THE QUESTION

Did the early church let Christian women braid their hair?

Asked by a THF member on April 7, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 12 early Christian passages and 10 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-let-christian-women-braid-their-hair

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

Early Christian writers did not approve of elaborate braids worn to show off beauty, wealth or sexual appeal, and they read Paul and Peter as a real limit. They praised hair that was cared for and fastened simply. These passages do not clearly settle whether a plain braid used only to keep hair tidy was allowed.

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	Clement: fasten hair simply, not in showy braids	2
2	Cyprian read Paul and Peter as real limits	2
3	Vowed virgins should not braid for beauty	3
4	Curled styles and false hair were rejected	3
5	Tertullian asked what fancy hair does for salvation	4
6	A woman's hair itself was an honor	4
7	Commodianus: drop vanity and show wealth by giving	5
	What these passages don't tell us	5
	The Sources: 12 early Christian passages and 10 Bible verses, with links	6

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POINT 1 OF 7

Clement: fasten hair simply, not in showy braids

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

Clement of Alexandria, writing around AD 200, says plain, pinned-up hair is enough for women and is true beauty. He links elaborate braids, curls and twisted strands with prostitutes, and describes how deceptive braids leave women afraid to touch their heads or even to sleep, lest they spoil the shape.

1

> “It is enough for women to protect their hair and fasten it simply at the neck with a plain hairpin, caring for modest hair in a simple way for the sake of true beauty. For prostitute-like braiding of the hair, and arranging it in curls and twisted strands, only makes them look ugly.”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “It cuts the hair and pulls it out because of those deceptive braids. Because of this, they do not touch their head, since they are afraid of disturbing their hair. Even sleep comes with fear, lest without knowing it they ruin the shape of the braid.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Cyprian read Paul and Peter as real limits

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

Cyprian, in the 3rd century, answers a woman's claim to wealth by quoting Paul's words against braided hair, gold and pearls, and Peter's call for adornment of the heart. He treats these verses as a limit on dress, not just advice.

2

> “In his own words, he sets a proper limit for your clothing and ornaments. He said, "Let women adorn themselves with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or expensive clothing, but as is fitting for women who profess chastity, with a good way of life."”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “Peter also agrees with these same teachings and says, "Let a woman's adornment not be outward, in clothing, or gold, or fine dress, but the adornment of the heart."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

Vowed virgins should not braid for beauty

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

Cyprian speaks to women who had devoted their unmarried lives to God. He asks why they would arrange their hair as if looking for a husband, and says plainly that braiding hair to display beauty is not right for them.

3

"Why should she go out adorned? Why with her hair arranged, as if she either had or were seeking a husband?"

later in the same passage

"For it is not right for a virgin to have her hair braided to display her beauty, or to boast of her flesh and its beauty, when she has no greater struggle than that against her flesh, and no more stubborn contest than that of conquering and subduing the body."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Curled styles and false hair were rejected

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

Clement says that if Jesus removed anxious care about clothes, curled hair arrangements and artificial hair are even less fitting. He says hair added from other people must be completely rejected and calls it sacrilegious. That rule is about added hair, not a woman braiding her own.

4

"If, then, He takes away anxious care for clothes and food, and unnecessary extras in general, what are we to think should be said about love of ornament, dyeing wool, a variety of colors, fussiness about gems, delicate work in gold, and still more, artificial hair and curled arrangements?"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›

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5 “But hair added from other people must be completely rejected. It is a very sacrilegious thing for false hair to cover the head, shading the skull with dead locks.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Tertullian asked what fancy hair does for salvation

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

Tertullian mocks the endless work of binding, loosing and curling hair. He asks what any of it adds to salvation, and urges women to look now as God will see them at the resurrection.

6 “What help to salvation comes from all the effort spent arranging your hair? Why is your hair given no rest? At one moment it must be bound, at another loosed, then cared for, then thinned out. Some are anxious to force their hair into curls.”

later in the same passage

“Keep away, even now, from things that are condemned. Even now, let God see you as He will see you then.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Apparel of Women* 2.7 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

A woman's hair itself was an honor

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

Tertullian, arguing that virgins should be veiled, does not treat women's hair as shameful. He says that if Paul adds that abundant hair is a woman's honor because it serves as a covering, this is above all true of a virgin, whose hair is gathered on the crown of the head. This suggests the objection was to showy display, not to hair itself.

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7 “Moreover, if the apostle further adds the prejudgment of nature, that an abundance of hair is an honor to a woman because hair serves as a covering, then this is above all a mark of distinction for a virgin. For their proper adornment consists in this: by being gathered together upon the crown, it completely covers the very citadel of the head with an encirclement of hair.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Commodianus: drop vanity and show wealth by giving

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

Commodianus scolds a Christian woman who curls her hair at the mirror like worldly ladies. He calls such adornment vanity and urges modest women of Christ to show their wealth by giving instead.

8 “At the mirror you adorn yourself, with your curled hair turned back from your brow.”

later in the same passage

“O good matrons, flee from the adornment of vanity. Such attire is fitting for women who haunt the brothels. Overcome the evil one, O modest women of Christ. Show forth all your wealth in giving.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 12, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages clearly says whether a plain braid used only to keep hair tidy was allowed or forbidden.
- These are teachers' instructions; they do not show how strictly every congregation enforced them.
- No first-century Christian writing outside the New Testament on this topic appears in these passages.
- 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.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 12 early Christian passages and 10 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–12, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 13–17, in Bible order), then 5 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 *12 passages from 5 writers*

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 1–6*

1. *Instructor* 2.13 (1885 English; on point 1) "admirably, therefore, the blessed Peter says, In like manner also, that women adorn themselves not with braids, or gold, or costly array, but (which becomes women professing godliness) with good… [continues online] **read ›**
2. *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 1, page 2** "is enough for women to protect their hair and fasten it simply at the neck with a plain hairpin, caring for modest hair in a simple way for the sake… [continues online] **read ›**
3. *Instructor* 3.3 (on point 4) to comb himself and shave himself with a razor for the sake of fine appearance, to arrange his hair at the mirror, to shave his cheeks, pluck hairs out of… [continues online] **read ›**
4. *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 5, page 4** hair added from other people must be completely rejected. It is a very sacrilegious thing for false hair to cover the head, shading the skull with dead locks. For on… [continues online] **read ›**
5. *Instructor* 2.8 (on point 4) foolish women who dye their gray hair and put oil on their hair quickly become even grayer because of the perfumes they use, since those perfumes have a drying effect… [continues online] **read ›**
6. *Instructor* 2.11 **Quote 4, page 3** "If, then, He takes away anxious care for clothes and food, and unnecessary extras in general, what are we to think should be said about love of ornament, dyeing wool, a variety of colors, fussiness about gems, delicate work in gold, and still more, artificial hair and curled arrangements?" **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 7–8*

7. *On the Apparel of Women* 2.7 **Quote 6, page 4** "What help to salvation comes from all the effort spent arranging your hair? Why is your hair given no rest? At one moment it must be bound, at another loosed, then cared for, then thinned out. Some are anxious to force their hair into curls." **read ›**
8. *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7 **Quote 7, page 5** "Moreover, if the apostle further adds the prejudgment of nature, that an abundance of hair is an honor to a woman because hair serves as a covering, then this is above all a mark of distinction for a virgin. For their proper adornment consists in this: by being gathered together upon the crown, it completely covers the very citadel of the head with an encirclement of hair." **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 9–10*

9. *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "women, said he, adorn themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with broidered hair, nor gold, nor pearls, nor costly array, but as becomes women professing chastity, with a good conversation… [continues online] **read ›**
10. *Treatises* **Quote 3, page 3** "Why should she go out adorned? Why with her hair arranged, as if she either had or were seeking a husband?" **read ›**

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Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 11*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) or to brush it up together, or to let it spread out, or to puff it up, or by careful combing and braiding to make it curl and shine, since… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 12*

12 *Writings* **Quote 8, page 5** "At the mirror you adorn yourself, with your curled hair turned back from your brow." **read ›**

THE BIBLE *5 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **1 Corinthians 11:5** But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For it is one and the same thing as if she were shaved. **read ›**

14 **1 Corinthians 11:6** For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or be shaved, let her be covered. **read ›**

15 **1 Corinthians 11:15** But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, because her hair is given as a covering. **read ›**

16 **1 Timothy 2:9** Likewise, I desire that women adorn themselves in orderly clothing, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothing, **read ›**

17 **1 Peter 3:3** Let your adornment not be outward—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothes— **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *5 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 10:30 · 18:7

1 Corinthians 11:3

2 Corinthians 13:5

1 John 2:27

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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