

Clement of Rome & Mathetes

By Tim Warner

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Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians is the earliest Christian document we have outside the New Testament. Clement was a bishop of the church in Rome and likely the Clement mentioned by Paul in Phil. 4:3. He was conversant with the Apostles. The Epistle was written while John and perhaps some of the other Apostles were still alive. The occasion of the first Epistle of Clement was a schism in the Corinthian church. Some of the younger members had revolted against the bishops and deacons, causing a church split, and dismissing some of the bishops and deacons for wrong reasons. The Epistle was written from the Roman church encouraging the Corinthians to resolve the issue, and respect the duly appointed leadership. Clement appealed to apostolic tradition several times in this epistle, and the chain of custody of the Christian faith also articulated by Tertullian and Irenaeus. That is, the Father sent Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus Himself trained and sent the Apostles into the world. The Apostles founded local churches, teaching and ordaining elders in every city. And these elders / bishops were to train and ordain their own successors. The local Apostolic churches were therefore the custodians of the Christian Faith from generation to generation.

CHAPTER 42

THE ORDER OF MINISTERS IN THE CHURCH

"The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scripture a certain place, "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.""

CHAPTER 44

THE ORDINANCES OF THE APOSTLES, THAT THERE MIGHT BE NO CONTENTION RESPECTING THE PRIESTLY OFFICE

"Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure [from this world]; for they have no fear lest any one deprive them of the place now appointed them. But we see that ye have removed some men of excellent behavior from the ministry, which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honor."

Another writer from about the same time was Mathetes. Little is known of this writer, except that he wrote that he learned directly from the Apostles. Mathetes' Epistle to Diognetus is filled with the Pauline spirit. It also reflects familiarity with John, referring to Christ constantly as "the Word."

CHAPTER 11

THESE THINGS ARE WORTHY TO BE KNOWN AND BELIEVED

"I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth. For who that is rightly taught and begotten by the loving Word, would not seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to His disciples, to whom the Word being manifested has revealed them, speaking plainly [to them], not understood indeed by the unbelieving, but conversing with the disciples, who, being esteemed faithful by Him, acquired a knowledge of the mysteries of the Father? For which reason He sent the Word, that He might be manifested to the world; and He, being despised by the people [of the Jews], was, when preached by the Apostles, believed on by the Gentiles. This is He who was from the beginning, who appeared as if new, and was found old, and yet who is ever born afresh in the hearts of the saints. This is He who, being from everlasting, is to-day called the Son; through whom the Church is enriched, and grace, widely spread, increases in the saints, furnishing understanding, revealing mysteries, announcing times, rejoicing over the faithful, giving to those that seek, by whom the limits of faith

are not broken through, nor the boundaries set by the fathers passed over. Then the fear of the law is charted, and the grace of the prophets is known, and the faith of the gospels is established, and **the tradition of the Apostles is preserved**, and the grace of the Church exults; which grace if you grieve not, you shall know those things which the Word teaches, by whom He wills, and when He pleases. For whatever things we are moved to utter by the will of the Word commanding us, we communicate to you with pains, and from a love of the things that have been revealed to us."