THE QUESTION

What did early Christians teach about gluttony?

Asked by a THF member on August 24, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 27 early Christian passages and 126 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-early-christians-teach-about-gluttony

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

Early Christians called gluttony a real sin. They taught that food is good, but eating mainly for pleasure, being ruled by the belly, and feasting while others go hungry harm the soul. They urged simple, moderate meals, eating for health and strength, and sharing food with the poor.

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.
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POINT 1 OF 7

Freedom in food is not permission for luxury

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

Novatian teaches that the Gospel freed Christians from the old food laws, but did not free them from self-control. He says no one gave stricter laws against gluttony than Christ.

1

"But from the fact that we are given freedom in foods, it does not necessarily follow that luxury is allowed to us."

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 19, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Eat for health, not appetite alone

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

Origen gives a simple rule: Christians should not eat just to please the appetite, but to keep the body healthy and strong. Eating is good when it serves that purpose.

2

"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 15, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Gluttons make the belly their master

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

Origen, following Paul, says lovers of pleasure treat the belly as their god. Novatian calls those who obey the belly and palate slaves whose slavery never ends. Both picture gluttony as a kind of bondage.

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3 “the belly, though it is not the god of those who prize pleasure too highly, being lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, is said by Paul to be their god”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 11 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 16, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

4 “For those who obey the rule of their belly and their palate would never lack material for their lusts, so their slavery could never end.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Novatian,** *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (c. 240–258 AD) **Source 19, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Overeating fights against the spirit

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

Dionysius of Alexandria warns that flesh fed in luxury rises against the spirit, and he asks how heavy eating and drinking could not be against God. Commodianus mocks the person who thinks he is truly alive while he only fills his belly.

5 “For when the flesh is fed in luxury, it fights against the soul and rises in revolt against the spirit. And how could excessive eating and drinking not also be contrary to God?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Dionysius of Alexandria,** *Exegetical Fragments* 2 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

6 “You believe that you live while you desire to fill your belly.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 24, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Feasting while the poor go hungry

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

Commodianus rebukes the well-fed believer with a full belly while a poor brother cries out in need. Hermas teaches that on a fast day a believer should give the money saved on food to a widow, an orphan, or someone in need. Self-control at the table was tied to love for the poor.

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7 “The brother, oppressed with want, nearly languishing away, cries out at the splendidly fed, and with distended belly.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 23, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “Then calculate the cost of the food for that day which you intended to eat, and give that amount to a widow, or an orphan, or to some person in need.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Fullness and comfort can lead to rebellion

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

Clement of Rome quotes Scripture about a people who ate, drank, grew fat, and rebelled. He links that comfort to envy, strife and disorder in the church, as a warning that plenty can make people forget God.

9 “My beloved ate and drank, grew large and fat, and rebelled.” From this came rivalry and envy, strife and rebellion, persecution and disorder, war and captivity.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 27, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Simple, orderly meals honor God

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

Clement of Alexandria tells believers to avoid excess and to eat in an orderly way. He points to the bread and fish Jesus shared with his disciples as an example of simple food, and he urges eating to the glory of God.

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10 “We must keep away from every slavish habit and from excess, and touch what is set before us in a proper way.”

later in the same passage

“It seems to me that the Lord also hinted at this when He blessed the loaves and the cooked fish with which He feasted the disciples, giving a beautiful example of simple food.”

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

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not set a rule for how much food is too much.
- They speak about habits of eating and the heart, not about body size or medical weight.
- 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 27 early Christian passages and 126 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–27, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 28–47, in Bible order), then 106 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 *27 passages from 15 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 1*

1 *Shepherd* **Quote 8, page 4** do good. And I will be with all those," he added, "who have such a desire." He continued, "This fasting is very good, provided that the commandments of the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 2*

2 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 6) ate and drank, and then indulged in revelry.’ And again: ‘Jacob ate, was satisfied, and became fat; and the beloved one rebelled: he grew fat, thick, and large, and abandoned… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Address to the Greeks* 2 his tub, was struck with a bowel disease from eating a raw octopus, and so lost his life through gluttony. Aristippus, walking around in a purple robe, lived a morally… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Address to the Greeks* 25 (on point 3) a weaver for their cloak, a woodcutter for their staff, rich people, and also a cook for their gluttony. O man competing with the dog, you do not know God… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 5*

5 *Resurrection of the Dead* 6 (on point 2) being fed, and also that excess amount of food taken in only to fill the stomach and satisfy the appetite. No one can doubt that this nourishment becomes part of… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 6–10*

6 *Instructor* 2.1 **Quote 10, page 5** “ourselves to the knowledge of God. For the just man who eats is satisfied in his soul, but the belly of the wicked will lack, Proverbs 13:5, being filled… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Instructor* 2.1 (1885 English; on point 7) “called ὀψοφαγία, is nothing but excess in the use of relishes (ὄψον … [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Instructor* 2.7 (1885 English; on point 7) “is the part of a temperate man also, in eating and drinking, to take a small portion, and deliberately, not eagerly, both at the beginning and during the courses, and… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Instructor* 2.11 (on point 7) “voluptuousness, rich cooking, dainty feeding, gluttony. These are the "What… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Instructor* 3.11 (on point 2) more lovely color has ever been seen — then bodily beauty too should be cared for: a well-shaped body and limbs, with a healthy complexion. Here the adornment of health… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 11–14*

11 *Against Marcion* 29 (1885 English) “room for temperance in appetite does famine give… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *On Fasting* 5 “therefore, from men so ungrateful, all that was more pleasing and appetizing… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *On Fasting* 6 (1885 English; on point 4) “them, to wit, had the heart of the People been made thick, lest they should see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with a heart obstructed… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *On Fasting* 16 (1885 English; on point 4) “this day the monuments of concupiscence remain, where the People, greedy of flesh, till, by devouring without digesting the quails, they brought on cholera, were buried… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 15–16*

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

16 *Commentary on Matthew* 11 **Quote 3, page 3** world. 2 Corinthians 4:4 And do not suppose that Paul said that he was truly God. For just as the belly, though it is not the god of those… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 17*

17 *Exegetical Fragments* 2 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** “how should not intemperate eatings and drinkings also be contrary to God… [continues online] **read ›**

Gregory Thaumaturgus, *c. 240–270 AD · source 18*

18 *Metaphrase of Ecclesiastes* 10 (on point 3) the idler become mockers and make the house fall into decay. Misusing everything for their own gluttony, like eager slaves of money, they are content for a small price to… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · sources 19–21*

19 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 **Quotes 1, 4, pages 2, 3** “restrained lack of self-control as much as the Gospel. No one has given such strict laws against gluttony as Christ. He is said even to have called the poor… [continues online] **read ›**

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20 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (on point 1) 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 ›**

21 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (1885 English; on point 1) “frugality and moderation in appetite were becoming to those who were chosen for this purpose… [continues online] **read ›**

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

22 *Apostolic Constitutions* pure, her hearing clean, her hands undefiled, her feet quiet, and her mouth prepared neither for gluttony nor for foolish talk, but for speaking what is fitting, and for taking… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · sources 23–24*

23 *Writings* **Quote 7, page 4** “rebuke calamity. O belly, stuff yourself out with luxury… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Writings* **Quote 6, page 3** “regard your belly as if you can provide for it… [continues online] **read ›**

Arnobius, *c. 290–330 AD · source 25*

25 *Against the Heathen* 7 (1885 English) “stuffing themselves with sumptuous and ample dinners, do they, as is usually done, take these little bits as sweet dainties, not to appease their hunger, but to rouse their wearied… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 26*

26 *Divine Institutes* 17 (on point 3) but throws itself down to the earth with its whole body and face. It is always a slave to its appetite and food. During its life, it cannot provide any… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 27*

27 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 9, page 4** given to you, and then what is written was fulfilled: “My beloved ate and drank, grew large and fat, and rebelled.” From this came rivalry and envy, strife and rebellion… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *20 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

28 **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 ›**

29 **Matthew 4:2** When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. **read ›**

30 **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 ›**

31 **Matthew 9:14** Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” **read ›**

32 **Mark 2:18** John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees were fasting. They came and asked him, “Why do John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” **read ›**

33 **Mark 2:20** But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. **read ›**

34 **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 ›**

35 **Luke 8:19** His mother and brothers came to him, and they could not come near him for the crowd. **read ›**

36 **Acts 2:46** Day by day they continued steadfastly with one accord in the temple, breaking bread at home and sharing food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **read ›**

37 **Acts 22:13** came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ In that very hour I looked up at him. **read ›**

38 **Acts 27:33** As day was about to dawn, Paul urged everyone to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have continued waiting without food, taking nothing. **read ›**

39 **Romans 14:2** One believes he may eat everything, but the weak person eats vegetables. **read ›**

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40 **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 ›**

41 **1 Corinthians 10:31** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. **read ›**

42 **1 Corinthians 11:21** For when you eat, each one takes his own supper first, and one is hungry while another is drunk. **read ›**

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

44 **Philippians 3:19** their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; they set their minds on earthly things. **read ›**

45 **1 Timothy 6:8** But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. **read ›**

46 **Hebrews 13:9** Do not be carried away by various and strange teachings, for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. **read ›**

47 **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 ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *106 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.

Genesis 1:12 · 9:3

Exodus 16:3

Leviticus 11:3

Deuteronomy 14:3

2 Samuel 6:19

1 Kings 13:19

Psalms 112:6

Proverbs 13:25 · 15:17

Ecclesiastes 6:7 · 10:1

Zechariah 7:6

Matthew 4:4 · 6:21 · 6:32 · 15:11 · 15:13 · 15:14 · 15:17 · 19:12 · 19:18 · 22:21 · 22:29 · 22:35 · 23:4 · 23:6 · 23:19 · 23:25 · 23:30 · 24:22 · 25:25 · 25:35 · 26:36 · 26:40 · 26:46 · 26:51 · 26:63 · 27:45 · 27:48 · 27:50 · 27:59

Mark 7:19 · 12:42 · 13:14

Luke 4:4 · 8:18 · 12:28 · 17:7 · 20:36 · 21:3 · 24:41

John 1:14 · 4:34 · 6:26 · 6:51 · 12:40 · 16:11 · 20:19

Acts 6:2 · 10:10 · 10:14 · 15:23 · 28:26

Romans 1:8 · 7:14 · 10:4 · 14:6 · 14:14 · 14:17 · 14:20 · 14:21 · 14:23

1 Corinthians 5:11 · 6:13 · 7:25 · 7:29 · 8:6 · 8:8 · 8:13 · 9:4 · 9:14 · 10:7 · 10:23 · 10:25 · 11:33 · 15:32 · 15:35

2 Corinthians 1:21 · 3:3 · 3:7 · 3:16 · 4:4 · 6:5 · 11:27 · 12:9

Ephesians 4:20

Colossians 2:18 · 2:21

2 Thessalonians 2:12

1 Timothy 4:1 · 4:4 · 4:5 · 6:10

Titus 1:15

2 Peter 3:16

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did early Christians teach about gluttony?” on August 24, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “What did early Christians teach about gluttony?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-early-christians-teach-about-gluttony. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 19.”

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THE END OF THIS STUDY