THE QUESTION

Must the wives of elders and deacons avoid gossip and slander?

Asked by a THF member on June 7, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 18 early Christian passages and 132 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/must-the-wives-of-elders-and-deacons-avoid-gossip-and-slander

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

Yes. The early writers expected church leaders and the women of their households to keep a clean tongue. Polycarp tells deacons not to be slanderers and teaches wives and widows to avoid slander and evil-speaking. Ignatius, Hermas and the Apostolic Constitutions condemn gossip, backbiting and evil-speaking for every believer.

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.
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POINT 1 OF 7

Deacons must not be slanderers

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

Polycarp lists the marks of a good deacon. Slander and a double tongue are named first among the faults a deacon must not have, because deacons serve God and Christ, not men.

1

"They must not be slanderers, double-tongued, or lovers of money, but must be temperate in all things, compassionate, industrious, and live according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 11, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Church leaders were to teach their wives

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

Polycarp tells the church's leaders to teach their wives faith, love and purity. In the same breath he tells the widows to avoid slander and evil-speaking, because God sees even the secret things of the heart.

2

"Next, teach your wives to live in the faith given to them, and in love and purity, tenderly loving their own husbands in all truth, and loving everyone equally in all chastity; and to raise their children in the knowledge and fear of God."

later in the same passage

"Teach the widows to be discreet regarding the faith of the Lord, praying continually for all, avoiding all slandering, evil-speaking, false-witnessing, love of money, and every kind of evil; knowing that they are the altar of God, that He clearly perceives all things, and that nothing is hidden from Him, neither reasonings, nor reflections, nor any of the secret things of the heart."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 12, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

Gossip and slander are for no believer

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

Ignatius tells every member of the church, not only leaders, to put away evil-speaking, slander and gossip. He places this right next to his words to presbyters and deacons about good order.

3 "Lay aside, each of you, all malice and beast-like fury, evil-speaking, slander, filthy speaking, lewdness, gossip, arrogance, drunkenness, lust, greed, vanity, envy, and everything similar to these."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 7

Even listening to slander shares the sin

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

Hermas warns that a person who listens to slander and believes it becomes guilty along with the one who speaks it. He calls slander restless and at war with peace.

4 "First, do not speak evil of anyone, and do not enjoy listening to anyone who speaks evil of another person."

later in the same passage

"For slander is evil, and it is an unstable demon. It never stays in peace, but always remains in conflict."

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

Source 4, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 5 OF 7

Backbiting keeps a servant from living to God

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

Hermas lists backbiting and slander among the worst deeds of human life. He says a servant of God must hold back from them in order to live to God.

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5 “Listen," he says: "from adultery and sexual immorality, from unlawful feasting, from wicked luxury, from indulging in many kinds of food and the extravagance of riches, and from boastfulness, haughtiness, insolence, lies, backbiting, hypocrisy, remembering wrongs, and every kind of slander. These are the deeds that are most wicked in human life.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* **Source 3, page 5** Read it in the library ›
(c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

The church's widows must guard their speech

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

The Apostolic Constitutions describe how the church's widows must live. Each must be quiet and gentle, not a talker, not an evil-speaker, not double-tongued and not a busybody. The same book calls evil-speaking foreign to a Christian.

6 “Let every widow be meek, quiet, gentle, sincere, free from anger, not talkative, not loud, not quick to speak, not given to speaking evil, not fault-finding, not double-tongued, and not a busybody.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 14, page 6** Read it in the library ›
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

7 “Now concerning envy, or jealousy, or evil-speaking, or strife, or the love of contention, we have already said to you that these are foreign to a Christian, and especially in the case of widows.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 15, page 6** Read it in the library ›
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Idle talkers are not worthy of their calling

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

The Apostolic Constitutions warn against women who wander from house to house as idle talkers and evil-speakers. Such conduct, they say, is unworthy of the God who called them.

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8 “For women like these are wanderers and shameless.”

later in the same passage

“Being like this, they are not worthy of Him who called them.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 13, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not set out a separate rule naming the wives of elders as such.
- They do not say what a church should do if a leader's wife is known for gossip.
- 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 18 early Christian passages and 132 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–18, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 19–98, in Bible order), then 52 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 *18 passages from 7 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 3 (1885 English; on point 3) “a filthy talker, nor of lofty eye… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 15 (1885 English; on point 1) “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, 1 Timothy 3:4 and truthful and proven… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 3–8*

3 *Shepherd* **Quote 5, page 4** of food and the extravagance of riches, and from boastfulness, haughtiness, insolence, lies, backbiting, hypocrisy, remembering wrongs, and every kind of slander. These are the deeds that are most wicked… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Shepherd* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “then, will you be guilty of the sin of him who slanders… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Shepherd* (on point 5) “the chipped stones are the deceitful and the slanderers… [continues online] **read ›**

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6 *Shepherd* (on point 5) “Deceit. And their followers are called Sorrow, Wickedness, Wantonness, Anger, Falsehood, Folly, Backbiting, and Hatred. The servant of God who bears these names will indeed see the kingdom of God… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Shepherd* (on point 4) of them repented, and the rest also will repent when they hear my commandments, because their slanders are small, and they will quickly repent. But those who live in the… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Shepherd* (on point 4) alive nor dead. And those whose branches were half-withered and cracked are both wavering and slanderers, speaking abusively against those who are absent, and never at peace with one… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 9–10*

9 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 3, page 3** “each of you, all malice and beast-like fury, evil-speaking, slander, filthy speaking, lewdness, gossip, arrogance, drunkenness, lust, greed, vanity, envy, and everything similar to these. "But put on… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English; on point 6) “drunkenness, anger, envy, reviling, clamour, and blasphemy “be not so much as named among you.” Let not the widows live a life of pleasure, lest they wax wanton against the… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *Epistle to the Philippians* **Quote 1, page 2** “that "God is not mocked," we ought to live worthy of His commandment and glory. Similarly, the deacons should be blameless before His righteousness, as they are the servants of… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Epistle to the Philippians* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “the widows to be discreet as respects the faith of the Lord, praying continually for all, being far from all slandering, evil-speaking, false-witnessing, love of money, and every… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 13–16*

13 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 5** do not permit our women to teach in the Church… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 6, page 4** “Let every widow be meek, quiet, gentle, sincere, free from anger, not… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “it becomes them, when one of their fellow widows is clothed by any one, or receives money, or meat, or drink, or shoes, at the sight of the refreshment of… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) “says He, Woe to him by whom My name is blasphemed among the Gentiles… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 17*

17 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 64 (1885 English; on point 3) “if false witness by falsehood is injurious to him against whom it is spoken, and deceives him in whose presence it is spoken, we must therefore never speak falsely, because… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 18*

18 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English; on point 2) “enjoined young men to be of a sober and serious mind… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *80 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

19 **Susanna 1:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

20 **Susanna 1:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

21 **Susanna 1:27** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

22 **Susanna 1:28** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

23 **Susanna 1:36** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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24 **Susanna 1:43** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

25 **Susanna 1:49** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

26 **Matthew 26:60** but they found none. Though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. **read ›**

27 **Mark 12:40** those who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." **read ›**

28 **Mark 14:56** For many gave false testimony against him, but their testimonies did not agree. **read ›**

29 **Mark 14:57** Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, **read ›**

30 **John 2:16** To those who sold the doves, he said, "Take these things out of here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!" **read ›**

31 **Acts 5:2** and kept back part of the price, his wife also being aware of it, then brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. **read ›**

32 **Acts 6:13** and set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. **read ›**

33 **Acts 13:8** But Elymas the sorcerer—for that is how his name is translated—opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **read ›**

34 **Acts 19:36** Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you must be quiet and do nothing rash. **read ›**

35 **Acts 25:18** When his accusers stood up, they brought no charge of the things I had expected, **read ›**

36 **Acts 26:25** But he said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but speak words of truth and sound judgment. **read ›**

37 **Romans 3:4** May it never be! Let God be true, but every man a liar. As it is written: that you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged. **read ›**

38 **Romans 3:10** as it is written: There is none righteous, not even one; **read ›**

39 **Romans 5:2** through whom we also have our access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **read ›**

40 **Romans 9:1** I tell the truth in Christ. I am not lying, my conscience testifying with me in the Holy Spirit **read ›**

41 **Romans 9:19** You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" **read ›**

42 **1 Corinthians 4:2** Moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found faithful. **read ›**

43 **1 Corinthians 6:10** nor the covetous, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **read ›**

44 **1 Corinthians 14:30** But if a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first keep silent. **read ›**

45 **1 Corinthians 14:34** Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but to be in submission, as the law also says. **read ›**

46 **1 Corinthians 14:35** And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. **read ›**

47 **1 Corinthians 15:15** And we are also found false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if indeed the dead are not raised. **read ›**

48 **2 Corinthians 6:8** by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, **read ›**

49 **Ephesians 5:24** But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their own husbands in everything. **read ›**

50 **Colossians 1:2** to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **read ›**

51 **Colossians 1:8** who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. **read ›**

52 **Colossians 1:27** to whom God was pleased to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **read ›**

53 **Colossians 1:28** We proclaim him, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; **read ›**

54 **Colossians 3:18** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **read ›**

55 **Colossians 3:19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be bitter against them. **read ›**

56 **Colossians 4:6** Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. **read ›**

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57 **2 Thessalonians 3:11** For we hear that some among you walk in a disorderly way, not working at all, but meddling. **read ›**

58 **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 ›**

59 **1 Timothy 2:10** but with good works, which is appropriate for women professing godliness. **read ›**

60 **1 Timothy 3:2** The bishop therefore must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable, able to teach; **read ›**

61 **1 Timothy 3:3** not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for shameful gain, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money; **read ›**

62 **1 Timothy 3:7** He must also have a good testimony from outsiders, so that he does not fall into reproach and the devil's trap. **read ›**

63 **1 Timothy 3:8** Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for shameful gain, **read ›**

64 **1 Timothy 3:10** Let them also first be tested; then let them serve if they are blameless. **read ›**

65 **1 Timothy 3:11** Women likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. **read ›**

66 **1 Timothy 3:12** Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **read ›**

67 **1 Timothy 3:13** For those who have served well gain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in faithfulness in Christ Jesus. **read ›**

68 **1 Timothy 5:1** Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father; the younger men as brothers; **read ›**

69 **1 Timothy 5:2** the older women as mothers, the younger women as sisters, in all purity. **read ›**

70 **1 Timothy 5:3** Honor widows who are widows indeed. **read ›**

71 **1 Timothy 5:9** Let no one be enrolled as a widow under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, **read ›**

72 **1 Timothy 5:11** But refuse younger widows; for when their desires turn them against Christ, they want to marry, **read ›**

73 **1 Timothy 5:13** At the same time they also learn to be idle, going from house to house; and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. **read ›**

74 **1 Timothy 5:14** Therefore I desire that the younger women marry, bear children, manage the household, and give the adversary no occasion for reviling. **read ›**

75 **1 Timothy 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. **read ›**

76 **1 Timothy 5:19** Do not receive an accusation against an elder except at the word of two or three witnesses. **read ›**

77 **1 Timothy 6:1** Let all who are slaves under a yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the doctrine may not be blasphemed. **read ›**

78 **2 Timothy 2:13** If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful; he cannot deny himself." **read ›**

79 **2 Timothy 3:3** without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, not lovers of good, **read ›**

80 **2 Timothy 3:6** For some of these are people who creep into houses and take captive gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, **read ›**

81 **Titus 1:6** provided a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of reckless living and are not insubordinate. **read ›**

82 **Titus 1:7** For a bishop must be blameless as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain, **read ›**

83 **Titus 1:8** but hospitable, loving what is good, sober-minded, righteous, holy, self-controlled, **read ›**

84 **Titus 1:11** Their mouths must be stopped, for they overturn whole households, teaching what they ought not for dishonest gain. **read ›**

85 **Titus 1:13** This testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith, **read ›**

86 **Titus 2:3** and that older women likewise be reverent in behavior, not slanderers nor enslaved to much wine, teachers of that which is good, **read ›**

87 **Titus 2:4** that they may train the young wives to love their husbands, to love their children, **read ›**

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88 **Titus 2:5** to be sober-minded, pure, keepers of the home, good, subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God may not be blasphemed. **read ›**

89 **Titus 2:8** and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. **read ›**

90 **Titus 3:2** to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable and gentle, showing all meekness toward all men. **read ›**

91 **1 Peter 3:1** Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some disobey the word, they will be won without a word through their wives' conduct, **read ›**

92 **1 Peter 3:2** when they see your pure conduct in fear. **read ›**

93 **1 Peter 3:5** For this is how in the past the holy women who hoped in God also adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands. **read ›**

94 **1 Peter 3:7** You husbands, in the same way, live with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor to the woman as to the weaker vessel, as also being joint heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. **read ›**

95 **1 Peter 3:16** having a good conscience, so that, when they speak against you as evildoers, those who malign your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. **read ›**

96 **1 Peter 5:1** I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed: **read ›**

97 **Jude 1:16** These are grumblers and complainers, walking according to their own lusts; their mouth speaks boastful things, flattering people for gain. **read ›**

98 **Revelation 14:5** In their mouth was found no lie, for they are blameless. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *52 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 32:32

Job 1:21

Psalms 44:21

Proverbs 11:13 · 16:18

Matthew 5:5 · 5:21 · 5:27 · 5:42 · 7:6 · 13:31 · 18:3 · 18:33 · 20:23 · 20:28 · 23:5

Mark 10:43

Luke 22:24

John 10:16

Acts 6:1

Romans 8:28 · 12:8 · 12:9 · 13:14

1 Corinthians 6:9 · 10:33 · 11:3

Galatians 5:10 · 5:16 · 6:1 · 6:7

Ephesians 2:4 · 2:14 · 2:20 · 5:3 · 6:11

Philippians 1:27 · 4:8

1 Thessalonians 5:17

2 Thessalonians 3:10

1 Timothy 2:2 · 3:4 · 5:5 · 5:6 · 6:7 · 6:10

2 Timothy 2:12

Titus 2:12

Hebrews 13:17

James 1:14

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1 Peter 2:11 · 4:3

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Must the wives of elders and deacons avoid gossip and slander?” on June 7, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY