THE QUESTION

How did the early Christians contrast generous and greedy uses of money?

Asked by a THF member on April 11, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 37 early Christian passages and 82 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/how-did-the-early-christians-contrast-generous-and-greedy-uses-of-money

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

The early Christians said the truly rich person is the one who gives, not the one who keeps, while greed is never satisfied. They praised giving freely, without grumbling and without hope of return, judged generosity by the heart rather than the amount, and warned the stingy rich that God sees their neglect of the hungry.

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

The giver, not the keeper, is rich

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

Clement of Alexandria turns the usual idea of wealth upside down. Owning much does not make a person rich or happy; giving it away does, because true riches are in the soul.

1 “So it is not he who has and keeps, but he who gives away, that is rich. And it is giving away, not possession, that makes a man happy.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

Greed can never be satisfied

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

Clement says that for those who love gold, purple and jewels, no amount is ever enough. Even endless gold would leave such a person poor, because the craving itself never stops.

2 “Even if a man were to become a Midas, he would still not be satisfied. He would still be poor, because he would keep craving more wealth.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.2 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 8

Generosity is measured by the heart

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

Chrysostom warns that the rich are not excused just because they gave something; gifts are weighed against what a person has. He praises the poor churches Paul describes, whose deep poverty only made them more generous.

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3 “For our alms are judged not by the measure of our gifts, but by the largeness of our mind.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Matthew* 52 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 34, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “For the poorer they were, the more generous they were, and the more readily they gave.""”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 16 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 36, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

Greed builds high while the hungry wait

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

Chrysostom names the greedy plainly: people who spend on bigger and bigger houses while ignoring the hungry. He says such people will face even heavier judgment.

5 “But if these suffer punishment, much more those who are eager about unnecessary things: those who build houses of two and three stories, but despise the hungry; who give heed to covetousness, but neglect almsgiving.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Matthew* 52 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 34, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 8

Give without hoping to be repaid

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

Lactantius rejects the pagan advice to give only to people who can return the favor. True generosity goes to those who cannot repay, and helping a stranger out of kindness alone deserves the most praise.

6 “For we must bestow our generosity not on suitable persons, but as much as possible on unsuitable persons.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 11 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 26, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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7 “But he who does this for a stranger and an unknown person is truly worthy of praise, because he was led to do it by kindness alone.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 12 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 29, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 8

Give freely, without grumbling

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

The Didache describes the generous believer: quick to give, slow to grasp, never complaining, and willing to share all things with a brother instead of calling them his own.

8 “Do not stretch out your hands to receive and draw them back from giving.”

later in the same passage

“You shall not turn away from him who is in want, but you shall share all things with your brother, and shall not say that they are your own.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 4 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 8

Mercy makes us like God

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

Chrysostom says that fasting and prayer without mercy bear no fruit. Showing mercy is God's own work, so in giving to others we become like our merciful Father.

9 “Prayer without almsgiving bears no fruit. Without it, all things are unclean and unprofitable.”

later in the same passage

“In this we are able to be like God, by showing mercy and pity.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Second Timothy* (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 33, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 8 OF 8

Generosity is no license to sin

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

Lactantius adds a warning: giving is part of turning from sin, but no one may sin while counting on later gifts to cover it. Repentance means resolving to sin no more.

10 “But do not think that, because offenses are removed by generosity, you are given permission to sin.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 13 (c. 290–320 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 30, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not set a fixed amount or share that counts as generous.
- They focus on the attitude of the heart and do not lay out rules for running a household budget.
- 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 37 early Christian passages and 82 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–37, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 38–39, in Bible order), then 80 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 *37 passages from 13 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · sources 1–3*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 13 (1885 English; on point 6) “of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment… [continues online] **read ›**

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2 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 3 (1885 English; on point 2) “money-loving, nor vainglorious, for out of all these thefts are engendered… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 4 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “shall not turn away from him that is in want, but you shall share all things with your brother, and shall not say that they are your own… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome, *c. 88–99 AD · source 4*

4 *Second Epistle* 16 “earth will melt, like lead melting in fire. Then the hidden and open deeds of men will appear. Almsgiving, then, is good as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 5*

5 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 6) “who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to every one in need… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English; on point 6) “instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [He told us] to share all our possessions with the poor… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Against Heresies: Book IV* not, as otherwise the Lord would not have said, “Keep the commandments”), the Lord, exposing his greed, said, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell all you have, and… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–12*

8 *Stromata* 2.5 (1885 English) “more, then, is the Scripture to be believed which says, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man Matthew… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Instructor* 3.6 **Quote 1, page 2** “the fruit of the Spirit is generosity… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Instructor* 3.2 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “full table and repeated cups are enough to satisfy greed… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Instructor* 2.11 (1885 English) “to take thought of these things argues greed and luxury… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 20 Failing to understand these things in their proper sense, the man of much wealth and observance of the law — and not understanding how the same person can be both… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 13–14*

13 *Against Marcion* 36 (1885 English) “vainglorious observer of the commandments was therefore convicted of holding money in much higher estimation (than charity… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Against Marcion* 32 “13, because while one is pleased, the other must necessarily be displeased. He mentions God and mammon. If you have no interpreter with you, you may learn again from Him… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 15*

15 *Against Celsus* 21 (on point 6) the letter of the law promises riches to the just, Celsus may follow the letter that kills and understand it as worldly riches, which blind men. But we say it… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · source 16*

16 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (on point 2) he also gave himself as an example of what he had written. So he added, not without reason, that avarice is the root of all evils, 1 Timothy 6:10… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 17–21*

17 *Treatises* (1885 English) “O Christ, such givers as these of Yours — those rich men, those men affluent with abounding wealth— whether in the Church wherein You preside and behold, they set forth a… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Treatises* help. He said, "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; and redeem your sins by almsgiving, and your unrighteousness by mercies to the poor, and God will… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 2) “however, rages openly, and, safe by its very boldness, exposes the weapons of its headlong craving in the light of the market-place… [continues online] **read ›**

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20 *Treatises* (1885 English) “says He, your goods, and give alms… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Treatises* (1885 English) “when in the Gospel the Lord was discoursing concerning almsgiving, and faithfully and wholesomely warned us to make to ourselves friends of our earthly lucre by provident good works, who… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 22–23*

22 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) “I am here." Let such a woman also be free from the love of money, free from arrogance, not greedy for shameful gain, not insatiable, not gluttonous, but self-controlled… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 6) “him also be merciful, of a generous and loving temper… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 24*

24 *Writings* (1885 English; on point 2) “greedy survey of the eyes is never satisfied… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 25–30*

25 *Divine Institutes* 17 (on point 6) “from the love of possessing. Yet we ought both to abstain from pleasures and never to hold back money. For using money sparingly, that is, moderately, is a kind of… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Divine Institutes* 11 **Quote 6, page 3** “he speaks like this: “Generosity that comes from our own property drains the very source of our liberality, and so liberality is destroyed by liberality. For the more people there… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Divine Institutes* 4 (1885 English; on point 2) “he infuses into some insatiable avarice, that, being chained by their riches as by fetters, he may drive them from the way of truth… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Divine Institutes* 11 (on point 5) be said about those who, led on by the empty desire for popular applause, spend on public shows wealth that would have been enough even for great cities? Must we… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Divine Institutes* 12 **Quote 7, page 4** is a great and noble act of justice, and the same Tullius also approved of it. He says that this generosity is useful even to the state: captives should be… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Divine Institutes* 13 **Quote 10, page 5** and as far as you can, heal your wounds. But do not think that, because offenses are removed by generosity, you are given permission to sin. For sins are taken… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 31–37*

31 *Homilies on John* 73 “is defiled? Just as a man who throws dung into a pure fountain makes it all unclean, so also with riches: when anything wrongly gained enters in, it causes all… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Homilies on John* 81 (1885 English) “11:41 Alms, not covetousness, for that which proceeds from covetousness endures not, though thou give to those who need… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Homilies on Second Timothy* **Quote 9, page 4** is natural, and the desire for it is inborn and grows naturally in the body. It is not so with riches. In this we are able to be like God… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Homilies on Matthew* 52 **Quotes 3, 5, page 3** “give heed to covetousness, but neglect almsgiving… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Homilies on Philippians* Christ Himself has declared that this is impossible. "You cannot," He says, "serve God and Mammon," and, "No man can serve two masters," Matthew 6:24, because they give us… [continues online] **read ›**

36 *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 16 **Quote 4, page 3** “he nowhere says, "the richness of the gifts," but "the riches of their liberality." What he means is this: "Their poverty was not only no obstacle to their being generous… [continues online] **read ›**

37 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 39 (1885 English) “goest about a common enemy of the blessings of the world, and a foe to the liberality of the Lord of the world, and a friend of Mammon, or rather… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *2 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

38 **Luke 6:32** If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **read ›**

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39 **Acts 4:32** The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. No one said that any of his possessions was his own, but they had all things in common. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *80 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.

Exodus 23:14 · 29:41

Leviticus 19:15

Numbers 25:10

Deuteronomy 18:4

Joshua 3:14

2 Samuel 5:8

2 Kings 7:1

Proverbs 3:3 · 16:18 · 22:6 · 31:20

Ecclesiastes 9:8

Isaiah 1:15 · 1:17 · 40:3

Jeremiah 17:10

Ezekiel 16:8 · 16:12 · 16:61

Matthew 4:10 · 5:3 · 5:5 · 5:9 · 5:17 · 5:21 · 5:27 · 5:45 · 6:21 · 6:32 · 7:7 · 10:10 · 11:28 · 19:24

Mark 12:33 · 12:42

Luke 10:7 · 12:28 · 16:11 · 16:12 · 16:13 · 16:14 · 16:15 · 16:16 · 16:17 · 18:1 · 18:7 · 18:10 · 18:18 · 18:19 · 18:21 · 18:38 · 18:39 · 18:40 · 18:42 · 21:3

John 1:9 · 8:32 · 13:35

Romans 8:28 · 15:19 · 15:27

1 Corinthians 15:32

2 Corinthians 2:15

Galatians 2:5

Ephesians 6:5 · 6:9

Colossians 3:22 · 4:1

1 Thessalonians 5:12

1 Timothy 2:2 · 6:8 · 6:10 · 6:17

Hebrews 7:2 · 13:7

James 1:14 · 5:16

1 Peter 2:9

Revelation 22:18

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “How did the early Christians contrast generous and greedy uses of money?” on April 11, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY