

## Lesson 4

### THE DISCIPLES OF THE APOSTLES: *The Apostolic Fathers*

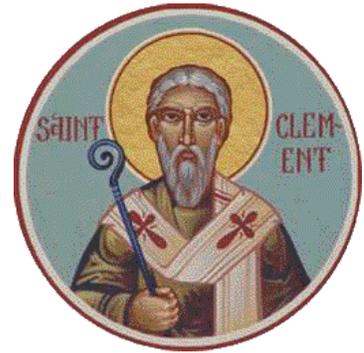
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“These things entrust to faithful men, who will be able to entrust others also.”

**INTRODUCTORY NOTE:** Although scholars do not always agree on the specific dates, the general consensus includes the following individuals in this category: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Barnabas of Alexandria, Papias of Heiropolis, Polycarp of Smyrna, and the authors of *The Didache*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and *The Letter to Diognetus*. The early date of these Fathers and their writings is what makes them so significant. Outside of the New Testament itself, they furnish the earliest testimony of church life—echoing the initial understanding of apostolic teaching.

#### **Clement of Rome (c. 30–d. 100)**

- The fourth pastor at the church of Rome (from around 90–100); followed after Peter, Linus, and Cletus (according to Roman tradition)
- He was born before Christ died and died around the same time as the Apostle John
- Probably mentioned in Philippians 4:3; if so, then he was a coworker with Paul; probably mentioned also in *Shepherd of Hermas*
- A disciple of both Peter and Paul (from their time in Rome); according to tradition, martyred under Emperor Trajan
- He wrote a letter to the Corinthians around 95. This is generally considered to be the oldest Christian document we have outside of the New Testament. It was written while the apostle John was still alive.
  - That Clement wrote this letter is affirmed by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, 3. 15), Origen (*Comm. in Joan.*, 1. 29), and others.
  - Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, 3. 16) says this about this letter: “There is one acknowledged Epistle of this Clement [whom he has just identified with the friend of St. Paul], great and admirable, which he wrote in the name of the Church of Rome to the Church at Corinth, sedition having then arisen in the latter Church. We are aware that this Epistle has been publicly read in very many churches both in old times, and also in our own day.”
- Scholars generally agree that the *Second Epistle of Clement* was written later and is not his work.



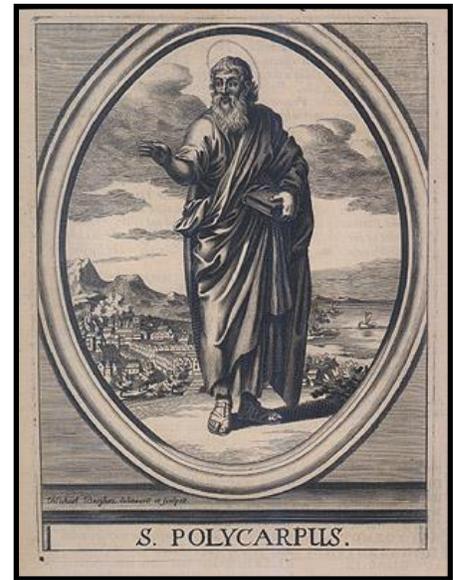
## Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69–c. 155)

- Disciple of John; friend of Ignatius; companion of Papias; teacher of Irenaeus
- One extant letter, *Letter to the Philippians*
- Is a connecting link between first and second century
- Smyrna is mentioned in Rev. 2:8–13
- Stabbed to death at 86 years old and then his body burned at the stake; later writing entitled, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, details his death

According to this account:

- When he was found, he fed dinner to the Roman guards who had come to arrest him. He then asked for an hour in prayer, which they permitted him to have. Yet his prayer was so fervent and passionate that his captors regretted even being involved in his apprehension.
  - Appearing before a Roman proconsul, Polycarp stood firm. The proconsul even urged him to deny Christ, “Swear, and I will release you—reproach Christ.”
  - But Polycarp’s faith was undeterred: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who has saved me?” When it was clear that Polycarp would not recant, he was sentenced to be burned at the stake.
- **Key Quote:**

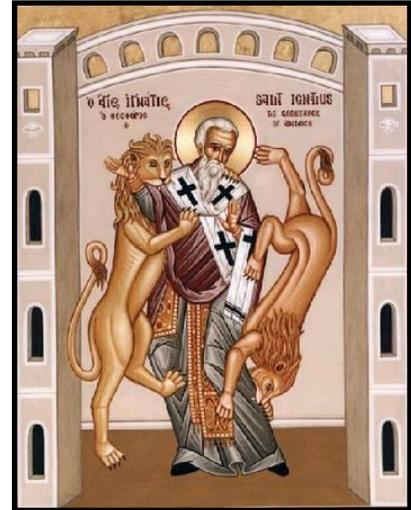
“I know that through grace you are saved, not of works, but by the will of God, through Jesus Christ.” (*The Epistle of Philippians*)



## Ignatius of Antioch (d. between 98–117)

- Bishop of the church in Syrian Antioch; according to tradition, he was the third pastor in Antioch and was appointed by Peter himself to the position
- Wrote at least seven authentic letters to various churches; he was a disciple and contemporary of the Apostle John

- Killed as a martyr in Rome, in the Coliseum
- Promoted single-bishop form of church government, and the replacement of the Sabbath with the Lord's Day
- **Key Quotes:**



**Regarding salvation:** “His cross, and his death, and his resurrection, and the faith which is through him, are my unpolluted muniments; and in these, through your prayers, I am willing to be justified” (Epistle to Philadelphians).

**Regarding the Lord's Day:** Be not seduced by strange doctrines nor by antiquated fables, which are profitless. For if even unto this day we live after the manner of Judaism, we avow that we have not received grace.... If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing Sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day, on which our life also arose through Him and through His death which some men deny ... how shall we be able to live apart from Him? ... It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity — *Ignatius to the Magnesians* 8:1, 9:1-2, 10:3, Lightfoot translation.

**First to use the term “catholic” [katholikos or “universal”] church:** Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid. — *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8, J.R. Willis translation.

**Regarding martyrdom:** I am writing to all the Churches and I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.— *Letter to the Romans*

## Papias (c. 60–c. 130)

- Wrote *Interpretations of the Sayings of the Lord* (now lost); only extant writings come from Irenaeus and Eusebius
- Was ridiculed by Eusebius for believing in a literal millennial kingdom
- Noted that Mark wrote his gospel from Peter; and that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew
- **Key Quotes:**

**On his relationship to John:** I will not hesitate to add also for you to my interpretations what I formerly learned with care from the Presbyters and have carefully stored in memory, giving assurance of its truth. For I did not take pleasure as the many do in those who speak much, but in those who teach what is true, nor in those who relate foreign precepts, but in those who relate the precepts which were given by the Lord to the faith and came down from the Truth itself. And also if any follower of the Presbyters happened to come, I would inquire for the sayings of the Presbyters, what Andrew said, or what Peter said, or what Philip or what Thomas or James or what John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which Aristion and the Presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, were saying. For I considered that I should not get so much advantage from matter in books as from the voice which yet lives and remains.

**On the writing of the Gospels:** Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements. Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.

**On premillennialism (from Eusebius):** The same person, moreover, has set down other things as coming to him from unwritten tradition, amongst these some strange parables and instructions of the Saviour, and some other things of a more fabulous nature. Amongst these he says that there will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth.” (Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord - Fragment VI).

## SELECT READINGS FROM THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

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### **The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians**

*(Translation by J. B. Lightfoot with English wording updated slightly)*

#### **Chapter 31**

- (1) Let us therefore cling to His blessing, and let us see what are the ways of blessing. Let us study the records of the things that have happened from the beginning.
- (2) Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he wrought righteousness and truth through faith?
- (3) Isaac with confidence, as knowing the future, was led as a willing sacrifice.
- (4) Jacob with humility departed from his land because of his brother, and went to Laban and served; and the twelve tribes of Israel were given to him.

#### **Chapter 32**

- (1) If any man will consider them one by one in sincerity, he shall understand the magnificence of the gifts that are given by Him.
- (2) For of Jacob are all the priests and Levites who minister unto the altar of God; of him is the Lord Jesus as concerning the flesh; of him are kings and rulers and governors in the line of Judah; yea and the rest of his tribes are held in no small honor, seeing that God promised saying, *Thy seed shall be as the stars of heaven.*
- (3) They all therefore were glorified and magnified, not through themselves or their own works or the righteous doing which they wrought, but through His will.
- (4) 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 which we wrought in holiness of heart, but through faith, whereby the Almighty God justified all men that have been from the beginning; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

#### **Chapter 33**

- (1) What then must we do, brethren? Must we idly abstain from doing good, and forsake love? May the Master never allow this to befall us at least; but let us hasten with urgency and zeal to accomplish every good work.

(2) For the Creator and Master of the universe Himself rejoices in His works.

(3) For by His exceeding great might He established the heavens, and in His incomprehensible wisdom He set them in order. And the earth He separated from the water that surrounds it, and He set it firm on the sure foundation of His own will; and the living creatures which walk upon it He commanded to exist by His ordinance. Having before created the sea and the living creatures therein, He enclosed it by His own power.

(4) Above all, as the most excellent and exceeding great work of His intelligence, with His sacred and faultless hands He formed man in the impress of His own image.

(5) For thus says God, *Let us make man after our image and after our likeness. And God made man; male and female made He them.*

(6) So having finished all these things, He praised them and blessed them and said, *Increase and multiply.*

(7) We have seen that all the righteous were adorned in good works. Yea, and the Lord Himself having adorned Himself with worlds rejoiced.

(8) Seeing then that we have this pattern, let us conform ourselves with all diligence to His will; let us with all our strength work the work of righteousness.

### **Chapter 34**

(1) The good workman receives the bread of his work with boldness, but the slothful and careless dares not look his employer in the face.

(2) It is therefore needful that we should be zealous unto well doing, for of Him are all things:

(3) since He forewarns us saying, *Behold, the Lord, and His reward is before His face, to recompense each man according to his work.*

(4) He exhorts us therefore to believe on Him with our whole heart, and to be not idle nor careless unto every good work.

(5) Let our boast and our confidence be in Him: let us submit ourselves to His will; let us mark the whole host of His angels, how they stand by and minister unto His will.

(6) For the scripture says, *Ten thousands of ten thousands stood by Him, and thousands of thousands ministered unto Him: and they cried aloud, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; all creation is full of His glory.*

(7) Yea, and let us ourselves then, being gathered together in unity with intentness of heart, cry unto Him as from one mouth earnestly that we may be made partakers of His great and glorious promises.

(8) For He says, *Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and it has not entered into the heart of man what great things He has prepared for them that patiently await Him.*

### **Chapter 35**

(1) How blessed and marvelous are the gifts of God, dearly beloved!!

(2) Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in boldness, faith in confidence, temperance in sanctification! And all these things fall under our apprehension.

(3) What then, do you think, are the things being prepared for them that patiently await Him? The Creator and Father of the ages, the All holy One Himself knows their number and their beauty.

(4) Let us therefore contend, that we may be found in the number of those that patiently await Him, to the end that we may be partakers of His promised gifts.

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