

CHAPTER 24. ALLEGORY

When Appion heard this, he said: I knew, ever since I heard that you were consorting with Jews, that you had alienated your judgment. For it has been well said by some one, 'Evil communications corrupt good manners.' Then said I: Therefore good communications correct evil manners. And Appion said: Today I am fully satisfied to have learned your position; therefore I permitted you to speak first. But tomorrow, in this place, if it is agreeable to you, I will show, in the presence of these friends when they meet, that our gods are neither adulterers, nor murderers, nor corrupters of children, nor guilty of incest with sisters or daughters. But the ancients, wishing that only lovers of learning should know the mysteries, veiled them with those fables of which you have spoken. For they speak physiologically of boiling substance under the name of Zen, and of time under that of Kronos, and of the ever-flowing nature of water under that of Rhea. However, as I have promised, I shall tomorrow exhibit the truth of things, explaining them one by one to

you when you come together in the morning. In reply to this I said: Tomorrow, as you have promised, so do. But now hear something in opposition to what you are going to say.

CHAPTER 25. AN ENGAGEMENT FOR TO-MORROW

If the doings of the gods, being good, have been veiled with evil fables, the wickedness of him who wove the veil is shown to have been great, because he concealed noble things with evil narratives, that no one imitate them. But if they really did things impious, they ought, on the contrary, to have veiled them with good narratives, lest men, regarding them as their superiors, should set about sinning in like manner. As I spoke thus, those present were evidently beginning to be well-disposed towards the words spoken by me; for they repeatedly and earnestly asked me to come on the following day, and departed.

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