THE QUESTION

Why did the early Christians call humility the foundation of every virtue?

Asked by a THF member on August 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 36 early Christian passages and 90 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/why-did-the-early-christians-call-humility-the-foundation-of-every-virtue

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

They saw humility as the base on which every other virtue stands. Chrysostom noted that Christ began the Beatitudes with it, and taught that fasting, prayer and almsgiving done in pride lose their worth. The writers agree that God resists the proud but lifts up the humble, even repentant sinners.

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.
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	Christ laid humility first, like a foundation	2	6	Humility belongs on the way of life	4
2	Good works done in pride lose their worth	2	7	True humility is inward, not a show	4
3	Humility lifts sinners while pride casts down	3		What these passages don't tell us	5
4	God gives His blessing to the humble	3		The Sources: 36 early Christian passages and 90 Bible verses, with links	5
5	The humble will be exalted	4			

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POINT 1 OF 7

Christ laid humility first, like a foundation

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

Chrysostom points out that Jesus began the Beatitudes with humility, as a builder lays the base of a great building. He also says Paul, following his Master, called lowliness of mind the mother of good deeds.

1 “Nothing equals humility of mind. For this reason, Jesus began the Beatitudes with it. And when He was about to lay, as it were, the foundation and base of a mighty building, He placed humility first.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on John* 33 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 27, page 7 Read it in the library ›

2 “Here he is bringing before us the mother of good deeds, which is lowliness of mind, in imitation of his own Master.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 29, page 7 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Good works done in pride lose their worth

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

Chrysostom warns that fasting, prayer and giving to the poor become hateful to God when done with a proud spirit. With humility, the same deeds are pleasing and safe.

3 “Even if he fasts, even if he prays, even if he gives alms, if he does these things with a proud spirit, they are hateful if humility is not there. But if humility is there, all these things are pleasing and lovely, and they are done safely.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on John* 33 (c. 386–407 AD)
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POINT 3 OF 7

Humility lifts sinners while pride casts down

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

Chrysostom uses the tax collector and the thief on the cross as examples. Pride brought down the devil, while humility and honest confession of sin brought the thief into Paradise.

4

"We have learned that pride can cast down from heaven itself the one who does not take heed, and that lowliness of mind can lift up from the very abyss of sins the one who knows how to be sober."

later in the same passage

"While lowliness of mind and the acknowledgment of his own sins committed brought the robber into Paradise before the Apostles."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homily Concerning Lowliness of Mind* 1 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 28, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

God gives His blessing to the humble

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

Clement of Rome contrasts the boldness and arrogance that God curses with the humility and meekness He blesses. Lactantius adds that God receives the sinner who confesses before the proud just man.

5

"Boldness, arrogance, and audacity belong to those that are accursed by God; but moderation, humility, and meekness to such as are blessed by Him."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 35, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

6

"For humility is dear and lovely in the sight of God. Since He receives the sinner who confesses his fault rather than the just man who is haughty, how much more will He receive the just man who confesses, and exalt him in His heavenly kingdom in proportion to his humility!"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 67 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 25, page 7** Read it in the library ›

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POINT 5 OF 7

The humble will be exalted

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

Ignatius gathers examples of humble saints, such as Abraham, Job, David and Moses. He urges believers to share that humble spirit, repeating Christ's promise that those who humble themselves will be lifted up.

7 “Therefore, those great ones, Abraham and Job, described themselves as “dust and ashes” before God.”

later in the same passage

“Be therefore also of a humble spirit, that you may be exalted; for “he who humbles himself shall be exalted, and he who exalts himself shall be humbled.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Humility belongs on the way of life

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

Barnabas lists humility among the commands for those walking the way of light. Refusing to exalt oneself or take glory stands beside loving God and neighbor.

8 “You shall not exalt yourself but shall be humble. You shall not take glory for yourself. You shall not take evil counsel against your neighbor.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Barnabas,** *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 70–132 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

True humility is inward, not a show

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

Answering a pagan critic, Origen says Christian humility is not about kneeling, rolling on the ground or wearing rags. It means bowing oneself under God's mighty hand even while handling great truths.

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9 “These words show that he who is of humble mind does not humble himself in an unseemly or unfavorable manner, by falling on his knees, or casting himself headlong on the ground, or putting on the dress of the miserable, or sprinkling himself with dust.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 15 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 12, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages praise humility but do not give one agreed list ranking it against every other virtue.
- They speak mainly of humility before God and toward others, not of how humility should shape church office or rank.
- 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 36 early Christian passages and 90 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 37–40, in Bible order), then 86 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 15 writers*

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “shalt not forsake the commandments of the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistle of Barnabas* (on point 7) so that your voice is heard with a cry? I have not chosen this fast, says the Lord, for a man to humble his soul. Nor, even if you bow… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 3*

3 *Shepherd* forgiven completely? Not entirely. The one who repents must torment his own soul, must be deeply humble in all his conduct, and must be afflicted in many ways. And if… [continues online] **read ›**

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Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "he that abaseth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* For thus says the Lord, "If you take the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth." Be humble in response to their wrath; oppose their blasphemies with… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 6*

6 *Diatessaron* 8 (on point 1) "Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the humble, for… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 7*

7 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) "which reason it is, too, that [the character of] a humble and meek man is kept up through the whole Gospel… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Stromata* 3 (on point 7) more careful to abstain from wine, from living creatures, and from sexual relations. But just as humility is meekness, and not affliction of the body, so also self-control is… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Stromata* 4.17 (1885 English; on point 4) "them learn what humility avails before God… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Instructor* 3.12 (1885 English; on point 5) "5:20-21 For he that humbles himself shall be exalted, and he that exalts himself shall be humbled… [continues online] **read ›**

Early Liturgies, *c. 200–400 AD · source 11*

11 *Liturgy of Adaeus and Maris* 1 "in me the good seed of humility… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Against Celsus* 15 **Quote 9, page 5** "who is humble and becomingly adorned is so in a greater degree than Plato's humble and becomingly adorned individual. For he is becomingly adorned, on the one hand, because… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 1 (on point 5) "every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and every one that humbles himself shall be exalted… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 14–19*

14 *Treatises* (on point 1) "humility we grow to the highest attainments… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Epistles* of the Church requires of them according to the authority of Scripture: that they ought to be humble, modest, and peaceable; that they should preserve the honor of their name… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Treatises* (1885 English) "in conversation; steadfastness in faith; modesty in words… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Treatises* man, did not resist or struggle against his brother who murdered him, but with humility and meekness he was patiently killed. So Abraham, believing God and first laying down the… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Epistles* "has carried out these saving commands and warnings of the apostle, while keeping, above all, humility and meekness! For what could be more humble or meek than to disagree with… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Epistles* the Lord, beg you to walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love; endeavoring to… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 20–21*

20 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 4) from such as these God takes away His grace. For God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Now Silas and Agabus prophesied in our times. Yet they… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Apostolic Constitutions* "he may please You in meekness and a pure heart, with a… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 22*

22 *Writings* (1885 English) "submit yourself, and give honour to Him that is powerful… [continues online] **read ›**

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Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 23*

23 *Disputation with Manes* 1 (1885 English) “in that saying Jesus did; not refer to those who are poor simply in worldly substance, but to those who are poor in spirit, that is to say, who are… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 24–25*

24 *Divine Institutes* 16 (on point 5) “although in humility we are equal with one another—the free with slaves, and the rich with the poor—still, in the sight of God, we are set apart by… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 67 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 3** “are the things which the worshipper of God ought to hold forth… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 26–34*

26 *Homilies on Acts* And see how he begins: “How I have been with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility of mind.” Notice what especially becomes rulers. Moses says in… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Homilies on John* 33 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 3, page 2** “is nothing equal to lowliness of mind… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Homily Concerning Lowliness of Mind* 1 **Quote 4, page 3** have learned that pride can cast down from heaven itself the one who does not take heed, and that lowliness of mind can lift up from the very abyss of… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Homilies on Romans* **Quote 2, page 2** above, “I beseech you by the mercies,” here he says again, “by the grace.” Notice the teacher’s lowliness of mind. Notice how subdued his spirit is. He means to… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Homilies on Ephesians* 22 (1885 English) “thou that the expression is that of lowliness and of humility… [continues online] **read ›**

31 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 1 (on point 4) of God is a broken spirit, and a heart that is brought low God will not despise.” For if humility is so lovely with men, much more is it so… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Homilies on Matthew* 15 “a certain degree. Another has humility in the fullest and deepest sense. It is this last kind of lowliness of mind that the blessed prophet praises. He shows us a… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Homilies on Philippians* “51:16-17. Not simply humility, but intense humility… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Homilies on Philippians* (1885 English) “lowliness of mind, he says, each counting other better than themselves, as Christ also did… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *sources 35–36*

35 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 5, page 3** “moderation, humility, and meekness to such as are blessed by Him… [continues online] **read ›**

36 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English; on point 4) “them learn of how great avail humility is with God—how much the spirit of pure affection can prevail with Him—how excellent and great His fear is, and how… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *4 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

37 **Psalms 131:1** A Song of the Steps. O Lord, my heart was not exalted, nor were my eyes lifted up; nor did I walk in great things, nor in things too wonderful for me. (Septuagint Psalm 130:1 (Psalm 131:1 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

38 **Luke 16:15** He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. **read ›**

39 **Romans 12:3** For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought, but to think soberly, as God has apportioned to each a measure of faithfulness. **read ›**

40 **James 4:6** But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, “God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.” **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *86 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.

Exodus 20:7

Job 5:17 · 11:2

Psalms 94:12 · 119:71

Proverbs 3:34 · 27:2

Isaiah 66:2

Jeremiah 13:1

Matthew 5:8 · 5:32 · 5:42 · 7:12 · 7:15 · 8:10 · 10:10 · 10:19 · 11:18 · 11:20 · 13:27 · 19:3 · 19:6 · 19:10 · 19:11 · 22:39 · 23:27 · 24:5 · 24:19 · 24:37

Mark 2:19 · 8:38 · 10:9 · 12:41 · 13:17

Luke 6:30 · 14:11 · 14:33 · 17:28 · 18:14 · 21:14 · 21:23

John 7:37 · 11:51 · 15:1 · 15:12 · 21:17

Acts 1:7 · 19:14 · 20:29 · 21:9

Romans 2:29 · 8:29 · 14:3 · 14:17

1 Corinthians 1:29 · 7:2 · 7:18 · 7:27 · 9:5 · 10:13 · 11:1 · 12:3 · 12:29 · 14:40

2 Corinthians 1:3 · 13:3

Galatians 1:10

Ephesians 4:27 · 6:9

Philippians 2:6

Colossians 2:18

1 Thessalonians 5:12

2 Thessalonians 3:6

1 Timothy 2:4 · 4:1 · 5:21

2 Timothy 3:2

Hebrews 4:15 · 12:6 · 12:7 · 13:17

James 1:2 · 1:8

1 Peter 1:6 · 5:5

Revelation 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 “Why did the early Christians call humility the foundation of every virtue?” on August 18, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY