Clement of Rome,
Theology of (50-97 AD)
Theological View: Modalism

The historical evidence proves that Clement of Rome was a leading Elder in the first century church in Rome long before he became the Senior Bishop. The word “bishop” simply means “overseer.” All extant early Christian literature says that Clement personally knew both Peter and Paul before becoming a bishop of the city of Rome. In fact, the earliest Christian literature unanimously acknowledged that Clement was the reputed author of both 1 and 2 Clement within the first century.

In my first article and video entitled, “Introduction to 1 and 2 Clement”, I covered in great detail the historical data proving that both 1 and 2 Clement were written by the first century Roman bishop named Clement who was a contemporary of the author of the Shepherd of Hermas and the first century apostles. In this second article and video, I’m giving a very brief introduction beginning with 1 Clement.

WHEN EXACTLY WAS 1 CLEMENT WRITTEN?

1 Clement chapter 41: 1-3 proves that Clements First Epistle was written before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

“Not in every place, my brethren are the daily sacrifices offered or the free-will offerings, or the sin-offerings and trespass-offerings, but only in Jerusalem; and there also the offering is not made in every place, but before
the shrine, at the altar, and the offering is first inspected by the High Priest and the ministers already mentioned. Those therefore who do contrary to that which is agreeable to his will suffer the penalty of death’ (1 Clement chapter 41:1-3).”

Why would Clement write “Not in every place ... ARE the daily sacrifices offered” if the temple in Jerusalem was already destroyed? Notice how Clement writes that the daily sacrifices are being offered in Jerusalem in the present tense rather than in the past. This is a strong argument in favor of 1 Clement being written sometime before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

Scholars who hold that 1 Clement was written before 70 A.D., cite Clements’ frequent quotes from the Gospel of Matthew as proof for a pre-70 A.D. composition of the gospel according to Matthew. Since Clement frequently cited New Testament Scripture, we have first century evidence confirming that much of the New Testament was written before 70 A.D. Therefore we can see how important it is to study the earliest Christian literature.

**DID CLEMENT WRITE AS THE UNIVERSAL BISHOP OVER ALL CHURCHES?**

The Epistle of 1 Clement to the Corinthians itself does not give us a reason to believe that a single Roman Bishop ruled over God’s universal Church as the Roman Catholic Church now proclaims. Clement was a first century leader in the Church of Rome long before he was appointed its Senior Bishop. Eusebius recorded that: ‘Clement of Rome wrote in the name of the church of the Romans’ (EH 3: 38, 1). Eusebius did not say Clement wrote as the head bishop of Rome. The apostle Peter had ordained Linus, Cletus and Clement as overseers of the Church of God at Rome. Linus succeeded Peter in 67 AD. So Clement would have been acting as an assistant bishop long before he became the leading bishop of the city of Rome in the later portion of the first century.

The opening words of Clements first Epistle to the Corinthians say nothing about Clement being a head bishop of the Roman Church.

Clement opened his Epistle to the Corinthians by saying, “The Church of God which sojourns in Rome to the Church of God which sojourns in Corinth, to those who are called and sanctified by the will of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace from God Almighty be multiplied to you through
Jesus Christ. Owing to the sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities which have befallen us, we consider that our attention has been somewhat delayed in turning to the questions disputed among you, (the Corinthians) ...”

Notice that Clement does not write his Epistle as the Senior Bishop of Rome, but as a representative of the Roman church by saying “we consider” and “our attention.” Therefore it is highly unlikely that Clement wrote his first Epistle as the Senior Bishop of Rome.

Denis Barton wrote, “Clement does not claim to be writing as the bishop of Rome, but on behalf of the Roman Community. Eusebius recorded that: ‘Clement of Rome wrote in the name of the church of the Romans’ (EH 3: 38, 1). He did not say Clement wrote as the (single) bishop of Rome. Peter had ordained Linus, Cletus and Clement as bishops. Linus succeeded Peter in 67 AD. So Clement would have been acting as an assistant bishop for at least three years prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. He would therefore write in the present tense regarding Jerusalem during this period.” The Clementine Gospel Tradition (The Authors of the Gospels) By Dennis Barton - www.churchinhistory.org

The Shepherd of Hermas says that “Clement” served as one of the prominent leaders in the vast Roman Church as a contemporary of Hermas.

“Thou shall therefore write two little books, and shall send one to Clement, and one to Grapte. So Clement shall send to the foreign cities, for this is his duty; while Grapte shall instruct the widows and the orphans. But thou shall read [the book] to this city along with the elders that preside over the Church.” (Shepherd of Hermas II, 19 and JATR 320).

Dennis Barton wrote, “So we learn it was the duty of a person named Clement to correspond with foreign cities. Lightfoot called him: ‘the foreign secretary of the Roman church’ (JATR 321), and Robinson described him as: ‘the correspondent of external relations of the Roman Church.’ Edmundson, in his 1913 prestigious Bampton Lecture, pointed out that Clement was: ‘only the servant, not the head of the Church acting on his own initiative’,” (JATR 333). Dennis Barton, “The Clementine Gospel Tradition” (The Authors of the Gospels) From www.churchinhistory.org

Clement was later the Senior Bishop of Rome from about 88-97 A.D. Clement is listed in Philippians as a fellow laborer in ministry with the apostle Paul. Therefore it is highly unlikely that Clement’s theology would have been substantially different from the first century apostles.
Around 200 A.D. Tertullian had denounced the idea that God could suffer in his polemic Against Praxeus (the chief leader of the Modalists in the late 2nd century). Yet Clement, who was familiar with the first century teachings of the apostles, taught that GOD SUFFERED as Jesus Christ just one hundred years before the time of Praxeus and Tertullian. The first century Roman Bishop wrote, "Content with the provision which GOD had made for you, and carefully attending to HIS WORDS, you were inwardly filled with the doctrine, and HIS SUFFERINGS were before your eyes." 1 Clement 2. Thus we can clearly see that Clement taught that God (the only true God the Father - John 17:3) suffered just like Praxeaus and the Modalists had taught a century later.

The first century Roman bishop never wrote anything about an alleged pre-incarnate God the Son distinct from God the Father. Even Trinitarian historians have noted that it was Origen who first taught the idea of a timeless eternal Son in the early third century and that the opponents of the Modalists such as Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Origen were “Semi-Arian” in their theology (Johannes Quasten Patrology, vol. II: Pg. 326-327 / Patrology Vol. 2, Page 78 / Patrology Vol. 2, Page 200) – Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, Vol. 1, Pg. 191 – Jaroslav Pelikan / Princiipis 4 4:1) before the Trinity doctrine fully developed.
The Codex Alexandrinus is a fifth century codex bound book of the entire New Testament Scripture with the two Epistles of Clement attached. Wikipedia says that the Codex Alexandrinus, “… contains all of the books of the New Testament (although the pages that contained Matthew 1:1-25:5 are not extant). In addition, the codex contains 1 Clement (lacking 57:7-63) and the homily known as 2 Clement (up to 12:5a).”

Scholars Roberts and Donaldson did not include the latter interpolated passage in Leo’s 1056 version of 1 Clement chapter 58 because the passage is not found in the earliest surviving manuscript from which the later copies appear to have been made. J. B. Lightfoot had translated the Codex H manuscript written by Leo in 1056 which contains an apparent interpolated addition to 1 Clement that does not appear in the earlier fifth century Codex Alexandrinus. Hence, 1 Clement 58 is likely a later interpolated addition.
1 Clement 58 says, “For as God lives, and as the Lord Jesus Christ and as the Holy Spirit live ...” Trinitarians often cite the passage from Leo’s eleventh century manuscript which does not appear in the more trustworthy fifth century manuscript that was found attached to the New Testament Scriptures in the Codex Alexandrinus. The Second Epistle of Clement also happens to appear with 1 Clement in the Codex Alexandrinus with the words, “The Second Epistle of Clement” appearing on the manuscript.

Every single manuscript of 1 Clement was always found with 2 Clement attached to it with the words, “The Second Epistle of Clement” written on the manuscript. From the earliest days of Christian history, Clement was always known as the original author of both one and two Clement. Therefore it is nonsensical to deny the Clementine authorship of both manuscripts.

2 Clement CHAP. I.

BRETHREN, it is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God,—as the Judge of the living and the dead. And it does not become us to think lightly of our salvation; for if we think little of Him, we shall also hope but to obtain little [from Him]. And those of us who hear carelessly of these things, as if they were of small importance, commit sin, not knowing whence we have been called, and by whom, and to what place, and how much JESUS CHRIST submitted to suffer for our sakes. What return, then, shall we make to Him, or what fruit that shall be worthy of that which He has given to us?
For, indeed, how great are the benefits which we owe to Him! He has graciously given us light; as a FATHER, He has called us sons; He has saved us when we were ready to perish. [Notice that there is nothing within the text to indicate that the subject has changed from Jesus Christ to God the Father. Hence Clement of Rome identified Jesus Christ as the “Father”]. What praise, then, shall we give to Him, or what return shall we make for the things which we have received?

2 Clement 9:5-6, "If Christ the Lord who saved us was Spirit at first but became flesh and so called us, so shall we receive the reward in the flesh."

Notice that Clement never spoke of “Christ the Lord” as God the Son who “became flesh.” According to Clement, “Christ the Lord who saved us was Spirit at first.” Clement appears to say that Christ was first the Spirit as “the Holy Spirit” in chapter eight, but Clement left no room to doubt that he was addressing Christ as the Holy Spirit in chapter 14:3-4.

“… the Holy Spirit … guard the flesh that you may partake of the (Holy) Spirit. Now if we say that the flesh is the Church as the Spirit is Christ, then verily he who has dishonored the flesh has dishonored the Church. Such a one, therefore, shall not partake of the Spirit which is Christ.”

2 Clement clearly states that the “Holy Spirit” is “the Spirit which is Christ.”

Moreover, Clement frequently cited the now non extant Gospel to the Egyptians which contains graphic Modalistic Monarchian content. 2 Clement repeatedly quotes texts from the Gospel to the Egyptians, which he regarded as scripture. This presents a problem for Trinitarian scholars because the historical data proves that “The Gospel to the Egyptians” was highly regarded as sacred scripture by the early Modalistic Monarchians. Eiphaphianus (340-403) wrote that The Gospel to the Egyptians states that Jesus “makes clear to the disciples that he himself is the Father, that he himself is the Son, and that he himself is the Holy Spirit (Panarion 62).”

If Clement did not believe that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit, then why would he repeatedly cite the Gospel to the Egyptians as authoritative inspired scripture? It is apparent that Clement’s Modalistic teaching of Jesus being called the “Father” and the Holy Spirit being called “Christ” is the real reason why most Trinitarian scholars refuse to accept 2 Clement as a document written by the first century Roman bishop. For Trinitarian
theology is supposed to believe that the Father and the Holy Spirit are not the Son. Therefore Trinitarians cannot claim “apostolic succession” through the Roman bishops if the earliest first century Roman bishops were Modalists!

For more information about Clement of Rome, click on the link to our other YouTube Video entitled, “Introduction to 1 and 2 Clement”.