THE QUESTION

What did the early Christians teach about gossip, backbiting and slander?

Asked by a THF member on April 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 19 early Christian passages and 148 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-teach-about-gossip-backbiting-and-slander

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

The early church treated gossip, backbiting and slander as serious sins, not harmless talk. Early writers listed them beside lies, greed and hatred, warned that a listener who believes slander shares the sin, and urged Christians to guard their ears and mouths. They also taught believers to bless and pray for those who slander them.

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

The Didache forbids evil speech and double talk

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

This very early church manual gives plain commands: do not speak evil, do not hold a grudge, and do not be double-tongued, which it calls a snare of death. It also asks that our speech be true and not empty, but backed up by what we do.

1

> "You shall not speak evil. You shall bear no grudge. You shall not be double-minded or double-tongued, for to be double-tongued is a snare of death. Your speech shall not be false or empty, but fulfilled by deed."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 2 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Ignatius tells believers to lay gossip aside

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

Ignatius of Antioch puts evil-speaking, slander and gossip in the same list as drunkenness, lust and greed. He tells each believer to lay all of them aside, treating them as things a Christian must put off, not small habits to shrug at.

2

> "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) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Hermas says the listener shares the sin

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

The Shepherd of Hermas warns against both speaking evil and enjoying hearing it. If you believe the slander, you now have something to say against your brother, so you share the slanderer's guilt. He calls slander restless and always stirring up conflict, and promises peace with everyone to those who

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keep away from it.

3 “First, do not speak evil of anyone, and do not enjoy listening to anyone who speaks evil of another person. But if you listen, you will share in the sin of the one who speaks evil, if you believe the slander you hear. For if you believe it, you too will have something to say against your brother. In this way, then, you will be guilty of the sin of the one who slanders. For slander is evil, and it is an unstable demon. It never stays in peace, but always remains in conflict. Keep yourself from it, and you will always be at peace with everyone.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Hermas ranks backbiting among the worst sins

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

Hermas tells the servant of God to hold back from a list of sins, including lies, boasting, hypocrisy, backbiting and every kind of slander. He calls these the most wicked deeds in human life and says one who does not restrain himself from them cannot live to God. In a vision, Backbiting is among the followers of Unbelief and Deceit.

4 “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. Therefore, the servant of God must restrain himself from all these deeds. For he who does not restrain himself from these cannot live to God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 2, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

5 “Of these, four are stronger than the rest. The first is Unbelief, the second Incontinence, the third Disobedience, and the fourth 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, but will not enter it.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 7

Clement compares evil words to evil deeds

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

Clement of Alexandria says people whose speech is evil are no better than those whose actions are evil. He explains that slander serves the sword and evil-speaking causes pain and disaster, while those devoted to good speech come close to those who do good deeds.

6 “And just as people whose speech is evil are no better than those whose actions are evil—for slander serves the sword, and evil-speaking causes pain, and from these come disasters in life, since such are the results of evil speech—so also those who are devoted to good speech are very close to those who do good deeds.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 1.10 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Methodius offers the ears to God, not gossip

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

Methodius describes giving each part of the body to God. For the ears, that means shutting them against backbiting and slander and opening them instead to God's word and the company of wise people.

7 “If I shut my ears against backbiting and slander, and open them to the word of God, keeping company with wise men, then I have offered my ears to the Lord.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Methodius,** *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 4 (c. 270–311 AD) **Source 19, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Answer slander with blessing, not reviling

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

Tertullian points to Isaiah 66:5: those who hate and slander us are still to be called brothers, so, as Christ commands, we are to bless them and pray for them instead of answering in kind.

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8 “The Creator included these commands in one precept through His prophet Isaiah: "Say, 'You are our brothers,' to those who hate you." Isaiah 66:5 For if those who are our enemies, and hate us, and speak evil of us, and slander us, are to be called our brothers, then surely He did in fact tell us to bless those who hate us, and pray for those who slander us, when He taught us to count them as brothers.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 15 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 13, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give exact definitions that separate gossip, backbiting and slander from one another.
- They do not lay out a full rule for when it is right to report real wrongdoing or give truthful testimony.
- 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 19 early Christian passages and 148 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–19, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 20–85, in Bible order), then 82 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 *19 passages from 10 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 2 **Quote 1, page 2** “shall not speak evil. You shall bear no grudge… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 2–5*

2 *Shepherd* **Quote 4, page 3** “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 ›**

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3 *Shepherd* **Quote 3, page 3** “But if you listen, you will share in the sin of the one who speaks evil, if you believe the slander you hear. For if you believe it, you too… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Shepherd* **Quote 5, page 3** “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 ›**

5 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 3) “they who have them half-withered and cracked are both waverers and slanderers, [railing against the absent,] and never at peace with one another, but always at variance… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 2, page 2** 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 ›**

7 *Epistles of Ignatius* (on point 2) should eat, so they don't become a wanderer and a whoremonger. Let drunkenness, anger, envy, reviling, clamor, and blasphemy "not even be mentioned among you." Widows should not live… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 8*

8 *Epistle to the Philippians* covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, and false witness; "not returning evil for evil, or reviling for reviling," or blow for blow, or cursing for cursing, but remembering what the… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 9–12*

9 *Stromata* 1.10 **Quote 6, page 4** “And just as people whose speech is evil are no better than those whose actions are evil—for slander serves the sword, and evil-speaking causes pain, and from these… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Instructor* 2.6 (1885 English; on point 5) “filthy speaking the apostle beats off, saying, Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Instructor* 2.6 (1885 English; on point 5) “10:19 Sins of the tongue, therefore, shall be punished… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Instructor* 3.11 “stir up sexual desires. Therefore, spectacles and plays that are full of vulgarity and endless gossip must be forbidden. For what shameful act is not shown in the theaters? And… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 13*

13 *Against Marcion* 15 **Quote 8, page 5** who listen to you," "Love your enemies, and bless those who hate you, and pray for those who slander you." The Creator included these commands in one precept through His… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 14–15*

14 *Commentary on John* 5 words you shall not escape sin, but in sparing your lips you shall be wise.” Here I ask whether speaking many words of any kind is a multitude of words… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Against Celsus* 54 (1885 English) “your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 16*

16 *Epistles* “besides, Paul the apostle writes and says the same thing: "Whisperers, backbiters… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 17–18*

17 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) “not therefore either a bishop, or a presbyter, or a deacon, or any one else of the sacerdotal catalogue, defile his tongue with calumny, lest he inherit a curse instead… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) “prohibition of evil speaking and passion, of deceitful conduct, or idle words, lies, covetousness, and hypocrisy… [continues online] **read ›**

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Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · source 19*

19 *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 4 **Quote 7, page 4** "If I shut my ears against backbiting and slander, and open them to the word of God, keeping company with wise men, then I have offered my ears to the Lord." **read ›**

THE BIBLE *66 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

20 **Leviticus 19:16** You shall not go about with deceit among your nation; you shall not rise up against the blood of your neighbor. I am the Lord your God. **read ›**

21 **Psalms 15:3** who has not deceived with his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbor, nor taken up an insult against those nearest to him; (Septuagint Psalm 14:3 (Psalm 15:3 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

22 **Psalms 34:13** Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. (Septuagint Psalm 33:14 (Psalm 34:13 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

23 **Psalms 41:7** All my enemies whispered against me; against me they devised evil for me. (Septuagint Psalm 40:8 (Psalm 41:7 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

24 **Psalms 64:5** They have strengthened for themselves an evil word; they have talked of hiding traps; they have said, "Who will see them?" (Septuagint Psalm 63:6 (Psalm 64:5 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

25 **Proverbs 10:18** Righteous lips cover hostility, but those who utter abuse are most foolish. **read ›**

26 **Proverbs 11:13** A double-tongued man reveals counsels in the council, but he who is faithful in spirit hides matters. **read ›**

27 **Proverbs 16:28** A crooked man sends out evils, and will light a torch of deceit with evils, and he separates friends. **read ›**

28 **Proverbs 17:4** A bad man listens to the tongue of the lawless, but a righteous man does not pay attention to lying lips. **read ›**

29 **Proverbs 18:8** Fear casts down the lazy, and the souls of the unmanly will hunger. **read ›**

30 **Proverbs 20:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

31 **Proverbs 25:23** The north wind stirs up clouds, and a shameless face provokes the tongue. **read ›**

32 **Proverbs 26:22** The words of the cunning are soft, but they strike into the chambers of the inward parts. **read ›**

33 **Jeremiah 11:3** and you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Cursed is the man who will not listen to the words of this covenant, **read ›**

34 **Jeremiah 33:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

35 **Jeremiah 49:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

36 **Daniel 2:14** Then Daniel answered Arioch with counsel and discretion—Arioch, the king's chief cook, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon: **read ›**

37 **Amos 1:11** Thus says the Lord: For three ungodly deeds of Idumea, and for four, I will not turn away from them, because they pursued their brother with the sword, and he destroyed the mother upon the earth, and seized his trembling for a testimony, and kept his onrush forever. **read ›**

38 **Nahum 3:2** The sound of whips, and the sound of rattling wheels, and of the pursuing horse, and of the bounding chariot, **read ›**

39 **Wisdom of Solomon 1:11** Beware, then, of useless grumbling, and keep your tongue from slander; for no secret word goes out empty, and a lying mouth slays the soul. **read ›**

40 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:14** Do not be called a gossip, and do not lie in ambush with your tongue; for shame is upon the thief, and an evil condemnation upon the double-tongued. **read ›**

41 **Wisdom of Sirach 9:18** A talkative man is feared in his city, and he who is rash in his speech will be hated. **read ›**

42 **Wisdom of Sirach 12:16** The enemy will speak sweetly with his lips, but in his heart he will plan to throw you down into a pit; the enemy will weep with his eyes, but if he finds an opportunity, he will not be satisfied with blood. **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 19:15** Question a friend, for slander often happens; and do not believe every word. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 19:16** There is one who slips, but not from the soul; and who has not sinned with his tongue? **read ›**

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45 **Wisdom of Sirach 21:25** The lips of strangers will be weighed down by these things, but the words of those of sound judgment will be weighed on the scale. **read ›**

46 **Wisdom of Sirach 21:28** The gossip defiles his own soul, and will be hated where he lives. **read ›**

47 **Wisdom of Sirach 23:13** Do not accustom your mouth to coarse vulgarity, for in it is the word of sin. **read ›**

48 **Wisdom of Sirach 27:15** The fighting of the proud is bloodshed, and their abuse of one another is painful to hear. **read ›**

49 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:13** Curse the gossip and the double-tongued, for they have destroyed many who were at peace. **read ›**

50 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:14** A third tongue has shaken many, and driven them from nation to nation; it has pulled down strong cities, and overthrown the houses of nobles. **read ›**

51 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:15** A third tongue has driven out courageous women, and deprived them of their labors. **read ›**

52 **Wisdom of Sirach 51:5** from the depth of the belly of Hades, from an unclean tongue and a lying word— **read ›**

53 **Mark 7:22** thefts, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained vice, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. **read ›**

54 **Luke 11:54** lying in wait for him, and seeking to catch him in something he might say, that they might accuse him. **read ›**

55 **Luke 12:3** Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light. What you have spoken in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. **read ›**

56 **Luke 22:65** And they said many other things against him, blaspheming. **read ›**

57 **Acts 20:30** Men will arise from among your own selves, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. **read ›**

58 **Romans 1:29** being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness; secret slanderers, **read ›**

59 **Romans 1:30** backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, **read ›**

60 **Romans 3:13** Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have dealt deceitfully; the poison of cobras is under their lips; **read ›**

61 **Romans 3:14** their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; **read ›**

62 **Romans 9:7** Nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s seed. But, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” **read ›**

63 **Romans 14:16** Then do not let your good be slandered, **read ›**

64 **1 Corinthians 14:30** But if a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first keep silent. **read ›**

65 **Philippians 3:2** Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation. **read ›**

66 **Colossians 3:8** But now you also must put away all these things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and shameful speech from your mouth. **read ›**

67 **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 ›**

68 **2 Timothy 2:17** and their word will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, **read ›**

69 **2 Timothy 3:3** without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, not lovers of good, **read ›**

70 **2 Timothy 3:4** traitors, headstrong, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **read ›**

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

72 **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 ›**

73 **James 1:26** If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is worthless. **read ›**

74 **James 3:5** So the tongue is also a little member, and boasts great things. See how large a forest a small fire sets ablaze! **read ›**

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75 **James 3:6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. Thus the tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting the course of life on fire, and itself set on fire by hell. **read ›**

76 **James 3:8** but no human being can tame the tongue—an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. **read ›**

77 **James 3:10** Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. **read ›**

78 **James 4:11** Do not speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. **read ›**

79 **1 Peter 2:1** Putting away therefore all wickedness, all deceit, hypocrisies, envies, and all evil speaking, **read ›**

80 **1 Peter 2:22** who did no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth; **read ›**

81 **1 Peter 3:10** For the one who desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. **read ›**

82 **1 Peter 4:4** They are surprised that you do not run with them into the same flood of reckless excess, and they speak evil of you. **read ›**

83 **2 Peter 2:2** And many will follow their licentious ways, because of whom the way of truth will be maligned. **read ›**

84 **Jude 1:8** Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander dignitaries. **read ›**

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

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *82 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 9:5

Psalms 2:7 · 69:28

Proverbs 10:19

Ecclesiastes 12:12

Isaiah 10:23 · 45:1

Ezekiel 2:10

Zechariah 7:10

Matthew 4:3 · 5:3 · 5:22 · 5:42 · 7:1 · 7:2 · 12:36 · 12:37 · 18:3 · 20:23 · 23:5

Luke 6:20 · 6:27 · 6:29 · 6:30 · 6:31 · 6:36 · 6:37 · 6:38 · 11:1 · 22:24

John 1:3 · 5:39 · 5:46 · 8:26 · 10:16 · 11:25 · 13:2

Acts 3:14 · 8:30 · 17:31 · 20:7

Romans 2:16 · 8:11 · 9:28 · 12:8 · 12:9 · 12:19 · 13:14

1 Corinthians 1:10 · 2:8 · 5:13 · 6:14 · 8:6

2 Corinthians 4:14

Galatians 1:4 · 5:10

Ephesians 2:4 · 2:14 · 2:20 · 4:29 · 5:3 · 5:16 · 6:14

Philippians 2:2 · 2:10 · 3:16

2 Thessalonians 3:10

1 Timothy 3:15 · 5:6 · 6:1 · 6:10

Titus 2:5 · 3:2

Hebrews 10:30 · 13:17

1 Peter 1:13 · 1:21 · 2:9 · 3:9 · 3:22 · 4:3

Revelation 5:1

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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 the early Christians teach about gossip, backbiting and slander?” on April 9, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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 above, with a link to read it.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY