

VBCC Schola

The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians

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The Corinthian Church

Clement begins his letter by outlining the virtuous nature of the Corinthian Church. It seems to be a place where people were living their lives in tune with God. Clement writes:

“For ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who had the rule over you, and giving all fitting honour to the presbyters among you. Ye enjoyed young me to be of a sober and serious mind; ye instructed your wives to do all things with a blameless, becoming, and pure conscience, loving their husbands as in duty bound; and ye taught them that, living in the rule of obedience, they should manage their household affairs becomingly, and be in every respect marked by discretion.”

Clement’s praise doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say how they were marked by their humility. They were generous and content with what God provided them. He goes on and on with the praise of the Corinthian believers. He finished his praise with these pertinent words:

“Every kind of faction and schism was abominable in Your sight. Ye mourned over the transgressions of your neighbours: their deficiencies you deemed your own. Ye never grudged any act of kindness, being ‘ready to every good work.’ Adorned by a thoroughly virtuous and religious life, ye did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and ordinance of the Lord were written upon the tables of your hearts.”

We are given a picture of the Corinthians “before” and “after.” At one time they were full of virtue. Later, their present attitudes and behavior do not reflect the attitudes and actions that Clement just described in detail. Somehow, the Corinthians got off track. Instead of being focused on their relationship with God, they became distracted by allowing envy and jealousy to slither in and cause harm within the church body.

There seems to be a good lesson here for all of us: we are not perfect. We battle the old man. We are sinners in great need of transformation. What strikes me here is that Clement loved the church enough to confront them on the problems found within the Corinthian Church. I would think this was no easy letter for him to write. Yet, he cared enough to confront and point out the error of their ways. May we love people enough to offer correction in a spirit of grace.

Dangers of Envy and Jealousy

Clement describes the dangers of envy and jealousy within the church. We are reminded of many Biblical personalities who saw envy and jealousy bring destruction into their life situations. He mentions several: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Moses, etc. Proving that envy brings about much destruction, he exhorts the Corinthians to repent.

Humility

Knowing the present condition of the church, it's not surprising that humility is a major focus of this letter to the Corinthians. Clement reminds us of several passages of Scripture which exhort us to lay aside pride and haughtiness.

(Jeremiah 9:23,24; 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17). He describes Jesus' example of humility and ends with this: "Ye see, beloved, what is the example which has been given us; for if the Lord thus humbled Himself, what shall we do who have through Him come under the yoke of His grace?" Ouch. A good question to meditate on.

Schism

Clement takes up the problem of schism found in the church. He could be writing to a modern day church. This problem seems so common and yet shouldn't be. Why is it that we often see disharmony as something that is expected and normal? Clement writes boldly for the need of pursuing peace and getting rid of all disharmony within the body of Christ. He gives various examples of harmony: the universe with the rising and setting of the sun. The earth, in its bringing forth of food and crops. The sea, the ocean, the seasons. If those small pieces of God's creation exist in harmony, so should we who are made in His image.

In chapter twenty one, Clement goes on to list a long but beautiful lists of things a believer should be engaged in. Here's a short sampling:

"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 honour the aged among us; let us train up the young men in the fear of God; let us direct our wives to that which is good. Let them exhibit the lovely habit of purity; let them display their love, not by preferring one to another, but by showing equal affection to all that piously fear God. Let your children be partakers of true Christian training; let them learn of how great avail humility is with God"

Clement mentions many good activities and attitudes in the above list. I hope to find those things manifested in my life. Instead of sedition, there are many more valuable things we can be engaged in.

It is disgraceful, beloved, yeah, highly disgraceful, and unworthy of your Christian profession, that such a thing should be heard of as that the most steadfast and ancient Church of the Corinthians should, on account of one or two persons, engage in sedition against its presbyters. And this rumour has reached not only us, but those also who are unconnected with us; so that, through your infatuation, the name of the Lord is blasphemed, while danger is also brought upon yourselves.

Clement encourages believers to put an end to disharmony and sedition. May we hear what he has to say. If there's one thing the church doesn't need it's more disharmony. He asks those in error to fall on their knees, and seek forgiveness from God and practice brotherly love. He gives some attributes of love: "Love admits of no schisms: love gives rise to no seditions: love does all things in harmony." Of all things we need to understand better and deeper it's this thing called love. Where love exists, how can disharmony exist?

Correction

The last item I want to comment on is Clement's words on admonishment and correction. This section was probably my favorite part of Clement's letter, probably because it's most applicable to my life. He says:

“Let us then also pray for those who have fallen into any sin, that meekness and humility may be given to them, so that they may submit, not unto us, but to the will of God.”

Correction is something we don't see practiced in the church today—at least I've not seen it done in a good and healthy way. Yet, isn't correction something we should ask for? Something we should desire since it will help us in our own process of transformation? I want to say “yes” to those questions but also know in my heart, it's hard to receive correction. Although Clement would have us believe that we shouldn't feel displeased with receiving correction because it's good and profitable. It's for our own good. I think he's right. I certainly need it.

I believe Clement, in dealing with the problems of the Corinthian Church, provides us some very healthy and practical ways to live. Humility, love, repentance and correction are all things which are good and beneficial to us who would embrace them.