THE QUESTION

Besides Ignatius, did early Christians teach honoring and obeying bishops and elders?

Asked by a THF member on August 1, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 14 early Christian passages and 48 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/besides-ignatius-did-early-christians-teach-honoring-and-obeying-bishops

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Yes. Ignatius often urged believers to be subject to the bishop, presbyters and deacons, and other early writers said the same. Polycarp called Christians to be subject to presbyters and deacons, Clement of Rome urged honor for elders, and Irenaeus said to obey presbyters who hold the succession from the apostles.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Ignatius ties obeying leaders to obeying Christ

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Ignatius tells believers to be subject to the bishop, the presbyters and the deacons. He gives the reason: Christ appointed them. So he treats obeying them as obeying Christ, and refusing them as refusing Christ.

1

> "Beloved, be careful to be subject to the bishop, and the presbyters and deacons. For being subject to them is being obedient to Christ, who appointed them; but being disobedient to them is being disobedient to Christ Jesus."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (c. 98–117 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Nothing in the church apart from the bishop

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Ignatius compares following the bishop to Christ following the Father, and following the presbyters to following the apostles. He also asks for reverence toward deacons. He says no church work should be done without the bishop.

2

> "See that you all follow the bishop, just as Christ Jesus does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles. Also, show reverence to the deacons, as those who carry out the appointment of God through their office."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "Let no one do anything connected with the Church without the bishop."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (c. 98–117 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 6, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Honoring the bishop honors God the Father

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Ignatius warns a church not to look down on its bishop because he is young. He says that when the elders submit to the bishop, they are really submitting to the Father. In another letter he joins reverence for God with reverence for the bishop.

3 "They do not judge hastily based on their bishop's youthful appearance, but being wise in God, they submit to him—or rather, not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, the bishop of us all."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 "It is good to reverence both God and the bishop. Whoever honors the bishop has been honored by God; whoever does anything without the knowledge of the bishop truly serves the devil."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Polycarp: be subject to presbyters and deacons

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Polycarp, writing to the church at Philippi, tells believers to turn from sin while being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as to God and Christ. He also says the presbyters must be kind and merciful, caring for the straying, the sick and the poor.

5 "Therefore, it is necessary to abstain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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6 “And let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to everyone, bringing back those who wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always "providing for that which is becoming in the sight of God and man;" abstaining from all wrath, favoritism, and unjust judgment; keeping far from all covetousness, not quickly believing an evil report against anyone, not severe in judgment, as knowing that we are all under a debt of sin.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Clement of Rome: respect leaders, honor elders

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Rome praises the Corinthian church for having obeyed its leaders and honored its elders in earlier days. He then calls them to do this again, placing respect for leaders right after honoring Christ.

7 “For you did all things without favoritism, and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who led you, and giving all appropriate honor to the elders among you.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 12, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “Let us honor the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; let us respect those who lead us; let us honor the elders among us; let us train the young men in the fear of God; let us guide our wives to what is good.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 13, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Clement urges peace with appointed presbyters

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement wrote about a division that a few people had stirred up at Corinth. He urges anyone who caused the trouble to step aside, so that the flock can live in peace with the presbyters set over it.

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9 “If because of me there has been sedition, disagreement, and division, I will leave, I will go wherever you want, and I will do whatever the majority commands; only let the flock of Christ live in peace with the presbyters appointed over it."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 14, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Irenaeus: obey presbyters in apostolic succession

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus says believers must obey the presbyters who have the succession from the apostles, together with the succession of bishops. He links this to keeping the truth. He warns against those who break away and divide the church.

10 “Therefore, it is necessary to obey the presbyters in the Church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, along with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not explain what believers should do if a particular leader teaches error or lives badly.
- They do not describe how bishops, presbyters and deacons were chosen.
- Two of the Ignatius passages come from the longer versions of his letters.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 14 early Christian passages and 48 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–14, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 15–17, in Bible order), then 45 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *14 passages from 4 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 1–7*

1 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* **Quote 1, page 2** if I, in this brief period, have enjoyed such fellowship with your bishop—not just a human, but a spiritual one—how much more fortunate I consider you, who rely… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (on point 2) "deacons to the presbyters; the presbyters to the bishop… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Epistle to the Magnesians* **Quote 3, page 3** "is important for you not to treat your bishop too casually because of his youth, but to show him full respect, honoring the authority of God the Father, as I… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English; on point 1) "ye subject to the bishop, to the presbyters, and to the deacons… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistle to the Trallians* (on point 1) "a person is defiled in his conscience and is worse than an infidel… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* **Quote 2, page 2** that you all follow the bishop, just as Christ Jesus does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles. Also, show reverence to the deacons, as those who… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "who honours the bishop has been honoured by God… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Epistle to the Philippians* **Quote 5, page 3** "as they are the servants of God and Christ, not of men. They must not be slanderers, double-tongued, or lovers of money, but must be temperate in all things… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Epistle to the Philippians* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** "Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church,—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English; on point 7) "Such presbyters does the Church nourish, of whom also the prophet says: "I will give thy rulers in peace, and thy bishops in righteousness." Of whom also did the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

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Clement of Rome · *sources 12–14*

12 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 7, page 4** "who did not rejoice over your perfect and well-grounded knowledge… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** "us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** "let the flock of Christ live on terms of peace with the presbyters set over it." He that acts thus shall procure to himself great glory in the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *3 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

15 **1 Corinthians 10:26** for the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness. **read ›**

16 **2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive what is due for the things done through the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. **read ›**

17 **Galatians 6:7** Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *45 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Exodus 32:32

Isaiah 66:2

Matthew 4:10 · 6:12 · 10:19 · 13:27 · 20:28 · 22:39 · 24:5 · 24:11

Mark 8:38 · 10:43

Luke 16:15 · 21:14

John 7:37 · 15:1 · 15:12 · 21:17

Acts 20:29

Romans 12:17 · 14:10 · 14:12

1 Corinthians 1:9 · 6:9 · 10:33 · 12:3

2 Corinthians 8:21

Galatians 1:10 · 5:16

Ephesians 4:27 · 5:22

Philippians 1:27 · 4:8

1 Thessalonians 5:12

2 Thessalonians 3:6

1 Timothy 2:4 · 3:8 · 5:21

2 Timothy 2:12 · 2:20

Hebrews 13:17

James 2:13 · 5:14

1 Peter 2:11

Revelation 2:5

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Besides Ignatius, did early Christians teach honoring and obeying bishops and elders?” on August 1, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY