THE QUESTION

Did early church bishops and elders guard what was preached and who taught?

Asked by a THF member on May 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 19 early Christian passages and 73 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-early-church-bishops-and-elders-guard-what-was-preached-and-who-taught

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

Yes. The early writers say the apostles appointed tested bishops and elders, and these leaders were to hold the apostles' teaching, explain the Scriptures soundly and guard the flock from false teachers. Believers were told to learn from such leaders, keep one preaching under the bishop and stay away from those who strayed.

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 apostles appointed tested leaders

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

Clement of Rome says the apostles preached the gospel and then appointed leaders in each place. They first tested these men by the Spirit before making them bishops and deacons for the believers who would come later.

1

> “Thus, preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits of their labors, having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who would later believe.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 19, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Bishops were warned to watch for wolves

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

Irenaeus recalls Paul's charge to the bishops and presbyters at Miletus. They were to guard the flock, because false teachers would come from outside and even rise up from among them, twisting the truth to win followers.

2

> “Be careful, then, both about yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, to lead the Church of the Lord, which He has acquired for Himself through His own blood.””
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you, not sparing the flock. Even from among your own number, men will arise, speaking twisted things to draw followers after them.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

Leaders were chosen for sound teaching

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

The Apostolic Constitutions list what to look for when appointing bishops, presbyters and deacons. Along with a godly life, they must be able to teach and handle the Lord's teachings rightly.

3 “First, appoint bishops worthy of the Lord, and presbyters and deacons: men who are godly, righteous, gentle, free from the love of money, lovers of truth, approved, holy, not showing partiality, able to teach the word of godliness, and rightly dividing the doctrines of the Lord, as in”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 15, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Learn the truth from faithful successors

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

Irenaeus tells believers where to find true teaching: with the presbyters who stand in the line from the apostles and whose life and speech are sound. He says such men explain the Scriptures safely.

4 “Therefore, where the gifts of the Lord have been placed, we must learn the truth from those who possess the succession of the Church from the apostles, and among whom is found conduct that is sound and blameless, as well as speech that is unadulterated and incorrupt.”

later in the same passage

“They explain the Scriptures to us without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonoring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 7

Avoid teachers who leave apostolic doctrine

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

Irenaeus says believers should hold to leaders who keep the apostles' doctrine and live blamelessly. Their sound speech serves to strengthen and correct others, while those who stray are to be avoided.

5 “From all such persons, then, it is necessary for us to keep away, but to adhere to those who, as I have already mentioned, hold the doctrine of the apostles, and who, along with the order of priesthood, demonstrate sound speech and blameless conduct for the confirmation and correction of others.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 6, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 6 OF 7

One preaching under one bishop

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

Ignatius urges a church to keep one faith and one preaching, tied to the one bishop with his presbyters and deacons. He also tells believers to be grounded in the teachings of the Lord and the apostles together with their leaders.

6 “Therefore, I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and urge you to have only one faith, and one type of preaching, and one Eucharist.”

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

Source 1, page 6 Read it in the library ›

7 “Therefore, strive to be grounded in the teachings of the Lord and the apostles, so that everything you do may prosper, both physically and spiritually, in faith and love, with your most admirable bishop, and the well-organized spiritual assembly of your presbytery, and the deacons who are according to God.”

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

Source 3, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 7 OF 7

No one should seize authority not given

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

The Apostolic Constitutions charge each person to stay in his appointed place, since church order is God's. Tertullian warns that rivalry against the bishop's office breeds splits in the church.

8 “Now this is what we all together charge you: let each one remain in the rank appointed to him, and do not go beyond his proper bounds. For these are not ours, but God's.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 14, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

9 “Rivalry against the episcopal office is the mother of schisms.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Baptism* 17 **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not lay out a step-by-step process for approving each preacher.
- Tertullian allows laymen to act in cases of need, so the passages do not show that every act of ministry waited on a bishop.
- 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 19 early Christian passages and 73 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–19, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 20–60, in Bible order), then 32 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).

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *19 passages from 9 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 1–3*

1 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “presbyters, and deacons, and the rest of the clergy, together with all the people, and the soldiers, and the governors, and Cæsar [himself], to the bishop… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistle to the Trallians* (1885 English; on point 6) “in harmony among yourselves, and in supplication… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever ye do, may prosper, both in the flesh and spirit, in faith… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 4–6*

4 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “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 ›**

5 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “heed, therefore, both to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has placed you as bishops, to rule the Church of the Lord, which He has… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “From all such persons, therefore, it behoves us to keep aloof, but to adhere to those who, as I have already observed, do hold the doctrine of the apostles, and… [continues online] **read ›**

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

7 *Stromata* 7.1 (1885 English) “also, in the Church, the elders attend to the department which has improvement for its object… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *On Prescription Against Heretics* 44 (1885 English; on point 5) “to my own disciples did I give a charge, that they should preach the same things to you… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *On Baptism* 17 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** “how much more is the rule of reverence and modesty incumbent on laymen— seeing that these powers belong to their superiors — lest they assume to themselves the specific function of… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 10–13*

10 *Epistles* (on point 7) to you to be a bishop who, after a bishop had been appointed in the Church by sixteen fellow bishops, strives through bribery to be made a corrupt and outsider… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 7) “warning, indeed, our presbyters and deacons ought to have given you, that they might cherish the sheep committed to their care, and by the divine authority might instruct them in… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 7) “what danger ought we not to fear from the Lord's displeasure, when some of the presbyters, remembering neither the Gospel nor their own place, and, moreover, considering neither the… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Epistles* “it is the duty of those placed over them to keep the… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 14–16*

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 8, page 5** yourselves are not ignorant of them. For you certainly know that those named by us bishops, and presbyters, and deacons, were made so by prayer and by the laying on… [continues online] **read ›**

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15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "Do you first ordain bishops worthy of the Lord, and presbyters and deacons, pious men, righteous, meek, free from the love of money, lovers of truth, approved, holy, not accepters… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 3) "But concerning bishops, we have heard from our Lord, that a pastor who is to be ordained a bishop for the churches in every parish, must be unblameable, unreprovable, free… [continues online] **read ›**

Alexander of Alexandria, *c. 313–328 AD · source 17*

17 *Epistles on the Arian Heresy* 1 (on point 2) things at great length. For you yourselves are taught by God, and you are not ignorant that this doctrine, which has lately raised its head against the piety of the… [continues online] **read ›**

Anonymous · *source 18*

18 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (on point 5) a view, especially no one ordained in any clerical office at all, and much more in the order of bishops, it is a shocking thing for bishops themselves to devise… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 19*

19 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 1, page 2** "Thus, preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits of… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *41 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

20 **Numbers 27:16** "Let the Lord God of the spirits and of all flesh select a man over this congregation, **read ›**

21 **Numbers 27:17** who shall go out before them and who shall come in before them, who shall lead them out and who shall bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep that have no shepherd." **read ›**

22 **Numbers 27:19** Set him before Eleazar the priest, and give him a charge before all the congregation, and give a charge concerning him before them. **read ›**

23 **Joshua 4:16** "Command the priests who carry the ark of the covenant of the testimony of the Lord to come up out of the Jordan." **read ›**

24 **Ezra 7:2** the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, **read ›**

25 **Ezra 9:4** Then everyone who followed the word of the God of Israel gathered to me because of the faithlessness of the exiles; and I sat still in silence until the evening sacrifice. **read ›**

26 **Proverbs 14:19** The evil will fall before the good, and the ungodly will wait at the doors of the righteous. **read ›**

27 **Ecclesiastes 3:15** What has been already is, and what is to be has already been; and God will seek the one who is pursued. **read ›**

28 **Isaiah 15:3** Wrap yourselves in sackcloth in her squares, and lament on her rooftops and in her lanes; all of you, wail with weeping. **read ›**

29 **Isaiah 60:17** And instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and instead of iron I will bring you silver, and instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and instead of stones, iron; and I will set your rulers in peace and your overseers in righteousness. **read ›**

30 **Daniel 2:11** For the thing that the king asks is difficult, and there is no one else who can declare it before the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with any flesh." **read ›**

31 **1 Esdras 5:40** And Nehemiah and Attharias told them not to share in the holy things until a high priest should arise clothed with the Manifestation and the Truth. **read ›**

32 **1 Esdras 7:2** supervised the holy works very carefully, working together with the elders of the Jews and the temple officials. **read ›**

33 **1 Esdras 8:46** commanding them to speak to Loddaeus and his brothers and the treasurers at that place, to send us men to serve as priests in the house of our Lord. **read ›**

34 **1 Esdras 8:59** Keep watch and guard them until you deliver them to the chiefs of the priests and the Levites and to the leaders of the families of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of our God." **read ›**

35 **1 Esdras 9:4** and that whoever did not come within two or three days, according to the judgment of the ruling elders, should have his cattle given over to the temple, and he himself should be cut off from the multitude of the captivity. **read ›**

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36 **Wisdom of Sirach 8:9** Do not miss the talk of the elders, for they themselves learned from their fathers; because from them you will learn understanding, and how to give an answer in time of need. **read ›**

37 **Wisdom of Sirach 10:20** Among brothers their leader is honored, and those who fear the Lord in his eyes. **read ›**

38 **Wisdom of Sirach 48:10** you were written down for rebukes at the appointed times, to calm anger before wrath, to turn the heart of a father to his son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. **read ›**

39 **Susanna 1:34** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

40 **Susanna 1:50** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

41 **1 Maccabees 4:42** He chose unblemished priests, devoted to the law; **read ›**

42 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

43 **2 Maccabees 3:15** The priests, throwing themselves down before the altar in their priestly robes, called toward heaven upon him who had given the law about deposits, that he would keep them safe for those who had deposited them. **read ›**

44 **4 Maccabees 15:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **1 Enoch 89:59** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

46 **Luke 10:16** Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me. Whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.” **read ›**

47 **Acts 9:14** Here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” **read ›**

48 **Acts 14:23** They appointed elders for them in every church and, after prayer with fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. **read ›**

49 **Acts 20:28** Therefore pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock among whom the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, to shepherd the church of the Lord and God, which he purchased with his own blood. **read ›**

50 **1 Timothy 1:3** As I urged you when I was going into Macedonia, stay at Ephesus that you might command certain men not to teach a different doctrine, **read ›**

51 **1 Timothy 3:1** The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a good work. **read ›**

52 **1 Timothy 3:2** The bishop therefore must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable, able to teach; **read ›**

53 **1 Timothy 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. **read ›**

54 **1 Timothy 5:19** Do not receive an accusation against an elder except at the word of two or three witnesses. **read ›**

55 **Titus 1:5** I left you in Crete for this reason, that you would set in order the things that were lacking and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you— **read ›**

56 **Titus 1:7** For a bishop must be blameless as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain, **read ›**

57 **Titus 1:9** holding firmly to the trustworthy word that accords with the teaching, so that he may both exhort by sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. **read ›**

58 **Titus 2:1** But say the things which fit sound doctrine, **read ›**

59 **1 Peter 5:1** I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed: **read ›**

60 **1 Peter 5:2** shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily; not for dishonest gain, but willingly; **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *32 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 63:3

Matthew 5:5 · 5:6 · 5:7 · 5:8 · 10:5 · 12:36 · 12:37 · 28:19

Mark 7:9 · 13:35

Luke 11:23 · 12:35 · 12:47 · 12:50

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John 10:30 · 14:8 · 20:22
Acts 1:8 · 9:5
1 Corinthians 1:10 · 6:10 · 9:25 · 10:23 · 14:33 · 14:34
2 Corinthians 5:10
Galatians 3:27
Ephesians 4:2
Philippians 1:18
2 Timothy 2:15
1 John 2:27

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did early church bishops and elders guard what was preached and who taught?” on May 9, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY