

Sovereign Grace in *I Clement*

The Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians, also known as *I Clement*, is considered to be the oldest Christian writing outside of the New Testament. It was probably written in A.D. 95 or 96. Eusebius (c. 260–c. 340) credits the writing to Clement of Rome.

The contents of this rather lengthy letter show that it was written to address certain problems among the believers at Corinth, especially the rejection of worthy leaders in their assembly.

Below are selected portions of the letter which in one way or another address the subject of the sovereignty of God. As this issue is not the theme of the letter, we do not expect to find a detailed treatment of it. However, the incidental references to it interspersed throughout do reveal something of the doctrinal framework and nomenclature that existed in the early church among non-inspired writers. Advocates of freewill theology neither think nor speak in these terms used by Clement.

Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from the *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, Ages Digital Library*. Boldface type is added for emphasis. Material in italicized brackets is added by Daniel Chamberlin.

Salutation

The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are **called and sanctified by the will of God**, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied.

Chapter 1

Owing, dear brethren, to the sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points respecting which you consulted us; and especially to that shameful and detestable sedition, utterly abhorrent to **the elect of God**, which a few rash and self-confident persons have kindled to such a pitch of frenzy, that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be universally loved, has suffered grievous injury.

Chapter 2

Day and night ye were anxious for the whole brotherhood, that **the number of God's elect** might be saved with mercy and a good conscience.

Chapter 6

To these men who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of **the elect**, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example.

Chapter 8

Desiring, therefore, that **all His beloved should be partakers of repentance**, He has, **by His almighty will**, established [these declarations].

Chapter 27

“Who shall say unto Him, What hast thou done? or, Who shall resist the power of His strength?” When and as He pleases He will do all things, and none of the things determined by Him shall pass away?

Chapter 29

Let us then draw near to Him with holiness of spirit, lifting up pure and undefiled hands unto Him, loving our gracious and merciful Father, who has made us partakers in the blessings of **His elect**.

Chapter 32

All these, therefore, were highly honored, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but **through the operation of His will**. And we, too, being **called by His will** in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. [*Since Clement was not a universalist, the “all men” here obviously means all men whom God saves.*]

Chapter 36

By Him **the Lord has willed** that we should taste of immortal knowledge, “who, being the brightness of His majesty, is by so much greater than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

Chapter 38

Let us consider, then, brethren, of what matter we were made, — who and what manner of beings we came into the world, as it were out of a sepulcher, and from utter darkness. He who made us and fashioned us, **having prepared His bountiful gifts for us before we were born**, introduced us into His world.

Chapter 46

And again, in another place, [the Scripture] saith, “With a harmless man thou shalt prove thyself harmless, and **with an elect man thou shalt be elect**, and with a perverse man thou shalt show thyself perverse.” Let us cleave, therefore, to the innocent and righteous, since these are the elect of God. ... Remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, how He said, “Woe to that man [by whom offenses come]! It were better for him that he had never been born, than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of **my elect**.”

Chapter 49

By love have all **the elect of God** been made perfect; without love nothing is well-pleasing to God. In love has the Lord taken us to Himself. On account of the Love he bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord **gave His blood for us by the will of God; His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls**.

Chapter 50

For it is written, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not impute to him, and in whose mouth there is no guile.” This blessedness cometh upon those who have been **chosen by God** through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Chapter 52

For, says **the elect** David, “I will confess unto the Lord; and that will please Him more than a young bullock that hath horns and hoofs. Let the poor see it, and be glad.”

[Henceforth, we follow the text and chapter divisions found in The Apostolic Fathers, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.)]

Chapter 58

For as God lives, and as the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit (who are the faith and hope of **the elect**), so surely will the one who with humility and constant gentleness has kept without regret the ordinances and commandments given by God be enrolled and included among **the number of those who are saved** through Jesus Christ, through whom is the glory to him for ever and ever. Amen.

Chapter 59

We, however, will be innocent of this sin, and will ask, with earnest prayer and supplication, that the Creator of the universe may keep intact the **specified number of his elect** throughout the whole world, through his beloved servant Jesus Christ, through whom he called us from darkness to light, from ignorance to the knowledge of the glory of his name. Grant us, Lord, to hope on your name, which is the primal source of all creation, and open the eyes of our hearts, that we may know you, who alone is “Highest among the high, and remains Holy among the holy.” You “humble the pride of the proud”;

you “destroy the plans of nations”; you “exalt the humble” and “humble the exalted”; you “make rich and make poor”; you “kill and make alive.” You alone are the Benefactor of spirits and the God of all flesh, who “looks into the depths,” who scans the works of man; the Helper of those who are in peril, the “Savior of those in despair”; the Creator and Guardian of every spirit, who multiplies the nations upon the earth, and from among all of them **have chosen those who love you through Jesus Christ**, your beloved Servant, through whom you instructed us, sanctified us, honored us. [*Loving God is a consequence of having been chosen by God. As 1Jn. 4:19 says, We love him, because he first loved us.*]

Chapter 64

Finally, may the all-seeing God and Master of spirits and Lord of all flesh, who **chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him to be his own special people**, grant to every soul that has called upon his magnificent and holy name faith, fear, peace, patience, steadfastness, self-control, purity, and sobriety, that they may be pleasing to his name through our high priest and guardian, Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and majesty, might and honor to him, both now and for ever and ever. Amen.