THE QUESTION

Did the early Christians look down on people who are overweight?

Asked by a THF member on April 13, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 15 early Christian passages and 112 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-look-down-on-people-who-are-overweight

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

These passages never single out overweight people for scorn. What the early writers warn against is gluttony, luxury, and living for the belly. They treat food as a good gift from God, call Christians to self-control and thanksgiving, and tell believers not to despise one another over what they eat.

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.

IN THIS STUDY

1	The concern was gluttony, not body size	2
2	Food is a good gift from God	2
3	Freedom in food is not permission for excess	3
4	Clement aims at the greed of rich feasters	3
5	Believers must not despise each other over food	4
6	Overeating can dull the soul and prayer	4
7	Clement reads the food laws as self-control training	5
8	In Scripture, fat can also mean rich blessing	5
	What these passages don't tell us	5
	The Sources: 15 early Christian passages and 112 Bible verses, with links	6

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

POINT 1 OF 8

The concern was gluttony, not body size

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

Origen explains why Christians are careful about food. His rule is not about how a person looks. It is about why a person eats. Christians should not eat just to please their appetite, but should keep in mind the health and strength of the body.

1 “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 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

Food is a good gift from God

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

The early church did not treat eating as shameful. The Apostolic Constitutions tell believers to enjoy the good things of the land with a right heart, because every good and pleasant thing belongs to God. Novatian adds Paul's teaching that nothing God made should be refused when it is received with thanks.

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 14, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

3 “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Novatian,** *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (c. 240–258 AD) **Source 11, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

POINT 3 OF 8

Freedom in food is not permission for excess

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

Novatian says the gospel set Christians free from the old food laws. But he warns that this freedom does not open the door to luxury. He says Christ gave the strongest teaching of all against gluttony, and Paul taught being content with simple food and clothing.

4

> "But from the fact that we are given freedom in foods, it does not necessarily follow that luxury is allowed to us. Nor, because the Gospel has dealt very generously with us, has it removed self-control."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "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 10, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

Clement aims at the greed of rich feasters

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

Clement's sharpest words are for wealthy people who search the whole world for fancy dishes. His target is greed and luxury, the habit of spending life chasing rich food. He does not mock anyone's body. He says he feels sorry for this sickness of the soul.

5

> "In their greed and anxious effort, these gluttons seem to drag-net the whole world in order to satisfy their luxurious tastes."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "There is no limit to self-indulgence among people."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.1 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

POINT 5 OF 8

Believers must not despise each other over food

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

Clement tells Christians to eat what is set before them in a modest way. He quotes Paul's command that the one who eats must not despise the one who does not, and the other way around. For Clement, the right food is thanksgiving. That leaves no room for looking down on a brother.

6 “Let him who eats, not despise him who eats not; and let him who eats not, not judge him who eats.""

later in the same passage

“So the right food is thanksgiving. And the one who gives thanks does not spend his time in pleasures.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.1 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 8

Overeating can dull the soul and prayer

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

Dionysius warns that feeding the flesh in luxury stirs it up against the spirit. Cyprian says God warned the church to eat simply and drink moderately, so that a mind weighed down by feasting would not grow lazy in prayer. The danger they name is spiritual, not about appearance.

7 “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 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

8 “But by these divine condescensions we are also warned about a simple diet and a moderate use of drink, so that worldly temptation may not weaken the heart now lifted up with heavenly strength, and so that the mind, weighed down by too much feasting, may not be less watchful in prayers and supplication.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 13, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

POINT 7 OF 8

Clement reads the food laws as self-control training

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

Clement says the law of Moses forbade some fatty animals, like the pig, to train God's people in self-control. He does not apply this to people's bodies. He uses it to teach that Christians must rule the belly and their desires.

9

“And it prepares us in advance to gain self-control by forbidding us to eat things that are naturally fatty, such as the pig, which is heavy with flesh.”

later in the same passage

“If, then, we must exercise control over the belly, and over what is below the belly, it is clear that long ago we heard from the Lord, through the law, that we must restrain lust.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 2.20 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

In Scripture, fat can also mean rich blessing

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

Not every use of the word fat was negative. Hippolytus reads a promise of fat, rich bread as a picture of the Christian calling. He says Christ himself is that rich bread. So the early writers could use fat as a sign of God's goodness, not only of excess.

10

“We understand this as a figure of our calling, for "fat" means rich. And whose bread is rich, if not ours? For the Lord is our bread, as He Himself says: "I am the bread of life."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages talks directly about overweight people or how the church treated them.
- They do not say that a person's size shows whether he is godly or sinful.

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

- The writers focus on the heart and habits behind eating, so they give no health or weight rules.
- 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 15 early Christian passages and 112 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–15, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 16–65, in Bible order), then 62 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 *15 passages from 9 writers*

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 1–4*

1 *Instructor* 2.1 **Quote 5, page 3** "we who seek the heavenly bread must rule the belly, which is… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Instructor* 2.1 (on point 4) "just as righteousness is not gained by greed, nor temperance by excess, so the way of life of a Christian is not formed by indulgence. For the table of truth… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Instructor* 2.1 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "called ὀψοφαγία, is nothing but excess in the use of relishes (ὄψον… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Stromata* 2.20 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** "these surpass other fishes in fleshiness and fatness… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 5*

5 *On Fasting* 17 (1885 English) "these it is not by robustness of flesh and blood, but of faith and spirit, that it behooves us to make our antagonistic stand… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 **Quote 10, page 5** "fat" means rich. And whose bread is rich, if not ours… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (1885 English; on point 8) "And that the land was fat; that is, the flesh of our Lord: fat, that is, rich… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 8*

8 *Against Celsus* 30 **Quote 1, page 2** "we are to avoid eating for gluttony, or… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 9*

9 *Exegetical Fragments* 2 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "how should not intemperate eatings and drinkings also be contrary to God… [continues online] **read ›**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “whom, obeying the government of their belly and their palate, the material of their lusts could never be wanting, so that their servitude could not cease… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 **Quote 3, page 2** 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 ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Treatises* (1885 English) “feeding at rich banquets, and puffed out with fuller dainties, belches forth on the next day his indigestions, and does not dispense of his meat and drink so as to… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Epistles* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “that, in the meantime, there is a little delay, that some who still remain may be proved… [continues online] **read ›**

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

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

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 15*

15 *Writings* “rebuke calamity. O belly, stuff yourself out with luxury… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *50 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

16 **Leviticus 7:25** Everyone who eats fat from the cattle from which he brings a burnt offering to the Lord, that person shall perish from his people. **read ›**

17 **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 ›**

18 **Judges 3:17** He went and presented the gifts to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very handsome man. **read ›**

19 **Job 15:27** For he has covered his face with his fat, and made a roll of fat upon his thighs. **read ›**

20 **Psalms 17:10** They have shut up their fat; their mouth has spoken pride. (Septuagint Psalm 16:10 (Psalm 17:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

21 **Psalms 73:7** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

22 **Proverbs 13:25** The righteous eats and satisfies his soul, but the souls of the ungodly are in want. **read ›**

23 **Proverbs 23:20** Do not be a wine-drinker, nor linger at shared feasts and purchases of meat. **read ›**

24 **Proverbs 23:21** For every drunkard and man who goes to prostitutes will become poor, and every drowsy man will clothe himself in torn and ragged clothes. **read ›**

25 **Song of Solomon 3:4** Scarcely had I passed from them when I found him whom my soul has loved. I held him and did not let him go, until I brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. **read ›**

26 **Song of Solomon 7:11** Come, my kinsman, let us go out into the field; let us spend the night in the villages. (Septuagint Song of Solomon 7:12 (Song of Solomon 7:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

27 **Isaiah 1:3** The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s manger; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not understood me. **read ›**

28 **Isaiah 1:27** For her captivity shall be saved with judgment and with acts of mercy. **read ›**

29 **Isaiah 1:31** And their strength shall be like a stalk of flax fiber, and their works like sparks, and the lawless and the sinners shall be burned up together, and there shall be no one to quench them. **read ›**

30 **Isaiah 2:2** For in the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be manifest, and the house of God shall be on the top of the mountains, and it shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall come to it. **read ›**

31 **Isaiah 5:19** who say, “Let what he will do draw near quickly, so that we may see; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel come, so that we may know.” **read ›**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

32 **Isaiah 18:3** all of them, will be inhabited like an inhabited country; their land will be as when a signal is raised from a mountain; it will be heard like the sound of a trumpet. **read ›**

33 **Jeremiah 16:10** And it shall be, when you report to this people all these words, and they say to you, “Why has the Lord spoken all these evils against us? What is our unrighteousness, and what is our sin that we have sinned before the Lord our God?” **read ›**

34 **Ezekiel 21:24** Therefore thus says the Lord: Because you have brought your unrighteous deeds to remembrance, when your ungodly deeds were uncovered, so that your sins were seen in all your ungodly deeds and in your practices—because you have brought them to remembrance, in these you shall be taken. (Septuagint Ezekiel 21:29 (Ezekiel 21:24 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

35 **Ezekiel 32:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

36 **Daniel 1:15** And at the end of the ten days their appearance looked better and stronger in flesh than that of the young men who ate at the king’s table. **read ›**

37 **1 Esdras 9:51** “So go, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing; **read ›**

38 **Wisdom of Solomon 19:16** but these, after receiving with festivities those who had already shared the same rights with them, mistreated them with terrible labors. **read ›**

39 **Wisdom of Sirach 33:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

40 **Wisdom of Sirach 34:20** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

41 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:23** If there is mercy and meekness on her tongue, her husband is not like the sons of men. (Septuagint Wisdom of Sirach 36:28 (Wisdom of Sirach 36:23 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

42 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:29** Do not be greedy for every luxury, and do not pour yourself out upon foods; **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:30** for with many foods there will be pain, and gluttony will come near to cholera. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:31** Through gluttony many have died, but he who is careful will add to his life. **read ›**

45 **3 Maccabees 3:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

46 **3 Maccabees 7:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

47 **4 Maccabees 1:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

48 **4 Maccabees 1:27** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

49 **4 Maccabees 1:31** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

50 **4 Maccabees 1:35** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

51 **4 Maccabees 5:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

52 **4 Maccabees 5:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

53 **4 Maccabees 18:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

54 **1 Enoch 108:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

55 **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 ›**

56 **Matthew 11:19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.” **read ›**

57 **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 ›**

58 **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 ›**

59 **Romans 14:15** Yet if because of food your brother is grieved, you walk no longer in love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. **read ›**

60 **Romans 14:21** It is good neither to eat meat nor to drink wine nor to do anything by which your brother stumbles or is caused to fall or is made weak. **read ›**

61 **1 Corinthians 6:13** Foods are for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will bring both it and them to nothing. But the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. **read ›**

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

63 **Colossians 2:23** These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed worship, humility, and severity to the body, but have no value against the indulgence of the flesh. **read ›**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

64 **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 ›**

65 **2 Peter 1:6** and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, perseverance; and in perseverance, godliness; **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *62 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.

Leviticus 11:3

Deuteronomy 14:3

2 Samuel 6:19

Psalms 112:6

Proverbs 15:17 · 23:3

Isaiah 30:1

Haggai 1:6

Zechariah 7:6

Matthew 5:17 · 7:13 · 11:28 · 15:11 · 15:17 · 22:21

Mark 7:19 · 7:22

Luke 13:24 · 14:8 · 14:12 · 14:15 · 14:16 · 24:41

John 3:34 · 4:34 · 6:26 · 6:35

Acts 10:10 · 10:14

Romans 8:8 · 10:4 · 14:6 · 14:14 · 14:16 · 14:17 · 14:20

1 Corinthians 5:11 · 8:6 · 8:13 · 9:4 · 9:14 · 10:23 · 10:25 · 10:31 · 11:21 · 11:33 · 13:3 · 13:7 · 15:32 · 15:35

2 Corinthians 3:3 · 4:18

Ephesians 6:12

Colossians 2:18 · 2:21

1 Timothy 4:1 · 4:4 · 5:17 · 6:8 · 6:10

Titus 1:15

Revelation 5:5

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did the early Christians look down on people who are overweight?” on April 13, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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 above, 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.

How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “Did the early Christians look down on people who are overweight?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-christians-look-down-on-people-who-are-overweight. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 8.”

© 2026 The Historic Faith. Selection, arrangement and editing by THF; machine-compiled text and public-domain quotations are not claimed. For personal study; please don’t republish.

THEHISTORICFAITH.COM

THE END OF THIS STUDY