





## THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

The title Apostolic Fathers is assigned to the earliest Christian writings that appear after the New Testament. They were named in the seventeenth century after their writers, the apostolic fathers, who were believed to have known the apostles. In a couple instances, this might have been true. Over time, simply because of the way scholars classified the material, the number of these fathers has grown from five to eight. There is disagreement over how to classify the *Epistle to Diognetus*. With the exception of *Diognetus*, the works of the apostolic fathers are addressed to other Christians. In some instances we can identify the author of a work; in others we know only the name of the document. Some writings of the apostolic fathers are clearly beneficial for edification; some are considerably less so.

# CLEMENT OF ROME



In the apostolic father known as Clement of Rome (ca. AD 30–100), we encounter one marked by the spirit of the apostles. He had a clear understanding of the gospel, a love for God and the church, and a passion for order and harmony in Christ’s body. Clement had probably known the apostle Paul. He seems to have been at Philippi (ca. AD 57) when Paul was there. Along with godly women and others, Clement “struggled beside [Paul] in the work of the gospel” (Phil. 4:3, NRSV).

He was a copresbyter or clergy with Linus and Cletus in the church at Rome. After the deaths of Linus and Cletus, who were probably martyred under Emperor Nero (ca. AD 64–67), Clement became bishop of Rome. During the latter part of his life, the church in Corinth was plagued by internal conflict. Rebellion by some younger members against the bishop (pastor) had erupted. A “few rash and self-confident persons” had kindled a “pitch of frenzy” (Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, chap. 1). The turmoil was subverting the faith of many, discouraging others, giving rise to doubt, and generally causing grief.

On behalf of the church in Rome, Clement wrote a letter (ca. AD 96) to the Corinthians. The letter is known as *1 Clement* and also as *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*. It is a letter sent from one church to another. Its tone and the condition of the Corinthian church remind us of problems Paul addressed decades earlier. In fact, Clement urges the Corinthian Christians to “take up the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul” (chap. 47). Like Paul, Clement appeals for unity, peace, and righteousness in Christ’s church. The tone is collegial and commendatory but also firm in its call for reform and correction. Clement tells the congregation that the Christian life must be lived in godly fear before the Lord. His instructions rely heavily on Scripture. The letter was highly esteemed in the early church for its sound doctrine. A second epistle to the Corinthians bears Clement’s name but is not considered authentic.

## 1

Let us yield obedience to God's excellent and glorious will; and imploring his mercy and loving-kindness, while we forsake all fruitless labors and strife and envy that lead to death, let us turn and have recourse to his compassions. Let us steadfastly contemplate those who have perfectly ministered to his excellent glory. Let us take for instance Enoch, who, being found righteous in obedience, was translated; death was never known to happen to him. Noah, being found faithful, preached regeneration to the world, and by him the Lord saved the animals that, with one accord, entered the ark.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 10

*RAISE US UP, O GOD, by your grace. Let us dedicate ourselves to you through Jesus Christ. We pray for those who are newly converted that they may be strengthened in the faith and that all your people may be mutually comforted by one another. Sanctify us body and soul; grant us the favor to be "made pure from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." May we obtain the good things laid up for us. Do not account any of us unworthy; but be our comforter, helper, and protector, through your Christ, with whom glory, honor, praise, doxology, and thanksgiving be to you and to the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.*

CLEMENTINE LITURGY (LATE FOURTH CENTURY),  
IN *CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES*, BK. 8, SEC. 2.13



**FOR REFLECTION:** Gen. 5:21-24; 1 Sam. 12:19-25; 2 Cor. 6:6; 7:1; Eph. 4:7-16, 25-32; Phil. 4:4-8; Heb. 11:1-38

## 2

Having so many great and glorious examples of humility and godly submission set before us, let us turn again to the practice of that peace that from the beginning was the mark set before us. Let us look steadfastly to the Father and Creator of the universe and hold fast to his mighty and surpassingly great gifts and benefits of peace. Let us contemplate him with our understanding and look with the eyes of our soul to his long-suffering will. Let us reflect how free from wrath he is toward all his creation.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 19

*YOU, LORD, remember not every sin of your servants and handmaids, but purify us with the purification of your truth; and direct our steps that we may walk in holiness of heart and do what is good and well-pleasing in your sight. Let us be submissive to your almighty and all-excellent name. Amen.*

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 60, LIGHTFOOT



**FOR REFLECTION:** Deut. 7:7-11; Ezra 9:5-9; Pss. 66:1-20; 95:1-5; Isa. 55:7-9; Eph. 2:4-7; Heb. 4:12-16; 12:1-3

## 3

The heavens, revolving under God's government, are subject to him in peace. Day and night they run the course appointed by him, in no wise hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the companies of stars, roll on in harmony according to his command within their prescribed limits and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to his will, brings forth food in abundance at the proper seasons for humans and beasts and all other living beings. The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter peacefully give place to each other. God does good to all but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to his compassions through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and majesty forever and ever. Amen.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 20

*O LORD, make your face to shine on us for good, in peace, that we may be shielded by your mighty hand and delivered from every sin by your uplifted arm. We are submissive to your almighty and all-excellent name. Amen.*

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 60, LIGHTFOOT



**FOR REFLECTION:** Job 38:4-11; Pss. 8:1-9; 19:1-4; 24:1-2; Isa. 40:12-17; Jer. 10:12-16; John 1:1-19; Col. 1:15-20



4

Take heed, beloved, lest God's many kindnesses lead to the condemnation of us all. For thus it will be unless we walk worthy of him and, with one mind, do those things that are good and well-pleasing in his sight. Let us consider how near he is and that none of the thoughts or reasonings in which we engage are hid from him. Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; let us esteem those who have the rule over us; let us honor the aged among us; let us train up the young in the fear of God. Let your children be partakers of true Christian training; let them learn how important humility is for God—how much the spirit of pure affection can prevail with him—how excellent and great is a holy fear of him, how it saves all those who walk in it with a pure mind. For God is a Searcher of our thoughts and desires; his breath is in us. When he pleases, he will take it away.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 21

*O LORD, give concord and peace to all who dwell on the earth, even as you gave to our fathers when they called on you in faith and truth, submissive as we are to your almighty and all-excellent name. Amen.*

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 60, LIGHTFOOT



**FOR REFLECTION:** Deut. 30:1-20; Isa. 61:8-11; Mic. 6:6-8; Rom. 6:1-23; Eph. 4:17-32; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17

## 5

Having then our Christian hope, let our souls be bound to him who is faithful to his promises and just in his judgments. He who has commanded us not to lie shall much more himself not lie. Nothing is impossible with God except to lie. Let his gift of faith therefore be stirred up within us. By the word of his might, he established all things, and by his word, he can overthrow them. When and as he pleases, he does all things, and none of the things determined by him shall pass away. All things are open before him, and nothing can be hidden from his counsel.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 27

*ALMIGHTY, ETERNAL GOD, Lord of the whole world, the Creator and Governor of all things, we pray for the peace and happy settlement of the world and of the holy churches. Give us your peace that can never be taken away. May you fulfill in us such virtue as is in keeping with godliness. We pray for our enemies and those who hate us. We pray for those who persecute us for the name of the Lord, that he may pacify their anger and scatter their wrath. We pray for those who are not yet Christians and for those who have wandered from the way, that the Lord may convert them. We pray for infants in the faith, that the Lord may perfect them in his fear and bring them to complete maturity. We pray for our sisters and brothers in Christ, that the Lord may keep us all and preserve us to the end by grace. Deliver us, O Lord, from the evil one, from all the scandals of those who work iniquity. Preserve us for your heavenly kingdom. Save us, and lift us up, O God, by your mercy. May we give ourselves and each other to the living God, through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

CLEMENTINE LITURGY (LATE FOURTH CENTURY),  
IN *CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES*, BK. 8, SEC. 2.9, 10



**FOR REFLECTION:** Pss. 19:1-3; 31:1-15; 138:2; Isa. 51:6-8; Matt. 24:35; Rom. 8:18-39; 2 Cor. 1:18-22; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 10:22-37; 11:18-29



## 6

Seeing, therefore, that we belong to the Holy One, let us do those things that pertain to holiness, avoiding all evil speaking, all abominable and impure attachments, together with all drunkenness, all abominable lusts, detestable adultery, and abhorrent pride. “For God,” says the Scripture, “resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Let us cling, then, to those to whom grace has been given by God. Let us clothe ourselves with peace and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all whispering and evil speaking, being known by our works and not our words. Let our praise be to God and not to ourselves, for God rejects those that commend themselves. Let testimony to our good deeds be borne by others, as it was in the case of our righteous forefathers. Boldness, arrogance, and audacity belong to those who are accursed of God; but moderation, humility, and meekness belong to such as are blessed by him.

We, being called by God’s will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, by our own wisdom, understanding, or godliness, or by works we have performed in holiness of heart but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified his people. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAPS. 30, 32

*WE PRAISE YOU, we sing hymns to you, we bless you for your great glory, O Lord our King, the Father of Christ the immaculate Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. Praise becomes you, hymns become you, and glory becomes you, the God and Father, through the Son, in the most Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.*

“DAILY PRAYERS,” IN *CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES*, BK. 7, SEC. 5.48



**FOR REFLECTION:** Prov. 3:34; Eph. 1:4-14; 4:20-24; Phil. 1:10-11; 2:15; 4:8; Col. 3:5-15; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5

## 7

Let us hasten with all energy and readiness of mind to perform every good work. For the Creator and Lord of all rejoices in his works. By his infinitely great power he established the heavens, and by his incomprehensible wisdom he adorned them. He also divided the earth from the water that surrounds it and fixed it on an immoveable foundation. The animals also that are on it he commanded into existence by his own word. Above all, with his holy and undefiled hands he formed humans, the most excellent of his creatures. They are truly great because of the understanding God gave them. They are the express likeness of his image. Having thus finished all these things, God approved them, blessed them, and said, "Increase and multiply." We see, then, how all righteous people have been adorned with good works and how the Lord himself, adorning himself with his works, rejoiced. Having therefore such an example, let us without delay obey his will, and let us work the work of righteousness with our whole strength.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 33

*BREATHE IN US, O our Lord and God, the fragrance of the sweetness of your love; illumined are our souls through the knowledge of your truth: may we be rendered worthy of receiving the manifestation of your Beloved in the holy heavens where we will give thanks to you. In the meantime, we will glorify you without ceasing in your church, which is crowned and filled with every aid and blessing. You are Lord and Father, Creator of all. Amen.*

ADAEUS AND MARIS, *THE LITURGY OF THE BLESSED APOSTLES* (CA. AD 150)



**FOR REFLECTION:** Gen. 1:26-28; Exod. 20:1-17; Rom. 12:1-21; Col. 3:5-17; Rev. 22:12-21

## 8

How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness! And all these are ours now. What then shall those things be that are prepared for those who wait for Christ's coming? The Creator and Father of all worlds, the Most Holy, alone knows their measure and their beauty. Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those who wait for him, so that we may share in his promised gifts. But how, beloved, can this be accomplished? Only if our understanding is fixed by faith in God; if we earnestly seek the things that are pleasing and acceptable to him; if we do the things that are in harmony with his blameless will; and if we follow the way of truth, casting away all unrighteousness and iniquity, along with all covetousness, strife, evil practices, deceit, whispering, and evil speaking, all hatred of God, pride and haughtiness, and all vainglory and sinful ambition.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 35

*ENLIGHTEN, O OUR LORD AND GOD, our meditations to hear and understand your life-giving and divine commands in the Epistles. Grant to us through your grace and mercy to gather from them the assurance of your love, hope, and salvation suitable to soul and body. We shall sing to you everlasting glory without ceasing, O Lord of all. Amen.*

ADAEUS AND MARIS, *THE LITURGY OF THE BLESSED APOSTLES* (CA. AD 150)



**FOR REFLECTION:** Pss. 27:1-5; 31:1-3; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:17-32; Heb. 10:32-39; 12:29; 1 Pet. 1:3-21

## 9

Let him who loves Christ keep his commandments. Who can describe the blessed bond of God's love? What person is able to tell the excellence of its beauty as it ought to be told? The height to which love exalts is unspeakable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love bears all things, is long-suffering in all things. There is nothing base, nothing arrogant, in love. Love admits of no schisms; love gives rise to no seditions; love does all things in harmony. By God's love have all his elect been made perfect; without love nothing is well-pleasing to God. In love has the Lord gathered us to himself. Because of the love he has for us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave his blood for us by the will of the Father; his flesh for our flesh, and his soul for our souls.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 49

*IN PEACE LET US BESEECH THE LORD. For the peace that is from above, for God's love to humankind, and for the salvation of our souls, let us beseech the Lord. For the peace of the whole world and for the unity of all the holy churches of God, let us beseech the Lord. For the remission of our sins, and forgiveness of our transgressions, and for our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and distress, and from the uprising of our enemies, let us beseech the Lord. Amen.*

THE DIVINE LITURGY OF JAMES THE HOLY APOSTLE (CA. AD 150–200)



**FOR REFLECTION:** Matt. 5:43-48; 19:16-22; John 17:1-26; 1 Cor. 13:1-13; 14:1; Heb. 13:1-22; James 1:27; 5:20; 1 Pet. 4:8; 1 John 4:7-21



## 10

You see, beloved, how great and wonderful a thing love is, and that there is no declaring its perfection. Who is fit to be found in it, except such as God has granted to become so? Let us pray, therefore, and implore his mercy that we may live blameless in love, free from all human partialities for one above another. All the generations from Adam even to this day have passed away; but those who through the grace of God have been made perfect in love now possess a place among the godly. They will be manifest at the consummation of the kingdom of Christ. Blessed are we, beloved, if we keep the commandments of God in the harmony of love, that so through love our sins may be forgiven. “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” This blessedness comes upon those who have been chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 50

*MAY GOD, WHO SEES ALL THINGS, and who is the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh—who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through him to be a peculiar people—grant to every soul that calls upon his glorious and holy name faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity, and sobriety, to the well-pleasing of his name, through our High Priest and Protector, Jesus Christ, by whom be to him glory, majesty, power, and honor, both now and forevermore. Amen.*

CLEMENT, *FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS*, CHAP. 58



**FOR REFLECTION:** Ps. 32:1-2; Isa. 26:20; Luke 10:25-37; Eph. 5:21-33;  
1 Thess. 5:8-14; Heb. 13:1-6; 1 John 3:11-24