THE QUESTION

Did the early Christians call anyone besides Jesus a head?

Asked by a THF member on April 19, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 21 early Christian passages and 101 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-christians-call-anyone-besides-jesus-a-head

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

Yes. Early Christian writers also called a husband the head of his wife, and God the Father the head of Christ. But Christ alone is called the head of the Church. Bishops led the elders, yet the only passage here that calls a church leader head is a later church manual, about a chief bishop.

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 6

A husband is called his wife's head

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

Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200, explains head as ruling power. He says the Lord is head of the man and the man is head of the woman. He then quotes Ephesians 5:21-29, which calls the husband head of the wife, as Christ is head of the Church, and tells husbands to love their wives as their own bodies.

1

“The ruling power, therefore, is the head. And if the Lord is head of the man, and the man is head of the woman, then the man, being the image and glory of God, is lord of the woman.”

later in the same passage

“Therefore it is also written in the Epistle to the Ephesians, “Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church. So men also ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man has ever yet hated his own flesh.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.8 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

God the Father is called Christ's head

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

Following 1 Corinthians 11:3, writers call the Father the head of Christ. Clement quotes this directly. Cyprian uses the same chain, Christ head of the man and God head of Christ, to say that tearing a martyr's head was an attack on God and Christ.

2

“In another sense, we have heard it said, "The head of Christ is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," as in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 5.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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3 “Before he tortured the other limbs, he tore the skin from his head with the hair, no doubt with purpose in his hatred. For since Christ is the head of the man, and God is the head of Christ, he who tore the head in the martyr was persecuting God and Christ in that head.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 15, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Christ alone is head of the Church

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

When writers speak of the head of the Church, they name only Christ, citing Ephesians 5:23. Clement calls the Savior the Head of the Church and links it to his royal rule. Dionysius says that because Christ is the Church's head, the wise walk in his way.

4 “Also, the broad gold mitre shows the royal power of the Lord, since the Head of the Church is the Savior, as Ephesians 5:23 says. The mitre that is on it, that is, on the head, is a sign of most royal rule.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 5.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

5 “Again, Christ is the head of the Church, Ephesians 5:23. Therefore, those who walk in His way are wise, for He Himself has said, "I am the way,"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Dionysius of Alexandria,** *Exegetical Fragments* 2 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 14, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Tertullian: no room for another head

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

Tertullian reads Paul's word head as authority that belongs to the one who made us. Because man is the Creator's image, he says, there is no room for another head. He is arguing against Marcion's rival god, so his point is about God, not about church leaders.

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6 “Here he has used "head" to mean authority. Now authority belongs to no one except the author.”

later in the same passage

“For if I am the image of the Creator, there is no room in me for another head.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

Ignatius has bishops lead elders, not called head

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

Ignatius tells churches to follow the bishop, with the elders (the presbytery) and deacons, and to do nothing in church matters without him. He praises elders who submit to a young bishop, saying they really submit to the Father. So one bishop led the elders, but in these passages Ignatius does not call him the head.

7 “Ensure that you all follow the bishop, just as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as being the institution of God. Let no one do anything related to the Church without the bishop.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

8 “It 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 have seen even holy elders do. 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 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 6 OF 6

A later manual calls a chief bishop head

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

The Apostolic Constitutions, a later church manual from the 300s, tells the bishops of a region to regard their chief bishop as their head. Even so, each bishop runs his own area, the chief must also act with everyone's consent, and the goal is unity that glorifies God through Christ.

9

> "The bishops of every country ought to know who is chief among them and regard him as their head. They should not do any important thing without his consent. But each one should manage only the matters that belong to his own parish and the places under it. But let him also do nothing without the consent of all. For in this way there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through Christ in the Holy Spirit."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 17, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- Only the later Apostolic Constitutions calls a church leader head, and only as head of the other bishops in a region, never of the whole Church.
- None of these passages uses the title head elder, and they do not show when Christians first called a church officer head or whether every church spoke this way.
- 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 21 early Christian passages and 101 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–21, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 22–56, in Bible order), then 66 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 *21 passages from 8 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 1–5*

1 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (1885 English; on point 5) “bishop to Christ, even as Christ to the Father… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English; on point 5) “ye subject to the bishop, and to one another, as Jesus Christ to the Father, according to the flesh, and the apostles to Christ, and to the Father, and to… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (1885 English; on point 5) “bishop to Christ, even as He is to the Father… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* **Quote 7, page 4** “Ensure that you all follow the bishop, just as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and respect the deacons as being the institution of God. Let no one do anything related to the Church without the bishop.” **read ›**

5 *Epistle to the Magnesians* **Quote 8, page 4** “It 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 have seen even holy elders do. 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.” **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 6*

6 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English; on point 3) “holding the Head, from which the whole body of the Church, having been fitted together, takes increase”—that is, acknowledging the advent in the flesh of the Son of God… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 7–9*

7 *Stromata* 4.8 **Quote 1, page 2** “ruling power, therefore, is the head. And if the Lord is head of the man, and the man is head of the woman, then the man, being the image and… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Stromata* 5.6 (1885 English) **Quotes 2, 4, pages 2, 3** “otherwise we have heard it said, The Head of Christ is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Stromata* 4.8 (1885 English; on point 1) I would have you know, says the apostle, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man: for the man is not… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 10–12*

10 *Against Marcion* 8 **Quote 6, page 4** “head of every man is Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:3 What Christ, if He is not the author of man? Here he has used "head" to mean authority. Now authority… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Against Marcion* 8 (on point 3) “he says, "even as Christ is the head of the Church… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *De Corona* 14 (on point 3) less may the Christian put the service of idolatry on his own head. No, I might have said, upon Christ, since Christ is the Head of the Christian man. For… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 13*

13 *Against Celsus* 79 (on point 3) “since Christ is the Head of the Church, so that Christ and the Church form one body, the… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 14*

14 *Exegetical Fragments* 2 **Quote 5, page 3** “Christ is the head of the Church… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 15*

15 *Treatises* **Quote 3, page 3** “since Christ is the head of the man, and God is the head of Christ, he who tore the head in the martyr was persecuting God and Christ in that… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 16–21*

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) “the head of Christ is God, even His Father… [continues online] **read ›**

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17 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** "The bishops of every country ought to know who is the chief among them, and to esteem him as their head, and not to do any great thing without his… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) with the presbytery and the bishops who are present, and let them give their consent. And let the chief of the bishops ask the presbytery and the people whether this… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) if the head of the wife be the man… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) if the man be the head of the woman… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) "is your ruler and governor. He is your king and potentate… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *35 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

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

23 **Matthew 14:11** His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. **read ›**

24 **Matthew 17:8** Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone. **read ›**

25 **Matthew 20:25** But Jesus summoned them, and said, "You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **read ›**

26 **Matthew 21:42** Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? **read ›**

27 **Matthew 23:8** But you are not to be called 'Rabbi', for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers. **read ›**

28 **Matthew 23:10** Neither be called teachers, for one is your teacher, the Christ. **read ›**

29 **Mark 10:42** Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that they who are recognized as rulers over the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **read ›**

30 **Luke 3:5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked places shall become straight, and the rough ways shall become smooth roads. **read ›**

31 **John 13:9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" **read ›**

32 **Acts 3:2** A man lame from his mother's womb was being carried. They laid him daily at the temple gate called Beautiful to ask alms from those entering the temple. **read ›**

33 **Acts 7:9** The patriarchs, moved with jealousy against Joseph, sold him into Egypt. God was with him **read ›**

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

35 **Romans 1:6** among whom you are also called to belong to Jesus Christ; **read ›**

36 **1 Corinthians 3:11** For no one can lay another foundation besides the one laid, which is Jesus Christ. **read ›**

37 **1 Corinthians 11:3** But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. **read ›**

38 **Ephesians 1:22** And he subjected all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the church, **read ›**

39 **Ephesians 2:20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, **read ›**

40 **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, and he is the Savior of the body. **read ›**

41 **Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, **read ›**

42 **Philippians 2:15** so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **read ›**

43 **Philippians 3:3** For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh, **read ›**

44 **Colossians 1:18** He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence. **read ›**

45 **Colossians 2:10** and you have been made full in him, who is the head of every principality and power. **read ›**

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46 **Colossians 2:19** and not holding firmly to the head, from whom the whole body, supplied and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with the growth that comes from God. **read ›**

47 **Colossians 4:11** Jesus, who is called Justus, also greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision who are my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. **read ›**

48 **1 Timothy 2:2** for kings and all who are in high places, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence. **read ›**

49 **1 Timothy 2:12** But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness. **read ›**

50 **1 Timothy 3:4** one who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all reverence; **read ›**

51 **1 Timothy 3:15** but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. **read ›**

52 **1 Timothy 6:15** which at its proper times he will show—the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **read ›**

53 **Hebrews 3:1** Therefore, holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus Christ, **read ›**

54 **1 Peter 2:13** Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme, **read ›**

55 **1 Peter 5:3** not as lording it over those entrusted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock. **read ›**

56 **3 John 1:9** I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *66 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.

1 Chronicles 16:22

Psalms 45:3

Isaiah 8:4

Matthew 6:10 · 12:36 · 28:19

Luke 10:27 · 16:16 · 22:15

John 10:34 · 12:34 · 15:25 · 20:22

Acts 2:17

Romans 5:19 · 6:12

1 Corinthians 4:15 · 5:13 · 7:29 · 11:5 · 11:7 · 11:9 · 11:10 · 11:18 · 11:23 · 12:1 · 12:4 · 12:8 · 12:12 · 12:31 · 13:1 · 14:21 · 14:25 · 14:26 · 14:34

2 Corinthians 6:17 · 11:31

Galatians 1:8 · 4:4 · 4:19 · 5:16 · 5:22

Ephesians 3:8 · 3:10 · 4:8 · 4:16 · 4:25 · 4:26 · 5:11 · 5:18 · 5:19 · 5:21 · 5:22 · 5:28 · 5:29 · 5:31 · 5:32 · 6:2 · 6:4 · 6:11 · 6:12 · 6:19

Colossians 3:3 · 3:11 · 3:18 · 4:1

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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