THE QUESTION

What did the early church teach about men wearing beards?

Asked by a THF member on April 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 11 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-church-teach-about-men-wearing-beards

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

Clement of Alexandria and Lactantius treated the beard as a natural, God-given mark of manhood. Clement allowed trimming for need, such as cutting the moustache, but called shaving the chin bare blameworthy. Cyprian rebuked plucking and styling the beard to please others.

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IN THIS STUDY

1	Clement says a full beard suits men	**2**
2	Trimming for need is allowed, not for show	**2**
3	The beard is God's mark of manhood	**3**
4	Clement warns against smoothing the face for looks	**3**
5	Lactantius sees the beard as God's design	**4**
6	Cyprian rebukes plucking the beard	**4**
	What these passages don't tell us	**4**
	The Sources: 11 early Christian passages and 18 Bible verses, with links	**5**

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POINT 1 OF 6

Clement says a full beard suits men

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

Clement of Alexandria says a full beard is enough for men. He calls shaving the chin down to the skin a disgraceful sight and blameworthy, close to plucking out the hair. He points to the Psalm that delights in the oil running down Aaron's beard.

1 “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. For example, the Psalmist, taking delight in the hair of the beard, says, "Like the ointment that comes down on the beard, the beard of Aaron."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 3, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Trimming for need is allowed, not for show

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

Clement allows trimming when it is needed, not for looks: hair that would fall in the eyes, and a moustache that gets dirty while eating, cut with scissors rather than a razor. But he says the chin hair should be left alone, because it causes no trouble and gives the face dignity.

2 “Since trimming should be done not for the sake of appearance, but because it is necessary, the hair on the head should be cut so that it does not grow so long that it hangs down and gets in the way of the eyes. The moustache should be cut in the same way, because it gets dirty while eating. It should be trimmed evenly, not with a razor, because that would not be proper, but with a pair of trimming scissors. But the hair on the chin should not be touched, since it causes no trouble and gives the face dignity and a fatherly sternness.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 6

The beard is God's mark of manhood

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

Clement says God made women smooth but adorned man with a beard, as he did the lion, as a mark of manhood and a sign of strength and rule. He calls the beard a man's natural and noble ornament and says it is not right to pull it out.

3 “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.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.3 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 2, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

4 “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 6, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Clement warns against smoothing the face for looks

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

Clement criticizes men who shave with a razor, pluck, and smooth their cheeks for the sake of a fine appearance. He calls this womanly and says such men could be taken for women. His target is grooming done to look fine.

5 “But for a man to comb himself and shave himself with a razor for the sake of fine appearance, to arrange his hair at the mirror, to shave his cheeks, pluck hairs out of them, and smooth them, how womanly that is. In truth, unless you saw them naked, you would suppose they were women.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.3 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 2, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 5 OF 6

Lactantius sees the beard as God's design

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

Lactantius, describing how God made the human body, says the beard marks a man's maturity, the difference between the sexes, and manly strength. He adds that the whole work would not fit together if anything were made differently.

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)
THF's updated English

Source 11, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 6 OF 6

Cyprian rebukes plucking the beard

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

Cyprian speaks of a man who should be mourning but walks cheerfully. He quotes the law against marring the beard (Leviticus 19:27) and rebukes the man for plucking his beard and styling his hair, asking whether he is trying to please people while he displeases God.

7

> "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)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 5 Read it in the library ›

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not address men who cannot grow a beard or who must shave for health or work.

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- They do not settle whether the Old Testament beard law binds Christians as a law today.
- Clement allows some trimming, so the passages do not forbid every cut of the beard.
- 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 11 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 1–11, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 12–25, 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 *11 passages from 7 writers*

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 1*

1 *Address to the Greeks* 19 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. Crescens, who made his… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 2–6*

2 *Instructor* 3.3 **Quotes 3, 5, page 3** 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… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *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 ›**

4 *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 2, page 2** trimming should be done not for the sake of appearance, but because it is necessary, the hair on the head should be cut so that it does not grow so… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Instructor* 3.1 (on point 3) "first, he was a lion with a full beard… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Instructor* 3.3 **Quote 4, page 3** it is not right to pull out the beard, which is a man's natural and noble ornament… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 7*

7 *On the Apparel of Women* 2.8 "sex acknowledges in itself deceptive tricks of appearance peculiarly its own, such as cutting the beard too sharply, plucking it out here and there, shaving around the mouth, arranging the… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 8*

8 *Miscellaneous Fragments* 1 "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 · source 9*

9 *Treatises* **Quote 7, page 4** "although it is written, "You shall not mar the figure of your beard," Leviticus 19:27, he plucks out his… [continues online] **read ›**

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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 · source 11*

11 *On the Workmanship of God* 7 **Quote 6, page 4** “back part of the head covered, present an appearance of wonderful beauty. Then the nature of the beard contributes in an incredible way to mark the maturity of the body… [continues online] **read ›**

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

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

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

14 **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 ›**

15 **1 Samuel 16:12** So he sent and brought him in. He was ruddy, with beautiful eyes, and good in appearance to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, “Arise and anoint David, for he is good.” **read ›**

16 **2 Samuel 10:4** So Hanun took David’s servants and shaved off their beards, and cut off their cloaks in the middle as far as their hips, and sent them away. **read ›**

17 **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 ›**

18 **1 Chronicles 19:5** And some came to tell David about the men; and he sent to meet them, for they were greatly disgraced. And the king said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards grow, and then return.” **read ›**

19 **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 ›**

20 **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 ›**

21 **Jeremiah 48:37** Every head in every place will be shaved, and every beard will be shaved, and all hands will beat the breast, and on every waist there will be sackcloth. (Septuagint Jeremiah 31:37 (Jeremiah 48:37 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

22 **Ezekiel 5:1** And you, Son of man, take for yourself a sword sharper than a barber’s razor; you shall acquire it for yourself, and you shall bring it upon your head and upon your beard; and you shall take a balance of weights and divide them. **read ›**

23 **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 ›**

24 **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 ›**

25 **1 Peter 3:4** but the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious before God. **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

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

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THE END OF THIS STUDY