

Clement opens his letter to the Corinthians reminding them of the great good he and others had seen in this community. They possessed and lived out faith, hospitality, sober moderation, well-grounded knowledge, and obedience. However one quality he emphasizes is humility.

“Moreover, ye were all distinguished by humility...”

“Thus a profound and abundant peace was given to you all, and ye had an insatiable desire for doing good, while a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all.”

“Ye were sincere and uncorrupted, and forgetful of injuries between one another. Every kind of faction and schism was abominable in your sight.”

Is this because out of humility all of these other qualities come? Or, at least, humility enables these other virtues to flourish? Humility certainly seems to be an underlying theme of Clement’s letter.

He continues his letter by outlining the evils that man have committed out of envy and jealousy – from Cain and Abel all the way to the recent martyrdom of Peter and Paul. He calls them to return to humility:

“Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you.” By this precept and by these rules let us establish ourselves, that we walk with all humility in obedience to His holy words. For the holy word saith, “On whom shall I look, but on him that is meek and peaceable, and that trembleth at My words?”

It is through a heart that is humble and submitted to God, that we live peaceably, and receive God’s divine blessings. Later, in Chapter XXXI, Clement outlines how we obtain this blessing. Once again, reading these ancient texts, I’m amazed at how applicable they are to the Church’s current state of affairs. Humility does not seem to be highly valued. We try to circumvent these basic truths by striving for blessing in our own way. We obtain God’s blessing (i.e. getting things, or recognition) through, programs – we pray the Prayer of Jabez for thirty days. Or we focus on positive confessions, working up our faith, as if God is forced to bless us because we repeated a verse or faith statement enough times. Clement points out that God’s blessings are obtained through righteousness and truth through faith, as we saw in Abraham’s life; yielding ourselves as a sacrifice, like Isaac; and humbly submitting to others as Jacob did.

This is because we are justified by faith, not by works. That faith is not something that we have obtained (works). Faith is a gift given to us by God. It is received in humility. Yet Clement is very quick to agree with James in that faith without works is dead. Justification

by faith is no excuse for laziness. If we truly receive this faith through submission, the natural result will be good works.

Humility and faith do not exist in a vacuum. They are both lived out in relationship. We humbly submit to others, our faith results in good works done for others. We live in community – each having his or her part, whether great or small. “The great cannot subsist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture in all things, and thence arises mutual advantage” (Chapter XXXVII, pg. 15). “Let our whole body, then, be preserved in, Christ Jesus; and let every one be subject to his neighbour, according to the special gift” (Chapter XXXVIII, pg. 15).

Later Clement puts this into a context of order. God has appointed an order within the church. We’re talking about living in community, our good works are performed, not to receive blessings, but out of a heart response. In Chapter XL he points out that with understanding these truths, we should do all things in order at the stated times. “He has enjoined offerings and service to be performed, and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours.”

This causes me to take a hard look at valuing community as being organic. Has “organic” become the new “led by the Spirit”? There is order, appointed times to do service, liturgy. It is this skeletal structure that we have talked about so much. Organic does not mean void of structure & order. All living things have order. There is a skeleton that holds the body together. At the cellular level there is a distinct order. An “organic” community has order. There is a relational aspect that on the surface may appear to be rather free. But it is still through a mutual submission to each other based on his or her gifts and place within the community. There are regular gatherings and doing the work of the people. Transformation and good works occur when offerings and service are thoughtful and regular.

Clement encourages a leadership that is healthy and relational (Chapter XLII). Respect for and submission to leadership occurs not because of a title, but because appointments are made in an orderly way through relationship. Christ was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Christ, as part of the Trinity, was in obvious relationship with the Father. The apostles were in relationship with Christ. The apostles, in turn, traveled around starting new communities. In each community the apostles appointed bishops and deacons among the people they had mentored.

It is through these truths regarding humility, faith, and relationships that Clement appeals to the Corinthians to stop the dissention.

Why do we divide and tear to pieces the members of Christ, and raise up strife against our own body, and have reached such a height of madness as to forget that “we are members one of another”? Your schism has subverted [the faith of] many, has discouraged many, has given rise to doubt in many, and has caused grief to us all. And still your sedition continueth.

How true this is today. With even more factions in the Church, we must return to brotherly love - that we would truly be known by our love for one another. “Let us pray, therefore, and implore of His mercy, that we may live blameless in love, free from all human partialities for one above another.”