THE QUESTION

What did the early Christians think about men wearing beards?

Asked by a THF member on April 8, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 12 early Christian passages and 18 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-think-about-men-wearing-beards

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

Several early Christian writers praised the beard as a natural, God-given mark of a man and warned against shaving the chin bare or plucking it out for vanity. Clement allowed some trimming. Some also mocked pagan philosophers who wore beards for show, so a beard by itself was not treated as proof of wisdom.

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 6

Clement told men to keep their beards

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

Clement of Alexandria, writing around AD 200, gives the clearest rule: men should keep the hair on the chin. He allows a man to shave part of his beard, but says shaving the chin down to bare skin is shameful and close to plucking the hair out.

1

"About hair, the following seems right. A man's head should be shaved, unless his hair is curly. But he should keep the hair on his chin."

later in the same passage

"A full beard is enough for men. And if a man also shaves part of his beard, he must not make it completely bare, because this is a disgraceful sight. Shaving the chin down to the skin is blameworthy. It comes close to plucking out the hair and smoothing the skin."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Clement called the beard God's mark of manhood

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

For Clement this was more than style. He says God made women smooth but gave men the beard as a sign of manhood and strength. He applies Jesus' words about numbered hairs to the chin, so plucking goes against God's design, and he calls the beard a natural and noble ornament.

2

"For God wished women to be smooth, and to rejoice only in their locks growing naturally, as a horse in its mane. But He has adorned man, like the lions, with a beard, and endowed him, as a mark of manhood, with shaggy breasts. This is a sign of strength and rule."

later in the same passage

"Those on the chin too are numbered, and those on the whole body. Therefore there must be no plucking out, contrary to God's appointment, since He has counted them according to His will."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.3 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

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3 “For it is not right to pull out the beard, which is a man’s natural and noble ornament.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.3 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Tertullian called men to a sober appearance

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

Tertullian turns his teaching on modesty toward men. He says some things are forbidden to men too, for the sake of the sobriety owed to God, and in the same passage he counts cutting the beard too sharply and plucking it among men's tricks of appearance. Where God is, there is modesty, so seriousness should mark a man's appearance and face.

4 “Are there not, in our case too, some things which, in respect of the sobriety we are to maintain on account of the fear due to God, are disallowed?”

later in the same passage

“For where God is, there is modesty; there is sobriety, her assistant and ally.”

later in the same passage

“How, moreover, shall we bring sobriety to bear on the discharge of the functions of modesty, unless seriousness in appearance, in countenance, and in the general aspect of the entire man marks our conduct?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Apparel of Women* 2.8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Cyprian linked beard plucking to false repentance

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

Cyprian, in the 3rd century, describes a man who claims to grieve over his sin but goes around cheerful and grooms himself. He cites Leviticus 19:27 against marring the beard and asks whom such a man is trying to please when he displeases God.

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5 “How can a man who walks with a cheerful and happy step be mourning for his death? And although it is written, “You shall not mar the figure of your beard,” Leviticus 19:27, he plucks out his beard and arranges his hair. Is he now trying to please anyone when he displeases God?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

The beard was praised as God's design

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

Lactantius says the beard marks a grown man, shows the difference between the sexes, and adds manly beauty, all as part of a fitting design. Dionysius of Alexandria says Providence cares for beauty too and calls the beard a suitable ornament for the philosopher. Neither passage gives a grooming rule.

6 “Then the nature of the beard contributes in an incredible way to mark the maturity of the body, or the distinction of sex, or the beauty of manliness and strength. So it is clear that the arrangement of the whole work would not have been fitting, if anything had been made different from what it is.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *On the Workmanship of God* 7 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “For Providence cares not only for the useful, but also for the fitting and beautiful. Thus the hair is a kind of protection and covering for the whole head, and the beard is a suitable ornament for the philosopher.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Dionysius of Alexandria,** *Miscellaneous Fragments* 1 (c. 232–265 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

A beard alone did not prove wisdom

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

Tatian mocks pagan philosophers who were paid by the emperor just to wear long beards. Lactantius says pagan philosophy shows itself only by a beard and cloak, as a sign that it is not true wisdom. These writers aim at pagan teachers, not at Christian men with beards.

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8 "Some of them receive six hundred aurei every year from the king of the Romans, for no useful service that they perform, but so that they may not even wear a long beard without being paid for it."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Address to the Greeks* 19 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

9 "Therefore, this is a very strong argument that philosophy neither leads to wisdom nor is itself wisdom: its mystery is made known only by the beard and cloak of the philosophers."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Divine Institutes* 25 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 12, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not say exactly how much trimming was acceptable.
- They show what some teachers urged, not how many Christians actually wore beards or shaved.
- They do not set a separate beard rule for clergy or compare customs between regions.
- 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 12 early Christian passages and 18 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–12, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 13–26, in Bible order), then 4 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 *12 passages from 7 writers*

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Address to the Greeks* 25 (1885 English; on point 6) "cultivate their beards; their nails are like the claws of wild beasts… [continues online] **read ›**

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2 *Address to the Greeks* 19 **Quote 8, page 5** “Some of them receive six hundred aurei every year from the king of the Romans, for no useful service that they perform, but so that they may not even wear a long beard without being paid for it.” **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 3–5*

3 *Instructor* 3.3 **Quote 2, page 2** “has adorned man, like the lions, with a beard, and… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 1, page 2** “Twisted locks should not hang far down from the head, falling into womanish ringlets. A full beard is enough for men. And if a man also shaves part of his… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Instructor* 3.3 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** “it is not lawful to pluck out the beard, man's natural and noble ornament… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 6*

6 *On the Apparel of Women* 2.8 **Quote 4, page 3** “Are there not, in our case too, some things which, in respect of the sobriety we are to maintain on account of the fear due to God, are disallowed?” **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 7*

7 *Miscellaneous Fragments* 1 **Quote 7, page 4** “the hair is a kind of protection and covering for the whole head, and the beard is a… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “does he now study to please any one who displeases God… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Treatises* (on point 4) “Nor should those people flatter themselves that they need less repentance, who, although they have not stained their hands with hateful sacrifices, have still defiled their conscience with certificates. That… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 10*

10 *Apostolic Constitutions* “the law says, "You shall not mar your beards… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *On the Workmanship of God* 7 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “the nature of the beard contributes in an incredible degree to distinguish the maturity of bodies, or to the distinction of sex, or to the beauty of manliness and strength… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Divine Institutes* 25 **Quote 9, page 5** “Therefore, this is a very strong argument that philosophy neither leads to wisdom nor is itself wisdom: its mystery is made known only by the beard and cloak of the philosophers.” **read ›**

THE BIBLE *14 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **Leviticus 13:29** If a man or a woman has a plague of leprosy on the head or in the beard, **read ›**

14 **Leviticus 14:9** On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair—his head, his beard, and his eyebrows; all his hair he shall shave off—and he shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean. **read ›**

15 **Leviticus 19:27** You shall not cut the hair of your head into a round tuft, nor spoil the appearance of your beard. **read ›**

16 **Leviticus 21:5** You shall not shave your heads bald for the dead; and they shall not shave the appearance of their beard, nor cut gashes in their flesh. **read ›**

17 **Leviticus 21:10** And the high priest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured, and who has been consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor tear his garments; **read ›**

18 **Numbers 6:5** all the days of his purification. No razor shall come upon his head until the days that he vowed to the Lord are fulfilled; he shall be holy, letting the hair of his head grow long, **read ›**

19 **2 Samuel 10:5** When they told David about the men, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly disgraced. And the king said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return.” **read ›**

20 **Proverbs 20:29** Wisdom is an ornament to young men, and gray hairs are the glory of old men. **read ›**

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21 **Song of Solomon 4:1** Behold, you are beautiful, my companion; behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves, apart from your silence. Your hair is like flocks of goats that have come into view from Gilead. **read ›**

22 **Song of Solomon 5:11** His head is gold of Kephaz; his locks are fir boughs, black as a raven. **read ›**

23 **Isaiah 7:20** In that day the Lord will shave the head and the hair of the feet with the razor hired beyond the river, the razor of the king of the Assyrians, and he will take away the beard. **read ›**

24 **Ezekiel 44:20** And they shall not shave their heads, and they shall not pluck out their hair; they shall surely cover their heads. **read ›**

25 **1 Corinthians 11:6** For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or be shaved, let her be covered. **read ›**

26 **1 Corinthians 11:14** Or does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *4 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.

Matthew 10:30 · 18:7

1 Corinthians 11:3

2 Corinthians 13:5

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 think about men wearing beards?” on April 8, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY