

## Paul's Co-workers: Clement

This is the fourth in a continuing *Ekklesia Then & Now* [series](#) on the individuals Paul referred to as ***sunergos sunergos*** (co-workers). Previous installments have been [Priscilla and Aquila](#) (*ET&N* 62), [Aristarchus](#) (63), and [Euodia and Syntyche](#) (66). The purpose of the series is to examine the biblical and extrabiblical information about these people and their lives to determine what lessons they hold for today's Christian. Additional installments of this series will include Demas, Epaphroditus, Jesus Justus, Luke, Mark, Philemon, Timothy, Titus, Urbanus, Silas, and Barnabas. It is also the second in the [Early Church Fathers series](#). The [first](#) introduced the "Fathers."

### Then

*"Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life"* (Philippians 4:3, probably written from Rome in about 62 A.D.).

The women in question are [Euodia and Syntyche](#), the subjects of the previous installment in this *ET&N* series. Regardless of the relationship problems they were then experiencing, Paul commends them, along with Clement, as ***sunergos sunergos*** (co-workers), who had labored side by side with him. Furthermore, Paul affirms that the names of all of the co-workers are in the book of life. This one verse is the only reference to Clement in the New Testament, but what an honor to be mentioned by name by the apostle to the Gentiles, who during his second missionary journey had endured insults and imprisonment but still founded an important church in Philippi, which will be the subject of a future installment in the [Cities of the New Testament series](#).

Several ancient writers identify this Clement as a bishop (Greek, ***episkope***, overseer) of Rome, but Clement was a common name. Clement of Rome, as he is often called to distinguish him from Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens), who was an influential theologian in [Alexandria](#) in the late second and early third century, is claimed as the fourth pope of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* ([newadvent.org](#)), Clement of Rome was probably a Jewish "freedman or son of a freedman of the emperor's household," citing the fact that his one extant writing—a letter to the church in Corinth—was delivered by two men whose names would be very common in the imperial household. This makes the identification of Clement, Paul's co-worker of Philippians 4:3, as Clement, the bishop of Rome, extremely unlikely.

There is no further information about Clement of Philippi available in either the New Testament or the writings of the early church fathers. Any record of his life lies in the grave of antiquity. Since he is never mentioned as one of Paul's traveling companions, it is likely that he was a faithful Christian who dedicated his life to sharing the gospel in his hometown.

In the ancient world, it was common for philosophers to travel from place to place sharing their opinions about the world and life. As people accepted a philosophy, they might become disciples of these traveling sages and join one in his continuing travels. Such is certainly the case with Paul. Many of the individuals in this series did travel with Paul, but Clement of Philippi is never mentioned among his companions.

I could have included Clement of Rome in the "[Early Fathers](#)" series, although he is more properly included in the "Apostolic Fathers" rather than the pre-Nicaean fathers, the distinction being that the lives of the former were thought to have overlapped with the apostles. Even though it is probable that Clement of Rome and Paul's co-worker are not the same person, I will nonetheless write about him here since there's really nothing else to say about Clement of Philippi.

The dates of both his birth and his death are a matter of conjecture and differing opinion, but Eusebius, the great church historian of the early fourth century, places his death during the third year of Trajan (98-117), having served as bishop of the church of Rome for nine years (Eusebius, *Church History* III.15, 34). This would place his episcopate as 92-101. Eusebius refers to Clement as an apostle (III.24), and Tertullian (d. ca 230) writes of records from the Roman church testifying that Clement was ordained by Peter (*The Prescription Against Heretics* XXXII). At the same time, he is supposed to have been a student of Paul, but (unless he is the Clement of Philippians 4:3), Paul makes no mention of him.

Clement of Rome is credited as being the fourth bishop of Rome, a position that was elevated to Pope much later. According to Roman Catholic chronology, Peter was the first Pope (32-67), followed by Linus (67-76, see 2 Timothy 4:21) and Anacletus/Cletus (76-88). Dating Peter to 32 A.D. is simply a matter of filling a hole. The church in Rome probably began at Pentecost, when visitors from Rome heard the apostles' message (Acts 2:10) and would have carried the Gospel back to the capital, but there is no evidence of an apostolic visit until at least the early 40's, when, according to some traditions, Peter is said to have visited.

Paul's first visit to Rome was in about 61, and [apocryphal](#) legend holds that Peter returned in about 62. Clement was probably a relatively young man at the time, perhaps in his early thirties, so we shouldn't make much about the absence of his name in Paul's epistles from Rome.

There are two ancient works bearing his name—1 Clement and 2 Clement, both included in the famous Alexandrian codex of the New Testament which now resides in the British Library—but only the former—a letter to the church in Corinth—is considered genuine. 2 Clement is an interesting ancient homily, but it probably originated well after Clement's death. Eusebius refers to 1 Clement in his *Church History*:



"There is extant an epistle of this Clement which is acknowledged to be genuine and is of considerable length [about 12,000 words vs. about 9,400 in 1 Corinthians] and of remarkable merit. He wrote it in the name of the church of Rome to the church of Corinth, when a sedition had arisen in the latter church. We know that this epistle also has been publicly used in a great many churches both in former times and in our own. And of the fact that a sedition did take place in the church of Corinth at the time referred to Hegesippus is a trustworthy witness" (III.16).

The merit (and the authenticity) of 1 Clement has been questioned by some, primarily because of some unusual uses of Old Testament passages and particularly because of the inclusion of the legendary phoenix as a comparison to Christ's resurrection:

"Let us consider that wonderful type of the resurrection which is seen in the Eastern countries, that is to say, in Arabia. There is a certain bird called a Phoenix, of which there is never but one at a time: and that one lives five hundred years. And when the time of its dissolution draws near, that it must die, it makes itself a nest of frankincense and myrrh, and other spices into which, when its time is fulfilled, it enters and dies. But when its flesh putrefies, it breeds a certain worm, which being nourished with the juice of the dead bird brings forth feathers; and when it is grown to a perfect state, it takes up the nest in which the bones of its parents lie and carries it from Arabia into Egypt, to a city called Heliopolis: And flying in open day in the sight of all men, lays it upon the altar of the sun, and so returns from where it came. The priests then search into the records of the time, and find that it returned precisely at the end of five hundred years." (1 Clement 25:1-5)<sup>1</sup>.

It is not clear that Clement viewed the phoenix as real, for he may be using the legend to argue that if people believe in such a fantastic creation, why would they not believe all the more in God's ability to raise His Son? Nonetheless, that short excerpt almost certainly contributed to the letter's disqualification from the canon. But as Eusebius points out, it was highly regarded, and its inclusion in one of the earliest biblical manuscripts, the Codex Alexandrinus (early fifth century), further testifies to the esteem in which it was held.

Yet, despite its lofty language, 1 Clement does not really contribute anything to core Christian doctrine. A large percentage of the work is direct quotes from the Old Testament (in the Greek Septuagint version)—both individual phrases and verses, as well as lengthy passages. He quotes the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah, for example, in calling for humility (1 Clement 16:2-14) and all but two verses of Psalm 51 in citing David as a model of humility (18:2-14). He also quotes from at least two books of the Old Testament Apocrypha—the *Wisdom of Solomon* (27:5) and *Judith* (55:4-5)—and more than once from unknown texts (e.g., 42:5).

He also quotes Jesus on several occasions, although the quotes cannot generally be attributed to a specific Gospel. For example, in calling the Corinthians to peace, Clement writes, "Remember the words of our Lord Jesus, how he said, 'Woe to that man by whom offenses come, for it were better for him that he had never been born, than that he should have offended one of my elect. It were better for him that a millstone should be tied about his neck, and he should be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of my little ones'" (1 Clement 46:8 vs. Luke 2).

He also refers the 1 Corinthians in general, asking the Corinthians, "What was it that (Paul) wrote to you at his first preaching the Gospel among you? Truly, he by the spirit admonished you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then you had begun to fall into parties and factions among yourselves" (1 Clement 47:1-3).

One of the most notable features, however, is Clement's corollaries to concepts and phrases employed by Paul. There are far too many of these to be coincidental, so it is apparent that Clement was familiar with a number of Paul's letters besides 1 Corinthians. Here are a few examples:

Paul	Clement
<i>God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.</i> (1 Timothy 2:3b-4)	These things has God established by his Almighty will, desiring that all his beloved should come to repentance. (8:6)
<i>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.</i> (Ephesians 4:32)	But let us be kind to one another, according to the compassion and sweetness of him who made us. (14:3)
<i>Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.</i> (Romans 1:32)	For they that do these things are odious to God, and not only they that do them, but also all such as approve of those that do them. (35:6)
Paul uses the a military analogy in 1 Corinthians 9:7; Philippians 2:25; 2 Timothy 2:3; 2 Timothy 2:4; and Philemon 2.	Let us consider those who fight under our earthly governors: How orderly, how readily, and with what exact obedience they perform those things that are commanded them. (37:2)
<i>For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body... But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.</i> (1 Corinthians 14:14-20)	Let us, for example, take our body: the head without the feet is nothing, neither the feet without the head. (37:5)
<i>There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call--one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.</i> (Ephesians 4:4-6)	Have we not all one God, and one Christ? Is not one spirit of grace poured out upon us all? Have we not one calling in Christ? (46:6)
<i>But all things should be done decently and in order.</i> (1 Corinthians 14:40)	Although therefore many gates are opened, yet this gate of righteousness is that gate in Christ, at which blessed are they that enter in and direct their way in holiness and righteousness, doing all things without disorder. (48:4)
<i>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.</i> (1 Corinthians 13:7)	Charity [agape] unites us to God; charity covers the multitude of sins; charity endures all things and is long-suffering in all things (49:5).

Clement was obviously either a student of Paul (if they met during Paul's lifetime) or of his letters. His use of the pastoral letters (both *Timothys*, *Titus*, and *Philemon* at the end of the first century is solid evidence for refuting those skeptics who refuse to ascribe them to Paul, attributing them to a much later date. Clement also appears to be familiar with the Hebrew letter, which many credit to Paul. In the ninth through twelfth chapters, Clement mirrors Hebrews 11, citing Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and later, Rahab as examples of faith.

1 Clement has been criticized for the innovative use of Scripture, some of which would be sufficient to cause even the worst modern proof-texter to blush, and

particularly the phoenix story, but it fails to reach the standard of canonical books for one other basic reason. The motivation for this letter is some sort of church division in Corinth, similar in some ways to the one Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians. Whereas Paul dealt with the issue in about 500 words (chapters 1-2), it takes Clement 12,000 words. Some of the difference may be attributable to Paul's familiarity with the Corinthian church, something Clement may not have, but it also suggests Clement's authority with substantially less than Paul's. One way to attempt to overcome weak authority is to use many words.

Furthermore, also in contrast to Paul, Clement makes no personal appeal. Not once in the letter does he refer to himself, whereas Paul does so repeatedly in his appeals to the Corinthians. Papists will claim that Clement's letter "proves" an early recognition of the authority of Rome over other churches and particularly of the bishop of Rome, but the letter belies that. Clement makes no personal appeal; he does not even name himself at the opening of the letter, which was the custom in ancient letters. "The Church of God which sojourns at Rome," he writes, "to the Church of God which is at Corinth..." (1:1). If the bishop of Rome were viewed as an authority by other churches, surely Clement would have used his name or title. The claim that he was practicing some sort of humility doesn't wash, because the problem in Corinth was severe enough to slander the church among outsiders.

While it is not entirely clear, it appears that the Corinthian church sought the advice of the Roman church. Their reasons for doing so are not known, but it may have to do with the status of Rome in the empire, or perhaps there was a vestigial respect for Rome because Paul spent his last days and was martyred there. Perhaps the concerned members knew Clement or others in Rome. Whatever the reason, one thing is clear from the text—Clement did not even hint at any authority over Corinth. He merely lays out (at great length) a scriptural argument against divisions and dissension and for humility and obedience, and asks those who are responsible for the problem to repent, saying: "Let (those responsible) say, If this sedition, this contention, and these schisms, be upon my account, I am ready to depart; to go away wherever you please, and do whatever you will command me. Only let the flock of Christ be in peace, with the elders that are set over it" (54:2).

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A few additional details about 1 Clement are worth mentioning.

1. Clement refers to the martyrdoms of both Peter and Paul, bolstering the tradition that both apostles were executed in Rome.
2. Clement writes that Paul "traveled even to the utmost bounds of the West" (5:5). In Luke's *Acts*, Paul's furthest western travel is to Rome, which wouldn't be "the West" to a Roman. We know that Paul had intended to visit Spain (Romans 15:28), and Clement's comment suggests that he accomplished that goal after his initial release from Roman confinement.
3. 1 Clement does **not**, as some claim, establish the "orders" of the church. He refers only to elders and deacons, and he does not distinguish between clergy and laity. He does, however, suggest that seeking power or prestige within the church is wholly inappropriate, and that each person should be satisfied with their station, regardless of how lowly it may be.
4. We don't know the nature of the divisions in Corinth, but Clement employs a bit of hyperbole at one point, comparing the perpetrators of the sedition to persecutors,

jailers, stoners, and killers of righteous individuals. "Was Daniel cast into the den of lions by men fearing God?" (45:6) he asks, for example, but no such injustices were done in Corinth. Some church leaders were merely deposed.

5. One minor New Testament character makes an appearance in 1 Clement. Among the messengers Clement employs to carry the letter to Corinth and return with a report is Fortunatus. Writing to Corinth from Ephesus, Paul says, "*I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men*" (1 Corinthians 16:17-18). It is not certain that this is the same man, but it seems very likely. Fortunatus had been part of the entourage that brought the news of divisions in Corinth to Paul; it would be logical for Corinthians many years later to employ him again for the same purpose.

6. While I have suggested that the inclusion of 1 Clement would not have added to Christian doctrine, it nevertheless contains some wonderful prose; for example:

"Let our praise be from God, not from ourselves; for God hates those that commend themselves. Let the witness of our good actions be given to us by others, as it was given to the holy men that went before us. Rashness, and arrogance, and confidence, belong to them who are accursed of God: but equity, and humility, and mildness, to such as are blessed by him. Let us then lay hold of his blessing, and let us consider what are the ways by which we may attain it" (30:6-31:1).

"This is the way, beloved, in which we may find our Savior, even Jesus Christ, the high-priest of all our offerings, the defender and helper of our weakness. By him we look up to the highest heavens; and behold, as in a looking-glass, his spotless and most excellent visage. By him are the eyes of our hearts opened; by him our foolish and darkened understanding rejoices to behold his wonderful light. By him would God have us to taste the knowledge of immortality. He, who is the brightness of his glory, is so much greater than the angels that he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (36:1-2).

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<sup>1</sup>Quotations from 1 Clement used here cite the J.B. Lightfoot divisions, which are the best known, but use the Archbishop Wake translation, which is far more readable.

## Now

Passages such as those quoted above deserve to be remembered. Clement's letter, perhaps the most ancient extant non-canonical Christian document, is worthy of study and preservation. Unfortunately, it seems that only those who wish to use it self-servingly pay it much attention.

The letter also raises an interesting issue for our times: how does one remove a church leader? Since the only biblically-ordained church leaders are local elders (see [ET&N 10, Church Government](#)), I'll consider only them, and 1 Clement cannot be used to resolve any such issues except inasmuch as it is clear that the removal of leaders for "political" reasons is totally unjustified. I have witnessed several examples of church in-fighting, both in my own Church of Christ community and in other denominational groups. Some of the latter have made national news, and therein lies the problem.

Certainly any move to depose a church leader must be taken under only the most extreme circumstances. The world loves to see the church embarrassed by internal struggles, as evidenced by the interest in the current divisions of the Episcopal Church. The prime directive for church leadership must be to maintain unity and order at *almost* any cost. Replacing leaders should never be for simple preference, but only for grotesque public sin. One would hope, however, the leaders so exposed would voluntarily recognize the need to step aside, at least for a time.

Probably the most notorious current church division involves the Episcopal Church, but it's a slightly different issue—one that underscores the inherent problem in centralized decision-making. The American Episcopal Church has welcomed an openly homosexual bishop. This decision spread a cancer throughout the entire denomination by centralized decision. Some local congregations have objected to that decision, and some of those have chosen to disassociate themselves from the central body, raising property issues. With largely autonomous congregations, such as exist in churches of Christ and the Society of Friends (Quakers), for example, such a problem cannot occur. If one congregation commits a grotesque error, it has little affect on other congregations.

This is why, I believe, central organization is never ordained by God in the New Testament. The organization of the New Testament church, in contrast to that of the Old Testament Nation of Israel, is fundamentally organic, egalitarian, and autonomous. This protects the church from the kind of perversion that is almost inevitable when power is centered on one individual or one group of individuals. Importantly, it also allows churches to associate loosely with others whose practices may be in violation, at some level, with biblical principles.

In a very real sense, this is what Clement's letter to Corinth represents—the autonomous Roman church associating with the erring Corinth church, trying to help them overcome a serious problem, but neither claiming authority over them, nor refusing the hand of fellowship. That's a lesson we could all stand to learn from this ancient letter.



Unsure about or don't agree with something in Ekklesia Then & Now? First, be a Berean (Acts 17:10-11). If you still disagree, [post a message](#) so we can all share in the discussion!

## **NEXT ISSUE: The Ultimate "Adventure Vacation"**

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