

# The Early Church

## Part 2

Q. Who was St. Clement of Rome?

A. St. Clement of Rome was the Fourth Pope, following St. Peter, Linus and Anacletus. Sources tell us that St. Clement assumed this office when he was about 60 in approximately the year 92 AD.

Q. What was life like in the Church of Rome in this time?

A. In his text *Four Witnesses*, author Rod Bennett explains that "after twenty-five years of relative peace for the Church, persecution broke out (for Christians) under...(the emperor) Domitian. (This emperor) was the first of the Caesars to proclaim himself officially 'Lord and God.' (He) moved with swift severity against all objectors or atheists." Author Bennett explains that "Clement (was) handed the shepherd's crook at a dire and desperate hour."

Q. How do we know about Clement's life?

A. From his writings. One of them was his *Epistle to the Corinthians*, written in the year 96 AD. St. Clement addressed the same church that St. Paul had written to in his letters.

Q. How does St. Clement describe the Church in his Epistle?

A. He calls it a "stranger at Rome" and "a stranger at Corinth." In these words St. Clement describes the fact that the Church is living in a hostile, pagan world where it does not belong.

Q. Why did St. Clement write the Epistle to The Corinthians?

A. In *Four Witnesses*, author Rod Bennett explains that the church in Corinth was “dividing up into theological cliques” based on members’ relationships with various apostles or leaders such as St. Paul, Apollos or St. Peter. Thus, the church was having problems with factionalism.

Q. How did St. Clement address the problem of factionalism in the Corinthian church?

A. He asks “Why are these quarrels and outbursts of passion and divisions and schism and war in your midst? Or, do we not have one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was poured out upon us?” St. Clement goes on to ask “And is there not one calling in Christ?” Thus, he invites church members to stop and reflect upon why they are allowing factionalism to rend their church asunder.

Q. What does St. Clement teach about the effects of factionalism upon the faithful?

A. He states “your schism has perverted many; many it has thrown into discouragement, many it has bewildered, and to all of us it has brought sorrow.” Thus, St. Clement invites the Corinthian church members to make factionalism cease so that the faith of the members is not weakened or destroyed.

Q. In addition to making a conscious effort to avoid factionalism, how does St. Clement direct the Corinthians to resolve their problems?

A. He states “Let us, then, quickly blot out this blemish and fall to our knees before the Master, and with tears implore Him to have mercy on us and to be reconciled to us and to restore us to the venerable and holy practice of brotherly love.” Thus, St. Clement invites the Corinthians to practice humility and to pray.

Q. Why is this selection from *The Epistle to The Corinthians* relevant today?

A. Because what happened in the Corinthian church is the result of human nature. Human nature has not changed over the centuries and the problems the Corinthian Christians have are present in every body of the Christian faithful today.

St. Clement describes the Church as a "stranger" in the world. This means that this world is not our true home and that we were created by God for Heaven. It is only there that we will truly be "at home."

He wrote to the Corinthians because of his pastoral responsibility to care for the spiritual welfare of all churches as Bishop of Rome. If he did not address the factionalism in Corinth then it would not be recognized by Christians as an evil to be avoided. Presently, factionalism in the nation is at an all-time high and threatens the unity of the country. In St. Clement's advice to the Corinthians he provides a remedy for us as we face national difficulties.