

Clement of Alexandria

by J.B. Galloway

Clement of Alexandria's teachings emphasize the importance of perfection, achieved through knowledge, faith, love, and ascension to God, and the role of the Holy Spirit in purification and sanctification.

Topics: "Early Church", "Christian Perfection"

Description

J.B. Galloway preaches about Titus Flavius Clemens, a celebrated Greek father of the Early Church, who traveled extensively seeking knowledge before entering the Christian faith under Pantaenus in Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria believed in the possibility of being freed from all sin at baptism and discussed the distinction between spiritual and carnal Christians. He emphasized the pursuit of holiness through pure thoughts, knowledge of God's love, and treating the body as a temple. Clement highlighted prayer from a pure mind as a superior sacrifice and outlined steps to perfection through faith, knowledge, and a life of prayer.

Transcript

A Link In The Early Christian Schools

His full name was Titus Flavius Clemens. He was a celebrated Greek father of the Early Church, of about A.D. 153 to 217. It is uncertain whether he was born in Alexandria, Egypt, or Athens. He was probably born of heathen parents and received a liberal education and sought many teachers; for this purpose he traveled extensively through Greece, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, and the East. He finally resorted to Pantaenus, who presided over the Christian school at Alexandria. Here he entered the Church and was made a presbyter. He taught with great distinction and succeeded Pantaenus as the head of this famous school. During the persecution of Septimius Severus he left Egypt, and later we hear of him in Palestine and Asia Minor. His last days are veiled with obscurity, so that we do not know the place or time of his death. He was followed in the school by his pupil Origen. Clement of Alexandria was a man of great learning and proficient in Greek philosophy, literature, and history.

His greatest works are: Exhortation to the Heathen, the object of which was to win them to the Christian faith; the Instructor, which contains instruction in morals and matters of everyday life; and the Stromata, which is a miscellaneous collection of unsystematic discussions of doctrinal points. In these he tries to guide the mature Christian to perfect knowledge.

He speaks of a young man's being baptized and then anointed with oil. After the Church began to anoint the young converts with oil, they would pray that they might be filled with the Holy Ghost. The anointing was called sealing; this was probably from Ephesians 1: 13 (see Eusebius, Book III, chapter 17).

Clement Of Alexandria On Holiness

Free from All Sin

He believed that a man could be freed from all sin, but thought that it would be done at baptism. In his Instructor, Book I, chapter 6, he says:

Thus also we who are baptized, have wiped off the sins which obscure the light of the divine Spirit, and have the eye of the Spirit free and unimpaired, full of light, by which we contemplate the divine, the Holy Spirit flowing down from above. This is the eternal adjustment of vision, which is able to see the eternal light, since like loves like; and that which is holy loves that from which holiness proceeds, which has appropriately been termed light.

Still Carnal

A little further on in the chapter he sees a distinction between the spiritual and the carnal Christian, for he says:

For he called those who had already believed, spiritual, and those newly instructed and not yet purified, carnal, whom with justice he calls still carnal, as minding equally with the heathen the things of the flesh.

Perfect Women

In Book 4, chapter 19, he shows that woman is capable of perfection as well as man. In chapters 20 and 21 he gives a description of the perfect man. "Who then is perfect? He who professes abstinence from what is bad." He shows that the Spirit distributes the gifts of the Spirit that each may be perfect in his own place of service.

And the same Spirit, distributing to each according to His will. Such being the case, the prophets are perfect in prophecy, the righteous in righteousness, the martyrs in confession, and others in preaching, not that they are not sharers in the common virtues, but are proficient in those to which they are appointed.

Holy Thoughts

In chapter 22 he says:

We ought to go washed to the sacrifices and prayers, clean and bright; that this external adornment and purification are practiced for a sign. Now purity is to think holy thoughts For purity, as I conceive it, is perfect pureness in mind, and deeds and thoughts, and words too.

Dignified with the Spirit

In chapter 25 he shows that true perfection consists in the knowledge of the love of God, and in chapter 26 he shows how the perfect man treats the body and the things of the world. He says:

. . . that those who run down created existence and vilify the body are wrong Whence this abode becomes receptive of the soul which is most precious to God; and is dignified with the Holy Spirit through

the sanctification of soul and body, perfected with the perfection of the Saviour . . . The body too, is one sent on a distant pilgrimage, using inns and dwellings by the way, caring for the things by the way, of the place where he halts; but leaving his dwelling and property without excessive emotion giving thanks for the sojourn, and blessing God for his departure, embracing the mansion in heaven.

Holy Builders

In his Stromata, Book 7, chapter 5, he shows that a holy soul is a more excellent temple than any man-made edifice. He begins by saying:

For is it not the case that rightly and truly we do not circumscribe in any place that which cannot be circumscribed; nor do we shut up in temples made with hands that which contains all things? What work of builders, and stone-cutters, and mechanical art can be holy?

Holy Altar of Prayer

In the next chapter we read that prayer and praise from a pure mind is better than sacrifices.

But if, by nature needing nothing, He delights to be honored, it is not without reason that we honor God in prayer; and thus the best and holiest sacrifice with righteousness we bring, presenting it as an offering to the most righteous Word, by whom we receive knowledge, giving glory to Him for that we have learned.

A little farther on he says,

And will they not believe us when we say that the righteous soul is the truly sacred altar, and the incense arising from it is holy prayer?

Steps to Perfection

In chapter 10 he gives the steps to perfection, and begins with knowledge.

For knowledge to speak generally, a perfecting of man as man, is consummated by acquaintance with divine things, in character, life, and word, accordant and conformable to itself and to the divine Word. For by it faith is perfected, inasmuch as it is solely by that the believer becomes perfect. Faith is an internal good, and without searching for God, confesses His existence, and glorifies Him as existent.

Commenting further on faith, he says:

And this takes place when one hangs on the Lord by faith, by knowledge, by love, and ascends along with Him to where the God and guard of our faith is It leads us to an endless and perfect end, teaching us beforehand the future life, that we shall lead, according to God.

Again he says in the same chapter,

After which redemption the rewards and honors are assigned to those who have become perfect; when they have done with purification, and cease from all service, though it be holy service.

Society of Angels

In chapter 12 he says of a holy man:

His whole life is prayer and converse with God. And if he be pure from sins, he will by all means obtain what he wishes. For He says to the righteous man, "Ask, and I will give thee." . . . So he is always pure for prayer. He also prays in the society of angels, as being already of angelic rank, and he is never out of their holy keeping; and though he pray alone, he has the choir of saints standing around him.

We will close with a statement from chapter 12. Here he is commenting upon I Corinthians 6:1, and he says of a holy man:

But ye are sanctified, for he who has come to this state is in a condition to be holy, falling in none of the passions in any way, but as it were separated and already grown holy without this earth.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jb-galloway/clement-of-alexandria/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net