

The Problem of 1 Clement: Did Fellow Christians Have a Hand in the Deaths of Peter and Paul?

Part 2

By [Jason Foster](#)

Jason Foster, MDiv, Reformed Theological Seminary 2006

Did fellow Christians play a role in the deaths of Peter and Paul? Several scholars tend to think so. In Part 1 of this study, we assessed the views of three respected scholars of this persuasion.¹ Each offer serious proposals and introduce legitimate issues to paint a picture of plausibility that internal jealousy played a part in Peter and Paul's death. But we concluded that such proposals are not bulletproof and come with drawbacks that are just as formidable as the weaknesses they ascribe to more traditional views. But can we do any better? Up to this point, all we've done is critique the proposals of others. Can we offer an alternate view that competes with or even surpasses the impressive work we surveyed in Part 1? Such is the aim of this Part 2 study.

As seen in Part 1, a key jumping-off point to this question is *1 Clement*. In *1 Clem.* 3-6, the deaths of Peter and Paul in chapter 5 are discussed within the context of jealousy, envy and strife. Our three scholars see in this an emphasis on internal jealousy within the Christian community provoking the violent action of Rome, likely during or in the vicinity of the Neronian pogrom. But is this reading of Clement accurate? What we will endeavor to present are alternate interpretations of Clement which, when combined with other sources, may yield a more enriched interpretation.

To be clear, I am not asserting a definitive resolution to the Peter and Paul demise debate. As we saw in Part 1, *1 Clem.* 5 contains tantalizing details about the circumstances surrounding their deaths, but nothing approaching a comprehensive accounting. Other documents of later decades and centuries provide various versions of their deaths, such that the researcher is presented with several possibilities that both accord and discord with each other in the details. I share the view of Cullmann, Eastman and Corke-Webster that in the end, we are dealing in possibilities or perhaps probabilities, not certainties.

¹ These would be the studies of Oscar Cullmann, David Eastman, and James Corke-Webster.

Some Preliminaries:

Before settling into our ideas of how chapters 3-6 might be read, a few preliminaries:

First, as many have noted, including myself in Part 1, Clement makes clear in the opening verse of his letter to Corinth that he is primarily concerned with the wrongful overthrowing of the church leadership there and the discord it has sown. But while this is undoubtedly Clement's primary issue with the Corinthians, it is not his only issue with them. Verse 1 alludes to 'matters in dispute among you'; plural. It then cites 'especially' the 'unholy schism' that has been caused by the deposing of the presbyters. So, while we would expect Clement to give sustained focus to his primary concern, which he does, we should expect him to touch on other matters as well, which he also does.² True, Clement's concerns appear to be intra-tent in nature. But the issues in Corinth weren't just about factionalism within the church.³ In this, *1 Clement* bears affinity to 1 Corinthians, which we can confidently say Clement used as a source (47.1-3).

Second, the historical examples used throughout by Clement, including the examples in chapters 3-6, would have been people and events to which his audience in Corinth would be conversant. It would degrade the rhetorical impact of his argument for Clement to cite examples unfamiliar to his readers. In the cases of Peter and Paul, we have good cause to affirm this.⁴ The Corinthians were intimately acquainted with Paul prior to his death, with Paul having established and organized the Christian community at Corinth (Acts 18), paid them an emergency visit (2 Cor. 2.1), and wrote several letters to them.⁵ It also seems clear that Corinth was personally familiar with Peter (1 Cor. 1-3 especially, but also 9.5 and the credal 15.5).⁶ In my view, Clement's use of athletic

² In chapters 1-2, Clement catalogues a list of virtues the Corinthians once embodied, some of which relate to rejecting divisiveness, while others, like hospitality, piety and sound knowledge, have their own character. In the rest of the letter, he touches on how the Corinthians no longer embody these virtues. While such virtues can be seen as interrelated, they all have standalone qualities. So, the deposing of the leaders in Corinth, while Clement's central concern (as highlighted again in concluding chapters 63-65), is not his only concern.

³ Wrede saw *1 Clement* as multi-purposed, addressing specific issues as well as providing general instructions.

⁴ On the familiarity of Peter and Paul in both Rome and Corinth, see Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter in Ancient Reception and Modern Debate* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 128.

⁵ This isn't the place to address the disputed issue of how many letters Paul wrote to Corinth. We can be fairly confident there were at least four letters (1-2 Corinthians, and the non-canonical letters cited by Paul in 1 Cor. 5 and 2 Cor. 2.3-9/7.8). Many scholars posit more than four letters, often citing what they believe is the disjointed nature of both 1-2 Corinthians, particularly the latter. They argue that the final form of both letters is a welding together of various non-canonical letters or sections of letters now lost in their original form.

⁶ But on 1 Cor. 1-3, see Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011). To some degree following Chrysostom, Bailey argues that the Paul, Apollos and Cephas 'camps' in Corinth were based on identity (Roman, Greek, and Jew) and the names Paul, Apollos and Cephas were strategic representative stand-ins for these groups. I tend to differ with this, as

metaphor in his narrative about Peter and Paul, and also in chapter 7, may have been rhetorically deliberate in connecting with his audience.⁷

But we can go further. Corinth's knowledge of the Neronian pogrom and Peter and Paul's fates being tied to or in proximity to the pogrom is also likely. The terror of Nero's pogrom was confined to Rome and did not extend to Corinth as far as we know. But relations between the two cities were intimate in terms of commerce, people and form of government.⁸ These intimacies extended to the Christian communities in both cities, Priscilla and Aquila being obvious examples (Acts 18.2/Rom. 16.4), as well as Phoebe (Rom. 16.1-2). Moreover, we know from both the Roman historian Suetonius and the Jewish historian Josephus that Nero paid an extended visit to Achaia, including Corinth, beginning in the year 66, which would have been within two years of the unleashing of the pogrom in Rome in July, 64.⁹ Nero's extended presence would undoubtedly have brought the terror in Rome front and center to the Corinthian believers. This is especially true if, as has been theorized, Paul's final arrest occurred in Corinth.¹⁰

Third, the summary treatment of Peter and Paul by Clement likely presumes knowledge of them and their deaths by the Corinthians. This in itself is important. It could mean that in reciting these examples and the 'jealousy' surrounding them, Clement isn't telling the Corinthians anything they don't already know but reminding them in summary form of what they already do or should know (1.2, 53.1). That suggests that the 'jealousy' motif was not seen as an embarrassment for the church and worthy of suppression.¹¹ That could matter in addressing the source of the 'jealousy' that led to their demise.

the phenomenon of personality-centered groups fits well within the Corinthian milieu. But if true, it conceivably increases the possibility that Peter never personally visited or ministered in Corinth, Dionysius aside (Eusebius, *HE*, 2.25). Regardless, it's fair to say that Corinth was more familiar with Paul, and this might be why the treatment of Paul in *1 Clem.* 5 is more extensive than that of Peter as a rhetorical strategy. This possibility is not taken up by Cullmann, Eastman or Corke-Webster.

⁷ The Isthmian games, held just outside Corinth, occurred every two years and were second only to the Olympic games in prominence. Similar to Paul (1 Cor. 9.24-27), Clement may be using this illustrative imagery to make his point in a way that the Corinthians would not just understand but resonate with.

⁸ A very readable treatment is the introduction in Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

⁹ Suetonius records Nero being at the Isthmus of Corinth trying to jumpstart the canal project (Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, 19), while Josephus records Nero being in Achaia during the 12th year of his reign, the year 66 (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2.19-20). Incidentally, Nero's stay in Achaia/Corinth coincided with the outbreak of the first Jewish revolt in Judea. Nero responded by sending Vespasian to put down the revolt. Josephus records Vespasian sending 6,000 captured Jewish men back to Nero in Corinth to dig the canal (3.10.10). This indirectly highlights the length of Nero's stay in the region and the consequences of getting sideways with this Emperor. Nero would be dead via (assisted?) suicide a year later, having lost political, military and popular support.

¹⁰ This theory was proposed by Lightfoot as part of his expansive chronology of Paul's whereabouts after his first release from Roman imprisonment. See his *Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 221-223.

¹¹ Dionysius of Corinth reported to Rome later in the 2nd century that *1 Clement* was publicly read in the church in his day (Eusebius, *HE*, 4.23.11). See also *HE* 3.16 where Eusebius says it was "read aloud" in "many churches" in earlier days, and still in his own day.

Fourth, did Clement know Acts? Given that Peter and Paul are the two central figures in Acts, Clement's knowledge and use of Acts or lack thereof is obviously germane here. Scholarly opinion is mixed. Older scholarship tended to affirm Clement's knowledge of Acts, while the preponderance of more recent scholarship tends toward the negative. In my view, both sides have credible arguments. On the surface, Clement's possible allusion to a Jesus saying (2.1) that is only recorded in Acts (20.35) would seem to be a clincher.¹² But a maxim like this could have been in high use in oral tradition without any necessary or conscious tie-back to Acts.¹³ More interesting is what Clement says about the sufferings of Peter and Paul in chapter 5. He notes that Peter endured "not one or two but many trials" (5.4), and that Paul was "seven times in chains" (5.6).¹⁴ It seems to me that in order for Clement to say this, he either knew Acts or the traditions behind it, or had access to a different source tradition (perhaps multiple traditions), or that the 'seven' is symbolic and unhistorical. The latter two are not very strong positions (see below). Lastly, it is argued that if Clement knew Acts, he would have borrowed from it extensively when composing his seven newer examples in chapters 5-6. This is based on Cullmann's presumption, discussed in Part 1, that the latter examples of chapter 6 were artificial fillers that were tossed in to get to seven. But if this is not the best reading of Clement, this position collapses and says nothing about his knowledge of Acts.

Acts arguably provides adequate source material for Clement to say what he says about Peter and Paul. It records three occasions of Peter suffering at the hands of 'outsiders' (Acts 4; 5; 12). And Acts 16-28 contains seven instances of either direct or indirect references to Paul being imprisoned.¹⁵ While this does not guarantee that Clement knew Acts or used it (or may have also used other sources such as 2 Corinthians or the Pastorals(?)), it is the only known source that correlates this well to *1 Clem.* 5.

As an aside, regarding the issue of tradition, it is certain that Clement had access to streams of oral and maybe even extra-biblical written source traditions and drew upon them. But as I read scholars almost routinely cite 'tradition' as Clement's primary source(s) without much proof or solidified governing controls,¹⁶ it seems as if 'tradition' is being used as a quite hypothetical and

¹² Acts 20.35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". *1 Clem.* 2.1: "...more glad to give than to receive...".

¹³ A modern example is the common utterance, "The writing is on the wall". The origin of this saying is the account in Daniel 5 of King Belshazzar's doom. But it's unlikely that most folks saying this today would know this.

¹⁴ For a creative but mostly unfollowed take on the Paul piece of this, see Quinn, "Seven Times He Wore Chains (1 Clem. 5.6)." *JBL* 97 (1978): 574-576. Quinn argued that the 'seven' referred to the number of New Testament documents Clement was aware of that spoke of Paul being imprisoned, Acts being one of them.

¹⁵ Acts 16.23-27, 21.33, 22.29, 23.18, 23.35, 24.23, 28.16-30.

¹⁶ Work has been done on method formation. The 1905 OSHT work is still used in more recent treatments by Lindemann, Hagner and Gregory (see his "Reflections on Method: What Constitutes the Use of the

unregulated excuse to take a minimalist position on Clement's use of biblical material. I do not deny the complexity and even uncertainty surrounding Clement's use of NT material, the fixed sturdiness of such material, and the role of tradition. Maximalist approaches can indeed stretch similarities too far. But here, it seems the best evidence we have gets replaced by a proof-immune postulate that may not be any better than sophisticated conjecture, where one unproven hypothesis (Clement didn't know Acts) is explained by appealing to an even greater unproven hypothesis (Clement relied on 'tradition', but perilously nothing we can identify or substantize). I cautiously affirm Clement's knowledge and use of Acts.

Lastly, a note about the *Acts of Peter* and *Acts of Paul*, both likely written in the mid to later 2nd century. These apocryphal texts tell stories about the eventual executions of Peter and Paul at the hands of Agrippa and Nero respectively.¹⁷ There is debate about whether any authentic history can be found in these documents.¹⁸ What matters equally to us is the simple observation that both documents capture what appear to be well-developed traditions, whether historical or not, that were not all that far removed in chronology or location from Clement.¹⁹ In fact, it appears likely that the *Acts of Paul* knew *1 Clement*, citing 'envy' (using a variant of ζήλος) as the cause of Paul's death. The *Acts of Paul* says it is the envy of the devil that is to blame for his death.²⁰ I'm not suggesting that either document is more historically reliable than *1 Clement*. But I'm not sure we can confidently say that both documents are purely fantastical and contain no historical facts at all.²¹

Two Reading Strategies for *1 Clement* 3-6:

The following proposed readings, while somewhat overlapping, are largely independent of each other. To whatever extent either approach reflects

Writings that later formed the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers" in Gregory and Tuckett (eds.), *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Clarendon: Oxford, 2005), 61-82). But while conclusions may reflect reasonable application of a preferred methodology, that doesn't ensure the soundness of the investigation. Ultimately, this is about the quality of the (usually unacknowledged) presuppositions that drive a scholar's method formation.

¹⁷ It is in the *Acts of Peter* where the first known reference to Peter being crucified upside down is found.

¹⁸ Helyer, for one, thinks the Peter upside-down crucifixion story is possibly authentic. See his *The Life and Witness of Peter* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 297.

¹⁹ This is especially true of the *Acts of Paul*. Bauckham believes the *Acts of Paul* was intended to be a sequel to the canonical Acts, recounting Paul's post-Acts 28 activities and death in part through reliance on the Pastoral epistles. See his *The Christian World Around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 521-561.

²⁰ This echoes a concept implicitly advanced by Clement and applied to the Corinthians (*1 Clem.* 3.4).

²¹ Bauckham rightly breaks with Pervo and asserts that the *Acts of Paul* is a novelistic biography "in which genuine interest in history and freedom for historical imagination are not in tension but go naturally together." Bauckham, 559. See also 639-645 where he labels the Apocryphal Acts, including the *Acts of Paul*, as 'semi-fictional' (not wholly fictional) and thinks Paul's described baldness in the *Acts of Paul* is possibly a true "historical reminiscence".

Clement's intent, it's also possible that both may have played a role in the final product.

Reading Strategy #1: An Ever-Broadening Reach of the Negative Fallout of Jealousy:

Chronologically and structurally, chapters 3-6 can be read as an artful expanse on the increasing progression and perniciousness of jealousy. This reading suggests in general form the source of jealousy in Clement's examples. A proposed structure:²²

- Jealousy as the genesis of death entering the world (3.4)
- Brotherly Jealousy:
 - Cain and Abel (4.1-7)
 - Jacob and Esau (4.8)
 - Joseph and his brothers (4.9)
- Intra-Communal Jealousy:
 - Moses and a fellow Hebrew (4.10)
 - Aaron and Miriam vs Moses (4.11)
 - Dathan and Abiram vs Moses (4.12)
 - David and Saul (4.13)
- Inter-Communal Jealousy:
 - David and the Philistines (4.13)
 - The death of the 'Pillars' of the early church (5.1-2)
 - The death of Peter (5.4)
 - The death of Paul (5.5-5.7)
 - The death of the multitude of the elect (6.1)
 - The torture and death of noble women (6.2)
- Global Jealousy:
 - Marital estrangement between husbands and wives (6.3)
 - Great cities overthrown and great nations uprooted (6.4)

Organized this way, Clement is stressing a relentless broadening progression of the ills of unholy jealousy. What starts between brothers becomes a communal problem, then expands into conflict between different groups, and ends in the destruction of whole societies. Under this reading, the more sweeping examples of 6.3-4 are not afterthought fillers per Cullmann. Rather (contra Knopf), they provide climactic images of the global ruination brought about by unleashed jealousy that structurally and chronologically completes the circle through an *inclusio*.²³ Unholy jealousy enabled death to enter the world (3.4). Untamed jealousy brings about the destruction of the world (6.4).

²² While this proposal was arrived at independently (thus, any shortcomings are attributable to me), there is a hint of it in nascent form in Grant and Graham, *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 2: First and Second Clement* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1965), 24.

²³ Welborn also sees the ending of chapter 6 as providing a catastrophic climax to this section. See his *The Young Against the Old: Generational Conflict in First Clement* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), 138.

In this reading, the terrible effects of brotherly jealousy are preserved as a major point Clement is imparting to his audience. But in citing examples of non-fraternal jealousy, Clement is dramatically increasing the stakes to show his audience that intra-tent jealousy can ultimately have global consequences. Put simply, his message is that the destructive jealousy, envy and strife within the church of Corinth will not stay confined to Corinth if allowed to prosper. This would have made a deep impression on the Corinthians. In secular terms, the city of Corinth was a center of commerce between East and West, and also of strategic political and military importance between North and South.²⁴ To paraphrase a more current popular slogan; what happened in Corinth didn't stay in Corinth. Clement's Corinthian audience would have understood well the gravity of Clement dramatizing the infectious spread of jealousy far beyond its localized source.

The structure being proposed here obviously places the Peter and Paul examples within the inter-communal group of examples. This is admittedly not a sure thing. Cullmann and Eastman are correct that Peter and Paul faced resistance from within the tent and suffered for it. Moreover, jealousy cannot be said to reside only in those outside the Christian community. Paul attaches it to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3.3) in a section where he is talking to his 'brothers' (3.1),²⁵ and we know Clement knew 1 Corinthians. But the plain fact is that nowhere in the NT is intra-tent jealousy towards Peter and Paul explicitly called out, nor are there definitive instances of jealousy-fueled intra-tent delation. To the charge that such a phenomenon would have been scrubbed out of the final NT writings due to embarrassment, we note that the Gospels, the Pauline corpus, the Johannine corpus, the Petrine corpus, and even Acts all disclose 'embarrassing' material that contradict such an assertion. The NT is not a party-pamphlet glossy.

Moreover, the existence of false brothers, both expressly (Gal. 2.4-5; 2 Cor. 11.26) and implicitly (1 Tim. 1.19-20, 6.20-21, etc.), is important to note. Cullmann, Eastman and Corke-Webster seem to regard this as an intra-tent phenomenon, and perhaps rightly in our modern prism of group sociological dynamics. But it's hard to credit the assertion that Clement would have seen it that way. If the jealousy of pseudo brothers is what Clement means when discussing Peter and Paul, he would almost certainly have regarded them as outside the fold, beyond the tent, standing in opposition to the tent. The opposing of the two "good apostles" (5.2) and the stirring up of trouble against them would

²⁴ For more on this, see Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome 1: 228 BC – AD 267." *ANRW* 2:7:1 (1979): 438-548. Both Strabo (*Geographica*, 8.6.20) and Aristides (*Orationes*, 46.22) noted the thriving commerce of people and goods between Corinth and Italy, and even "all cities".

²⁵ Ζήλος (jealousy) and ἐρις (strife) are both used here. On φθόνος (envy), see 1 Pet. 2.1, addressed to God's elect, and James 4.5, addressed to 'the twelve tribes'. In the opening verses, both 1 Peter and James note the diasporic state of their audiences, which stresses the larger applicability of the warnings made about envy.

have been intolerable to Clement given his repeated stress on order and respecting leadership. Similar to his warning to the Corinthian usurpers (57.2) as well as his labeling of those who opposed the righteous as “lawless” and “abominable people” (45.3-7), he would regard unrepentant false brothers as having left the communal tent.

The ascribing of jealousy to the abusive and even violent treatment by non-Christian Jewish religious leaders of the apostles and their co-workers in Acts certainly raises the possibility that Clement had these episodes in mind when discussing Peter and Paul, particularly if we grant Clement’s knowledge of Acts. Friction between non-Christian and mainly Christian Jews periodically boiled over at various times in various places. Notably, the jealousy motif of this dynamic in Acts applied to both Peter (Acts 5) and Paul (Acts 13 and 17). What’s not clear is whether Clement would have considered this dynamic to be intra or inter-communal. The lack of anti-Jewish sentiment in *1 Clement* might argue for the former, but that’s rather inferential. That Peter and Paul both referred to Jewish audiences as their ‘brothers’ in various speeches in Acts might also tend in the intra-communal direction. As we noted in Part 1, the ‘parting of the ways’ between Christians and Jews, Christianity and Judaism, is a complicated topic.²⁶ But by the time of *1 Clement*, over 20 years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, diverging trajectories were coming more into focus and hardening, with both sides considering themselves to be the true Israel.²⁷ This may carry the most weight.

In the end, Clement may have had more than one opposer of Peter and Paul in mind when writing chapter 5. False brothers and non-Christian Jewish religious leaders could have been in the mix. And yes, so could the Romans. If we consider 1 Peter to be authentic, which we should, the almost constant theme of persecution and warnings to his diasporic audience of future persecutions makes

²⁶ For our purposes, it’s not on-point to discuss the Suetonius recounting (*Life of Claudius*, 25.4) of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the Emperor Claudius in the 40s (Acts 18.2) due to disturbances instigated by ‘Chrestus’, which is often thought to be referring to Jesus. The idea is that Jews in Rome were disturbing the peace by arguing intensely among themselves about Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, and that the Romans at the time weren’t making distinctions between “Jews” and “Christians”. First, there is a strong minority of scholars who doubt the equating of Chrestus with Christ (Mike Bird is in this camp). Second, while I think it’s right that in the Claudian era the ‘parting of the ways’ wouldn’t have been obvious to the Romans (see also Acts 18.12-16), it doesn’t really matter for our purposes what the Romans thought and when they thought it. What matters is what Clement thinks.

²⁷ See the good introduction in Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 6-14. See also Bauckham, *The Jewish World Around the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 175-192. He sees the Christian redefining of Temple as “decisive” in the parting of the ways and “that by the end of the first century not just rabbinic Jews but most non-Christian Jews placed Jewish Christians outside the community of Israel.” (p.177)

the most sense if the Romans are in view, with no hint of Christian informers or intra-tent strife aiding the effort.²⁸

Moreover, there is a possibility that Clement's passage on Peter and Paul, as well as some of the later examples in chapter 6, could be a case of 'protective anonymity'. The idea is that Clement deliberately did not name who the killers were in order to protect his readership (and perhaps himself) from public knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death of 'criminals' that could put all of them in danger.²⁹ I myself am not quite sold on this idea. I don't think it really fits the larger attitude toward Rome that prevails in *1 Clement*. Nor do I think it fits the pattern of protective anonymity that is more likely present in the Markan Passion material.³⁰ Still, if there is something to this in *1 Clem.* 5-6, the protection it sought to provide would have been against threats coming from 'outsiders' rather than 'insiders'. And in this case, the 'outsiders' presenting the most proximate threat would almost certainly have been the Romans. Any aiding and abetting provided by 'jealous' Christian informers would at best be a distant secondary consideration in any protective anonymity motive in Clement's writeup of Peter and Paul (and isn't really there at all if Cullmann's framework is rejected).

Further, the Tacitus passage that highlights information given by Christians to the Roman authorities resulting in mass executions simply cannot be definitively linked to Peter and Paul's deaths.³¹ We don't know what kind of information was given to the Romans, or about whom, by whom.³² And as we saw in Part 1, a jealousy motive on the part of the informers is weak. By not going into further detail about their deaths, Clement and the Corinthians seem to share common knowledge that doesn't need to be repeated. The alternative is that such details didn't matter to Clement and didn't serve his purpose. This leads to a second suggested reading of chapters 3-6.

Reading Strategy #2: *1 Clement* 3-6 Patterned from Hebrews 11:

Before exploring this proposal, we first need to briefly determine if Clement knew Hebrews and used it as a source. A survey of scholars finds mixed opinion.

²⁸ One might say the same about Hebrews. The provenance of both letters is disputed, but both have ties to Rome (1 Pet. 5.13; Heb. 13.24). Clement's use of Hebrews is very likely as we'll see. His use of 1 Peter is less likely, but still possible (*1 Clem.* 49.5//1 Pet. 4.8).

²⁹ This view is advanced by Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 110.

³⁰ On this, see both Theissen, *The Gospels in Context* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1992) and Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

³¹ I'm not denying that Peter and Paul were likely executed by the Romans in some proximity to the Neronian pogrom. But we don't know whether they were caught up in the feverish episode Tacitus describes.

³² Timothy Barnes implies that mere profession of Christian status is what got people killed: "Their admission that they were Christians was treated as tantamount to a confession of arson." See Bond and Hurtado, *Peter in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 81.

Lindemann thinks it merely “possible” without offering much of an explanation for this degree of skepticism.³³ Gregory, also more of an overall minimalist on Clement’s reliance on NT material, is more optimistic here, believing use of Hebrews is “very likely indeed.”³⁴ Holmes concurs.³⁵ Hagner thinks it “certain” that Clement knew Hebrews and even “loved” it.³⁶ Lane thinks the influence of Hebrews on Clement is “indisputable.”³⁷ Gregory compiles a healthy list of about a dozen “allusions” Clement makes to Hebrews throughout the letter.³⁸ To this, both Grant and Holmes add *1 Clem.* 9-12 tracking with Hebrews 11.³⁹ While there is again a propensity to appeal to ‘tradition’ in both Lindemann and Gregory, Gregory is not prepared in this case to overrule what he otherwise rightly cites as the “cumulative value” of the allusions to Hebrews he detects. Accordingly, the burden of proof rests overwhelmingly with any who dissent from the very high probability that Clement knew Hebrews and used it, rather extensively. I affirm Clement’s knowledge and use of Hebrews, including chapter 11.

Hebrews 11 is a lengthy recital of exemplars of true faith. When comparing *1 Clem.* 3-6 with Heb. 11, one instantly notices the literary commonality of the use of an anaphoric keyword. As we’ve seen, in *1 Clem.* 3-6 it is ζήλος (jealousy). In Heb. 11, it is πίστις (faith). The end lesson of the two passages is clearly different, in that Clement is offering up examples to teach a negative lesson while Heb. 11 is presenting a positive one. But the obvious use of anaphora is the same. Now, this alone hardly cements the idea that Heb. 11 may have been an inspiration for *1 Clem.* 3-6, as anaphora was/is a common rhetorical technique. But there are a number of other similarities between the two passages that may strengthen the case, as follows:

- Both passages are multi-themed within their larger main message
 - Death and Endurance are prominent themes common to both
- Athletic metaphor is present in both passages
- Both passages contain an introductory definitional statement of the anaphoric keyword to set a context for the examples that follow
- Both sets of examples are presented chronologically

³³ See his article on *1 Clement* in Pratscher (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Waco: Baylor, 2010), 61.

³⁴ Gregory and Tuckett (eds.), 154.

³⁵ Holmes, 37.

³⁶ Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 194.

³⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8; 9-13*, WBC, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), lviii; lci.

³⁸ Gregory and Tuckett (eds.), 152-154.

³⁹ Grant, 30ff; Holmes, 57-61. Both also cite mainly OT references in addition to Hebrews, a la *1 Clem.* 36, where debate has centered on whether Clement was drawing from Hebrews 1 or Psalms. This is admittedly challenging and is a cautionary tale on trying to proof-text the issue. To me, it may signal that Clement saw Hebrews as highly congruous with the OT he clearly adored, which would have enhanced his usage of Hebrews.

- Both passages are bracketed by an *inclusio*⁴⁰
- Both passages contain examples both of specific people/events and also more general global examples⁴¹
- Both passages include examples containing the names of both sides of the equation, as well as other examples that don't
- Both passages intermix more lengthy examples with short summary examples
- Both passages include an example in which the author momentarily pauses and editorializes on the meaning of the example
- Some of the examples in both passages relate to the same historical figures
- Both passages contain examples in which noble women are the prominent focus

This list of harmonious chords between *1 Clem.* 3-6 and Heb. 11 does not guarantee dependency or inspiration. But if Clement knew Hebrews (which is far more likely than not), liberally used it (which is far more likely than not), including Heb. 11 outside of chapters 3-6 (which is more likely than it isn't),⁴² a fairly impressive cumulative case emerges that Clement could have relied on Heb. 11 in the 'how-to' of presenting his own deliberative rhetoric case study of exemplars for his audience. Of all the known sources Clement is suspected of using, Heb. 11 is the preeminent instance of the style of rhetorical construction we find in chapters 3-6.

Why does this matter? I would suggest that if Clement was in fact inspired by Heb. 11 in constructing chapters 3-6, the influence of Heb. 11 would have extended beyond literary and rhetorical mechanics and into philosophy of purpose and main point. In Heb. 11, the writer's main point is faith. He seeks to define what true faith is (11.1), and then couches the heroic examples, either explicitly or implicitly, within this framework. The concept of faith in Heb. 11 is mostly other-worldly, trusting in divine promises not yet fully realized in time and space (11.39-40). It is this concept of faith that is the main thing in Heb. 11. The exemplars are illustrations of the main point. The main point of Heb. 11 is the 'what' of true faith more than the 'who' who modeled it.⁴³ And this is especially true of those on the other side of the equation, most of whom are never named because they are not part of the writer's concern. The 'who' is not as important as the 'what'.

⁴⁰ Heb. 11 is actually bracketed twice: once by the author's use of 'faith' (11.1; 11.39-12.2), and again by the author's use of 'perseverance/endurance' (variants of the same Greek root word) (10.36; 12.3).

⁴¹ This fact again defies Cullmann's theory that the global examples in *1 Clem.* 6.3-4 are artificial fillers, unless he's also prepared to say that a verse like Heb. 11.3 exhibits the same phenomenon.

⁴² In addition to the possible (likely?) influence of Heb. 11 on *1 Clem.* 9-12 mentioned earlier, we might also cite its possible influence on *1 Clem.* 17.1-19.3. On this, see Lane, 317.

⁴³ This dynamic is one reason among several why scholars see Hebrews as heavily sermonical/homiletical in nature.

I would suggest the same might be the case with Clement's construction of chapters 3-6. Like Heb. 11, Clement does at times care about the other side of the equation, particularly in the OT examples in chapter 4. But that emphasis disappears beginning in chapter 5 where Peter and Paul are discussed. Could it be that in following the 'example' of Heb. 11, Clement is less concerned about the 'who' of jealousy and more about the 'what' of it? In the end, Clement is doing what Heb. 11 is doing: making the 'what' of jealousy the overriding main point that is supplemented by brief illustrative examples. The examples themselves are not the main point. They illustrate and cumulatively flush out the main point. Under this reading, vigorous caution would need to be maintained in relying heavily on Clement to try and develop a theory about who the 'who' may have been regarding Peter and Paul's deaths. That is not Clement's concern, nor is it the functional purpose of the examples. Building a theory about something by relying heavily on a work that did not endeavor to tell us much about said something is fraught with the danger of filling in the blanks with wrong answers.⁴⁴

This is not a trifling concern. David Eastman, as we saw in Part 1, places muscular weight on Clement's 'jealousy' motif to argue that Paul's death was the result of internal jealousy. Yet, in a separate article, he doubts that Clement's account of Paul can be assimilated into a sturdy historical chronology of Paul's whereabouts and activities in his final years.⁴⁵ This, despite Clement arguably providing less detail about Paul's death and more detail about his pre-death experiences. Eastman may not be wrong in questioning the incorporation of Clement's account into a chronology of Paul's life, though I think it's certainly subject to challenge. But why the different views on the historical reliability and usefulness of the same pericope in *1 Clement*?⁴⁶ In one case, Eastman seems to recognize the limitations of putting great weight on Clement to answer our modern questions, while then heaping ample weight in an area where Clement is more circumspect and arguably has less to say.

Conclusion:

The two readings of *1 Clem.* 3-6 I have proposed are, in the end, mostly at cross-purposes with each other, though they would allow for some non-contradictory overlap. But one might have a hard time fully affirming both. That said, if either or both readings have validity, they provide little comfort to the theories and

⁴⁴ One might recall Martin Kähler's devastating critique of the Life of Jesus movement, in which he exposed the folly of a modern researcher trying to make an ancient text answer modern questions that the writer of that text didn't ask because such questions were beyond the scope and outside the purpose of the writing. In the case of the 19th century Jesus biographers, this resulted in 'historical Jesus' constructions that were eventually recognized as severely flawed in both method and result. See my "Martin Kähler and the 'Historical Jesus.'" *Biblical Perspectives Magazine* 25, no. 40: (October, 2023).

⁴⁵ See his "Paul: An Outline of His Life" in Harding and Nobbs (eds.), *All Things to All Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 34-56.

⁴⁶ Eastman thinks *1 Clement* provides a picture of "early Roman traditions" without really explaining why some 'traditions' are circumstantially helpful to the historian while not being so at other times.

conclusions about Peter and Paul's demise that we discussed in Part 1 of our study. It's unlikely we will ever fully know what happened to our 'good apostles' Peter and Paul. But it is my hope that our survey of known sources Clement likely drew upon yields sturdy conclusions that compete well with alternative approaches that try to understand Clement by supplementing his letter to Corinth both with sources not consulted by Clement and other sources like 'tradition' to which we can't reliably give shape.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).