THE QUESTION

What did the early church expect of an elder's wife?

Asked by a THF member on November 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 18 early Christian passages and 187 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-church-expect-of-an-elders-wife

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

The early writers expected the wife of a church leader to be a serious, faithful Christian wife who loved her husband and children and lived in purity. Her good character was checked before a bishop was ordained. The passages do not give her a church office of her own.

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

Her character was checked before ordination

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

The Apostolic Constitutions say that before a man is made bishop, the church should look at his household. Part of that check is whether he has a serious and faithful wife. His wife's life is treated as part of his fitness to lead.

1 "In this way, examination should be made when he is to receive ordination and be placed in his bishopric, to see whether he is serious, faithful, and respectable; whether he has a serious and faithful wife, or formerly had such a wife; whether he has brought up his children in a godly way and raised them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; Ephesians 6:4 and whether his servants fear and respect him and all obey him."

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

POINT 2 OF 7

A well-ordered home shows fitness to lead

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

The same passage asks how a man can lead the church if the people closest to him are rebellious. A faithful wife and an orderly household support the leader's credibility with the wider church.

2 "For if those who are immediately around him in worldly matters are rebellious and disobedient, how will others outside his family, when they are under his oversight, become obedient to him?"

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

POINT 3 OF 7

She should love her husband and children

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

Polycarp told the church to teach its wives faith, love and purity, and to raise their children to know and fear God. This is the pattern for every Christian wife, and so for a leader's wife too.

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3 “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.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 4, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

She manages her home with discretion

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

Clement of Rome praises a church whose wives kept a pure conscience, loved their husbands and ran their homes well. He links this to a church that honored its elders and walked in God's commands.

4 “You instructed young men to be of a sober and serious mind; you taught your wives to do all things with a blameless, becoming, and pure conscience, loving their husbands as was their duty; and you taught them that, living by the rule of obedience, they should manage their household affairs properly, and be marked by discretion in every respect.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Her life should bring honor to her husband

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

The Apostolic Constitutions tell a wife to please her husband so that he may be called blessed because of her. They then quote the virtuous woman of Proverbs, whose husband is honored among the elders.

5 “Render yourself acceptable to him in the several affairs of life, so that on your account your husband may be called blessed, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, which thus speaks: "Who can find a virtuous woman?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 12, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 6 OF 7

Husband and wife love as one

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

Ignatius calls husbands to love their wives as their own bodies, and wives to love their husbands because they are joined as one. Marriage in a leader's home is meant to show this same love.

6 “Take heed, husbands, to love your wives as your own bodies. Wives also, love your husbands, as being one with them by virtue of your union.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 2, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Church offices belonged to those ordained

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

The Apostolic Constitutions list what bishops, presbyters and deacons may do, and say even a deaconess does not do the work of a presbyter. Nothing here gives a leader's wife his office because she is married to him.

7 “A deaconess does not bless, nor does she do anything that belongs to the office of presbyters or deacons.”

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

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages speak of a bishop's wife and of Christian wives in general; none gives a separate job description for an elder's wife.
- They do not say whether a leader's wife had any special duties in worship or teaching.
- 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.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 18 early Christian passages and 187 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 19–96, in Bible order), then 109 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*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 1–3*

1 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (on point 6) therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," perform all things with harmony in Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands in the fear of God; and you virgins… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 6, page 4** "as if I were a person of any consequence, but simply as a brother. Be subject to the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons. Love one another in the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English; on point 6) "my sisters to love God, and be content with their own husbands only… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 4*

4 *Epistle to the Philippians* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "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 ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 5–8*

5 *Stromata* 3 1 Timothy 5:14-15. Indeed, he certainly also accepts the husband of one wife, whether he is a presbyter or a deacon or a layman, using marriage without blame… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Stromata* 4.8 (on point 6) in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Stromata* 4.17 (1885 English; on point 4) "us direct our wives to what is good… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Stromata* 4.20 (1885 English) "therefore, the apostle says in the Epistle to Titus, that the elder women should be of godly behaviour, should not be slanderers, not enslaved to much wine… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 9*

9 *On Exhortation to Chastity* 7 (1885 English) "long as no other can be a presbyter than a laic, provided he have been once for all a husband… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 10*

10 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 "what is said in the law about the bill of divorce, I wonder whether, since the bishop and the presbyter and the deacon are symbols of things that truly exist… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 11–16*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 7) among us, you yourselves are not ignorant of them. For you certainly know that those named by us bishops, and presbyters, and deacons, were made so by prayer and by… [continues online] **read ›**

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12 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 5, page 3** "husband is eminent in the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) named and approved, let the people gather on the Lord's Day, together with the presbytery and the bishops who are present, and let them give their consent. And let… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 2, page 2** "Timothy 3:4 In this manner let examination be made when he is to receive ordination, and to be placed in his bishopric, whether he be grave, faithful, decent… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 7, page 4** He lays on hands, ordains, offers, and receives the blessing from bishops, but never from presbyters. A bishop removes from office any clergyman who deserves removal, except a bishop, because… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* "Let every widow be meek, quiet, gentle, sincere, free from anger, not… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *sources 17–18*

17 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "enjoined young men to be of a sober and serious mind… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English; on point 4) "us honour the aged among us; let us train up the young men in the fear of God… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *78 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

19 **Exodus 1:21** And because the midwives feared God, they made households for themselves. **read ›**

20 **Leviticus 22:13** But if the daughter of a priest becomes a widow or is cast out, and has no seed, she shall return to her father's house as in her youth; she shall eat of her father's bread. But no stranger shall eat of it. **read ›**

21 **Deuteronomy 22:16** And the girl's father shall say to the elders, "I gave this daughter of mine to this man as a wife; **read ›**

22 **Deuteronomy 22:26** To the young woman there is no offense worthy of death. As when a man rises up against his neighbor and takes his life, so is this matter, **read ›**

23 **Deuteronomy 25:7** But if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then the woman shall go up to the gate, to the elders, and say, "My husband's brother refuses to raise up his brother's name in Israel; my husband's brother would not." **read ›**

24 **Deuteronomy 25:9** then his brother's wife shall come forward before the elders, untie one of his sandals from his foot, and spit in his face; and she shall answer and say, "So shall they do to the man who will not build up his brother's house in Israel." **read ›**

25 **Judges 21:7** What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord not to give them any of our daughters as wives?" **read ›**

26 **Judges 21:16** Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women have been destroyed out of Benjamin?" **read ›**

27 **Ruth 1:9** May the Lord grant you that each of you find rest in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept. **read ›**

28 **Ruth 4:15** He shall be to you a restorer of your soul and one to nourish your old age; for your daughter-in-law who has loved you has borne him, she who is better to you than seven sons." **read ›**

29 **1 Kings 10:8** Blessed are your wives; blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually, who hear all your understanding. **read ›**

30 **2 Kings 4:1** Now a certain woman of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your slave my husband is dead, and you know that your slave feared the Lord; and the creditor has come to take my two sons for himself as slaves." **read ›**

31 **Psalms 2:11** Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice greatly in him with trembling. **read ›**

32 **Psalms 11:3** For what you fashioned they have torn down; but what has the righteous one done? (Septuagint Psalm 10:3 (Psalm 11:3 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

33 **Proverbs 11:16** A gracious wife raises up glory for her husband, but a woman who hates what is right is a seat of dishonor. The lazy come to lack wealth, but the courageous support themselves with wealth. **read ›**

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34 **Proverbs 30:10** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

35 **Proverbs 30:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

36 **Proverbs 31:23** And her husband becomes admired in the gates, when he sits in council with the elders who dwell in the land. **read ›**

37 **Daniel 5:18** O king. God Most High gave the kingdom and the majesty and the honor and the glory to Nebuchadnezzar your father; **read ›**

38 **Daniel 11:16** And he who comes in against him shall do according to his will, and there is no one standing before him; and he shall stand in the land of Sabi, and it shall be consumed by his hand. **read ›**

39 **1 Esdras 9:18** Of the priests who had come together, there were found those who had foreign wives: **read ›**

40 **Tobit 11:3** Let us run ahead of your wife and prepare the house; **read ›**

41 **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 ›**

42 **Wisdom of Sirach 8:4** Do not jest with an untaught man, lest your ancestors be dishonored. **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 9:4** Do not linger with a woman harpist, lest you be caught by her schemes. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 15:8** She is far from pride, and lying men will never remember her. **read ›**

45 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:8** blessed is he who lives with a wife of understanding, and he who has not slipped with his tongue, and he who has not served one unworthy of him; **read ›**

46 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:18** Her husband will sit down among his neighbors, and when he hears, he sighs bitterly. **read ›**

47 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:19** All malice is small beside the malice of a woman; may the lot of a sinner fall upon her. **read ›**

48 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:20** Like a sandy ascent for the feet of an old man, so is a talkative wife to a quiet man. **read ›**

49 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:22** There is anger and shamelessness and great disgrace if a wife supports her husband. **read ›**

50 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:23** A low spirit and a gloomy face and a wounded heart— that is an evil wife; drooping hands and weakened knees— that is she who will not make her husband happy. **read ›**

51 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:25** Do not give water an outlet, nor an evil woman free rein. **read ›**

52 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:1** Blessed is the husband of a good wife; the number of his days will be doubled. **read ›**

53 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:2** A courageous wife gladdens her husband, and she will fill out his years in peace. **read ›**

54 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:3** A good wife is a good portion; she will be given among the portion of those who fear the Lord. **read ›**

55 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:6** A wife jealous of another wife is grief of heart and mourning, and a lash of the tongue that communicates with all. **read ›**

56 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:7** An evil wife is an ox yoke that slips about; he who takes hold of her is like one who grasps a scorpion. **read ›**

57 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:13** The grace of a wife delights her husband, and her knowledge will fatten his bones. **read ›**

58 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:14** A silent wife is a gift of the Lord, and nothing can be given in exchange for a well-instructed soul. **read ›**

59 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:15** A modest wife is grace upon grace, and no weight is worth a self-controlled soul. **read ›**

60 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:16** The sun rising in the heights of the Lord— so is the beauty of a good wife in the adornment of his house. **read ›**

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

62 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:29** He who acquires a wife begins a possession, a helper suited to him and a pillar of rest. **read ›**

63 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:11** With a woman about her rival, and with a coward about war, with a merchant about trade, and with a buyer about selling, with an envious man about thankfulness, and with a merciless man about kindness, with a lazy man about any work, and with a hired man of your household about finishing, with an idle household servant about much work— do not rely on these for any counsel. **read ›**

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64 **Wisdom of Sirach 42:10** in her virginity, lest she be defiled and become pregnant in her father's house; when with a husband, lest she transgress, and when married, lest she be barren. **read ›**

65 **Wisdom of Sirach 42:12** Do not gaze at anyone for beauty, and do not sit in the midst of women; **read ›**

66 **Wisdom of Sirach 42:13** for from garments comes a moth, and from a woman a woman's wickedness. **read ›**

67 **Wisdom of Sirach 42:14** Better is a man's wickedness than a woman who does good; and a woman who brings shame, ending in disgrace. **read ›**

68 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:28** Their priests sell their sacrifices and squander the money; and likewise their wives preserve some of the sacrifices in salt, and give nothing to the poor or the helpless. **read ›**

69 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:33** The priests take some of their gods' clothing and clothe their wives and children. **read ›**

70 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:43** And the women, with cords around them, sit by the roads burning bran for incense; and when one of them, led away by some passer-by, has lain with him, she taunts her neighbor for not having been thought as worthy as herself, nor having had her cord broken. **read ›**

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

72 **Susanna 1:34** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

74 **Bel and the Dragon 1:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

75 **2 Maccabees 14:25** Nicanor urged Judas to marry and have children; Judas married, settled down, and shared in the common life. **read ›**

76 **2 Maccabees 15:18** For their anxiety for wives and children, and also for brothers and relatives, weighed less with them; but the greatest and first fear was for the consecrated temple. **read ›**

77 **1 Enoch 9:9** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

78 **1 Enoch 12:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

79 **1 Enoch 15:7** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

80 **Luke 2:36** There was also Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her virginity, **read ›**

81 **Luke 12:13** One of the multitude said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." **read ›**

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

83 **1 Corinthians 9:5** Have we no right to take along a wife who is a fellow believer, as do the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? **read ›**

84 **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 ›**

85 **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 ›**

86 **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 ›**

87 **1 Timothy 3:11** Women likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. **read ›**

88 **1 Timothy 3:12** Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **read ›**

89 **1 Timothy 5:2** the older women as mothers, the younger women as sisters, in all purity. **read ›**

90 **1 Timothy 5:9** Let no one be enrolled as a widow under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, **read ›**

91 **1 Timothy 5:10** being approved by good works, if she has brought up children, if she has been hospitable to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, and if she has diligently followed every good work. **read ›**

92 **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 ›**

93 **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 ›**

94 **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 ›**

95 **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 ›**

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96 **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 ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *109 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 4:25

Exodus 32:32

Leviticus 15:18

Deuteronomy 8:18 · 20:5 · 20:19

Job 1:21

Psalms 44:21

Proverbs 9:17

Isaiah 50:9 · 66:2

Jeremiah 23:24

Matthew 5:17 · 6:10 · 6:19 · 6:24 · 7:6 · 7:21 · 10:19 · 12:36 · 13:27 · 13:31 · 18:20 · 19:6 · 22:39 · 23:9 · 24:5

Mark 8:38

Luke 6:46 · 14:11 · 16:15 · 20:25 · 20:27 · 20:34 · 21:14

John 3:6 · 6:27 · 7:37 · 15:1 · 15:12 · 21:17

Acts 9:5 · 20:29

Romans 1:17 · 2:13 · 7:4 · 7:12 · 14:19 · 14:21

1 Corinthians 6:12 · 6:18 · 7:5 · 7:8 · 7:9 · 7:14 · 7:32 · 7:39 · 10:31 · 10:33 · 11:3 · 12:3 · 14:33

2 Corinthians 11:3 · 11:23

Galatians 1:10 · 3:11 · 5:13 · 5:17

Ephesians 4:5 · 4:27 · 5:21 · 5:22 · 5:25 · 5:28 · 6:4 · 6:9 · 6:11

Philippians 4:3

Colossians 2:20 · 3:11 · 3:18 · 3:25 · 4:1

1 Thessalonians 5:12 · 5:17

2 Thessalonians 3:6

1 Timothy 2:2 · 2:4 · 3:1 · 3:4 · 3:6 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 5:5 · 5:21 · 6:7 · 6:10

Titus 1:5 · 2:12

Hebrews 10:38 · 12:14 · 13:4 · 13:5 · 13:14 · 13:17

1 Peter 1:6 · 1:17

Revelation 1:6 · 2:5

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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 church expect of an elder's wife?” on November 9, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY