THE QUESTION

Did early Christians think being fat was a sin?

Asked by a THF member on August 24, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 34 early Christian passages and 136 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-early-christians-think-being-fat-was-a-sin

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The passages do not treat a fat body as sinful in itself. They use "fat" both for good things, like rich blessing, and as a picture of pride and rebellion. What they clearly condemn is gluttony and being ruled by the belly, and they praise moderate eating that keeps the body healthy.

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

"Fat" could be a word of blessing

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

Hippolytus reads the "fat" bread of Asher as a picture of the rich food Christ gives his people. The Apostolic Constitutions tell believers to enjoy the good things of the land with thanks, because every good thing belongs to God. In these writers, "fat" often simply means rich and good.

1 “We understand this as a figure of our calling, for "fat" means rich. And whose bread is rich, if not ours?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 17, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 “But eat the fat of the land with righteousness. For if there is anything pleasant, it is His; and if there is anything good, it is His.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 27, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

A martyr prayed to be a fat offering

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

Before his death, Polycarp prays to be accepted as a "fat" sacrifice. He borrows the language of the best animal offered at the altar. Here the word carries honor, not shame.

3 “Among whom may I be accepted this day before you as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as you, the ever-truthful God, have foreordained, have revealed beforehand to me, and now have fulfilled.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

Growing fat can picture pride and rebellion

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

Clement of Rome quotes Scripture about a people who ate, grew fat, and rebelled, and he links it to envy and strife in the church. Ignatius warns that whoever grows fat and disregards Christ's teaching is in danger of hell. In both, fatness is a picture of a soul made careless and proud by comfort.

4 “My beloved ate and drank, grew large and fat, and rebelled.” From this came rivalry and envy, strife and rebellion, persecution and disorder, war and captivity.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 34, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

5 “Whoever, "becoming fat," and "becoming gross," disregards His doctrine, shall go into hell.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Gluttony is the sin they name

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

Origen says Christians must not eat for gluttony or just to please the appetite, but for health and strength. Novatian says Christ gave the strictest laws against gluttony. Their target is the habit of overeating for pleasure, not the shape of a person's body.

6 “For we are to avoid eating for gluttony, or for the mere gratification of appetite, without regard to the health and sustenance of the body.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 30 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 19, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

7 “No one has given such strict laws against gluttony as Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Novatian,** *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (c. 240–258 AD) **Source 22, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 7

Living for the belly harms the soul

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

Commodianus mocks the person who thinks he is truly living while he only fills his belly. Dionysius of Alexandria warns that when the flesh is fed in luxury it fights against the spirit. Both see a ruling appetite as a spiritual danger.

8 “You believe that you live while you desire to fill your belly.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 30, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

9 “For when the flesh is fed in luxury, it fights against the soul and rises in revolt against the spirit.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Dionysius of Alexandria,** *Exegetical Fragments* 2 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 20, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Moderate eating keeps the body healthy

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

Clement of Alexandria praises self-control in food and drink because it keeps the body healthy and lets natural beauty show. He treats care for a healthy body as proper, as long as the soul's beauty comes first.

10 “But self-control in drink, and moderation in food, are effective in producing natural beauty. For these not only keep the body healthy, but also make beauty appear.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Food itself is good, not unclean

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

Novatian teaches that since Christ came, all foods are good when received with thanks. So the early writers did not blame food or the body. They called for self-control in how food is used.

11 "From these things it is clear that all those things have now returned to their original goodness, since the law is finished."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Novatian,** *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (c. 240–258 AD) **Source 23, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not talk about body weight as a medical matter or say how heavy is too heavy.
- They do not say that a large body by itself shows that a person is sinning.
- 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.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 34 early Christian passages and 136 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–34, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 35–54, in Bible order), then 116 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 *34 passages from 19 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 1*

1 *Shepherd* do good. And I will be with all those," he added, "who have such a desire." He continued, "This fasting is very good, provided that the commandments of the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

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Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 2*

2 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* **Quote 5, page 3** "Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, endured the cross and submitted to death! Whoever, "becoming fat," and "becoming gross," disregards His doctrine, shall go into hell. Similarly, everyone who… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 3*

3 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* **Quote 3, page 2** taken out of a great flock for sacrifice, prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and said, "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 4*

4 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 3) ate and drank, and then indulged in revelry.' And again: 'Jacob ate, was satisfied, and became fat; and the beloved one rebelled: he grew fat, thick, and large, and abandoned… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 5–6*

5 *Address to the Greeks* 25 (on point 4) a weaver for their cloak, a woodcutter for their staff, rich people, and also a cook for their gluttony. O man competing with the dog, you do not know God… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Address to the Greeks* 2 (on point 4) his tub, was struck with a bowel disease from eating a raw octopus, and so lost his life through gluttony. Aristippus, walking around in a purple robe, lived a morally… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 7*

7 *Resurrection of the Dead* 6 (on point 6) being fed, and also that excess amount of food taken in only to fill the stomach and satisfy the appetite. No one can doubt that this nourishment becomes part of… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–12*

8 *Instructor* 2.1 (on point 6) "ourselves to the knowledge of God. For the just man who eats is satisfied in his soul, but the belly of the wicked will lack, Proverbs 13:5, being filled… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Instructor* 2.1 (1885 English; on point 4) "called ὀψοφαγία, is nothing but excess in the use of relishes (ὄψον … [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Instructor* 2.7 (1885 English; on point 6) "is the part of a temperate man also, in eating and drinking, to take a small portion, and deliberately, not eagerly, both at the beginning and during the courses, and… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 10, page 4** more lovely color has ever been seen — then bodily beauty too should be cared for: a well-shaped body and limbs, with a healthy complexion. Here the adornment of health… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Instructor* 2.11 (on point 4) "voluptuousness, rich cooking, dainty feeding, gluttony. These are the "What… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 13–16*

13 *Against Marcion* 29 (1885 English; on point 6) "room for temperance in appetite does famine give… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *On Fasting* 5 "therefore, from men so ungrateful, all that was more pleasing and appetizing… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *On Fasting* 16 (1885 English; on point 4) "this day the monuments of concupiscence remain, where the People, greedy of flesh, till, by devouring without digesting the quails, they brought on cholera, were buried… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *On Fasting* 6 (1885 English; on point 3) "them, to wit, had the heart of the People been made thick, lest they should see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with a heart obstructed… [continues online] **read ›**

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Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 17*

17 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 **Quote 1, page 2** “fat" means rich. And whose bread is rich, if not ours… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 18–19*

18 *Commentary on Matthew* 11 (on point 5) world. 2 Corinthians 4:4 And do not suppose that Paul said that he was truly God. For just as the belly, though it is not the god of those… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Against Celsus* 30 **Quote 6, page 3** “we are to avoid eating for gluttony, or… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 20*

20 *Exegetical Fragments* 2 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 4** “how should not intemperate eatings and drinkings also be contrary to God… [continues online] **read ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 21*

21 *Metaphrase of Ecclesiastes* 10 (on point 4) the idler become mockers and make the house fall into decay. Misusing everything for their own gluttony, like eager slaves of money, they are content for a small price to… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · sources 22–24*

22 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 **Quote 7, page 3** “restrained lack of self-control as much as the Gospel. No one has given such strict laws against gluttony as Christ. He is said even to have called the poor… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 **Quote 11, page 5** food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy." Romans 14:17 Also elsewhere: "Foods for the belly, and the belly for foods; but God will destroy both it and them… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (1885 English; on point 6) “frugality and moderation in appetite were becoming to those who were chosen for this purpose… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 25*

25 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 5) “still long also for suppers and banquets, whose debauch they belched forth in the indigestion lately left to the day, most manifestly proving now that they did not before serve… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 26–29*

26 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) pure, her hearing clean, her hands undefiled, her feet quiet, and her mouth prepared neither for gluttony nor for foolish talk, but for speaking what is fitting, and for taking… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 2, page 2** “eat the fat of the land with righteousness… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) “it up like a house on a hill, or like a high mountain, like a mountain fruitful for milk and fatness, where it has pleased God to dwell. For the… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 4) “if any one be in want by gluttony, drunkenness, or idleness, he does not deserve any assistance, or to be esteemed a member of the Church of God… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · sources 30–31*

30 *Writings* **Quote 8, page 4** “regard your belly as if you can provide for it… [continues online] **read ›**

31 *Writings* (on point 5) “rebuke calamity. O belly, stuff yourself out with luxury… [continues online] **read ›**

Arnobius, *c. 290–330 AD · source 32*

32 *Against the Heathen* 7 (1885 English) “stuffing themselves with sumptuous and ample dinners, do they, as is usually done, take these little bits as sweet dainties, not to appease their hunger, but to rouse their wearied… [continues online] **read ›**

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Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 33*

33 *Divine Institutes* 17 (on point 5) but throws itself down to the earth with its whole body and face. It is always a slave to its appetite and food. During its life, it cannot provide any… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 34*

34 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 4, page 3** given to you, and then what is written was fulfilled: “My beloved ate and drank, grew large and fat, and rebelled.” From this came rivalry and envy, strife and rebellion… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *20 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

35 **Deuteronomy 32:15** So Jacob ate and was filled, and the beloved one kicked; he grew fat, he grew thick, he grew broad; and he forsook God who made him, and turned away from God his Savior. **read ›**

36 **Matthew 4:2** When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. **read ›**

37 **Matthew 6:16** Moreover when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. **read ›**

38 **Matthew 9:14** Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” **read ›**

39 **Mark 2:18** John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees were fasting. They came and asked him, “Why do John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” **read ›**

40 **Mark 2:20** But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. **read ›**

41 **Luke 5:33** They said to him, “Why do John’s disciples often fast and pray, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink?” **read ›**

42 **Luke 8:19** His mother and brothers came to him, and they could not come near him for the crowd. **read ›**

43 **John 6:35** Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. **read ›**

44 **Acts 2:46** Day by day they continued steadfastly with one accord in the temple, breaking bread at home and sharing food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **read ›**

45 **Acts 22:13** came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ In that very hour I looked up at him. **read ›**

46 **Acts 27:33** As day was about to dawn, Paul urged everyone to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have continued waiting without food, taking nothing. **read ›**

47 **Romans 14:2** One believes he may eat everything, but the weak person eats vegetables. **read ›**

48 **Romans 14:3** Do not let him who eats despise him who does not eat. Do not let him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. **read ›**

49 **1 Corinthians 11:21** For when you eat, each one takes his own supper first, and one is hungry while another is drunk. **read ›**

50 **Galatians 5:23** meekness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. **read ›**

51 **Philippians 3:19** their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; they set their minds on earthly things. **read ›**

52 **1 Timothy 6:8** But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. **read ›**

53 **Hebrews 13:9** Do not be carried away by various and strange teachings, for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. **read ›**

54 **James 5:5** You have lived in luxury on the earth, and taken your pleasure. You have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *116 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.

Genesis 1:12 · 9:3

Exodus 16:3

Leviticus 11:3

Deuteronomy 14:3

2 Samuel 6:19

1 Kings 13:19

Psalms 112:6

Proverbs 13:25 · 15:17

Ecclesiastes 6:7 · 10:1

Daniel 3:16

Zechariah 7:6

Matthew 4:4 · 6:21 · 6:32 · 15:11 · 15:13 · 15:14 · 15:17 · 19:12 · 19:18 · 20:22 · 22:21 · 22:29 · 22:35 · 23:4 · 23:6 · 23:19 · 23:25 · 23:30 · 23:38 · 24:22 · 25:25 · 25:35 · 26:36 · 26:39 · 26:40 · 26:46 · 26:51 · 26:63 · 27:45 · 27:48 · 27:50 · 27:59

Mark 7:19 · 7:22 · 10:38 · 12:42 · 13:14

Luke 4:4 · 8:18 · 12:28 · 17:7 · 20:36 · 21:3 · 22:31 · 22:32 · 24:41

John 1:14 · 4:34 · 6:26 · 6:51 · 12:40 · 16:11 · 20:19

Acts 6:2 · 10:10 · 10:14 · 15:23 · 28:26

Romans 1:8 · 7:14 · 10:4 · 14:6 · 14:14 · 14:17 · 14:20 · 14:21 · 14:23

1 Corinthians 5:11 · 6:13 · 7:25 · 7:29 · 8:6 · 8:8 · 8:13 · 9:4 · 9:14 · 10:7 · 10:23 · 10:25 · 10:31 · 11:33 · 15:32 · 15:35

2 Corinthians 1:21 · 3:3 · 3:7 · 3:16 · 4:4 · 6:5 · 11:27 · 12:9

Ephesians 4:20

Colossians 2:18 · 2:21

2 Thessalonians 2:12

1 Timothy 4:1 · 4:4 · 4:5 · 6:10

Titus 1:15

2 Peter 3:16

Revelation 5:5

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY