THE QUESTION

What did the early Christians say a rich person must do to be saved?

Asked by a THF member on April 11, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 31 early Christian passages and 115 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-christians-say-a-rich-person-must-do-to-be-saved

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

Early Christian writers warned that riches make salvation hard, and said a rich person must keep God's commandments, root out greed, and share with the poor while following Christ. Some stressed selling everything; Clement of Alexandria stressed giving up the soul's ruling passions. The danger was trusting and hoarding wealth, not owning it.

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

Jesus warned that riches make salvation hard

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

Tatian's 2nd-century Gospel harmony tells the story of the rich young ruler. Jesus tells him to sell everything, give to the poor, and follow Him. The man goes away sad because he is very rich, and Jesus warns how hard it is for the rich to enter God's kingdom.

1 “Jesus looked intently at him, loved him, and said to him, "If you want to be perfect, you lack one thing: go and sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And take up your cross, and follow me." But the young man frowned at this word and went away sad, for he was very rich. When Jesus saw his sadness, he looked toward his disciples and said to them, "How hard it is for those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God!"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 28 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

2 “Truly I say to you, it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 29 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Keep the commandments, root out greed, follow Christ

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

Irenaeus, writing in the 2nd century, says Christ's call to sell and give to the poor exposed the young man's greed. He sums up the path as obeying God's commandments, removing greed by good works, and following Christ.

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3 “But when the questioner claimed, “I have kept all these” (though likely he had 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 give to the poor; and come, follow me;” promising to those who would act this way, the portion belonging to the apostles.”

later in the same passage

“But He taught that they should obey the commandments God enjoined from the beginning, eliminate their greed by good works, and follow Christ.”

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

Source 6, page 7 Read it in the library ›

POINT 3 OF 7

Riches distract the rich from prayer

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

The Shepherd of Hermas warns that a rich man can be poor toward the Lord. His wealth distracts him, so his confessions and prayers to God are few, small and weak.

4 “The rich man has much wealth, but he is poor in matters relating to the Lord, because he is distracted by his riches. He offers very few confessions and intercessions to the Lord, and those that he does offer are small and weak, and have no power above.”

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

Source 3, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 7

Clement says the soul's passions must go

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

Clement of Alexandria, around AD 200, says the passions of the soul, not the possessions, must be destroyed, so a person can use what he has well. The rich man who seeks God alone and is not ruled by money keeps the commandments. Otherwise, Clement warns, a camel will pass through a needle sooner than he enters God's kingdom.

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5 “So let no one destroy his possessions rather than the passions of the soul, which do not allow the better use of what one has. Then, by becoming noble and good, he may be able to use these possessions also well.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 14 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 12, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

6 “But if anyone is able to bend the authority of his goods inward, and to think moderately, and to be self-controlled, and to seek God alone, and to breathe God, and to live as a fellow citizen with God—this man, the poor one, stands by the commandments, free, undefeated, free of disease, unwounded by money. But if not, more swiftly will a camel pass through a needle than such a rich man will pass over into the kingdom of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 26 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 11, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 5 OF 7

Cyprian: wealth can chain the soul

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

Cyprian, in the 3rd century, says love of property held many believers like a chain when they had to leave everything. He quotes Christ's call to sell and give to the poor, and says the rich who obeyed it would not perish because of their riches, since their hearts would be where their treasure is.

7 “A blind love of one’s own property has deceived many. They could not be ready, or at peace, when it was time to leave, because their wealth held them like a chain.”

later in the same passage

“Therefore the Lord, the teacher of good things, warning us about the time to come, says, "If you will be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.""

later in the same passage

“If rich people did this, they would not perish because of their riches. If they stored up treasure in heaven, they would not now have an enemy and attacker in their own household. Their heart and mind and feeling would be in heaven, if their treasure were in heaven.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 19, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 6 OF 7

Riches can do good, but bring serious faults

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

Tertullian, in the early 3rd century, says God may rightly give riches, and much justice and charity is done with them. Yet he warns that serious faults come with riches, and that is why the Gospel pronounces woes on the rich.

8 “Indeed, giving a man riches is not unfitting for God, because by the help of riches even rich men are comforted and helped. Also, many works of justice and charity are done by means of riches. Yet there are serious faults that go along with riches. It is because of these that woes are pronounced against the rich, even in the Gospel.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 15 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 14, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

A later preacher: mercy matters more than money

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

John Chrysostom, a later 4th-century preacher, says the rich man in the Lazarus story was punished for showing no mercy, not for being rich. He warns that failing to give alms is enough to send a person to hell and that prayer without almsgiving bears no fruit, urging believers to show their faith by mercy.

9 “Let rich people hear these things. Or rather, not the rich, but the hard-hearted. For he was punished not because he was rich, but because he showed no mercy. It is possible for a man to be both rich and merciful, and to receive every good thing.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Philippians* (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 25, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

10 “Do you see that failing to give alms is enough to throw a person into hell fire? For where will the one who does not give alms find help? Do you fast every day? Those virgins did the same, but it helped them nothing. Do you pray? What of that? Prayer without almsgiving bears no fruit.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Second Timothy* (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 31, page 8** Read it in the library ›
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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not set one rule or a fixed share that every wealthy Christian must give away.
- The sharpest warnings about almsgiving here come from Chrysostom in the 4th century, later than the other writers quoted.
- They do not treat giving as a payment that replaces obeying God's commandments and following Christ.
- 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 31 early Christian passages and 115 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–31, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 32–35, in Bible order), then 111 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 *31 passages from 10 writers*

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistle of Barnabas* common partakers of things incorruptible, how much more of those which are corruptible! Do not be hasty with your tongue, for the mouth is a snare of death. As far… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Shepherd* (on point 3) preparations for this city cannot return to his own city again. Foolish, unstable, and miserable man! Do you not understand that all these things belong to someone else and are… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Shepherd* **Quote 4, page 3** “and rotten. Therefore, this illustration is for the servants of God, for the poor man and for the rich." I said, "How so, sir? Explain it to me." He said… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Diatessaron* 28 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “he was very rich. And when Jesus saw his sadness, he looked towards his disciples, and said to them, How hard it is for them that have possessions to enter… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Diatessaron* 29 **Quote 2, page 2** “19:23 Truly I say to you, it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 19:24 And I also say to you, it… [continues online] **read ›**

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Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 6*

6 *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 3, page 3** “Keep the commandments”), the Lord, exposing his greed, said, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell all you have, and give to the poor; and come, follow me;” promising… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 7–12*

7 *Stromata* 4.6 (on point 4) the image is another thing. What does the parable of Lazarus mean, by showing the image of the rich and poor? And what does the saying mean, "No man can… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 20 (1885 English; on point 4) “they were sanguine of salvation on the ground of their want of wealth… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 19 (on point 4) 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… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 4 (1885 English; on point 1) “Jesus looked round about, and says to His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 26 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “if not, sooner shall a camel enter through a needle's eye, than such a rich man reach the kingdom of God. Mark 10:25… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 14 **Quote 5, page 4** “So let no one destroy his possessions rather than the passions of the soul, which do not allow the better use of what one has. Then, by becoming noble and good, he may be able to use these possessions also well.” **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 13–15*

13 *Against Marcion* 36 (1885 English; on point 1) “18:18-20 Then, when he affirmed that from his youth up he had kept all the principal commandments, (Jesus) said to him: One thing you yet lack: sell all… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Against Marcion* 15 **Quote 8, page 5** “himself with riches. And the mighty man shall be dishonored, even he who is mighty through his wealth.” Isaiah 5:14 About these same people He says again: “Behold, the… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *To His Wife* 2.8 (1885 English; on point 6) “Christian, even although rich, would perhaps not afford (all) these… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 16–18*

16 *Commentary on Matthew* 11 unwilling. He no longer paid it to the money-lender, but now to God for the account of the poor, though in the name of the money-lender. What the… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Against Celsus* 23 (1885 English) “what has been said, it is clear then that Jesus, the man of Nazareth, did not promulgate laws opposed to those just considered in regard to riches, when He said… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Against Celsus* 16 “about what Jesus said against rich men — "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 19–21*

19 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “they laid up treasure in heaven, they would not now have a domestic enemy and assailant… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 5) “says He, your goods, and give alms… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 5) “riches, this wealth, she cannot possess, who had rather be rich to this world than to Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 22*

22 *Writings* (1885 English) “you rich men are undisciplined, you give a law to those, you yourselves not being prepared… [continues online] **read ›**

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John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 23–31*

23 *Homilies on Acts* (1885 English; on point 1) “whatsoever you have, and give to the poor, and come and follow Me… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 13 (on point 7) will enjoy those unspeakable good things." No, rather, one may see the opposite: few rich are saved, but far more of the poor. For consider this, if we carefully measure… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Homilies on Philippians* **Quote 9, page 5** rich people hear these things. Or rather, not the rich, but the hard-hearted. For he was punished not because he was rich, but because he showed no mercy. It… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Homilies on First Thessalonians* (on point 7) “again, "It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Homilies on First Timothy* (on point 7) “as riches make it difficult to enter into the kingdom of heaven, yet rich men have often entered in, so it is with marriage… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Second Homily on Eutropius* 1 (on point 7) necessity it runs away. Nevertheless, many reproach me, saying continually, "You fasten upon the rich," while they, on the other hand, fasten upon the poor. Well, I do fasten upon… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Homilies on the Statues* 2 (on point 7) and placing it clearly before you all. What then was the text read today? “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be high-minded.” 1 Timothy… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Homilies on Philippians* (1885 English; on point 7) “touching riches we read, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven… [continues online] **read ›**

31 *Homilies on Second Timothy* **Quote 10, page 5** “Do you see that failing to give alms is enough to throw a person into hell fire? For where will the one who does not give alms find help? Do you fast every day? Those virgins did the same, but it helped them nothing. Do you pray? What of that? Prayer without almsgiving bears no fruit.” **read ›**

THE BIBLE *4 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

32 **Matthew 19:21** Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” **read ›**

33 **Matthew 19:23** Jesus said to his disciples, “Amen, I say to you, a rich man will enter the kingdom of heaven with difficulty. **read ›**

34 **Matthew 19:24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” **read ›**

35 **Mark 10:17** As he set out on the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *111 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 · 20:12

Leviticus 20:9 · 25:23

Deuteronomy 22:10 · 26:18

2 Samuel 5:8

1 Chronicles 29:15

Proverbs 14:8

Isaiah 2:2 · 10:33

Jeremiah 17:7

Matthew 5:3 · 5:4 · 5:5 · 5:8 · 5:17 · 5:42 · 5:45 · 6:19 · 6:20 · 6:31 · 6:32 · 7:13 · 7:14 · 7:21 · 9:13 · 10:39 · 10:41 · 10:42 · 12:7 · 13:54 · 15:4 · 15:5 · 16:26 · 18:20 · 19:5 · 20:25 · 23:2 · 23:13 · 23:25 · 26:57 · 27:29 · 27:34

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Mark 6:2 · 8:36 · 10:8 · 10:23 · 10:25 · 10:44 · 14:5

Luke 2:7 · 6:20 · 6:24 · 6:25 · 6:26 · 6:30 · 12:20 · 12:22 · 12:30 · 12:33 · 12:42 · 13:32 · 16:14 · 18:1 · 18:7 · 18:10 · 18:18 · 18:19 · 18:21 · 18:24 · 18:38 · 18:39 · 18:40 · 18:42 · 19:8 · 19:15 · 22:25

John 7:15 · 12:5 · 12:6 · 12:25 · 14:27 · 15:5 · 19:17

Romans 8:29 · 9:15

1 Corinthians 1:26 · 10:24

2 Corinthians 5:1 · 8:12

Ephesians 1:12 · 4:26 · 5:19 · 5:31 · 6:9 · 6:16

Philippians 3:20 · 4:3

Colossians 3:5 · 3:16

1 Timothy 6:5 · 6:10 · 6:20

2 Timothy 3:2

Hebrews 9:14 · 11:13 · 13:14

James 1:8 · 1:27

1 Peter 2:11

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did the early Christians say a rich person must do to be saved?” 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