THE QUESTION

Which early church father explained Jesus' hard sayings about the rich?

Asked by a THF member on May 19, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 18 early Christian passages and 121 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/which-early-church-father-explained-jesus-hard-sayings-about-the-rich

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

The writer is Clement of Alexandria. In his book Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved? he explains Jesus' hard words to the rich young man. He teaches that money is not evil in itself, but the rich must give up greed and wrong desires and use what they have to help people in need.

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 6

Clement wrote a whole book on it

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

In Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved? Clement of Alexandria sets out to explain the Gospel story of the rich young man. He says these sayings had troubled believers because they heard them without thinking them through.

1 “For there is nothing like hearing once more the very sayings which up to now in the gospels have been distressing us, since we listened to them without examination and erringly through childishness”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 4
(c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 7, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 2 OF 6

The rich are not already lost

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

Clement says the story should not make wealthy believers give up on being saved. Nor should they throw their money away as if it were an enemy. Instead they must learn how to use wealth rightly and gain eternal life.

2 “Let it teach those of means that they must not neglect their own salvation as if already condemned beforehand, nor on the other hand sink wealth into the sea, nor condemn it as a plotter against and an enemy of life; rather, they must learn in what way and how wealth is to be used and life is to be acquired.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 27
(c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 3 OF 6

True riches are virtues in the soul

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

Clement says the truly rich person is rich in virtue and uses whatever he has faithfully. He reads the command to sell as giving up the extra things and wrong desires that close heaven, and trading them for what can save.

3

> “The man, then, who is truly and rightly rich is the one who is rich in virtues and able to use every fortune devoutly and faithfully, while the false rich man is the one who is rich according to the flesh and has shifted his life into outward possession — the kind that passes away and decays and now belongs to one and now to another, and in the end to no one whatever.”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “Thus you rightly sell your possessions — the many and superfluous things, those that shut the heavens against you — by exchanging for them the things that are able to save.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 19 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 8, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 6

Wealth should be shared with those in need

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

In another book, Clement tells Christians to live simply and share with people in distress. He says a rich person is saved by giving his wealth away to others. He also says the rich young man needed to grow into Christlike kindness.

4

> “He who climbs to heaven by force must carry with him the fair staff of beneficence, and attain true rest by sharing with those who are in distress.”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “That is, if he is rich, he will be saved by distributing it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.7 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 6, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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5 “Be not only justified by abstinence from what is evil, but also perfected by Christlike beneficence.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

Cyprian warns that riches can chain the soul

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

Cyprian says the love of property held many believers like a chain when persecution came. He quotes Jesus' command to sell and give to the poor, and says riches are full of danger.

6 “A blind love of one’s own property has deceived many. They could not be ready, or at peace, when it was time to leave, because their wealth held them like a chain.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 14, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “He teaches us that riches are not only to be looked down on, but are also full of danger.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 13, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

Rich and poor should help each other

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

The Shepherd of Hermas compares the rich and the poor to an elm tree and a vine. The vine bears good fruit only when the elm holds it up. Hermas says the rich man is distracted by his wealth and weak in prayer, so each needs the other.

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8 "Therefore, this illustration is for the servants of God, for the poor man and for the rich.""

later in the same passage

"The rich man has much wealth, but he is poor in matters relating to the Lord, because he is distracted by his riches."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 2, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages give only parts of Clement's book, not the whole of his argument.
- They do not set a rule for how much a Christian should keep or give away.
- 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 18 early Christian passages and 121 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 19–71, in Bible order), then 68 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 9 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 13 (1885 English; on point 4) "of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 2*

2 *Shepherd* **Quote 8, page 5** "and rotten. Therefore, this illustration is for the servants of God, for the poor man and for the rich." I said, "How so, sir? Explain it to me." He said… [continues online] **read ›**

Minucius Felix, *c. 150–270 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Octavius* 24 (1885 English; on point 3) "yet who can be poor if he does not want, if he does not crave for the possessions of others, if he is rich towards God… [continues online] **read ›**

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4 *Octavius* 13 (1885 English) “it is, that rich men, attached to their means, have been accustomed to gaze more upon their gold than upon heaven, while our sort of people, though poor, have both… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 5–9*

5 *Stromata* 4.6 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “is, in truth, the bag that waxes not old, the provisions of eternal life, the treasure that fails not in heaven… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Instructor* 3.7 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “as gushing wells, when pumped out, rise again to their former measure, so giving away, being the benignant spring of love, by communicating of its drink to the thirsty, again… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 4 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he was rich, having great possessions… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 19 **Quote 3, page 3** man, then, who is truly and rightly rich is the one who is rich in virtues and able to use every fortune devoutly and faithfully, while the false rich man… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 27 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “it teach the prosperous that they are not to neglect their own salvation, as if they had been already fore-doomed, nor, on the other hand, to cast wealth into… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *On Patience* 7 (1885 English) “always justifies the poor, fore-condemns the rich… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *On Monogamy* 14 (1885 English) “rich man did go his way who had not received the precept of dividing his substance to the needy, and was abandoned by the Lord to his own opinion… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 12*

12 *Against Celsus* 16 (1885 English) “would have inquired, moreover, how often the camel was adduced as an object of comparison in the sacred Scriptures, and in reference to what objects, that he might thus ascertain… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 13–16*

13 *Treatises* **Quote 7, page 4** “He teaches us that riches are not only… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “they laid up treasure in heaven, they would not now have a domestic enemy and assailant… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 4) “that from this it may appear how much he sins in the Church, who, preferring himself and his children to Christ, preserves his wealth, and does not share an abundant… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 5) “riches, this wealth, she cannot possess, who had rather be rich to this world than to Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 17*

17 *Writings* (1885 English; on point 4) “can healthful poverty do, unless wealth be present… [continues online] **read ›**

Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 18*

18 *Disputation with Manes* 1 (on point 3) “us look again at the fact that in the Old Testament we find the words, "I make the rich man and the poor man… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *53 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

19 **Deuteronomy 15:4** For there shall be no needy one among you, because the Lord your God will surely bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, to inherit it, **read ›**

20 **2 Samuel 12:2** The rich man had very many flocks and herds. **read ›**

21 **Psalms 4:7** You have put gladness into my heart; from the fruit of their grain and wine and oil they have been multiplied. (Septuagint Psalm 4:8 (Psalm 4:7 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

22 **Proverbs 10:15** The possessions of the rich are a strong city, but poverty is the ruin of the ungodly. **read ›**

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23 **Proverbs 13:7** There are some who make themselves rich though they have nothing, and there are some who humble themselves amid great wealth. **read ›**

24 **Proverbs 14:20** Friends will hate poor friends, but the friends of the rich are many. **read ›**

25 **Proverbs 18:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

26 **Ecclesiastes 3:10** I have seen all the distraction that God has given to the sons of men, to be distracted by it. **read ›**

27 **Isaiah 2:8** And the land was filled with abominations, the works of their hands, and they worshiped what their fingers had made. **read ›**

28 **Jeremiah 33:11** the voice of gladness and the voice of joy, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, ‘Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good, for his mercy is forever’; and they shall bring gifts into the house of the Lord. For I will bring back all the exiles of that land as before, said the Lord. (Septuagint Jeremiah 40:11 (Jeremiah 33:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

29 **Jeremiah 36:16** When they had heard all the words, they took counsel each with his neighbor and said, “Let us surely tell the king all these words.” (Septuagint Jeremiah 43:16 (Jeremiah 36:16 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

30 **Daniel 8:18** And while he was speaking with me, I fell on my face to the ground; and he touched me and set me on my feet, **read ›**

31 **Daniel 10:4** On the twenty-fourth day of the first month I was beside the great river, which is the Tigris, Hiddekel. **read ›**

32 **Amos 8:5** saying, “When will the month be over, that we may trade, and the Sabbath, that we may open the treasury, to make the measure small, and to enlarge the weight, and to make the balance unjust, **read ›**

33 **Tobit 4:7** Give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye be envious when you give alms. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will certainly not be turned away from you. **read ›**

34 **Wisdom of Solomon 8:5** If riches are a possession to be desired in life, what is richer than wisdom, who works all things? **read ›**

35 **Wisdom of Sirach 10:22** The rich, the glorious and the poor — their boast is the fear of the Lord. **read ›**

36 **Wisdom of Sirach 10:30** A poor man is glorified for his knowledge, and a rich man is glorified for his wealth. **read ›**

37 **Wisdom of Sirach 10:31** But one who is glorified in poverty — how much more in wealth? And one who is without glory in wealth — how much more in poverty? **read ›**

38 **Wisdom of Sirach 11:14** Good things and bad, life and death, poverty and wealth, are from the Lord. **read ›**

39 **Wisdom of Sirach 13:3** A rich man does wrong, and he even adds threats; a poor man is wronged, and he must even plead. **read ›**

40 **Wisdom of Sirach 13:21** A rich man who is shaken is held up by friends, but a lowly man who falls is pushed away by friends. **read ›**

41 **Wisdom of Sirach 13:22** When a rich man slips, his helpers are many; he speaks things not to be spoken, and they justify him; a lowly man slips, and they rebuke him besides; he speaks with understanding, and no place is given him. **read ›**

42 **Wisdom of Sirach 13:23** A rich man speaks, and all are silent, and they exalt his word to the clouds; a poor man speaks, and they say, ‘Who is this?’ and if he stumbles, they will help to overthrow him. **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 13:24** Wealth is good to one who has no sin, and poverty is evil in the mouth of the ungodly. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 22:23** Gain the trust of your neighbor in his poverty, so that you may be filled together with him in his good things; stand by him in a time of trouble, so that you may share his inheritance with him. **read ›**

45 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:4** Whether rich or poor, his heart is good, and at every time his face is cheerful. **read ›**

46 **Wisdom of Sirach 29:9** For the commandment’s sake help the poor man, and in his need do not send him away empty. **read ›**

47 **Wisdom of Sirach 34:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

48 **2 Maccabees 3:10** The high priest pointed out that there were deposits belonging to widows and orphans, **read ›**

49 **2 Maccabees 8:28** After the Sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and the rest they divided among themselves and the children. **read ›**

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50 **4 Maccabees 2:8** For instance, when a man orders his life by the Law, even if he is a lover of money, he does violence to his own character, lending to those in need without interest and canceling the debt when the seventh year comes. **read ›**

51 **1 Enoch 94:8** Woe to you, you rich, for you have trusted in your riches, and from your riches you shall depart, because you have not remembered the Most High in the days of your riches. **read ›**

52 **1 Enoch 97:8** Woe to you who acquire gold and silver, not from righteousness, and will say, “We have grown rich with riches, and we have possessions, and we have acquired them; **read ›**

53 **1 Enoch 102:10** See then, you who justify yourselves, what their overthrow was like: no righteousness was found in them until they died and perished; **read ›**

54 **Matthew 19:22** But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. **read ›**

55 **Matthew 19:23** Jesus said to his disciples, “Amen, I say to you, a rich man will enter the kingdom of heaven with difficulty. **read ›**

56 **Mark 10:17** As he set out on the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” **read ›**

57 **Mark 10:22** But his face fell at that saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he was one who had great possessions. **read ›**

58 **Mark 10:23** Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!” **read ›**

59 **Mark 10:24** The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! **read ›**

60 **Luke 6:20** He lifted up his eyes to his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for God’s kingdom is yours. **read ›**

61 **Luke 6:24** But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation. **read ›**

62 **Luke 12:33** Sell what you have and give alms. Make for yourselves money bags that do not grow old, an unfailing treasure in the heavens, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. **read ›**

63 **Luke 18:23** But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was very rich. **read ›**

64 **Luke 18:24** Jesus, seeing that he became very sad, said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter into God’s kingdom! **read ›**

65 **Acts 2:45** They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as anyone had need. **read ›**

66 **Acts 4:34** For neither was there among them any who lacked, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, **read ›**

67 **Acts 4:35** and laid them at the apostles’ feet. They were distributed to each as anyone had need. **read ›**

68 **2 Corinthians 8:9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich. **read ›**

69 **2 Corinthians 9:9** As it is written, He has scattered widely, he has given to the needy; his righteousness endures forever. **read ›**

70 **1 Timothy 6:9** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. **read ›**

71 **1 Timothy 6:17** Charge those who are rich in this present age that they not be arrogant, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy; **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *68 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 8:3 · 18:4 · 22:10 · 26:18

Proverbs 13:8 · 14:8

Matthew 4:4 · 5:4 · 5:5 · 5:8 · 5:32 · 5:40 · 6:19 · 6:31 · 6:32 · 7:12 · 7:13 · 7:14 · 7:15 · 7:21 · 8:10 · 9:13 · 10:10 · 10:39 · 10:41 · 10:42 · 12:7 · 13:54 · 16:26 · 19:12 · 19:16 · 19:24 · 23:27 · 26:41

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Mark 2:19 · 6:2 · 8:36 · 12:41
Luke 3:11 · 6:29 · 10:7 · 12:20 · 12:22 · 12:30 · 12:42 · 13:32 · 14:33 · 16:9 · 18:18 · 19:8
John 7:15 · 12:25 · 15:5 · 15:7
Romans 2:29 · 9:15 · 12:3
1 Corinthians 7:18 · 10:24
2 Corinthians 8:12 · 13:3
Philippians 4:3
Colossians 3:5
1 Timothy 6:10 · 6:20
Hebrews 4:15 · 9:14
1 Peter 2:9

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Which early church father explained Jesus' hard sayings about the rich?” on May 19, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY