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*Between Paul and James:
Faith and Works in 1 Clement 29:1–32:4*

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Abstract: Among early Christian scholars there remains an ongoing debate over how *1 Clement* understood the relationship between faith and works in justification and the Christian life. In dialoguing with these scholars, this paper will argue that *1 Clement* fundamentally affirms both justification by faith alone and the necessity of good works as the fruit of justification, and that Clement’s perceived rejection of Pauline justification owes to his varied purposes in the letter. In order to demonstrate this, this paper will examine *1 Clem.* 29:1–32:4, focusing on (1) the phrase “justified by works and not by words” (30:3); (2) the emphatic assertion of justification by faith alone (32:3–4); and (3) Clement’s stated assumptions regarding the Corinthians’ present identity in Christ. Forming the conclusion will be a synthesis of the exegetical analysis and some implications for early Christian studies.

Introduction

As in the New Testament, the relationship between faith and works in *1 Clement* is far from easy to discern.¹ Not a few have argued that

¹ The precise identity of “Clement” is not significant for our purposes. More significant is that the letter likely can be dated to the last few decades of the CE 1st

Clement held to some form of “works righteousness” and thus deviated from Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone, siding instead with James in the supposed early Christian debate regarding the relationship between faith and works.² Nevertheless, a close examination of *1 Clement* renders it most likely that Clement agreed with *both Paul and James*, and that his seeming contradictions owe to his varied purposes in the letter. In other words, despite his lack of desired theological clarity at points, he still presents a perspective in which a person cannot stand righteous before God on one’s own efforts. To be sure, personal holiness is necessary in order to approach God, but such holiness is the effect and not the cause of justification. To put it in theological categories, then, Clement thought that a person is justified by faith alone, and that his faith always produces good works. To demonstrate this we will first analyze *1 Clem.* 29:1–32:4 and then draw some conclusions regarding Clement’s view of the relationship between faith and works.

Exegesis of *1 Clement* 29:1–32:4

Like other letters in the Graeco-Roman world, *1 Clement* was an occasional document written to address a schism at the church of Corinth. Although we do not know many of the details, we can paint an

century (see 5:1–6:4; 44:3–5; 63:3). For a good discussion of the date of the letter, see Kurt Erlemann, “Die Datierung des ersten Klemensbriefes—Anfragen an eine Communis Opinio,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 591–607; Laurence L. Welborn, “On the Date of First Clement,” *Biblical Research* 29 (1984): 35–54.

² Representatives of this view are Benjamin W. Bacon, “The Doctrine of Faith in Hebrews, James, and Clement of Rome,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 19 (1900): 21; Franklin W. Young, “The Relation of 1 Clement to the Epistle of James,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948): 339–45; J. B. Lightfoot, *Clement* (London: Macmillan, 1890; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:397; and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 44–55.

adequate picture of the events in Corinth that precipitated its writing. There had been a schism (στάσις) in Corinth (1:1) brought about by the deposition of some of the elders of Corinth. Although these elders were blameless (44:6), they were deposed by a faction in the church who were unwilling to submit to them. Hence, Clement wrote his letter in order that the Corinthians might rid themselves of all dissension and strife, and that they might clothe themselves with humility and peace toward one another (62:1-2; 63:2).³ What this meant was that the church should reinstate these elders (54:2). Although the small faction is to blame (14:1; 51:1; 57:1), the whole church was responsible for the humiliation of the elders (3:4; 44:6); hence, the whole church was responsible to reinstate them as the rightful authorities in the congregation.⁴

First 1 Clement contains four main sections: a description of the situation in Corinth (1:1-3:4), an analysis of the nature of the Christian life (4:1-39:9), a solution for the Corinthians' schism (40:1-61:3), and a summary or conclusion (62:1-65:2).⁵ Our text comes from the second main section (4:1-39:9). This section is not just a theoretical treatment of the nature of the Christian life; it provides a description of certain virtues that should characterize the church. If the Corinthians were to heed Clement's call to clothe themselves with these virtues, they would abstain from strife and be unified around the gospel.⁶ The second

³ Lightfoot, *Clement*, 1:82.

⁴ Odd Magne Bakke, "Concord and Peace": *A Rhetorical Analysis of the First Letter of Clement with an Emphasis on the Language of Unity and Sediton* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 11-13.

⁵ This standard outline is a point of agreement among many scholars, e.g., Robert M. Grant and Holt H. Graham, *First and Second Clement*, vol. 2, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Robert M. Grant (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 14; Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 275-77.

⁶ Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 232.

section can be broken into nine subsections,⁷ one of which is 29:1–36:6. Chapters 29:1–36:6 describe the Christian life of holiness in which Clement exhorts the Corinthians to live a holy life as the chosen people of God (29:1–30:8), describes faith as the root of that holiness (31:1–32:4), and exhorts the Corinthians to do good (33:1–36:6).⁸ Because of space considerations, we will only be able to analyze 29:1–30:8 and 31:1–32:4.

1 Clement 29:1–30:8

Having exhorted the Corinthians to fear God and put away evil works because they cannot hide from God (28:1–4), Clement therefore (οὖν, 29:1) exhorts them to approach God in holiness (ὁσιότητι ψυχῆς).⁹ The way in which they should do this is by coming to him in right prayer and affection.¹⁰ The ancient manner of prayer was to extend the arms with palms uplifted, for this showed the worshiper's confession of sin and dependence on God.¹¹ Clement is saying that a large part of what it means to approach God in holiness of life is to approach him in confession and humility. The offering the Corinthians were to present

⁷ See 4:1–6:4; 7:1–8:5; 9:1–12:8; 13:1–19:1; 19:2–20:12; 21:1–22:8; 23:1–28:4; 29:1–36:6; 37:1–39:9. This structure is adapted from the outlines in Grant and Graham, *First and Second Clement*, 14; Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 275–76; Annie Jaubert, *Épître aux Corinthiens: Clément de Rome* (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 25–28.

⁸ 1 Clem 29:1 forms an inclusio with 30:8 by means of the ἐπιείκεια word group; 29:1 also forms a broader inclusio with 32:4 by means of the similar phrases ὁσιότητι ψυχῆς (29:1) and ὁσιότητι καρδίας (32:4; cf. 48:4; 60:2).

⁹ Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 168.

¹⁰ Αἵροντες and ἀγαπῶντες indicate manner.

¹¹ Cf. 1 Kgs 8:22, 54; Ezra 9:5; Pss 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Lam 2:19; 3:41; 2 Macc 3:20. So Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:93; Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 54–55; Donald Alfred Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 232.

was nothing less than hands that were pure and undefiled, and they were to approach God with an affection that recognizes his character as a gracious and compassionate God who has created for himself a chosen portion.¹² The Corinthians were not to approach God as if he were a tyrant but in the knowledge that he is already their Father who has made them his very own people. In other words, fearing God (28:1) does not mean that one should flee from God's presence but that he should approach him in holiness (29:1a), and this is done in right prayer and affection for him (29:1b).

Clement provides support from Scripture in 29:2–3 for the idea that God has chosen a people for himself. Verse 2 is an almost exact quote from Deut 32:8–9 (LXX) in which Moses sings of Yahweh's favor upon Israel by choosing her to be his portion. He did this long ago, at the time when God, having divided the nations (Gen 10) and dispersed them (Gen 11), chose Abram to be the father of many nations (Gen 12). At this time he established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the angels of God. Although it is difficult to know why the number of God's angels matters to the nations' boundaries, the point Clement is making is clear from the second half of the verse: it was at this time that the Lord chose to be his heritage and portion the people of Israel. The Corinthians' status before God was not the result of their own wisdom and righteousness but of God's choice (29:1).

Clement also adds another quote in 29:3 to demonstrate that Israel is God's chosen people. It is not clear from what source Clement is drawing his quote; he simply begins the quotation formula by noting it comes from another place (ἐτέρῳ τόπῳ). There is no strict canonical parallel to this passage; some texts (cf. Deut 4:34; 14:2; Num 18:27; 2 Chr

¹² The word ἐκλογῆς is a genitive of means. The idea is that Israel was made God's portion by means of his electing them. See Acts 9:15 for a similar example. So Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:93.

31:14; Ezek 48:12) share vocabulary with this quote, but none of them come close to being a canonical source for the quote. Although it is possible that Clement was quoting a canonical source from memory and thus confused the wording, more likely he was citing a non-canonical source, which he does occasionally throughout the letter (cf. 8:3; 23:3–4).¹³ In either case, Clement is citing a passage that the Corinthians would recognize points to the fact that the Lord has chosen his people Israel to be a special, beloved nation. Just as a man prizes the first fruits of his threshing floor because of its quality, so also God chose Israel to be his prized possession. This status is further heightened because the “Holy of holies” (ἅγια ἁγίων)—God himself¹⁴—will come forth from Israel, demonstrating that the holy God dwells with this nation.

The reason why Clement emphasizes the high privilege of the people of God is because the Corinthians themselves are a part of this people, the spiritual Israel and the portion of God.¹⁵ Knowing their holy status and identity in Christ would necessarily undergird and encourage them to act as God’s holy people, an inference (οὖν) Clement draws for the Corinthians in 30:1–8. Since the Corinthians are the portion of God the Holy One, they are to pursue things that are characterized by and lead to holiness (30:1a).¹⁶

¹³ Horacio E. Lona, *Der erste Clemensbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 328; Hagner, *Clement of Rome*, 75–76.

¹⁴ Lona, *Clemensbrief*, 328.

¹⁵ Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:93; Hagner, *Clement of Rome*, 122, 245.

¹⁶ Ὑπάρχοντες is causal. I also agree with Michael W. Holmes (*The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 84) that Codex Alexandrinus has the correct reading: ἁγίου οὖν μερίς. The variants ἅγια οὖν μερίς (Latin, Syriac), ἅγια οὖν μέρη (Codex Hierosolymitanus), and ἁγίων οὖν μερίς (Coptic) may be the more difficult readings, but the context concerning God’s people as his portion surely demands that the reading in this text is the correct reading.

The rest of 30:1b–8 explains how the Corinthians should abstain from unholy things and pursue holiness. Verse 1b contains a vice list in which are condemned sins of the heart (ἐπιθυμίας, ὑπερηφανίαν), tongue (καταλαλιάς), and body (συμπλοκάς, μέθας, νεωτερισμούς, μοιχείαν). Each of these seven deadly sins can be characterized by a lack of holiness and cultic purity.¹⁷ The list begins with the sin of slander because Clement wants especially to denounce the Corinthians' sins of speech against their deposed (yet blameless) elders (cf. vv. 3–8). The list ends with the sin of pride because it was the root of the schism at Corinth.¹⁸ To explain (γάρ) how much God hates pride, Clement quotes from Prov 3:34 (30:2; cf. Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5): God opposes those who think highly of themselves and their gifts, but he gives grace to those who sense their complete dependence on him. This quotation serves as a warning to the rebels in Corinth to humble themselves under God and his ordained authorities in the church. It also undergirds the call for the whole congregation to cling (κολλάω) to those who have been given the grace of God (30:3). Presumably Clement thinks of the deposed elders as humble leaders to whom God has given grace; hence, the Corinthian church should support this group of men, not the rebels whom God opposes.

This interpretation is likely because in 30:3b Clement exhorts the church to put on unity (ὁμόνοια). Clement was writing his letter chiefly so that the Corinthian church might be of one mind in the gospel and demonstrate this by reinstating their elders. But in order to achieve this unity, Clement exhorts the church to do four things: be humble, be

¹⁷ Note all the synonymous adjectives: μιαράς, ἀνάγνους, βδελυκτάς (twice), and μυσεράν.

¹⁸ Contra Grant and Graham (*Apostolic Fathers*, 55–56) and Bakke (*Rhetorical Analysis*, 168), who think the middle term (νεωτερισμούς) in the list is the most significant because it describes the schism in the Corinthian church.

self-controlled, keep themselves far from all gossip and slander, and seek to be justified by their works and not their words.¹⁹ These instructions together address the sin of slander, the first sin listed in the vices in 30:1. In order to be free from slander, one must be willing to humble himself, confessing his sin, and honoring those to whom God has given grace. One must be able to control his tongue with which the heart speaks, actively dissociate from all forms of slander, and seek righteousness in actions, not in words.

This last command has received much attention. Some have thought that Clement here is directly contradicting Paul's theology of justification by faith alone.²⁰ These claim that the language is straightforward and unambiguous in saying that believers should seek to be justified by works, and therefore, justification cannot be by faith alone. Others claim that Clement is in fact very much in concord with Paul here; he simply is affirming that someone who wants to live a righteous life before God cannot do so by words alone but by good works.²¹ To resolve the issue, we must remember the purpose of the letter. Clement did not intend to write a treatise on the nature of justification; rather, he was combating the Corinthian schism that had arisen and been expressed through slander. In order to deter the rebellious, Clement had to show that true righteousness cannot be characterized by words alone—not least those of the slanderous kind. He soon enough affirms his belief in justification by faith alone (32:4),

¹⁹ The four participles in 30:3 indicate the means of attaining unity (so Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 253).

²⁰ E.g., Lightfoot, *Clement*, 1:397.

²¹ E.g., Andreas Lindemann, "Paul's Influence on 'Clement' and Ignatius," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 13.

but in 30:1–8 the emphasis is on true holiness, which does not consist in words alone but in good works.

This seems to be implication of Jesus’s own statement regarding justification and words. In Matt 12:36–37, Jesus warns against speaking any careless word, for one’s words will play a role in one’s final justification. Even though at first glance Jesus’ statement seems to contradict Clement’s denial that words can justify, in actuality the two texts are similar, for both call for a cautious use of words. In fact, whereas Clement divorces works (ἔργα) from words (λόγοι), Jesus cautions against “any workless word” (πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργόν; cf. Jas 2:19). Whether or not Clement was aware of or alluded to the Jesus tradition at this point, his warning against careless and impetuous speech within the church is clearly in line with Jesus’s own dictum.

This interpretation of 30:3 is demonstrated by 30:4–8.²² In 30:4–5, Clement quotes from Job 11:2–3 in which Zophar the Naamanite chides Job for speaking too much when he should be silent before God. Despite the fact that the one giving this advice is Zophar—one of those who at the end of Job is rebuked for being in error—Clement thinks his advice has a place in the Christian life. The principle is stated in verse 5b: “do not be much in words.” The reasons are given in verse 4: the person who says much will hear much in reply, and the one who often speaks has no good reason to consider himself righteous.²³ The one who speaks often Clement can assume is not a righteous man but will receive a recompense according to what he has spoken.

²² Note the explanatory γάρ in 30:4a.

²³ It is not clear how v. 5a fits into the quote. It is lacking in the MT of Job 11:3 (perhaps influenced by 14:1?) and does not fit the context of Zophar’s speech; so Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:96–97. Probably Clement quoted directly from the LXX and did not consider v. 5a to prove his point.

Another sin of speech is self-praise, for in 30:6–7 the Corinthians are told to let their praise come from God (v. 6a) and others (v. 7a). Perhaps the Corinthian rebels were slandering the deposed elders by praising themselves over and against those elders.²⁴ Clement denounces such talk, for God hates (μισεῖ) those who praise themselves (v. 6b), unlike the righteous patriarchs of old who did not praise themselves but received it from others (v. 7b). Therefore, to live in a righteous manner, the Corinthians should not join in slandering their elders through self-praise but let their praise come from God (cf. Rom 2:29)²⁵ and the testimony about their good works from others.

Finally, Clement gives the result of living a life of vice or virtue (30.8). The verse has a parallel structure:

30.8a	30.8b
θράσος καὶ ἀυθάδεια	ἐπιείκεια καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνη
καὶ τόλμα	καὶ πραΰτης
τοῖς καταραμένοις	παρὰ τοῖς ἠυλογημένοις
ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ	ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ

The three vices in verse 8a are contrasted with the three virtues in verse 8b.²⁶ The vices all involve the notions of arrogance and stubbornness, and the virtues humility and kindness. People who have been cursed by God are characterized by these vices, and those who have been blessed by God are characterized by these virtues. The vices

²⁴ Bakke argues that rhetoric and self-praise often accompanied strife in the Graeco-Roman world. *idem.*, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 131–36.

²⁵ So Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:97; Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 56.

²⁶ So Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 56. For a helpful discussion on the distinction between the three virtues, see Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (New York: Redfield, 1854), 201–11.

were probably embodied in the rebels who were proud and insubordinate, and the virtues were likely present in the elders. The participles are in the perfect tense, pointing to the fact that the expression of these vices and virtues are simply manifesting and demonstrating the status one already has before God.²⁷ Those who have already been cursed by God demonstrate their true identity by living a life of unbelief and sin, whereas those who have already been blessed by God demonstrate their identity by the virtues they embody.²⁸ In this way, Clement again is in full agreement with Jesus's own teaching that a person is known by their fruits (cf. Matt 7:16–20). With this in mind, the good works of “gentleness and humility and meekness” are the fruit and not the root of righteousness, for these virtues characterize those who *have already been blessed* by God.

To summarize Clement's perspective on works and justification in 29:1–30:8, good works are the necessary fruit of justification. The Corinthians were called to perform good works *not in order to become but because they already were God's people*. Like Israel of old, they were his portion whom he had already chosen and blessed (29:1; 30:1, 8). And yet, because of their new identity as God's chosen people, good works were not optional but necessary. Since they belonged to him, they were enjoined to reflect his character: with gentleness (ἐπιείκεια, 30:8) since God is gentle (ἐπιεικῆς, 29:1), and with “the things of holiness” (τὰ τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ, 30:1) since God is holy (ἅγια ἁγίων, 29:3; ἅγιος, 30:1). The

²⁷ Contra Torrance (*Doctrine of Grace*, 53), who claims of 30:3, “The grace of God is the divine counterpart to the gentleness and humility and meekness acquired by men.”

²⁸ Further proving this point is the prepositional phrase παρά τοῖς ἡυλογημένοις. Παρά + dative has a basic meaning of proximity and nearness. Here it governs the dative of association, indicating these virtues are associated with those who have been blessed by God (cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 170).

Corinthians especially were to refrain from the sins of speech that had apparently been part and parcel of the schism (30:1–5). Those who continued in such slander and refrained from good works clearly demonstrated that they were not truly justified (30:4).

First Clement 31:1–32:4

In 1 *Clem.* 31:1–32:4, Clement addresses how one comes to receive the status of being blessed by God.²⁹ If the Corinthians were to cling to the blessing of God (31:1a), they would need to remember what the paths of blessing are (31:1b). Clement uses the patriarchs as examples of those who received God’s blessing (31:2–4). Having considered more specifically the greatness of God’s gifts to Jacob (32:1–2), Clement explains that everyone who has received God’s blessing of justification has done so not through his own efforts but through faith alone (32:3–4).³⁰

In 31:1a, Clement encourages his readers to cling to (κολλάω) God’s blessing. Since those who have his blessing are characterized by gentleness, humility, and meekness (30:8b), therefore (οὖν) the Corinthians should attach themselves to this blessing. However, the Corinthians were unable to endure if they did not remember afresh that the source of these virtues is God’s blessing of righteousness (31:1b). Remembering the contours or the “paths” (ὁδοί) of divine blessing would spur the church on to walk in holiness anew. In particular, they must study (lit. “unroll,” ἀνατυλίσσω) the ways in which God has bestowed his saving blessing throughout redemptive history (τὰ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς γενόμενα).

²⁹ Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 254.

³⁰ Lona, *Clemensbrief*, 337.

Redemptive history for Clement began with the Old Testament patriarchs, who were examples of people who had received God's blessing (31:2–4; cf. 30:7). In 31:2, Abraham is presented as the Corinthians' father whom God blessed.³¹ Clement asks the rhetorical question, "Was not Abraham blessed because³² he did righteousness and truth by faith?"³³ It is difficult to know the exact time in Abraham's life of which Clement is thinking. Abraham was blessed by God in Gen 15:4–5 when God promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven, a promise that Abraham believed in 15:6 and that resulted in God crediting Abraham as righteous. But it is also possible that Clement is thinking of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22 in which God blessed (εὐλόγησεν) Abraham because Abraham did not withhold his only son Isaac but rather obeyed God's voice (22:16–18; cf. 18:19). Again, the blessing promised to Abraham was that of many descendants (22:17). Clement is probably thinking of both instances, perhaps even the entirety of Abraham's life after having been called out of Ur.³⁴

³¹ Even though many of the Corinthian believers would have been Gentiles by birth, Clement affirms their kinship with Abraham (cf. Rom 2:29; Gal 3:7–14, 29; Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:23). For a good study on the coalescence of kinship and religion as ethno-racial categories in the ancient world, see Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race*, Library of New Testament Studies 410 (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

³² The participle ποιήσας is causal.

³³ It is interesting to note that Codex Hierosolymitanus omits the prepositional phrase διὰ πίστεως. However, while it is possible for a scribe to have inserted the phrase to make it fit with Pauline theology, it is more likely that the phrase is original to Clement since it fits with his thought concerning Abraham's reception of the blessing (cf. 10:1–7), and since the external evidence weighs in favor of it (cf. Codex Alexandrinus and the Latin, Syriac, and Coptic translations).

³⁴ A close parallel to 31:2 is 10:1–7, which seems to encompass the entirety of Abraham's life.

In any case, Clement seems to be summarizing the teaching of both Paul and James on why Abraham was blessed.³⁵ In Gal 3:9, 14 Paul uses the words εὐλογέω and εὐλογία together with faith (ἐκ πίστεως and διὰ τῆς πίστεως) to indicate that Abraham obtained God’s blessing by faith.³⁶ But Clement also appears to allude to Jas 2:21–26. Not only does James consider Abraham ὁ πατήρ ἡμῶν (2:21), but he also views Abraham as a prime example of a man who was justified because he owned the type of faith that works (2:21–23).³⁷ Like James, Clement emphasizes that the Corinthians must have true saving faith in order to receive God’s blessing, and this faith inevitably results in righteousness and truth (δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀλήθεια). Thus, in drawing together teaching from both Paul and James, Clement suggests that Abraham received God’s blessing by means of faith and that this faith came to fruition when he worked righteousness and truth.³⁸

In 31:3, Isaac is portrayed as an example of one who by faith was blessed by God. Despite knowing that he was to be the sacrifice, he went willingly to be offered because he had great confidence (πεποίθησις) in God who raises the dead (cf. Gen 22:1–10; Heb 11:17–19).³⁹ Since the term πεποίθησις is used throughout *1 Clement* as a synonym for faith (2:3; 26:1; 35:2; 45:8; cf. Phil 3:4), the emphasis in 30:3

³⁵ Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:97; Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 57.

³⁶ Hagner, *Clement of Rome*, 222.

³⁷ Another parallel between Jas 2:21 and *1 Clem.* is discovered if Clement has in mind the sacrifice of Isaac in 30.2, which appears likely.

³⁸ Lightfoot, *Clement*, 1:96; Hagner, *Clement of Rome*, 249.

³⁹ If “what was coming” (τό μέλλον) is interpreted as Isaac’s impending sacrificial death, then γινώσκων is concessive. If, however, τό μέλλον refers to Isaac’s resurrection (cf. Heb 11:19), then γινώσκων is causal. Given that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead (cf. Heb 11:19), the latter seems more likely, for the emphasis in 31:3 is on Isaac’s own confidence in God’s future provision.

is on Isaac's trust and confidence in God. Likewise, Jacob is an example of one whom God blessed (31:4). He departed from the land of Canaan because his brother Esau wanted to kill him for stealing his father's firstborn blessing (Gen 27). Having gone to his uncle Laban, Jacob served him for twenty years but experienced hardship along the way (cf. Gen 31:41–42). Nevertheless, in all this Jacob lived with humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη). Instead of laying claim to his right to stay in the land and enjoy the privileges of being Isaac's son, he chose to live a hard life in order to survive and that the family might enjoy unity in the future.⁴⁰ In humbling himself and recognizing his dependence on God, Jacob demonstrated the same type of faith found in Abraham and Isaac. While humility is not identical to faith, it presupposes it. Again, Jacob obtained the divine blessing in the same way as the other patriarchs—by believing in God and his promises—and this trust manifested itself in humbly leaving Canaan and serving Laban.⁴¹ As a result of his faith, Jacob was given the twelve tribes (δωδεκάσκηπτρον) of Israel.⁴²

⁴⁰ Grant and Graham (*Apostolic Fathers*, 57) notes that Clement will later in his epistle ask the Corinthian rebels to depart (ἐκχωρέω) as well for the sake of unity (54:2; 55:1).

⁴¹ Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 254. Rudolf Knopf (*Die Lehre der zwölf Apostel; Die zwei Clemensbriefe*, Handbuch zum neuen Testament Ergänzungsband [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1920], 96) defines Clement's conception of faith in this way: "πίστις ist natürlich nicht der paulinische Glauben, aber das Zutrauen zu Gott, das Bauen auf ihn und auf die Wahrheit seiner Verheissung liegt doch darin" (translation: "πίστις is, of course, not the Pauline faith, but it is the confidence in God that relies on him and on the truth of his promise") While it is true that faith for Clement includes "das Zutrauen zu Gott" and "das Bauen auf ihn und auf die Wahrheit seiner Verheissung," this does not entail that Clement has moved beyond or rejected Paul's conception of faith, which also produces good works (cf. Gal 5:6; Eph 2:8–10).

⁴² Lightfoot (*Clement*, 2:98) notes that the vocabulary of δωδεκάσκηπτρον as referring to the twelve tribes of Israel comes from the LXX (cf. 1 Kgs 11:31–32, 35–36) and the NT (Acts 26:7; cf. *T. Naph.* 5).

In 32:1–2, Clement continues to reflect on the greatness of God’s blessings to Jacob—blessings that one will understand if serious thought is given to each of them (32:1).⁴³ In 32:2 the gifts are listed in four statements, the first three of which begin with the prepositional phrase ἐξ αὐτοῦ, and the last of which summarizes the gifts of God in the remaining tribes of Israel.

The first phrase describes the gifts of God to Jacob in the tribe of Levi. The Levites were priests of God in Israel, and they served at the altar of God (32:2a). The priestly ministry in the Old Testament was a glorious and unique privilege, for it was only the priests who were able to come before Yahweh. For this reason, the tribe of Levi was held in great esteem.

The second phrase describes another of God’s gifts: it was from the lineage of Jacob that Jesus came κατὰ σάρκα, for Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (32:2b).⁴⁴ Further, from Jacob came the gifts of kings and rulers and leaders from the tribe of Judah (32:2c). This is a reference to Jacob’s blessing of Judah in Gen 49:10: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (cf. Gen 35:11). In these three phrases beginning with ἐξ αὐτοῦ, Clement has described both the priestly and kingly lineage of Jacob, in the center of which Jesus himself, who as a priest-king is God’s greatest gift to

⁴³ It is certain that αὐτοῦ refers to God, for Clement highlights God’s gifts. In 32:2a αὐτοῦ refers again to Jacob (so Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:98–99; Lona, *Clemensbrief*, 343). Καθ’ ἐν ἑκαστον combines the distributive use of κατὰ with ἕκαστος, producing the literal translation “each one individually.”

⁴⁴ That Clement held to the deity of Jesus is evident in the title κύριος and the phrase τό κατὰ σάρκα, which clarifies that Jesus is from the lineage of Jacob only with respect to the flesh (cf. Rom 9:5; Torrance, *Doctrine of Grace*, 46n3). Lightfoot (*Clement*, 2:99), Grant and Graham (*Apostolic Fathers*, 57), and Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier (*Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* [New York: Paulist, 1983], 167) note the parallel with Rom 9:5.

Jacob.⁴⁵ As for the rest of the tribes of Israel, they also possessed “no small glory” in that they became as numerous as the stars of heaven in accordance with God’s promise (32:2d; cf. Gen 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 28:14; Exod 1:7).⁴⁶

Why did the patriarchs and Israel experience such glory and honor? The conclusion (οὖν) in 32:3 is that they did not obtain their gifts by any work that they accomplished but by the promise of God (32:3).⁴⁷ This is stated quite emphatically with a negative clause introduced by the preposition *διά* that governs three genitive phrases: they did not receive glory through themselves (*αὐτῶν*) or their works (*τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν*) or their right actions (*τῆς δικαιοπραγίας*). The act of heaping up these phrases rhetorically combine to articulate one powerful point: the patriarchs and Israel received God’s blessing not on the basis of their own efforts but on the basis of God’s promise.⁴⁸

The rhetorical flourish comes to a climax in 32:4, where the author and audience are included within the principle of justification by faith alone. Just like God’s people in previous generations, so also Clement and the Corinthians (*καί ἡμεῖς*) were justified (*δικαιόω*) through faith alone (32:4b). As in 32:3, Clement uses a *οὐ/ἀλλά* construction to show rhetorically the means of justification. But unlike 32:3, in 32:4 there is a twofold negative construction (*οὐ . . . οὐδέ*) with the verb

⁴⁵ Lightfoot (*Clement*, 2:99) rightly notes that the placement of Jesus between Levi and Judah is meant to indicate that Jesus is a priest-king, not that Jesus came from both tribes.

⁴⁶ The particle *ὡς* introducing the genitive absolute construction is causal.

⁴⁷ *Πάντες* at the very least refers to the twelve tribes of Jacob because of the near context (32:1–2) and the linguistic parallel between *δόξῃ* (32:2d) and *ἐδοξάσθησαν* (32:3a; so Bakke, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 254–55). Nevertheless, the patriarchs are likely in view as well, for *πάντες* does not grammatically agree with *σκήπτρον*, and Clement’s argument to this point in 31–32 is that all of God’s people are justified by faith.

⁴⁸ Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 58.

δικαιούμεθα between. The first part of the negative construction contains the phrase δι' ἑαυτῶν and the second part a fourfold list of nouns. The separation of the first negative construction and the placement of it before the verb suggest that it is Clement's main point—no one is justified “by means of themselves”—and second negative construction merely clarifies this main point. People might seek to be justified “by means of themselves” in a number of ways: by their wisdom (σοφία), understanding (σύνεσις), godliness (εὐσέβεια), or good works (ἔργα). Indeed, not even good works that flow from a heart of devotion to God (ὀσιότητι καρδίας) can justify.

Rather, justification comes by faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως), the only means of justification throughout redemptive history (32:4c).⁴⁹ Even the Corinthians' faith itself was a gift of God, for their faith was the result of God's powerful and effective call in Christ (32:4a). The Pauline language is evident throughout this verse, with God “calling” (καλέω) believers “in Christ Jesus” (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) “by his will” (διὰ θελήματος αὐτοῦ). That Pauline language is used does not necessitate adoption of Pauline thought, but Clement's proclamation of justification by faith alone and not by works strongly argues for an endorsement of Paul's gospel.⁵⁰ That this is the correct interpretation is supported by the objection anticipated by Clement in 33:1ff. Like Paul in Rom 6:1ff., Clement anticipates that some will use his works-free understanding of justification as an argument against the necessity of good works. But he counters this objection by claiming that works in fact are necessary since God himself rejoices in his works (33:2–7). Hence, believers as

⁴⁹ Bakke (*Rhetorical Analysis*, 108–9, 255) contends that Clement's notion of πίστις still carries connotations of obedience in 32:4.

⁵⁰ So Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 58; Lindemann, “Paul's Influence,” 13. Contra Torrance, *Doctrine of Grace*, 50: “There can be no doubt that this is Pauline language, but it cannot be understood in Pauline fashion.”

well must do “the work of righteousness” (ἔργον δικαιοσύνης, 33:8).⁵¹ That Clement anticipates the same objection Paul does in Rom 6:1ff. corroborates that he had appropriated Paul’s understanding of justification by faith alone. Hence, the argument of 32:4 is clear: justification comes not by works but by faith alone because of the effectual call of God.⁵²

In summary, justification by faith alone is trumpeted in *1 Clem.* 31:1–32:4. As the “paths of blessing” are unfolded, it becomes clear that “from the beginning” (31:1) “every person throughout the age” (32:4) has been justified by faith alone. Just as the patriarchs and Israel were blessed through faith (31:2–32:3), so also the Corinthians received the blessing of justification through faith (32:4). Any form of works righteousness is removed as the means of justification, for not even those deeds done with a pure heart will suffice (32:4). Rather, God is the one who justifies, for by his will he effectively creates justifying faith in the hearts of individuals, uniting them to Christ.

Conclusions from *1 Clement* 29:1–32:4

Having analyzed *1 Clem.* 29:1–32:4, it remains for us to provide a synthesis of Clement’s teaching on the justification of the believer and the role of good works. First, Clement did not hold that a person must do “works righteousness” in order to be justified before God. In 29:1–30:1, Clement grounds the imperative to be holy in the indicative of

⁵¹ So Lightfoot, *Clement*, 2:101; Grant and Graham, *Apostolic Fathers*, 59; Brown and Meier, *New Testament Cradles*, 167; Lindemann, “Paul’s Influence,” 13–14.

⁵² The use of the perfective-aspect κληθέντες suggests a temporal or causal meaning, which fits the interpretation here. Contra Torrance, *Doctrine of Grace*, 48, who argues Clement’s view of grace at this point is “denuded of its real significance.”

who believers are as God's chosen people.⁵³ Hence, Clement's exhortation in 29:1-30:8 cannot be construed as a form of works righteousness whereby a person can approach God and hope to be accepted by virtue of their own holiness.⁵⁴ The call was not for the Corinthians to act contrary to but in accord with their new identity in Christ. Because God had chosen them to be his unique, holy people, they should therefore approach him in holiness. Further, in 32:3-4 Clement's emphatic negation of any good works people can do to be justified before God is enough to deny that he taught legalism. Especially significant in this list is his denial that even good works with pure motives (*δσιότητι καρδίας*) are not sufficient to justify a person before God. In light of the modern debate surrounding the "New Perspective on Paul," as well as the historical debate between Roman Catholics and Protestants on justification, *1 Clement* provides a clear testimony to the early church's adherence to the apostolic teaching that people cannot be justified solely by virtue of their own righteousness—do consider the argument of righteousness in *Pol.Phil.* 3-9.

Second, Clement taught that a person is justified by faith alone. Although he never used the word "alone" (*μόνος*) in connection with faith, his emphatic denial that anything else in a person can justify before God leaves no doubt that he taught that it was by faith alone that a person was justified (32:3-4). Furthermore, Clement's insistence

⁵³ So Lindemann, "Paul's Influence," 13; contra Torrance, *Doctrine of Grace*, 53n3, who says the hortatory subjunctive *κολληθῶμεν* in 30:3 and 31:1 shows that Clement believed in works righteousness.

⁵⁴ Grant and Graham (*Apostolic Fathers*, 54) note the linguistic connection between 29:1 (*δσιότητι ψυχῆς*) and 32:4 (*δσιότητι καρδίας*). Clement's rhetorical skill is evident in these chapters, for his exhortation to approach God with righteousness in 29:1-30:8 is immediately followed in 31:1-32:4 by the reminder that justification only comes by God's grace through faith.

on the priority of faith in the patriarchs (31:2–4) shows that he taught that God’s saving blessing and gifts come through faith in him. Even faith itself is a gift from God by his effectual call.

Third, Clement taught that good works are the necessary fruit of justification.⁵⁵ He does not misconstrue the doctrine of justification by faith alone to imply that believers do not need to live in a holy manner. Rather, throughout this section he urges the Corinthian believers to be holy (29:1; 30:1; 33:1, 8). The fact that the Corinthians had already been blessed by God (30:8b) did not eliminate the need to persevere in the faith by clinging to this blessing and considering afresh the gospel (31:1). They were to reflect God’s character in all things, especially in their use of words (30:1–5). To reject this warning concerning slander was tantamount to rejecting God and only showed the true wickedness of the individual.

Finally, this analysis of *1 Clem.* 29:1–32:4 indicates that Clement did not see a contradiction between Paul and James. That Clement relied on material from both Paul and James (cf. 31:2; 32:4) in formulating a doctrine of justification by faith and the necessity of good works suggests that he believed both authors were in harmony on the issue of justification. It is telling for the ongoing discussion of the formation of early Christian identity and theology that towards the end of the first century a Christian was able to articulate relatively faithfully the respective nuances of Paul and James as well as to reconcile them even in the same section.

Certainly Clement could have articulated the issue more clearly. For instance, he could have better explained that it is through Christ’s own righteousness imputed to the believer that God can justify the ungodly and remain just in the process (Rom 3:21–4:5). Or, he could

⁵⁵ S. G. Hall, “Repentance in 1 Clement,” in *Studia Patristica*, ed. F. L. Cross, vol. 8 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), 41–43.

have clarified that the object of the faith of the justified sinner is Christ crucified, for it was at the cross that Christ purchased complete forgiveness of sin and the imputation of righteousness to the believer. He could have better followed Paul's teaching that it is through union with Christ that the believer is counted righteous (1 Cor 1:30; 5:21). And he certainly could have better articulated *why* and *how* the justified sinner still must persevere in good works in order to obtain the divine blessing.

Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings of *1 Clement*, in it is found a faithful post-apostolic articulation of the traditions associated with Paul and James. While scholars will continue to debate the early church's understanding of the relationship between faith and works, *1 Clement* provides a witness to an early church theology that neither denigrated nor ignored both justification by faith and the necessity of good works. In this way *1 Clement* finds its place directly between Paul and James.