



The Second Epistle of Clement

An Ancient Homily to the Corinthians

Attributed to Clement of Rome

Patristics · c. A.D. 140–160

*The text of the translation is reproduced without alteration.
Passages of particular significance for Eastern Orthodoxy are set in red,
with brief notes in the margin.*

The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians

1. B ROTHERS, **we must think of Jesus Christ as of God—as the ‘judge of the living and the dead.’** And we must not think lightly of our Savior. 2 For, in thinking lightly of Him, we also hope to receive but little. And we sin, those of us who listen as if to an unimportant matter, not knowing whence, by whom, and to what place we have been called, and how much suffering Jesus Christ endured for our sakes. 3 What return, then, shall we make to Him, or what fruit worthy of that which He has given us? How much devotion do we owe Him! 4 He has lavished the light upon us; He has spoken to us as a father to his sons; He has saved us when we were perishing. 5 What praise, then, shall we give to Him, or what payment in return for what we have received? 6 Blinded in our understanding, we bowed down to sticks and stones and gold and silver and brass, the works of men; and our whole life was nothing else but death. While we were covered with darkness and our sight was obscured by this mist, by His will we recovered our sight, putting off the cloud which invested us. 7 For He had mercy on us and, out of pity, saved us, seeing in us much waywardness and destruction and no hope of salvation except such as might come from Him. 8 For He called us when we were not, and out of nothing willed us to be.

The oldest surviving Christian sermon opens by confessing Christ's full divinity — as in the Creed: “He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.”

2. 1 ‘Rejoice, O thou barren, thou bearest not; sing forth and shout, thou that dost not travail; for many are the children of the desolate, more than heirs that hath a husband.’ By saying ‘Rejoice, O thou barren, that bearest not’ He meant us, for our Church was barren before being given children. 2 And by saying ‘Shout, thou that dost travail’ He means this: to offer up our prayers in simplicity to God and not grow weary like women in labor. 3 And by saying ‘Many are the children of the desolate, more than heirs that hath a husband’ He meant that our people seemed to be abandoned by God, but now, having believed, we have become more numerous than those who seemed to have God. 4 And another Scripture says: ‘I came not to call the just, but sinners.’ This means that all who are perishing must be saved. 6 For it is a great and wonderful thing to sustain, not the things that are standing, but those that are falling. 7 So, also, Christ willed to save the things that were perishing, and He saved many men, when He had come and called us who were, even now, perishing.

3. 1 Since, then, He has bestowed such mercy on us, first that we the living do not sacrifice to gods who are dead nor worship them, but through Him know the Father of Truth—what is true knowledge concerning Him except not to deny Him through whom we knew the Father? 2 He Himself says: He

who confessed me before men, I will confess him before my Father.’ 3 This, then, is our reward, if we confess Him through whom we were saved. 4 But how do we confess Him? By doing what He says, and not disobeying His commandments, and honoring Him not only with our lips but ‘with all our heart and all our mind.’ 5 And He says also in Isaias: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.’

4. 1 Let us not merely call Him Lord, then, for this will not save us. 2 For He says: ‘Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall be saved, but he who works justice.’ 3 So, then, brothers, let us confess Him in our works by loving one another, by not committing adultery, nor speaking against one another, by not being envious, but by being self-controlled, kindly, good; and we ought to sympathize with one another and not be avaricious. By these works we confess Him, and not by the contrary. 4 And we must not fear men rather than God. 5 For this reason, provided you do these things, the Lord said: ‘If ye be gathered together with Me in My bosom and do not carry out My commandments, I will cast you off and will say to you: Depart from me; I know not whence you come, you workers of iniquity.’

5. 1 Therefore, brothers, leaving behind life as strangers in this world, let us do the will of Him who called us, and let us not be afraid to go forth from this world. 2 For the Lord said: ‘You shall be as lambs in the midst of wolves.’ 3 And Peter answered and said to Him: ‘What if the wolves should tear the lambs?’ 4 Jesus said to Peter: ‘The lambs should not fear the wolves after they are dead. And so with you—fear not those who kill you and can do nothing more to you; but fear Him who after your death has power over soul and body, to cast them into hell fire.’ 5 And understand, brothers, that the lingering of our flesh in this world is short and passing, but the promise of Christ is great and wonderful and is a repose in the kingdom to come and in eternal life. 6 What, then, shall we do to secure these things, except to conduct ourselves in holiness and justice and regard these things of the world as foreign to us and not desire them? 7 For it is by desiring to possess these things that we fall from the path of justice.

6. 1 The Lord says: ‘No servant can serve two masters.’ If we desire to serve both God and Mammon, it is no good to us. 2 ‘For what is the advantage if a man gain the whole world and lose his soul?’ 3 This world and the future world are two enemies. 4 This world talks of adultery and corruption and love of money and deceit, but that world says farewell to these things. 5 We cannot, then, be friends of both, but we must say farewell to this to possess the other. 6 We think that it is better to despise the things which are here, for they are small and passing and perishable, and to love the things which are there, things good and imperishable. 7 For if we do the will of Christ, we

shall find repose; but if not, nothing shall save us from eternal punishment, if we neglect His commandments. 8 And the Scripture also says, in Ezechiel, that ‘although Noa and Job and Daniel arise, they shall not rescue their children in the captivity.’ But if even such just men cannot rescue their children by their own just actions, with what confidence shall we enter into the palace of God, if we do not keep our baptism pure and unspotted? Or who shall be our patron if we are not found to have holy and just works?

7. 1 So then, my brothers, let us strive, knowing that the contest is close at hand and that many make voyages for corruptible contests, but not all are crowned—only those who have labored much and striven well. 2 Let us strive, then, that we may all be crowned. 3 Let us run the straight course, then, the incorruptible contest, and let many of us sail to it, and strive, that we also may receive the crown; and, if we cannot all be crowned, let us at least come near to the crown. 4 We must remember that he who takes part in a corruptible contest, if he be found dealing dishonestly, is flogged, taken away, and thrown off the course. 5 What do you think? What shall he suffer who cheats in the contest for immortality? 6 For, concerning those who have not kept the seal, He says: ‘Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be extinguished, and they shall be a spectacle to all flesh.’

8. 1 While we are yet on earth, let us repent. 2 For we are as clay for the hand of the workman. Just as the potter, if he makes a vessel and it bends or breaks in his hands, shapes it over again, but if he has gone so far as to put it into the fiery oven, can do nothing to help it any more; so let us also, while we are still in this world, repent with our whole heart of the evil things we have done in the flesh, that we may be saved by the Lord while we have time for repentance. 3 For, after leaving the world, we cannot there confess or repent any more. 4 So then, brothers, by doing the will of the Father and preserving the flesh pure and keeping the commandments of the Lord, we shall obtain eternal life. 5 For the Lord says in the Gospel. ‘If you do not keep what is small, who will give you what is great? For I say to you, that he who is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is great.’ 6 He means, therefore, this: Keep the flesh pure and the seal undefiled that we may receive eternal life.

9. 1 And let not any one of you say that this flesh is not judged and does not rise again. 2 Understand: In what state were you saved, in what did you recover your sight, except in this flesh? 3 We must, therefore, guard the flesh as a temple of God. 4 Just as you were called in the flesh, so shall you come in the flesh. 5 **If Christ the Lord, who saved us, being spirit at first, became flesh and so called us, so also shall we receive our reward in this flesh.** 6 Let us, then, love one another, that we may all arrive at the Kingdom of God.

The Incarnation and the resurrection of the body — the flesh is not despised but saved and glorified.

Repentance as healing and God as Physician — the therapeutic vision of sin and salvation cherished in Orthodoxy.

7 While we have time to be healed, let us give ourselves to God our Healer, giving Him some recompense. 8 What recompense? Repentance from a sincere heart. 9 For He has foreknowledge of all things and knows what is in our hearts. 10 Let us, then, give Him everlasting praise, not only from our mouth, but also from our heart, that He may receive us as sons. 11 For the Lord said: 'Those who do the will of my Father are my brethren.'

10. 1 Therefore, my brothers, let us do the will of the Father who called us, that we may live, and let us rather seek virtue and abandon vice as the forerunner of our sins, and let us flee from ungodliness, lest evil things come upon us. 2 For, if we are zealous to do good, peace will follow us. 3 On this account it is not possible for men to find peace, when they bring in human fears and prefer the pleasures of the present to the promises of the future. 4 For they know not what great torture the pleasures of the present bring and how great is the joy of the promised future. 5 And if only they themselves did these things, it could be endured; but, as it is, they continue teaching evil to innocent souls, not knowing that they will incur a double condemnation, themselves and their hearers.

11. 1 With a pure heart, then, let us serve God, and we shall be just; but if, through our not trusting the promises of God, we do not serve Him, we shall be miserable. 2 For the prophetic word says: 'Miserable are the double-minded, who hesitate in their heart and say: All these things we have heard even in our fathers' time, but we have waited from day to day and have seen none of them. 3 O foolish men, compare yourselves to a tree. Take a vine; first it sheds its leaves, then there comes a bud, after this a sour berry, then the bunch of ripe grapes. 4 So also my people had upsets and afflictions, but afterwards it shall receive good things.' 5 Therefore, my brothers, let us not be double-minded, but let us be patient in hope, that we may also gain our reward. 6 'For He is faithful who promised' to pay to each the wages of his works. 7 If, then, we perform justice before God, we shall enter into His kingdom and receive the promises which 'ear has not heard, nor eye seen, nor has it entered into the heart of men.'

12. 1 Let us, then, wait for the Kingdom of God, from hour to hour, in love and justice, since we know not the day of God's manifestation. 2 For the Lord Himself, when asked by someone when His Kingdom would come, said: 'When the two shall be one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female neither male nor female.' 3 Now, the 'two are one' when we speak truth to each other, and there is one soul in two bodies without dissimulation. 4 And 'the outside as the inside' means this: the inside is the soul and the outside the body. Therefore, just as your body is visible, so let your soul be apparent in your good works. 5 And 'the male with the female

neither male nor female' means that a brother seeing a sister has no thought of her as female, nor she of him as male. 6 'If you do this,' He says, 'the Kingdom of my Father shall come.'

13. 1 Accordingly, brothers, let us now at last repent and be watchful for the good, for we are full of great folly and evil; let us cleanse from ourselves our previous sins, and by repentance from our very heart gain salvation. Let us not be pleasers of men, nor seek to please ourselves alone, but rather by our justice those also who are outside, that the Name be not blasphemed because of us. 2 For the Lord says: 'My name is continually blasphemed among all the Gentiles,' and again: 'Woe to him on whose account my name is blasphemed.' 2 How is it blasphemed? By your not doing what I desire. 3 For when the Gentiles hear from our mouth the oracles of God, they wonder at their beauty and grandeur; afterwards, when they find out that our works are unworthy of the words we speak, they turn from this to blasphemy, saying that it is a myth and a delusion. 4 For, when they hear from us that God says: 'It is no credit to you, if you love them that love you, but it is a credit to you if you love your enemies and those who hate you'—when they hear this, they wonder at its surpassing goodness; but when they see that not only do we not love those who hate us but not even those who love us, they laugh scornfully at us, and so the Name is blasphemed.

14. 1 Thus, brothers, by doing the will of God our Father, **we shall belong to the first Church, the spiritual one established before the sun and the moon**; but if we do not the will of the Lord, we shall verify the Scripture which says: 'My house has become a den of thieves.' Let us choose, therefore, to belong to the Church of life, that we may be saved. 2 I do not think that you are ignorant that the living Church is 'the body of Christ.' For the Scripture says:³ 'God made man male and female'; the male is Christ and the female is the Church. The sacred books, moreover, and the Apostles say that the Church is not of the present time, but existed from the beginning. For she was spiritual, as also our Jesus, and He was revealed in the last days to save us. 3 And the Church, being spiritual, was revealed in the flesh of Christ, showing us that if any of us guard her in the flesh and do not corrupt her, he shall receive her again in the Holy Spirit. For this flesh is an antitype of the Spirit; no one, accordingly, who has corrupted the antitype shall receive the reality. So, then, brothers, it means this: Guard the flesh, so that you may share in the Spirit. 4 But if we say that the flesh is the Church and the Spirit is Christ, then he who has abused the flesh has abused the Church. Such a one, accordingly, will not share in the Spirit, which is Christ. 5 The flesh is able to share in this great life and immortality, provided the Holy Spirit is joined to it. No one can declare or tell 'the things which the Lord has prepared' for His chosen ones.

The pre-eternal Church, existing in God's counsel before creation — a mystery dear to Orthodox ecclesiology.

15. 1 It is no negligible advice, I think, that I have given you concerning self-control, and by following it a man will not regret, but will save both himself and me who advised him. For the reward is not small for having converted a straying and perishing soul to salvation. 2 For we have this return to make to God who created us, if both he who speaks and he who hears, speak and hear with faith and charity. 3 Let us, then, remain just and holy in the things which we have believed, that we may pray in confidence to God, who says: 'While thou art still speaking, I will say: Behold, here I am.' 4 For this saying is the sign of great promise; for the Lord says that He is more ready to give than a man is to ask. Being sharers of such great kindness, then, let us not begrudge ourselves the obtaining of such benefits. For, as these words contain a great joy for those who follow them, so they hold a great judgment for the disobedient.

16. 1 So, brothers, having received no slight opportunity to repent, let us, when there is yet time, turn to God who called us, while we still have One who awaits us. For if we bid farewell to these pleasures and overcome our soul by refusing to carry out its evil desires we shall share in the mercy of Jesus. 3 But you know that 'the day' of judgment 'is now coming, kindled as a furnace,' and 'the powers of heaven shall dissolve';² and the whole earth shall be as lead melting in the fire, and then shall the secret and public deeds of men be made known. 4 Almsgiving, therefore, is good as penance for sin; fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving is better than both; and 'charity covers a multitude of sins,' but prayer from a good conscience delivers from death. Blessed is every man who is found full of these things; for almsgiving relieves the burden of sin.

17. 1 Let us, then, repent wholeheartedly, that no one of us may perish by the way. For, if we have commandments to do this also, to snatch men away from idols and to instruct them, how much more necessary is it that a soul which already knows God should not be lost? 2 So let us help one another and guide those who are weak in goodness, that we may all be saved; and let us convert and encourage one another. 3 And let us not merely seem to pay attention and to believe now, while being admonished by the presbyters, but also, when we have gone home, let us remember the commandments of the Lord and let us not be carried away by worldly lusts; but let us try to come here more frequently and to advance in the commandments of the Lord, that 'keeping the same mind'² we may be gathered together unto life. 4 For the Lord said: 'I come to gather together all the nations, tribes, and languages.' By this He means the day of His appearing, when He will come and redeem us, each according to his works. 5 And the believers 'shall see his glory and might and shall be astounded when they look upon the sovereignty of the

world given to Jesus and shall say: 'Woe to us, for it was thou, and we knew it not and did not believe, and were disobedient to the presbyters who preached to us about salvation.' And 'their worms shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be a spectacle to all flesh.' 6 He means that day of judgment when they shall see those who were ungodly among us and contradicted the commandments of Jesus Christ. 7 But the just, who have done good and endured tortures and hated the pleasures of the soul, when they see how those who have sinned and denied Jesus by their words or their deeds are punished by terrible torture in unquenchable fire, shall give 'glory to their God,' saying: 'There shall be hope for him who has served God with all his heart.'

18. 1 Let us also be of those who give thanks, who have served God, and not of the ungodly who are judged. 2 For I myself also am altogether sinful and have not escaped temptation, but, being still surrounded by the devices of the devil, I strive to pursue justice, so that I may have the strength at least to approach it, fearing the judgment to come.

19. 1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, [following] the God of truth, I am reading to you an exhortation to heed what is written, that you may both save yourselves and him who is reading to you. As a reward, I ask you to repent with your whole heart, giving yourselves salvation and life. By doing this, we shall set a goal for all the young who wish to work in the cause of piety and goodness of God. 2 And let us not be annoyed or displeased, fools that we are, when anyone corrects us and turns us from justice to justice. For sometimes we do evil unknowingly because of the double-mindedness and unbelief within our breasts, and we are 'darkened in our understanding' by vain desires. 3 Let us, then, do justice that we may be saved in the end. Blessed are those who obey these instructions; although for a short time they suffer in this world, they shall reap the immortal fruit of the resurrection. 4 Let not the godly man grieve, then, if he be distressed in these present times. A time of blessedness awaits him; he shall live again above with the fathers and rejoice in an eternity without sorrow.

20. 1 But do not let it disturb your mind that we see the unjust wealthy and the servants of God in straitened circumstances. 2 Let us, then, have faith, brothers and sisters. We are contending in the contest of the living God and are being trained by the present life that we may obtain the crown in the life to come. 3 No one of the just has reaped fruit quickly, but waits for it. 4 For if God should pay out the reward of the just quickly, it would be immediately apparent that our training was in commerce and not in godliness, for we should seem to be just when we were pursuing not piety but gain. And for this cause the divine judgment punishes an unjust spirit and loads it with

chains. 5 To the one God, invisible, Father of Truth, who sent us the Savior and Prince of Immortality, through whom also He manifested to us Truth and the life of heaven, to Him be glory for all ages. Amen.¹ Francis X. Glimm, "The So-Called Second Letter of St. Clement," in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.-F. Marique, and Gerald G. Walsh, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 65–79. 1