THE QUESTION

What did the early church teach about God's patience, and does it mean He approves of sin?

Asked by a THF member on September 16, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 36 early Christian passages and 76 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-teach-about-gods-patience-and-does-it-mean-he

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

No. The early writers taught that God's patience is mercy that gives sinners time to repent, not approval of sin. Those who abuse His patience harden their hearts and store up judgment. They also pointed to Christ's own patience, from His quiet growing up to His gentleness with those who wronged Him, as the example for believers.

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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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.

IN THIS STUDY

1	God delays punishment so sinners can turn	2
2	Delay is no reason to feel safe	2
3	Abusing God's patience hardens the heart	3
4	Believers should fear despising His patience	3
5	Christ patiently waited through ordinary growing up	4
6	Christ bore insults without striking back	4
7	Patience keeps believers close to God	5
	What these passages don't tell us	5
	The Sources: 36 early Christian passages and 76 Bible verses, with links	6

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POINT 1 OF 7

God delays punishment so sinners can turn

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

Cyprian marvels that God sends sun and rain on good and evil alike while people insult Him. He says God holds back His anger on purpose, so that even long-standing sinners may at last turn back to Him.

1

> "Although He has vengeance in His power, He chooses instead to keep patience for a long time, mercifully bearing with people and delaying punishment, so that, if possible, long-continued evil may at some time be changed, and man, caught in the infection of errors and crimes, may, even though late, be converted to God."

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

Source 21, page 7 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Delay is no reason to feel safe

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

John Chrysostom, preaching on Romans 2:4, warns that when God does not punish at once, we should fear more, not less. God bears with us so that we repent, not so that we grow worse. Patience refused becomes a cause of greater judgment.

2

> "Even if He does not bring punishment on you at once, do not become confident because of that. Instead, fear even more."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "For this is why, he says, God bears with you: not so that you may become worse, but so that you may repent."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on the Statues* 12 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 32, page 8 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Abusing God's patience hardens the heart

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

Origen explains that the same patience softens some and hardens others. Those who treat delayed punishment as a license grow hard, while those who use it to repent find mercy. Methodius gives the voice of a sinner who admits he kept sinning because he was not struck down at once.

3 “If we can show, for example, that by one and the same act God has pity upon one individual, but hardens another; not intending or desiring that the one who is hardened should be so, but because, in the showing of His goodness and patience, the heart of those who treat His kindness and forbearance with contempt and insolence is hardened by the punishment of their crimes being delayed; while those, on the other hand, who make His goodness and patience the occasion of their repentance and reformation, obtain compassion.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 16, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “I knowingly turned to sin, saying to myself, "God is merciful and will put up with me." And when I was not struck down at once, I did not stop.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Methodius,** *Concerning Free Will* 1 (c. 270–311 AD) **Source 27, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Believers should fear despising His patience

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

Ignatius urges Christians to treat God's patience with reverence, echoing Paul's warning about despising His goodness. Clement of Alexandria adds that even God's quiet warnings come from His love and aim at repentance.

5 “Let us therefore be of a reverent spirit and fear the patience of God, lest we despise the riches of His goodness and restraint.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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6 “See how God, through His love of goodness, seeks repentance. By the plan He follows of threatening in silence, He shows His own love for mankind.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 1.8 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Christ patiently waited through ordinary growing up

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

Tertullian points out that the Son of God waited to be born, endured the slow years of growing up, and did not rush to be known. The Apostolic Constitutions add that He who commanded honor for parents was Himself subject to His own.

7 “God allows Himself to be conceived in a mother's womb and waits for the time of birth. When He is born, He endures the delay of growing up. When He has grown up, He is not eager to be recognized.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Patience* 3 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 10, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “He who had commanded us to honor our parents was Himself subject to them”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 25, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Christ bore insults without striking back

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

Tertullian describes Christ as gentle with all: He did not quarrel or shout, welcomed sinners, and was not even angry with a town that refused Him. He kept caring for the ungrateful and gave way to those plotting against Him.

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9 “He did not strive. He did not cry aloud, nor did anyone hear His voice in the streets.”

later in the same passage

“He cared for the ungrateful. He gave way to those who laid traps for Him.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Patience* 3 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 10, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Patience keeps believers close to God

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

Cyprian sums up his teaching by calling patience the root of many virtues. It keeps us for God, calms anger, and teaches us to forgive quickly and to stay gentle when wronged, just as God has been patient with us.

10 “It is patience that both commends us to God and keeps us for God.”

later in the same passage

“It makes people humble in prosperity, brave in adversity, and gentle when faced with wrongs and contempt. It teaches us to forgive quickly those who wrong us; and if you yourself do wrong, to ask for pardon long and earnestly.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 23, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not say how long God's patience will last for any one person.
- They do not explain every Gospel scene of Christ's patience, such as His silence before the high priest.
- 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 36 early Christian passages and 76 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–36, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 37–39, in Bible order), then 73 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 *36 passages from 16 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 1*

1 *Shepherd* (1885 English) "repentance is great wisdom. For he who has sinned understands that he acted wickedly in the sight of the Lord, and remembers the actions he has done, and he repents… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 2*

2 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** "last times are come upon us. Let us therefore be of a reverent spirit, and fear the long-suffering of God, lest we despise the riches of His goodness and… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 3*

3 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 1) "the goodness and the loving-kindness of God, and His boundless riches, hold righteous and sinless the man who, as Ezekiel tells, repents of sins… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 4*

4 *Diatessaron* 43 (1885 English; on point 2) "if that evil servant say in his heart, My lord delays his 6 coming… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · sources 5–6*

5 *To Autolycus* 25 (1885 English; on point 5) "as in stature one increases in an orderly progress, so also in wisdom… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *To Autolycus* 26 (1885 English; on point 1) "being long-suffering, He gave him an opportunity of repentance and confession… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 7*

7 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English; on point 1) "inasmuch as God is invincible and long-suffering, He did indeed show Himself to be long-suffering in the matter of the correction of man and the probation of all… [continues online] **read ›**

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

8 *Stromata* 2.20 (1885 English; on point 7) "also itself forces its way to the divine likeness, reaping as its fruit impassibility through patience, if what is related of Ananias be kept in mind… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Instructor* 1.8 **Quote 6, page 4** "how God, through His love of goodness, seeks repentance… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 10–14*

10 *On Patience* 3 (1885 English) **Quotes 7, 9, pages 4, 5** "this species of the divine patience indeed being, as it were, at a distance, may perhaps be esteemed as among things too high for us… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *On Patience* 12 (on point 7) for the rule of peace, which is so pleasing to God, who in a world so prone to impatience will forgive his brother even once? I will not say seven… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *On Patience* 16 (on point 7) "is the rule, this is the discipline, and these are the works of patience that is heavenly and true; that is, Christian patience, not the false and shameful kind found… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *On Patience* 13 (on point 7) the flesh in loneliness, in that lack of light, and in that patient endurance of the world's abuse. But when it is led out to the final test of… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *On Patience* 2 (1885 English; on point 1) "the divine arrangement of a living and celestial discipline, holding up before us God Himself in the very first place as an example of patience… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 15*

15 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (1885 English; on point 5) "he means that He increased and grew up into that which He had been from the beginning, and indicates the return to the glory which He had by nature… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 16–20*

16 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "show more clearly, however, what we mean, let us take the illustration employed by the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, For the earth, which… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (1885 English; on point 3) "It is not without reason, then, that he who is abandoned, is abandoned to the divine judgment, and that God is long-suffering with certain sinners… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Commentary on Matthew* 13 (on point 5) "taken a human soul: "Jesus advanced." Luke 2:52 For just as, by free will, His soul advanced in wisdom and grace, so also it did in stature. And the… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Against Celsus* 72 (1885 English; on point 3) "that wrath is no passion on the part of God, but that each one brings it upon himself by his sins, will be clear from the further statement of Paul… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (on point 3) "knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 21–23*

21 *Treatises* **Quote 1, page 2** "2:4-6. He says that God's judgment is just because… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Treatises* (on point 7) men who, in earlier times, bore the pattern of Christ, were careful above all else to preserve patience with strong and steady calmness in the praise of their virtues. So… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Treatises* **Quote 10, page 5** beloved brothers, since we have carefully considered both the benefits of patience and the evils of impatience, let us hold fast with full watchfulness to the patience by which we… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 24–25*

24 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) is beyond measure and beyond searching out; for You are the Most High Lord, of great compassion, longsuffering, very merciful, and You turn from the evils of men. You, O… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 8, page 4** "did He make laws to root out our natural passions, but only to… [continues online] **read ›**

Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · sources 26–27*

26 *Oration on the Psalms* 1 (1885 English; on point 1) "10:33 But what to this answers the long-suffering One, He who is abundant in mercy,Joel 2:13 and slow to wrath?James 1:18 He bears with… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Concerning Free Will* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "when I was not instantly smitten, I ceased not, but rather despised His forbearance, and exhausted the long-suffering of God… [continues online] **read ›**

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Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 28–29*

28 *On the Anger of God* 17 (on point 2) forgiving deeds of that kind belongs more to cruelty than to kindness, then it is not an act of goodness in God to remain unmoved by things that are done… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *On the Anger of God* 18 (1885 English; on point 2) “when any one is moved, and yet through unseasonable leniency grants pardon more frequently than is necessary, or at all times, he evidently both destroys the life of those whose… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 30–35*

30 *Three Homilies on the Power of Satan* (on point 1) would not have punished them. For if, even when He foresees that many will gain nothing from His longsuffering, He still endures them with great patience, doing His own part… [continues online] **read ›**

31 *Homilies on Colossians* (on point 4) As this same blessed man says elsewhere in his writings, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering?” “To all pleasing.” Not at one time… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Homilies on the Statues* 12 **Quote 2, page 2** “Instead, fear even more. Paul also warned you when he said, "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Homilies on Romans* (1885 English; on point 3) “after that he had shown long-suffering, that He might lead to repentance, but he did not repent, He suffered him a long time, that He might display at once… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 9 (1885 English; on point 2) “7:11. Septuagint But if we abuse His longsuffering, there will come a time when He will no more be longsuffering even for a little, but will straightway inflict the… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Homilies on Second Timothy* (1885 English; on point 7) “the heretics, he means, I show much longsuffering; patience, that under persecution… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 36*

36 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) “a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, “Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;” and, “The Lord shall suddenly… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *3 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

37 **Luke 2:51** And he went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was subject to them, and his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. **read ›**

38 **Romans 2:4** Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? **read ›**

39 **Romans 11:22** See then the goodness and severity of God. Toward those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise you also will be cut off. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *73 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.

Deuteronomy 32:20

Psalms 4:3 · 6:1 · 12:6

Amos 4:11

Malachi 3:1

Matthew 3:14 · 5:7 · 5:22 · 5:23 · 5:25 · 5:33 · 5:38 · 5:43 · 10:22 · 10:37 · 18:10 · 18:21 · 19:9 · 19:12 · 19:17 · 21:14 · 25:41 · 26:28 · 26:41

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Mark 14:44
Luke 1:17 · 1:32 · 2:52 · 6:37 · 9:51 · 12:50 · 15:3 · 15:11
John 1:1 · 3:19 · 10:33 · 12:47 · 13:34 · 15:23 · 17:3 · 17:5 · 18:10
Acts 20:35 · 28:25
Romans 8:15 · 15:4
1 Corinthians 7:34 · 7:39 · 8:6 · 13:11
Galatians 4:1 · 4:4
Ephesians 2:3 · 4:13 · 4:26 · 5:14
Philippians 2:7 · 2:10 · 3:8 · 3:19
Colossians 2:23 · 3:8
1 Timothy 5:3
2 Timothy 4:8
Hebrews 5:8 · 6:7 · 10:37
James 1:8 · 5:15
1 Peter 2:2
2 Peter 3:3
1 John 1:1

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 teach about God's patience, and does it mean He approves of sin?” on September 16, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY