THE QUESTION

What did the early church mean by the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)?

Asked by a THF member on August 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 13 early Christian passages and 92 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-mean-by-the-faith-once-delivered-to-the-saints

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

They took it to mean a fixed body of teaching, not only a feeling of trust inside a person. The faith was the message the apostles received from Christ and handed on to the churches, summed up in the rule of faith. Christians were to receive it, guard it whole, and live by it.

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POINT 1 OF 8

The faith is the apostles' teaching handed down

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

Irenaeus echoes Jude when he speaks of the faith delivered unto us. He ties it to the apostolic teaching. He also says this truth is simple. Even plain, unlearned believers can receive it, as long as they are humble and obedient rather than proud.

1

“This reflects the connection of the apostolic teaching and the most holy "faith delivered unto us," which the unlearned accept, and those with little knowledge have taught, not "paying attention to endless genealogies," but striving to live a straightforward life; lest, having been deprived of the Divine Spirit, they fail to reach the kingdom of heaven.”

later in the same passage

“For the truth is simple; and "the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," as the same apostle says, being easy to understand for those who are obedient.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 6, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

The church received it and keeps it

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

For Irenaeus, our faith is something we have received from the church and must preserve. He compares it to a treasure kept in a fine jar. The Holy Spirit keeps it fresh, and it brings new life to the church that holds it.

2

“This well-founded system aims for humanity's salvation, namely, our faith, which we have received from the Church and preserve.”

later in the same passage

“This faith is continually renewed by the Spirit of God, like a precious treasure in an excellent vessel, causing the vessel itself to also renew.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 5, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 3 OF 8

First preached, then written in Scripture

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

Irenaeus explains how the faith came down. The apostles first preached the gospel out loud. Later, by God's will, they wrote it down in the Scriptures. Those writings became the foundation of the faith. He rejects the idea that later teachers knew more than the apostles did.

3

"They proclaimed it publicly at one time and later, by the will of God, handed it down to us in the Scriptures, which serve as the foundation and support of our faith."

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

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

POINT 4 OF 8

The rule of faith cannot be changed

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

Tertullian calls the core of the faith the rule of faith. He says it is one and cannot be changed. He then sums it up: one God the Creator, and His Son Jesus Christ, born, crucified, raised and coming to judge. This is the content once delivered.

4

"The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immovable and irreformable."

later in the same passage

"That is, the rule of believing in one only God Almighty, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, now sitting at the right hand of the Father, destined to come to judge the living and the dead through the resurrection of the flesh as well as of the spirit."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 1 (c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 10, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 5 OF 8

Faith is kept, not endlessly searched for

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

Tertullian says faith has been placed in the rule, and keeping it leads to salvation. Questions are fine, he says, as long as the rule stays in place. But clever skill with Scripture does not save. Staying inside the faith that was given is better than chasing new ideas.

5

“Now faith has been deposited in the rule. It has a law, and in the observance of it there is salvation.”

later in the same passage

“To know nothing in opposition to the rule of faith is to know all things.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prescription Against Heretics* 14 (c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

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

POINT 6 OF 8

There is only one faith

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

A letter in the name of Ignatius urges believers to walk by the same rule of faith. Because there is one God, one Lord and one Spirit, there must be one faith about Christ. The faith is shared by the whole church, not made up by each person.

6

“For if there is one God of the universe, the Father of Christ, "of whom are all things;" and one Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord, "by whom are all things;" and also one Holy Spirit, who worked in Moses, and in the prophets and apostles; and also one baptism, which is administered so that we should share in the death of the Lord; and also one chosen Church; there should likewise be but one faith in respect to Christ.”

later in the same passage

“For "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is through all, and in all."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 3, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 7 OF 8

Being faithful means guarding what was entrusted

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

Clement of Alexandria says a faithful person keeps safe what was trusted to him. What God has trusted to us is His teaching, His words and His commands, and also the doing of those commands. So keeping the faith includes both believing rightly and obeying.

7

"Now a faithful person is one who keeps untouched what has been entrusted to him. And to us have been entrusted the teachings about God and the divine words, along with the commands and the carrying out of those commands."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 2.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 8, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

Teachers pass on what they received

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

The writer to Diognetus says he was taught by the apostles and now passes on what was handed to him. He links the faith of the gospels with the tradition of the apostles. The boundaries set by the fathers are not to be crossed.

8

"I minister the things delivered to me to those who are disciples worthy of the truth."

later in the same passage

"Then the fear of the law is chanted, the grace of the prophets is known, the faith of the gospels is established, the tradition of the Apostles is preserved, and the grace of the Church exults; which grace if you do not grieve, you will know those things which the Word teaches, by whom He wills, and when He pleases."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Mathetes,** *Epistle to Diognetus* (c. 80–200 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages quotes Jude 3 word for word or gives a line-by-line comment on it; we draw the meaning from how they speak of the faith that was delivered.
- These passages stress faith as shared teaching, but they do not deny that faith is also a person's trust in God; Clement and others speak of that too.
- The letter quoted under Ignatius's name comes from a longer collection whose exact origin is debated.
- 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 13 early Christian passages and 92 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–13, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 14–80, in Bible order), then 25 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 *13 passages from 8 writers*

Mathetes, *c. 80–200 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistle to Diognetus* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 5** “the fear of the law is chanted, and the grace of the prophets is known, and the faith of the gospels is established, and the tradition of the Apostles is… [continues online] **read ›**

Papias, *c. 95–130 AD · source 2*

2 *Fragments* (1885 English; on point 8) “in those who related strange commandments, but in those who rehearsed the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and proceeding from truth itself… [continues online] **read ›**

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

3 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 6, page 4** “there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 4*

4 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 3) “the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them… [continues online] **read ›**

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Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 5–7*

5 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "having been received from the Church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "it renders us like to Christ, if we experience "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." For this is the affinity of the apostolical teaching and… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed "perfect knowledge," as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Stromata* 2.6 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 5** "too, is based on faith. Accordingly the followers of Basilides define faith to be, the assent of the soul to any of those things, that do not affect the senses… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Stromata* 6.8 (1885 English) "this faith becomes sure demonstration; since truth follows what has been delivered by God… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 10–12*

10 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *On Prescription Against Heretics* 14 **Quote 5, page 4** "faith has been deposited in the rule… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Against Praxeas* 9 (1885 English; on point 4) "always in mind that this is the rule of faith which I profess… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · source 13*

13 *Homilies on Titus* (1885 English; on point 5) "faithful is here meant true, or that which was delivered through faith, not requiring reasonings, or questionings… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *67 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

14 **Genesis 49:18** waiting for the salvation of the Lord. **read ›**

15 **Proverbs 4:11** For I teach you the ways of wisdom, and I set you in straight tracks. **read ›**

16 **Ecclesiastes 2:17** So I hated life, for the work that is done under the sun was evil to me; for all is vanity and a choosing of the wind. **read ›**

17 **Ecclesiastes 3:22** And I saw that there is no good except that a man should be glad in his works, for that is his portion; for who will bring him to see what will be after him? **read ›**

18 **Song of Solomon 2:11** For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over, it has gone its way. **read ›**

19 **Isaiah 7:21** And it shall be in that day that a man shall rear a young cow and two sheep; **read ›**

20 **Isaiah 15:3** Wrap yourselves in sackcloth in her squares, and lament on her rooftops and in her lanes; all of you, wail with weeping. **read ›**

21 **Amos 3:9** Proclaim it to the regions among the Assyrians, and to the regions of Egypt, and say, "Gather yourselves on the mountain of Samaria, and see the many marvels in her midst, and the oppression that is in her." **read ›**

22 **Amos 3:14** For in the day when I avenge the ungodly deeds of Israel upon him, I will also take vengeance on the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar shall be broken off, and they shall fall to the ground. **read ›**

23 **Obadiah 1:1** The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God to Idumea: I have heard a report from the Lord, and he has sent out a summons to siege among the nations: "Arise, and let us rise up against her to war." **read ›**

24 **1 Esdras 8:94** as has been decided by you and by all who obey the law of the Lord. **read ›**

25 **Wisdom of Solomon 3:9** Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will stay with him in love, for grace and mercy are for his chosen ones. **read ›**

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26 **Wisdom of Solomon 3:14** And blessed is the eunuch who has done no lawless deed with his hand, nor devised evil things against the Lord; for to him will be given the choice grace of faith, and a more delightful lot in the temple of the Lord. **read ›**

27 **Wisdom of Solomon 18:6** That night was made known beforehand to our fathers, so that, knowing surely the oaths in which they had believed, they might take heart. **read ›**

28 **Wisdom of Sirach 1:1** Since many great things have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others who followed after them, for which Israel ought to be praised for its instruction and wisdom; and since not only must those who read become knowledgeable themselves, but lovers of learning must also be able to be of use to those outside, both by speaking and by writing: my grandfather Jesus, having given himself more and more to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers, and having gained considerable skill in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that lovers of learning, having become devoted to these things as well, might make still greater progress by living according to the law. You are urged, therefore, to read with goodwill and attention, and to be forgiving wherever, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to fall short in some of the expressions; for what is said in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is brought over into another language. And not only these things, but the Law itself and the prophecies and the rest of the books differ not a little when they are spoken in their own language. For in the thirty-eighth year, in the reign of King Euergetes, having come into Egypt and stayed there some time, I found a copy of no small instruction; and I myself thought it most necessary to apply some diligence and labor to the translation of this book, bringing much watchfulness and skill to it in that space of time, in order to complete the book and publish it also for those living abroad who wish to love learning, preparing their character beforehand to live according to the law. All wisdom is from the Lord, and is with him forever. **read ›**

29 **Wisdom of Sirach 2:13** Woe to the slack heart, for it does not trust; therefore it will not be sheltered. **read ›**

30 **Wisdom of Sirach 45:4** In his faithfulness and meekness he sanctified him; he chose him out of all flesh. **read ›**

31 **Wisdom of Sirach 46:15** By his faithfulness he was proved a prophet, and by his faithfulness he was known to be faithful in vision. **read ›**

32 **1 Maccabees 2:52** Was not Abraham found faithful in trial, and it was counted to him for righteousness? **read ›**

33 **1 Maccabees 4:11** Then all the nations will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel." **read ›**

34 **2 Maccabees 2:17** And God has saved all his people and has restored to all the inheritance, and the kingdom and the priesthood and the sanctification, **read ›**

35 **2 Maccabees 3:22** So they called upon God Almighty to keep the things entrusted safe and secure for those who had entrusted them. **read ›**

36 **2 Maccabees 14:38** For in the former times of separation he had been brought to trial for Judaism, and he had risked body and soul for Judaism with all earnestness. **read ›**

37 **2 Maccabees 15:17** Encouraged by the words of Judas, which were very noble and able to stir them to valor and to make the souls of the young men upright, they determined not to stay in camp but to charge bravely, and to engage with all manliness and decide the matter, because the city, the sanctuary, and the temple were in danger. **read ›**

38 **4 Maccabees 7:21** For who, living as a philosopher devoutly by the whole rule of philosophy, and having believed God, **read ›**

39 **4 Maccabees 15:3** loved more the godliness that saves to eternal life according to God. **read ›**

40 **4 Maccabees 16:22** You too, then, having the same faith toward God, do not be grieved. **read ›**

41 **1 Enoch 61:4** The chosen ones shall begin to dwell with the chosen ones, and those are the measures which shall be given to faith and which shall strengthen righteousness. **read ›**

42 **1 Enoch 69:11** For men were created exactly like the angels, so that they would continue pure and righteous, and death, which destroys everything, could not have taken hold of them; but through this knowledge of theirs they are perishing, and through this power it is consuming me. **read ›**

43 **Acts 26:4** All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, lived from the beginning among my own nation in Jerusalem. **read ›**

44 **Romans 3:10** as it is written: There is none righteous, not even one; **read ›**

45 **Romans 3:11** there is none who understands; there is none who seeks God. **read ›**

46 **Romans 7:2** For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives, but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband. **read ›**

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47 **Romans 10:8** But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” That is, the word of faith which we preach: **read ›**

48 **Romans 10:17** So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. **read ›**

49 **1 Corinthians 11:2** Now I praise you, brothers, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm the traditions, even as I delivered them to you. **read ›**

50 **1 Corinthians 11:23** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, **read ›**

51 **1 Corinthians 15:2** by which also you are saved, if you hold firmly the word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. **read ›**

52 **1 Corinthians 15:3** For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **read ›**

53 **Galatians 3:23** But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith which should afterwards be revealed. **read ›**

54 **Ephesians 4:5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **read ›**

55 **Colossians 1:23** if indeed you continue in faithfulness, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. **read ›**

56 **2 Thessalonians 2:15** So then, brothers, stand firm and hold the traditions which you were taught by us, whether by word or by letter. **read ›**

57 **2 Thessalonians 3:2** and so that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil people; for not all have faithfulness. **read ›**

58 **1 Timothy 1:11** according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted. **read ›**

59 **1 Timothy 1:19** holding faithfulness and a good conscience, which some have thrust away and so made shipwreck concerning the faith, **read ›**

60 **1 Timothy 3:9** holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. **read ›**

61 **1 Timothy 6:12** Fight the good fight of faithfulness; take hold of eternal life, to which you were called, and you made the good confession before many witnesses. **read ›**

62 **1 Timothy 6:21** which some profess, and thus have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you. Amen. **read ›**

63 **2 Timothy 1:13** Hold to the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faithfulness and love in Christ Jesus. **read ›**

64 **2 Timothy 1:14** Guard the good thing entrusted to you through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. **read ›**

65 **2 Timothy 2:2** And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. **read ›**

66 **Titus 1:3** but at his appointed times he manifested his word in the proclamation entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior, **read ›**

67 **Philemon 1:5** hearing of your love and of the faithfulness which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, **read ›**

68 **Hebrews 10:23** let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering; for he who promised is faithful. **read ›**

69 **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen. **read ›**

70 **Hebrews 11:3** By faith we understand that the ages have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which are visible. **read ›**

71 **Hebrews 13:7** Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faithfulness. **read ›**

72 **James 2:17** Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. **read ›**

73 **1 Peter 1:5** who by the power of God are guarded through faithfulness for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. **read ›**

74 **1 Peter 1:9** receiving the goal of your faithfulness, the salvation of your souls. **read ›**

75 **Jude 1:1** Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to the called, sanctified in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: **read ›**

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76 **Jude 1:3** Beloved, while making every effort to write to you about the common salvation, I found it necessary to write and urge you to contend earnestly for the faith delivered once for all to the saints. **read ›**

77 **Jude 1:5** Now I wish to remind you, though you already know this, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. **read ›**

78 **Jude 1:20** But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, **read ›**

79 **Jude 1:21** keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. **read ›**

80 **Revelation 14:12** Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and faithfulness to Jesus.” **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *25 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.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Matthew 5:37 · 15:14 · 23:8

Mark 4:28 · 14:22

Luke 18:42 · 22:19 · 22:32

John 14:6 · 14:16 · 14:26 · 14:28 · 16:12 · 16:13

1 Corinthians 1:9 · 5:11 · 10:13 · 12:8

Galatians 4:4

Ephesians 3:18 · 4:11

1 Timothy 3:16

Hebrews 11:40 · 12:24

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 mean by the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)?” on August 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.

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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THE END OF THIS STUDY