THE QUESTION

How did the early Christians say believers should handle wealth and possessions?

Asked by a THF member on April 11, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 42 early Christian passages and 66 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-say-believers-should-handle-wealth-and

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

The early Christians taught believers to live like strangers on earth, keeping what is enough instead of piling up houses and land. They urged simple, generous giving to all in need, warned against letting money rule the heart, and said the truly rich person is the one rich in virtue who uses what he has faithfully.

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 7

Live as strangers and keep what is enough

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

In Hermas, the Shepherd reminds believers that their true city is elsewhere. Piling up land, houses and costly buildings ties them to a place they must one day leave, so they should prepare only what is enough.

1

“If, then," he continues, "you know the city where you are going to live, why do you buy land here, make costly preparations, and gather houses and useless buildings?”

later in the same passage

“Be careful, then: as one living in a foreign land, make no further preparations for yourself except what is enough; and be ready, when the master of this city comes to throw you out for disobeying his law, to leave his city and go to your own, and to obey your own law without trouble and with great joy.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 5, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Give simply to everyone in need

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

Hermas teaches that what we earn is a gift from God, meant to be shared. Believers should give without fussing over who deserves it; those who receive falsely will answer to God, but the giver is guiltless.

2

“And from the rewards of your labor, which God gives you, give to all who are in need with simplicity, without hesitating about whom you should give to or not give to. Give to everyone, for God wants His gifts to be shared among all.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 4, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Christians should give more than the old tithe

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

Chrysostom notes that under the Old Covenant people gave tithes and more for orphans, widows and strangers. He is ashamed that Christians now marvel at someone who tithes, since Christ asks even more of us.

3

> “They gave tithes, and tithes again upon tithes for orphans, widows, and strangers. Yet someone was saying to me in astonishment at another, "Why, such a one gives tithes."”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Ephesians* 4 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 40, page 8 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 7

Household goods should fit a Christian life

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

Clement of Alexandria applies faith to ordinary things like food, clothing and household items. What a Christian owns should be useful and fitting for his age, work and station, showing one consistent way of life.

4

> “In the end, in food, clothing, household utensils, and everything else that belongs to the home, I say in a general way that a person must follow the principles of a Christian, in whatever is useful and fitting for that person's character, age, work, and stage of life.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.3 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 15, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 5 OF 7

The truly rich are rich in virtue

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

Clement says real wealth is not outward property, which passes from one owner to another. The truly rich person has virtues and uses whatever he has with devotion and faithfulness.

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5 “The man, then, who is truly and rightly rich is the one who is rich in virtues and able to use every fortune devoutly and faithfully, while the false rich man is the one who is rich according to the flesh and has shifted his life into outward possession — the kind that passes away and decays and now belongs to one and now to another, and in the end to no one whatever.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 19 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 12, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 6 OF 7

Do not let money rule you

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

Irenaeus says Christ teaches his disciples not to be ruled by mammon. Chrysostom adds that a greedy person truly worships it, not by bowing down, but by doing what greed commands in daily life.

6 “He does not call mammon Lord when He says, "You cannot serve two masters," but He teaches His disciples, who serve God, not to be subject to mammon, nor to be ruled by it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 11, page 6 Read it in the library ›

7 “If we ask, "Who is this Mammon?" it is covetousness, and that is what you are worshiping.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Ephesians* 18 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 42, page 8 Read it in the library ›

POINT 7 OF 7

Wealth must be gained honestly

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

Gregory warns that property gained by violence is harmful and ungodly, and that love of money is never satisfied. Chrysostom adds that gifts taken from robbery are not true mercy at all.

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8 “And just as property gained by violence is a possession that is very harmful as well as ungodly, so the man who longs for money never finds satisfaction for his desire, nor goodwill from his neighbors, even if he has gathered the greatest possible wealth.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Gregory Thaumaturgus,** *Metaphrase of Ecclesiastes* 5 (c. 240–270 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 22, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

9 “By almsgiving, I do not mean what is supported by injustice, for that is not almsgiving, but cruelty and inhumanity.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on John* 73 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 37, page 8 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give a set budget or a fixed share of income every Christian must give.
- They do not say that owning a home or property is itself a sin; they warn against excess and greed.
- 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 42 early Christian passages and 66 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–42, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 43–45, in Bible order), then 63 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 *42 passages from 15 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 13 (1885 English; on point 2) “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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Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · source 2*

2 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English) “shalt be simple in heart, and rich in spirit… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome, *c. 88–99 AD · source 3*

3 *Second Epistle* 16 (on point 2) 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 ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 4–6*

4 *Shepherd* **Quote 2, page 2** And from the rewards of your labor, which God gives you, give to all who are in need with simplicity, without hesitating about whom you should give to or not… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Shepherd* **Quote 1, page 2** souls, as each one is able, and care for widows and orphans, and do not neglect them. Spend your wealth and all your preparations, which you received from the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 2) “are they who have riches, and who understand that they are from the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 7*

7 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 2) “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 8–11*

8 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 7) “a comparison is made between us and them, I would ask, which group seems to have received their worldly goods in a fairer manner? Will it be the Jewish people… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) “as to those believing ones who are in the royal palace, do they not derive the utensils they employ from the property which belongs to Cæsar… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 7) “the poor cancel former greed was made clear by Zaccheus when he said, “Behold, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone, I… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Against Heresies: Book III* **Quote 6, page 4** “the saying "You cannot serve two masters" is explained by Him: "You cannot serve God and mammon," recognizing God as God but mentioning mammon as something that exists. He does… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 12–18*

12 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 19 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “him who is poor in worldly goods, but rich in vices, who is not poor in spirit and rich toward God, it is said, Abandon the alien possessions that are… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 18 (1885 English; on point 5) “a man rich in worldly goods temperate, poor in indulgences, trustworthy, intelligent, pure, chastened… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Instructor* 3.6 (1885 English; on point 5) “Christians are good. Now, a fool or a libertine can neither have any perception of what is good, nor obtain possession of it… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Instructor* 2.3 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “it becomes those that are servants of one God, that their possessions and furniture should exhibit the tokens of one beautiful life… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 20 (on point 5) 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 ›**

17 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 4 (1885 English) And Jesus looked round about, and says to His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Fragments* 1 (on point 1) as if from a mother’s womb. And naked I shall also depart to the earth. Naked, not merely of possessions, for that would be a trivial and common thing… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 19–20*

19 *Against Marcion* 32 (on point 6) “when He saw the covetousness of the Pharisees… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *On Idolatry* 11 (on point 6) we think over the rest of faults, tracing them from their generations, let us begin with covetousness, which is "the root of all evils," as 1 Timothy 6:10 says… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 21*

21 *Against Celsus* 21 (on point 5) 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 ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 22*

22 *Metaphrase of Ecclesiastes* 5 **Quote 8, page 5** for his desire, nor goodwill from his neighbors, even if he has gathered the greatest possible wealth. For this also is vanity. But goodness gives great joy to those who… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 23–28*

23 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 2) “says He, your goods, and give alms… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 2) “your gains with Christ; make Christ a partner with you in your earthly possessions, that He also may make you a fellow-heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 2) “you have, my son, so do. If your substance is abundant, give alms of it the more… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Treatises* (on point 1) As the prayer goes on, we ask and say, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This can be understood both spiritually and literally, because either understanding is full of… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Treatises* (on point 2) 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 ›**

28 *Treatises* (on point 2) Holy Spirit speaks in the sacred Scriptures and says, “By almsgiving and faith sins are purged.” This certainly does not mean the sins that had already been contracted before, because… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 29–30*

29 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 6) “being able to intercede with Him continuously on account that her mind and disposition run after money: for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 2) “if he be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more ought he to give directions about goods, that they all be distributed to those in want, according to… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · sources 31–33*

31 *Writings* (1885 English) “can healthful poverty do, unless wealth be present… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Writings* (1885 English; on point 7) “hiding the unrighteous gains in the concealed treasury, when the Lord shall supply to every one his daily life… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Writings* “now, O barren one, the law which is terrible to the evil and… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 34–35*

34 *Divine Institutes* 22 (on point 5) religion does not have the power of God: they are led by the appearance of earthly and present goods, which have nothing to do with the care of the mind… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Divine Institutes* 4 (on point 1) has stretched his hope beyond the present and chosen better things will be without these earthly goods, so that, being lightly equipped and unburdened, he may overcome the difficulty of… [continues online] **read ›**

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John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 36–42*

36 *Homilies on John* 8 (on point 6) the loss that comes to you from these lies not in ordinary matters, but in what is the chief of goods. For it is not possible for the man who… [continues online] **read ›**

37 *Homilies on John* 73 **Quote 9, page 5** 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 ›**

38 *Instructions to Catechumens* 1 (1885 English) “especially needs money, but even it shines forth in greater degree through poverty… [continues online] **read ›**

39 *Homilies on Titus* (1885 English; on point 2) “4:27 Part with your wealth, not that others may be fed, but that you may escape punishment… [continues online] **read ›**

40 *Homilies on Ephesians* 4 **Quote 3, page 3** “where the getting of wealth was allowed, and the enjoyment of it, and the care of it, there… [continues online] **read ›**

41 *Homilies on Philippians* (on point 6) 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 ›**

42 *Homilies on Ephesians* 18 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “we say, Who is this Mammon? It is covetousness, and this you are worshiping… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *3 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

43 **Luke 16:13** No household slave can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and mammon.” **read ›**

44 **Romans 12:8** or he who exhorts, to his exhorting; he who gives, let him do it with generosity; he who rules, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. **read ›**

45 **Hebrews 13:14** For we do not have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *63 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 20:7 · 29:41

Leviticus 25:23

Deuteronomy 18:4

Joshua 3:14

1 Chronicles 29:15

Proverbs 3:3 · 11:13

Ecclesiastes 9:8

Isaiah 5:4 · 40:3

Jeremiah 17:10

Ezekiel 16:8 · 16:61

Matthew 4:10 · 5:34 · 5:39 · 5:42 · 6:19 · 6:20 · 6:21 · 7:7 · 10:10 · 10:42 · 18:3 · 19:21

Mark 10:17 · 12:33 · 12:42

Luke 6:30 · 10:7 · 12:42 · 16:11 · 16:12 · 16:15 · 16:16 · 16:17 · 19:15 · 21:3

John 15:5

Romans 8:29 · 12:9 · 15:19

1 Corinthians 15:32

2 Corinthians 2:15

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Galatians 2:5
Ephesians 5:5 · 6:9
Philippians 3:20 · 4:3
Colossians 3:5
1 Timothy 1:19 · 2:2 · 6:7 · 6:10 · 6:17
2 Timothy 3:2
Titus 3:2
Hebrews 11:13
James 1:8 · 1:27
1 Peter 2:9 · 2:11

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