THE QUESTION

Did early Christians see the battle with temptation as a kind of persecution?

Asked by a THF member on August 16, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 36 early Christian passages and 49 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-early-christians-see-the-battle-with-temptation-as-a-kind-of

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

Yes. Clement of Alexandria called the inner attack of sinful desires the most painful persecution of all, worse than attacks from outside. Other writers also pictured the fight against temptation as a lifelong contest or war, endured with patience and rewarded by God, who measures each person's trials to their strength.

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

The most painful persecution comes from within

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

Clement names two kinds of persecution. One comes from people outside who hate or envy the faithful. The more painful kind rises inside a person's own soul when it is torn by godless desires and passions.

1

> “Now of persecution: one kind comes round from outside, from men driving the faithful—whether through hatred, or envy, or greed for gain, or by diabolical agency. But the most painful persecution is from within, sent forth from each one's own soul when it is being ravaged by godless desires, varied pleasures, base hopes, and destructive daydreams—whenever, ever reaching for more, raving under wild loves, and inflamed as if by goads or stings of the passions that beset it, the soul is bled toward mad pursuits, and despair of life, and contempt of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 25 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 4, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Fighting passions is a contest God watches

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

Clement pictures the believer as an athlete in a great stadium. The opponent is not flesh and blood but uncontrolled passions, and the one who overthrows the tempter wins immortality.

2

> “And the contest, which includes many different kinds of exercises, is not against flesh and blood, Ephesians 6:12, but against the spiritual powers of uncontrolled passions that work through the flesh.”

later in the same passage

> “The one who gains the victory in these struggles and overthrows the tempter, who threatens him, as it were, with certain contests, wins immortality.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 7.3 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 5, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Our chief struggle is against the flesh

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

Lactantius calls the fight against the desires of the flesh our great and chief struggle. He says the soul's real enemies are unseen: lusts, vices and sins, which virtue must overcome.

3 “For we have one great and chief struggle to carry on against the flesh. Its endless desires press upon the soul and do not allow it to keep control, but make it a slave to pleasures and sweet temptations, and bring upon it everlasting death.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 25 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 30, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “But what are the enemies of the soul except lusts, vices, and sins? And if virtue overcomes and drives these away, the soul will be pure and free from stain.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 12 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 29, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Temptations and persecutions are both daily battles

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

Cyprian places the continual battles of temptation right beside the struggle of persecution. He describes Christians as standing daily on a battlefield against an old and skillful enemy, needing patience to endure it all.

5 “Standing daily on the battlefield, we are worn out by the struggles of an old and skillful enemy. Besides the different and continual battles of temptations, in the struggle of persecutions we must also leave our family possessions, endure imprisonment, bear chains, give up our lives, endure the sword, wild beasts, fires, crucifixions, and, in short, all kinds of tortures and punishments.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 21, page 7** Read it in the library ›
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6 “For since, in that first breaking of the commandment, bodily strength departed along with immortality, and weakness came with death—and strength cannot be received unless immortality also has been received—it is necessary for us, in this bodily frailty and weakness, always to struggle and fight. And this struggle and conflict cannot be endured except by the strength of patience.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 25, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

The war with lust lasts a lifetime

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Commodianus tells his reader that the war never stops: from the first day to the last, lust and luxury must be fought. He seems to contrast this long fight with those who want a quick martyrdom without labor.

7 “From the first formed day to the end you fight. Lust drives you on; there is war. Fight against it.”

later in the same passage

“You wear such great words in vain, you who in one moment seek without labor to raise a martyrdom to Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 28, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

God matches each struggle to our strength

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

Origen compares God to a fair judge of the games who pairs contestants by age and strength. In the same way, God arranges each person's temptations according to the power He knows they have.

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8 “It arranges, on the most impartial principles, all who enter the struggles of this human life according to the nature of each person’s power, which is known only to Him who alone sees the hearts of men.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 11, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Being tempted is not the same as falling

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

Dionysius explains that a person who resists and endures is tempted but has not entered into temptation. The devil pulls toward ruin, but God uses trials to train us for salvation.

9 “But if a person resists and endures, that person is indeed tempted, but he has not entered into temptation or fallen into it.”

later in the same passage

“Therefore, the devil drives us forward by force, pulling us toward destruction. But God leads us by the hand, training us for our salvation.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Dionysius of Alexandria,** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 19, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- Only Clement here calls the inner struggle a persecution in so many words; the others speak of it as a contest, war or trial.
- These passages do not say the inner struggle replaces or equals martyrdom in God's reward.
- 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 36 early Christian passages and 49 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–36, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 37–39, in Bible order), then 46 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 *36 passages from 11 writers*

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

1 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English; on point 6) "whom enduring, ye shall escape all the assaults of this world: for "He is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 2*

2 *Diatessaron* 48 (on point 7) "he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray; and pray that you do not enter into temptations." He took with him Cephas and the sons of… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 3–7*

3 *Stromata* 4.12 (1885 English) "the devil tempting us, knowing what we are, but not knowing if we will hold out, but wishing to dislodge us from the faith, attempts also to bring us into… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 25 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "is a persecution which arises from without, from men assailing the faithful, either out of hatred, or envy, or avarice, or through diabolic agency… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Stromata* 7.3 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "who obtains the mastery in these struggles, and overthrows the tempter, menacing, as it were, with certain contests, wins immortality… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Stromata* 7.12 or pain, he remains inseparable from the love of God in his care for the house, and resists every temptation that comes through children, wife, servants, and possessions. But the… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Stromata* 7.12 (1885 English) "are applied to him, not for his purification, but, as we have said, for the good of his neighbours, if, making trial of toils and pains, he has despised and… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *De Fuga in Persecutione* 2 "in the prayer prescribed to us, when we say to our Father, 'Lead us not into temptation'—now what greater temptation is there than… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *On Baptism* 20 (1885 English; on point 3) "4:1-4 and that temptations incident to fullness or immoderation of appetite are shattered by abstinence… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *On Prayer* 8 (1885 English; on point 7) "Himself, when tempted by the devil, demonstrated who it is that presides over and is the originator of temptation… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 11–16*

11 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2 **Quote 8, page 5** "being able to be tempted by trials greater than human ones, since it is said of us, "There has no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man… [continues online] **read ›**

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12 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2 (on point 2) as the apostle's meaning, that all the athletes and soldiers of Christ have to wrestle and struggle against all the adversaries listed. The struggle indeed has to be maintained… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2 (on point 2) against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," must be understood as if we meant, "I, Paul, and you… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 4 (on point 3) “now, in my opinion, we should not pass over the subject of human temptations in silence. These temptations sometimes arise from flesh and blood, or from the wisdom of flesh… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Against Celsus* 70 (1885 English) “God gives to the tempter permission to persecute us, then we suffer persecution… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* (1885 English) “if we are our own masters, some influences perhaps may impel us to sin, and others help us to salvation… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · sources 17–19*

17 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (on point 7) near, but does not stay settled with him permanently, so the Saviour's first request is that the temptation which has come softly and plainly upon Him, and has associated… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (on point 7) “His face again and again. On both occasions, He urged this request: that He might not enter into temptation. He did so both when He prayed, "If it is possible… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 **Quote 9, page 5** “But you may perhaps say, “What difference is there between being tempted, and falling into temptation or entering into temptation?” Well, if a person is overcome by evil—and he… [continues online] **read ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 20*

20 *Twelve Topics on the Faith* 1 (1885 English) “was tempted in the wilderness, not as giving way, however, to temptation, but as putting our temptations before Himself on the challenge of the tempter, in order to show the… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 21–27*

21 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** “us who, besides the various and continual battles of temptations, must also in the contest of persecutions forsake our patrimonies, undergo imprisonment, bear chains, spend our lives, endure the sword… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Epistles* (on point 2) contest, also glorious because of the reward of a heavenly crown. Since God watches us as we struggle, and stretches His gaze over those whom He has been pleased to… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 4) “resists temptations, suffers persecutions, perfects passions and martyrdoms… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Treatises* (on point 4) battles. Let them not weaken or break the Christian's faith, but instead show his strength in the struggle, since all the harm brought by present troubles must be despised… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “a manifold kind of temptations is inflicted by the losses of property, by the heats of fevers, by the torments of wounds, by the loss of those dear to us… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Epistles* “firmness; and for any of you who, through the trickery of the adversary, have fallen, this second temptation is the time to take faithful counsel for your hope and your… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Treatises* “is another persecution and another temptation, by which the crafty enemy… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 28*

28 *Writings* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “precipitates you, there is war; fight with it… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 29–30*

29 *Divine Institutes* 12 **Quote 4, page 3** it is called fortitude, to distinguish it. Since, therefore, fortitude is connected with each, a struggle is set before each, and victory from that struggle is offered to each. The… [continues online] **read ›**

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30 *Divine Institutes* 25 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "we have one great and principal struggle to maintain with the flesh, the boundless desires of which press upon the soul, nor allow it to retain dominion, but make it… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 31–36*

31 *On the Priesthood* 4 always expect victory or defeat to be decided by the soldiers who are on the battlefield. But in spiritual warfare, it is very different. There it often happens that fighting… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Homily on the Paralytic Lowered Through the Roof* 1 (on point 4) certain wise man warns us, saying, "My son, if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation. Set your heart right, and constantly endure, and do not… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Homilies on Acts* (1885 English; on point 7) "how they do not cast themselves upon temptations, but when the temptations present themselves, with courage endure them… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Homilies on Matthew* 13 (1885 English) "endures also to be led up there, and to wrestle against the devil: in order that each of those who are baptized, if after his baptism he have to endure… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Homilies on First Timothy* (on point 5) a tyrant, but you serve under a King. And why does he call it a warfare? To show how great a struggle must be carried on by everyone, but especially… [continues online] **read ›**

36 *Homilies on First Thessalonians* (1885 English) "is said with respect to the temptations that bring in affliction… [continues online] **read ›**

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

37 **1 Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. With the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it. **read ›**

38 **Galatians 5:17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. **read ›**

39 **Ephesians 6:12** For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *46 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.

Isaiah 53:4

Matthew 3:6 · 4:1 · 4:10 · 5:13 · 6:13 · 7:7 · 10:29 · 10:37 · 26:41 · 27:63

Mark 5:11 · 14:31

Luke 2:14 · 4:8 · 11:9 · 14:27 · 14:34 · 22:28 · 22:31 · 22:40

John 11:33 · 12:27 · 13:2 · 13:21 · 16:33

Acts 9:15

Romans 2:11 · 8:38 · 8:39

1 Corinthians 1:27 · 10:2 · 12:4 · 15:10

2 Corinthians 8:16 · 10:5 · 12:7 · 12:9

Ephesians 4:27 · 6:10

Philippians 2:13 · 4:13

1 Thessalonians 4:3

1 Timothy 1:20

2 Timothy 1:15

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Hebrews 2:1

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did early Christians see the battle with temptation as a kind of persecution?” on August 16, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY