THE QUESTION

Did Origen teach Christians to live a life of virtue?

Asked by a THF member on October 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 6 early Christian passages and 91 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-origen-teach-christians-to-live-a-life-of-virtue

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

Yes. In these passages Origen clearly urges a life of virtue. He says people deserve praise when they practice virtue, that wanting what is good is itself virtuous, and that even very wicked people can change. He also says God does the greater part. His student Gregory says Origen taught virtue by his own example.

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 8

Practicing virtue deserves praise

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

Origen says reason lets people weigh virtue and vice, choose the good and turn from evil. Because the choice is ours, he says we are praised for giving ourselves to virtue and blamed for the opposite.

1 “Therefore, since reason naturally has helps for considering virtue and vice, by following these, after seeing good and evil, we choose the one and avoid the other. So we deserve praise when we give ourselves to the practice of virtue, and blame when we do the opposite.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

How we respond is our own choice

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

Origen grants that outside events stir us in ways we do not control. But he says how we use those moments belongs to our own reason, which can move us toward what is right.

2 “But deciding that we will use what has happened in this way or in a different way belongs to nothing but the reason within us. As occasion arises, it stirs us to efforts that move us toward what is virtuous and fitting, or turns us aside to the opposite.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 8

Wanting and chasing the good is virtuous

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

Answering people who said salvation is not in our power, Origen argues that desiring good things and running after them cannot be neutral. He concludes it is a virtuous act, as the holy ones show.

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3 “For all holy men both desire blessings and run after them, and they certainly are not blameworthy.”

later in the same passage

“It is established, then, that to desire and follow after blessings is not an indifferent act, but a virtuous one.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

Even the wicked can learn to live virtuously

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

Against a critic who said people cannot really change, Origen compares virtue to a skill gained by practice. If people can train to walk a tightrope, he asks, why could they not learn to live by virtue?

4 “For deliberate choice and practice help greatly in accomplishing things that seem very difficult and, to speak hyperbolically, almost impossible.”

later in the same passage

“Has human nature, when desiring to walk on a rope stretched through the air in the middle of the theater, and at the same time to carry many heavy weights, been able by practice and attention to accomplish such a feat; but when desiring to live in conformity with virtue, does it find it impossible to do so, although formerly it may have been extremely wicked?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 69 **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›
(c. 215–254 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 8

Freedom from sin needs the saving word

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

Origen does not say people become sinless by effort alone. He says those who are changed became so after giving themselves to the saving word, and that without its help no one becomes free from sin.

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5 “For apart from the aid of the word, and that too the word of perfection, it is impossible for a man to become free from sin.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 69 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 6 OF 8

God does the greater part of our growth

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

Origen uses farming and sailing as pictures. The farmer and the sailor do real work, but God gives the harvest and the safe voyage. In the same way, he says, our effort matters but God's work is far greater.

6 “So also our own perfection is brought about not as though we ourselves do nothing, for it is not completed by us; rather, God brings about the greater part of it.”

later in the same passage

“And in the matter of our salvation, what God does is infinitely greater than what we do ourselves.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 1, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 8

Origen taught virtue by his own example

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

Gregory Thaumaturgus, who studied under Origen, says other teachers had only words. Origen, he says, showed the life he taught by his deeds first, and only spoke of it with a sincere mind set on living it.

7 “This man, however, was the first who moved me to practice philosophy by his words, because he showed the call to it by his deeds before he gave it in words.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Gregory Thaumaturgus,** *Oration to Origen* 1 (c. 240–270 AD) **Source 6, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 8 OF 8

He trained students in every virtue

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

Gregory says Origen pushed his students toward both right action and right teaching. He names righteousness, prudence, temperance and fortitude as virtues Origen trained them in, not in part but as a whole.

8

> "For he pressed us toward both deed and doctrine, and led us on by that same view and method, not merely into some small part of each virtue, but rather into the whole of it, if perhaps we were able to receive it."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Gregory Thaumaturgus,** *Oration to Origen* 1 (c. 240–270 AD) **Source 6, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages show Origen's teaching on virtue and choice, not every part of his thought.
- Gregory's speech praises his own teacher, so it shows a grateful student's view.
- 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 6 early Christian passages and 91 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–6, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 7–93, in Bible order), then 4 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 *6 passages from 2 writers*

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 1–5*

1 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “whether the desire to run in order to reach the goal in the pursuit of what is good be worthy of praise or censure… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Against Celsus* 69 (1885 English) **Quotes 4, 5, pages 3, 4** “when desiring to live in conformity with the practice of virtue, does it find it impossible to do so, although formerly it may have been exceedingly wicked… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Commentary on John* 2 let us look at the words, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." That is the same as saying that He is not the God… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 **Quote 3, page 3** “is established, then, that to desire and follow after blessings is not an… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 2, page 2** “since there are in the nature of reason aids towards the contemplation of virtue and vice, by following which, after beholding good and evil, we select the one and avoid… [continues online] **read ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 6*

6 *Oration to Origen* 1 **Quotes 7, 8, pages 4, 5** them established their philosophy only in words. This man, however, was the first who moved me to practice philosophy by his words, because he showed the call to it by… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *87 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

7 **Proverbs 1:3** also to receive the turns of words, and to understand true righteousness, and to direct judgment; **read ›**

8 **Proverbs 11:19** A righteous son is born for life, but the pursuit of the ungodly is for death. **read ›**

9 **Proverbs 12:28** In the ways of righteousness is life, but the ways of those who bear grudges lead to death. **read ›**

10 **Proverbs 21:21** The way of righteousness and acts of mercy will find life and glory. **read ›**

11 **Ecclesiastes 7:15** I have seen all things in the days of my vanity: there is a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and there is an ungodly man remaining in his wickedness. **read ›**

12 **Song of Solomon 3:5** I have charged you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and by the strengths of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. **read ›**

13 **Isaiah 1:2** Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken: I have begotten sons and raised them up, but they have rejected me. **read ›**

14 **Isaiah 1:15** When you stretch out your hands, I will turn my eyes away from you; and if you multiply your pleas, I will not listen to you; for your hands are full of blood. **read ›**

15 **Isaiah 1:18** And come, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like crimson, I will make them white as snow; and though they are like scarlet, I will make them white as wool. **read ›**

16 **Isaiah 5:23** who justify the ungodly for gifts, and take away the right of the righteous. **read ›**

17 **Isaiah 7:22** and it shall be that, from drinking a great deal of milk, everyone who is left upon the land shall eat butter and honey. **read ›**

18 **Isaiah 9:8** The Lord has sent death upon Jacob, and it has come upon Israel. (Septuagint Isaiah 9:7 (Isaiah 9:8 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

19 **Isaiah 11:5** And he will have righteousness tied around his waist, and his sides wrapped with truth. **read ›**

20 **Isaiah 14:3** And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will give you rest from your anguish and your anger, and from your hard slavery, in which you served them. **read ›**

21 **Isaiah 17:12** Woe to the multitude of many nations! Like the surging sea, so you will be troubled; and the back of many nations will roar like water. **read ›**

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22 **Jeremiah 17:26** And they will come from the cities of Judah and from around Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the land of the plain, and from the hill country, and from the south, bringing whole burnt offerings and sacrifices and incense and grain offerings and frankincense, bringing praise to the house of the Lord. **read ›**

23 **Jeremiah 33:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

24 **Hosea 5:1** Hear these things, O priests, and attend, O house of Israel, and give ear, O house of the king, for the judgment is against you, because you have become a trap to Scopia, and like a net spread out upon Itabyrion, **read ›**

25 **Amos 4:1** Hear this word, you young cows of the land of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor and trample the needy, who say to their lords, “Give us, that we may drink.” **read ›**

26 **Amos 5:19** It is as if a man should flee from the face of a lion, and a bear meet him; and he should rush into his house and lean his hands on the wall, and a serpent bite him. **read ›**

27 **Amos 6:10** and the rest shall be left behind; and their relatives shall take them, and shall press hard to carry their bones out of the house; and one shall say to those in charge of the house, “Is there still anyone with you?” And he shall say, “No one else.” And he shall say, “Be silent, so as not to name the name of the Lord.” **read ›**

28 **Amos 8:7** The Lord swears by the pride of Jacob: None of your works shall ever be forgotten. **read ›**

29 **Wisdom of Solomon 4:1** Better is childlessness with virtue, for in the memory of virtue is immortality, because it is known both before God and before men. **read ›**

30 **Wisdom of Solomon 5:19** he will take holiness as an invincible shield, **read ›**

31 **Wisdom of Solomon 6:10** For those who keep holy things in holiness will be made holy, and those who have been taught them will find a defense. **read ›**

32 **Wisdom of Solomon 8:7** And if anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches self-control and sound judgment, righteousness and courage, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these. **read ›**

33 **Wisdom of Sirach 9:15** And let your reasoning be with men of understanding, and all your talk in the law of the Most High. **read ›**

34 **Wisdom of Sirach 27:11** The talk of a godly man is always wisdom, but the fool changes like the moon. **read ›**

35 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:12** But be continually with a godly man, whom you know to keep the commandments, whose soul is like your soul, and who will grieve with you if you stumble. **read ›**

36 **Wisdom of Sirach 41:13** A good life has a number of days, but a good name remains forever. **read ›**

37 **3 Maccabees 3:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

38 **4 Maccabees 1:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

39 **4 Maccabees 1:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

40 **4 Maccabees 1:18** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

41 **4 Maccabees 5:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

42 **4 Maccabees 7:22** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

43 **4 Maccabees 9:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

44 **4 Maccabees 9:31** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **4 Maccabees 11:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

46 **4 Maccabees 14:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

47 **4 Maccabees 17:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

48 **1 Enoch 92:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

49 **1 Enoch 94:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

50 **Luke 1:75** in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. **read ›**

51 **Luke 12:23** Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. **read ›**

52 **Acts 24:16** In this I also strive always to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. **read ›**

53 **Acts 26:7** which our twelve tribes, earnestly serving night and day, hope to attain. Concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa! **read ›**

54 **Romans 2:7** to those who by perseverance in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life; **read ›**

55 **Romans 5:7** For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a good person someone would even dare to die. **read ›**

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56 **Romans 6:2** May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer? **read ›**

57 **2 Corinthians 7:1** Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. **read ›**

58 **Galatians 6:8** For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. **read ›**

59 **Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but only what is good for building others up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear. **read ›**

60 **Philippians 1:27** Only let your conduct as citizens be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for faithfulness to the gospel, **read ›**

61 **Philippians 4:8** Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are well spoken of—if there is any virtue and if there is any praise—think on these things. **read ›**

62 **Colossians 4:6** Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. **read ›**

63 **1 Thessalonians 4:4** that each one of you know how to control his own body in sanctification and honor, **read ›**

64 **1 Thessalonians 4:7** For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. **read ›**

65 **1 Timothy 2:10** but with good works, which is appropriate for women professing godliness. **read ›**

66 **1 Timothy 3:9** holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. **read ›**

67 **1 Timothy 4:8** For bodily exercise has some value, but godliness has value in all things, having the promise of the life which is now and of that which is to come. **read ›**

68 **1 Timothy 4:12** Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the faithful in speech, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faithfulness, in purity. **read ›**

69 **1 Timothy 5:6** But she who gives herself to pleasure is dead while she lives. **read ›**

70 **2 Timothy 2:21** If anyone therefore cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful to the master, prepared for every good work. **read ›**

71 **2 Timothy 3:12** And all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. **read ›**

72 **Titus 2:7** In all things show yourself an example of good works. In your teaching, show integrity, seriousness, incorruptibility, **read ›**

73 **Titus 2:8** and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. **read ›**

74 **Titus 2:10** not stealing, but showing good faithfulness in every way, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. **read ›**

75 **Titus 2:12** training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and in godliness in this present age, **read ›**

76 **Hebrews 12:14** Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord, **read ›**

77 **James 1:12** Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to those who love him. **read ›**

78 **James 3:13** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show his works by good conduct in the meekness of wisdom. **read ›**

79 **1 Peter 1:15** but just as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior, **read ›**

80 **1 Peter 1:16** because it is written: Be holy, for I am holy. **read ›**

81 **1 Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct good among the nations, so that, where they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation. **read ›**

82 **1 Peter 3:2** when they see your pure conduct in fear. **read ›**

83 **1 Peter 3:10** For the one who desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. **read ›**

84 **1 Peter 3:13** Now who will harm you if you become imitators of that which is good? **read ›**

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85 **1 Peter 3:16** having a good conscience, so that, when they speak against you as evildoers, those who malign your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. **read ›**

86 **1 Peter 4:2** that you no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. **read ›**

87 **2 Peter 1:3** since his divine power has granted us all things pertaining to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us through glory and virtue, **read ›**

88 **2 Peter 1:5** And for this very reason, bringing all diligence, supply virtue in your faithfulness, and knowledge in virtue, **read ›**

89 **2 Peter 1:6** and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, perseverance; and in perseverance, godliness; **read ›**

90 **2 Peter 1:7** and in godliness, brotherly affection; and in brotherly affection, love. **read ›**

91 **2 Peter 3:11** Therefore, since all these things are being dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **read ›**

92 **1 John 3:7** Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who practices righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. **read ›**

93 **3 John 1:11** Beloved, do not imitate evil, but good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *4 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.

Matthew 5:16

Romans 9:16

1 Timothy 4:16

Hebrews 11:16

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “Did Origen teach Christians to live a life of virtue?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-origen-teach-christians-to-live-a-life-of-virtue. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 5.”

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THE END OF THIS STUDY