

I. Introduction

A. What will we be doing in this talk

1. Who were the apostolic fathers and do we have a way of knowing if our understanding of God and the Gospel are the same as that which was first received by the church?

II. Who are the apostolic fathers?

A. Why that name?

B. What time did they live/write in?

1. End of 1st c. into mid 2nd c.

C. Names and places

1. Didache, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Shep.Herm., Ep. Diog., Ep. Barn., Papias

D. Quality

1. Mostly really good
2. And then there's the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas

E. Value?

F. Who will we be looking at in this talk

1. 1 Clement and the 7 letters of Ignatius
2. Why them
 - a) We know who wrote them and more or less when
 - b) They were leaders of the church
 - c) They assume a common faith in all that they write to and from (Rome, Corinth, Philippi, Asia Minor, Arabia)

III. 1 Clement

A. Introductory matters

1. Date

- a) Late 1st century or early 2nd century AD. Most date to the mid to late 90s AD.
 - (1) 63.3 references people of an old age that have lived decades of faithfulness in the church
 - (2) 44.3-5 suggest that there are some living church leaders who were appointed by the apostles
 - (3) The beginning of the letter suggests a time when there was an uptick of persecution in Rome
 - (a) "Because of the sudden and repeated misfortunes and reverses that have happened to us, brothers, we acknowledge that we have been somewhat slow in giving attention to the matters in dispute among you" (1:1).
 - (b) Often traditionally associated with the end of Domitian's reign (81-96 AD) or the beginning of Nerva's (96-98 AD)

2. Author

- a) Clement, Bishop of Rome, writing on behalf of the whole church of Rome

3. Recipient

- a) The church of Corinth

4. Occasion

- a) The expulsion of a member of presbyters/elders from the church of Corinth by a group of younger individuals within the church.

B. Key Issues

1. Jealousy v. Unity
 - a) Chs 3-6
2. Harmony/humility
 - a) Chs 13-20
3. Right living in the church

C. Spotlight on

1. Scripture

a) Key points:

- (1) 1 Clem is full of Scripture, both OT and NT
 - (a) Note: this includes some OT apocrypha, because at this point he would have no means of knowing what was accepted in the OT or not
- (2) Clem assumes that God is the ultimate author of Scripture, through human authors
- (3) Clem does not use his position as the means of authority, but feels the need to substantiate all of his points with evidence, sometimes from nature, but always from Scripture. It is assumed to bear God's authority in all its declarations

b) Prolific quotation of Scripture

(1) Old Testament and New Testament

(a) Longest quotes of the Bible (OT) of any apostolic father

i) Isa 53:1-12 in 1 Clem 16:3-14

- (1) Introduced with, "The majestic scepter of God, our Lord Christ Jesus, did not come with the pomp of arrogance or pride (though he could have done so), but in humility, just as the Holy Spirit spoke concerning him. For he says..." (1 Clem 16:2-3a).

ii) Psalm 51:1-17 in 1 Clem 18:2-17

iii) Frequent quotations of Psalms, Genesis, Exodus, Pauline letters, saying of Jesus recorded in gospels, Hebrews

iv) Doctrine of Scripture

(1) From God through inspired men

- (a) The ministers of the grace of God spoke about repentance through the Holy Spirit; indeed, the Master of the universe himself spoke about repentance with an oath: "For as I live, says the Lord, I do not desire the death of the sinner so much as his repentance." He also added this merciful declaration: "Repent, O house of Israel, of your iniquity; say to the children of my people: 'Though your sins reach from the earth to heaven, and though they be redder than scarlet and blacker than sackcloth, yet if you turn to me with your whole heart and say "Father," I will listen to you as a holy people.'" And in another place he says this: "Wash and be clean; remove the wickedness from your souls out of my sight. Put an end to your wickedness; learn to do good; seek out justice; deliver the one who is wronged; give judgment on behalf of the orphan, and grant

justice to the widow. And come, let us reason together, he says: even if your sins are as crimson, I will make them white as snow; and if they are as scarlet, I will make them white as wool. And if you are willing and listen to me, you shall eat the good things of the earth; but if you are not willing and do not listen to me, a sword shall devour you, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things." Seeing, then, that he desires all his beloved to participate in repentance, he established it by an act of his almighty will. (1 Clem 8:1-5)

(b) Citing Ezekiel 33, Isaiah 1

(2) You have searched the holy scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit; you know that nothing unrighteous or counterfeit is written in them. (1 Clem 45:2-3)

(a) Then goes on to reference the OT (esp. Daniel) and NT (Paul, 47:1)

(3) Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to you in the beginning of the gospel? Truly he wrote to you in the Spirit about himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had split into factions. (1 Clem 47:1-3)

v) Jesus speaking

(1) Now faith in Christ confirms all these things, for he himself through the Holy Spirit thus calls us: "Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the person who desires life, who loves to see good days? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn aside from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are turned to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to destroy any remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous one cried out, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him from all his troubles. Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord shall deliver him from them all." Furthermore, "many are the afflictions of the sinner, but mercy will surround those who set their hope on the Lord." (1 Clem 22:1-8, citing Ps 34:11-17, 19; Ps 32:10).

2. Gospel

a) Key Points:

(1) Salvation by faith in Christ

(2) Explicitly not by works, though good works are prevalent in the letter and are the assumed result of having faith in Christ

b) "Anyone who sincerely considers these matters one by one will understand the magnificence of the gifts that are given by God. For from Jacob come all the priests and Levites who minister at the altar of God; from him comes the Lord Jesus according to the flesh; from him come the kings and rulers and governors in the line of Judah; and his other tribes are held in no small honor, seeing that God promised that "your seed shall be as the stars of heaven." All, therefore, were glorified and magnified, not

through themselves or their own works or the righteous actions that they did, but through his will. **And so we, having been called through his will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety, or works that we have done in holiness of heart, but through faith, by which the Almighty God has justified all who have existed from the beginning; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen**" (1 Clem 23:1-4).

- c) All these things the great Creator and Master of the universe ordered to exist in peace and harmony, thus doing good to all things, but especially abundantly to us who have taken refuge in his compassionate mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the majesty for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Clem 20:11-12)
 - d) This is the way, dear friends, in which we found our salvation, namely Jesus Christ, the high priest of our offerings, the benefactor and helper of our weakness. Through him we look steadily into the heights of heaven; through him we see as in a mirror his faultless and transcendent face; through him the eyes of our hearts have been opened; through him our foolish and darkened mind springs up into the light; through him the Master has willed that we should taste immortal knowledge, for he, being the radiance of his majesty, is as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent. For so it is written: "He makes his angels winds and his ministers flames of fire." But of his Son the Master spoke thus: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the Gentiles for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession." And again he says to him: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Who, then, are these enemies? Those who are wicked and resist his will. (1 Clem 36:1-6)
 - e) All the generations from Adam to this day have passed away, but those who by God's grace were perfected in love have a place among the godly, who will be revealed when the kingdom of Christ visits us. (1 Clem 50:3)
3. Trinity
- a) Key points:
 - (1) Even before the earliest debates on the language that should be used, do we have evidence that the earliest church had a knowledge of the Trinity as Trinity? Was it a late invention, or do we see it here?
 - (2) Also note from the scripture section, the Holy Spirit is described as talking, thus as personal
 - b) Do we not have one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was poured out upon us? (1 Clem 46:6)
 - c) For as God lives, and as the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit (who are the faith and the hope of the elect) (1 Clem 58:2)
 - (1) ζῆ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς καὶ ζῆ ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἧ τε πίστις καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν

D. Differences from us

- 1. Chapter 20 and a Stoic-ish view of the world
 - a) Insufficient view of fallenness of creation

- (1) Serves his argument of harmony as humility
- (2) E.g. "The heavens move at his direction and obey him in peace. Day and night complete the course assigned by him, neither hindering the other. The sun and the moon and the choirs of stars circle in harmony within the courses assigned to them, according to his direction, without any deviation at all. The earth, bearing fruit in the proper seasons in fulfillment of his will, brings forth food in full abundance for both humans and beasts and all living things that dwell upon it without dissension and without altering anything he has decreed." (1 Clem 20:1-4)
- 2. Church order
 - a) Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons
 - (1) Everywhere in the early church
 - (a) *Could* be analogous to Pastor, elders, deacons, but the one leading is made a bit more separate than that

IV. Letters of Ignatius

A. Introductory matters

- 1. Date
 - a) Usually dated within the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD)
 - (1) Some extend into Hadrian's reign (117-138), but this is not really necessary
- 2. Author
 - a) Ignatius, bishop of Antioch
- 3. Recipients
 - a) Six churches (Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans)
 - b) One person, Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna
- 4. Occasion
 - a) Ignatius' journey in chains under Roman army escort from Antioch to Rome in anticipation of public execution
 - (1) Wrote to churches who sent delegates to him on the way (Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians), churches he stopped at along the way (Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans and their bishop), and where he was heading (Rome)
 - (a) The Roman letter is unique in its purpose: To dissuade them from using any political or monetary means of rescuing him.

B. Key issues

- 1. Unity
 - a) In every letter, especially *ecclesial* unity.
- 2. Faith in Jesus
 - a) Waxes poetic on this quite a bit.
- 3. Martyrdom
 - a) For obvious reasons.
 - b) Most prominent in the letter to the Romans.
- 4. Discipleship
 - a) Tied closely with all the previous.

C. Spotlight on:

- 1. How is Jesus understood

- a) Key points:
 - (1) He seems to have the gospel traditions, that is the material recorded about Jesus' life in the gospels, well known and established. The human life of Jesus is important for him
 - (2) Along with this, Jesus is clearly and unambiguously called God. Pre-Chalcedonian knowledge of the full humanity and full divinity of Christ.
 - (3) Jesus died and was raised for the salvation of those who will believe
 - (4) Note: One group that he seems to be fighting is Docetists, those who argued that Jesus only *seemed* to have a human body and only *seemed* to die
- b) **There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord.** (Ep.Ephesians. 7:2)
- c) For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God's plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit. He was born and was baptized in order that by his suffering he might cleanse the water. (Ep.Ephesians 18:2)
- d) I will further explain to you the subject about which I have begun to speak, namely, the divine plan with respect to the new man Jesus Christ, involving faith in him and love for him, his suffering and resurrection, especially if the Lord reveals anything to me. All of you, individually and collectively, gather together in grace, by name, in one faith and one Jesus Christ, who physically was a descendant of David, who is Son of Man and Son of God, in order that you may obey the bishop and the council of presbyters with an undisturbed mind, breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ. (Ep.Ephesians 20:1-2)
- e) Jesus Christ, who before the ages was with the Father and appeared at the end of time. (Ep.Magnesians 6:1)
- f) Now I write these things, my dear friends, not because I have learned that any of you are actually like that, but, as one who is less than you, I want to forewarn you not to get snagged on the hooks of worthless opinions but instead to be fully convinced about the birth and the suffering and the resurrection that took place during the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate. These things were truly and most assuredly done by Jesus Christ, our hope, from which may none of you ever be turned aside. (Ep.Mag. 11:1)
- g) **Be deaf, therefore, whenever anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, who was the son of Mary; who really was born, who both ate and drank; who really was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, who really was crucified and died while those in heaven and on earth and under the earth looked on; who, moreover, really was raised from the dead when his Father raised him up. In the same way his Father will likewise also raise up in Christ Jesus us who believe in him. Apart from him we have no true life.** (Ep.Trallians 9:1-2)
- h) I glorify Jesus Christ, the God who made you so wise, for I observed that you are established in an unshakable faith, having been nailed, as it were, to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ in both body and spirit, and firmly established in love by the blood of Christ, totally convinced with regard to our Lord that he is truly of the family of David

with respect to human descent, Son of God with respect to the divine will and power, truly born of a virgin, baptized by John in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him, truly nailed in the flesh for us under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (from its fruit we derive our existence, that is, from his divinely blessed suffering), in order that he might raise a banner for the ages through his resurrection for his saints and faithful people, whether among Jews or among Gentiles, in the one body of his church. (Ep.Smyr. 1:1-2)

- i) For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection; and when he came to Peter and those with him, he said to them: "Take hold of me; handle me and see that I am not a disembodied demon." And immediately they touched him and believed, being closely united with his flesh and blood. For this reason they too despised death; indeed, they proved to be greater than death. And after his resurrection he ate and drank with them like one who is composed of flesh, although spiritually he was united with the Father. (Ep.Smyr. 3:1-3)
2. How is the gospel understood (See parts on Jesus, Trinity, and Scripture)
 - a) Salvation through faith in Jesus is explicit
 - b) Works not a way to salvation, but the path of discipleship
3. Trinity
 - a) Key points:
 - (1) Again, trinitarian formulations
 - b) But I have learned that certain people from elsewhere have passed your way with evil doctrine, but you did not allow them to sow it among you. You covered up your ears in order to avoid receiving the things being sown by them, because you are stones of a temple, **prepared beforehand for the building of God the Father, hoisted up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, using as a rope the Holy Spirit**; your faith is what lifts you up, and love is the way that leads up to God. (Ep.Ephesians 9:1)
 - c) Be eager, therefore, to be firmly grounded in the precepts of the Lord and the apostles, in order that in whatever you do, you may prosper, physically and spiritually, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit, in the beginning and at the end (Ep.Mag 13:1).
4. Scripture
 - a) Key points:
 - (1) All of Scripture from God
 - (2) All of Scripture oriented towards Jesus
 - (3) The prophets knew they were looking forward to Jesus, but had less specificity, and the addition of the Gospel was genuinely new revelation as well.
 - b) For the most godly prophets lived in accordance with Christ Jesus. This is why they were persecuted, being inspired as they were by his grace in order that those who are disobedient might be fully convinced that there is one God who revealed himself through Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Word that came forth from silence, who in every respect pleased the one who sent him. (Ep.Mag. 8:2)

- c) **And we also love the prophets, because they anticipated the gospel in their preaching and set their hope on him and waited for him;** because they also believed in him, they were saved, since they belong to the unity centered in Jesus Christ, saints worthy of love and admiration, approved by Jesus Christ and included in the gospel of our shared hope. (Ep.Philadelphians 5:2)
- d) The priests, too, were good, but the high priest, entrusted with the Holy of Holies, is better; he alone has been entrusted with the hidden things of God, for he himself is the door of the Father, through which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets and the apostles and the church enter in. All these come together in the unity of God. But the gospel possesses something distinctive, namely, the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, his suffering, and the resurrection. For the beloved prophets preached in anticipation of him, but the gospel is the imperishable finished work. All these things together are good, if you believe with love. (Ep.Phila. 9:1-2)

D. Differences from us

1. Potentially unhealthy zeal for martyrdom
 - a) I implore you: do not be unseasonably kind to me. Let me be food for the wild beasts, through whom I can reach God. I am God's wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, so that I may prove to be pure bread. Better yet, coax the wild beasts, so that they may become my tomb and leave nothing of my body behind, lest I become a burden to anyone once I have fallen asleep. Then I will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will no longer see my body. Pray to the Lord on my behalf, so that through these instruments I may prove to be a sacrifice to God. I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul: they were apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am even now still a slave. But if I suffer, I will be a freedman of Jesus Christ and will rise up free in him. In the meantime, as a prisoner I am learning to desire nothing. (Ep.Rom. 4:1-3)
 - b) From Syria all the way to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, on land and sea, by night and day, chained amidst ten leopards (that is, a company of soldiers) who only get worse when they are well treated. Yet because of their mistreatment I am becoming more of a disciple; nevertheless I am not thereby justified. May I have the pleasure of the wild beasts that have been prepared for me; and I pray that they prove to be prompt with me. I will even coax them to devour me quickly, not as they have done with some, whom they were too timid to touch. And if when I am willing and ready they are not, I will force them. Bear with me—I know what is best for me. Now at last I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible envy me, so that I may reach Jesus Christ. Fire and cross and battles with wild beasts, mutilation, mangling, wrenching of bones, the hacking of limbs, the crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil—let these come upon me, only let me reach Jesus Christ! Neither the ends of the earth nor the kingdoms of this age are of any use to me. It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ than to rule over the ends of the earth. Him I seek, who died on our behalf; him I long for, who rose again for our sake. The pains of birth are upon me. (Ep.Romans. 5:1-6:1)

- c) The ruler of this age wants to take me captive and corrupt my godly intentions. Therefore none of you who are present must help him. Instead take my side, that is, God's. Do not talk about Jesus Christ while you desire the world. Do not let envy dwell among you. And if upon my arrival I myself should appeal to you, do not be persuaded by me; believe instead these things that I am writing to you. For though I am still alive, I am passionately in love with death as I write to you. My passionate love has been crucified and there is no fire of material longing within me, but only water living and speaking in me, saying within me, "Come to the Father." I take no pleasure in corruptible food or the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love. (Ep.Rom. 7:1-3)
2. Bishops
- a) *Every* letter has a command to obey bishops
 - b) Key points: Every church must have a bishop, a council of presbyters, and deacons. Without a bishop, Ignatius thinks that a church is not there.
 - c) For when you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is evident to me that you are living not in accordance with human standards but in accordance with Jesus Christ, who died for us in order that by believing in his death you might escape death. It is essential, therefore, that you continue your current practice and do nothing without the bishop, but be subject also to the council of presbyters as to the apostles of Jesus Christ, our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we so live. Furthermore, it is necessary that those who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ please everyone in every respect. For they are not merely deacons of food and drink but ministers of God's church. Therefore they must avoid criticism as though it were fire. Similarly, let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, just as they should respect the bishop, who is a model of the Father, and the presbyters as God's council and as the band of the apostles. Without these no group can be called a church. I am sure that you agree with me regarding these matters, for I received a living example of your love and still have it with me in the person of your bishop, whose very demeanor is a great lesson and whose gentleness is his power; I think that even the godless respect him. (Ep.Trall. 2:1-3;2)

V. So what do we get out of studying these guys?

A. Apologetic purpose:

- 1. Justification by faith alone wasn't made up by the Reformers, we find it in the earliest Christian writings explicitly as well
- 2. It didn't take centuries for people to worship Christ as God, not only do we see it in the New Testament, but the generation after the apostles did so as well
- 3. The Trinity was not made up at Nicea, but the shape of Christian doctrine *always* acknowledged the Father, Son, and Spirit

B. Theological benefit:

- 1. The emphasis on the real, lived humanity of in Ignatius is something we could do to focus on more
- 2. Clement's relatively simple faith and confidence in the Scriptures is instructive to us