THE QUESTION

Why do people gossip and slander, according to the early Christians?

Asked by a THF member on May 25, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 20 early Christian passages and 123 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/why-do-people-gossip-and-slander-according-to-the-early-christians

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

The early writers point to inner causes. They name envy, rivalry and ill will, anger and old grudges, pride and self-praise, a loose tongue that cannot keep a secret, and the thrill of passing on news. They also warn that listening to and believing slander pulls the hearer into the same sin.

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.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Rumors grow from rivalry and suspicion

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

Tertullian explains how a report begins in one mouth and spreads from ear to tongue until no one asks if it was true. He names three causes: rivalry, a suspicious temper, and simple enjoyment of making up news.

1

> "After that, it somehow creeps along to ears and tongues that pass it on."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "This often happens because of rivalry, a suspicious temper, or even the pleasure of making up news."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Ad Nationes* 7 **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Envy and ill will drive false accusations

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

Bishops were told to ask whether accusers spoke from ill will or envy. Some people, it says, enjoy doing harm and make slander their business, so their words must be tested before they are believed.

2

> "Ask whether they are accusing out of ill will or envy. For there are many who delight in doing harm, who are rash in speech, slanderous, haters of the brothers, and make it their business to scatter the sheep of Christ."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 15, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Anger and grudges keep the slander going

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

Hermas pictures believers who keep slandering because they stay angry and want revenge on one another. The church manual likewise joins evil speaking with holding on to injuries, and warns that both lead to death.

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3 “But those who live in the large cracks keep on slandering, and in their anger against each other they are vindictive.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “Nor shall you keep injuries in mind, for the ways of those who remember injuries lead to death.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 16, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Pride feeds whispering and evil-speaking

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

Clement of Rome sets whispering beside pride, arrogance, vanity and ambition. Against them he sets humility and letting others praise our good deeds, which suggests that tearing others down often comes from wanting to lift ourselves up.

5 “If our understanding is fixed by faith towards God; if we earnestly seek the things which are pleasing and acceptable to Him; if we do the things which align with His blameless will; and if we follow the way of truth, casting away from us all unrighteousness and iniquity, along with all covetousness, strife, evil practices, deceit, whispering, and evil-speaking, all hatred of God, pride and arrogance, vanity and ambition.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 18, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “Let our praise be in God, and not of ourselves; for God hates those that commend themselves.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 19, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 7

A loose tongue cannot keep a secret

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

Clement of Alexandria reads an old saying about the swallow as a warning against the chatty whisperer. Such a person cannot hold what was told to him, and he links this with fault-finding slander.

7 “That means you should not receive a talkative, whispering, chatty person who cannot keep to himself what has been told to him.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 5.5 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Forgetting that God hears every word

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

Commodianus scolds people who chat and run down their neighbors even during prayer in church. He says they speak as if God were not there, so a lack of awareness of God is part of the cause.

8 “You mock him, or detract from your neighbor's reputation. You speak in an undisciplined way, as if God were absent, as if He who made all things neither hears nor sees.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 17, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Listening to slander spreads the sin

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

Hermas warns that whoever believes slander soon has something of his own to say against his brother. He calls slander a restless spirit that never stays at peace, so the cure starts with refusing to listen.

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9 “For if you believe it, you too will have something to say against your brother.”

later in the same passage

“For slander is evil, and it is an unstable demon. It never stays in peace, but always remains in conflict.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

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

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These writers name causes mostly by listing sins together or by warning against them, not by giving a full study of why people gossip.
- They do not rank which cause is most common.
- 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 20 early Christian passages and 123 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–20, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 21–82, in Bible order), then 61 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 *20 passages from 12 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 2 (on point 3) shall not speak evil. You shall bear no grudge… [continues online] **read ›**

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · source 2*

2 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English; on point 6) “are prone to evil-speaking, who know not Him that made them, who are murderers of children, destroyers of the workmanship of God… [continues online] **read ›**

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Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 3–6*

3 *Shepherd* **Quote 9, page 5** "But if you listen, you will share in the sin of the one who speaks evil, if you believe the slander you hear. For if you believe it, you too… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Shepherd* (on point 3) "of food and the extravagance of riches, and from boastfulness, haughtiness, insolence, lies, backbiting, hypocrisy, remembering wrongs, and every kind of slander. These are the deeds that are most wicked… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Shepherd* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "they who occupy the large clefts are persistent in their slanders, and vindictive in their anger against each other… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Shepherd* (on point 3) "Deceit. And their followers are called Sorrow, Wickedness, Wantonness, Anger, Falsehood, Folly, Backbiting, and Hatred. The servant of God who bears these names will indeed see the kingdom of God… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 7*

7 *Epistles of Ignatius* (on point 4) "each of you, all malice and beast-like fury, evil-speaking, slander, filthy speaking, lewdness, gossip, arrogance, drunkenness, lust, greed, vanity, envy, and everything similar to these. "But put on… [continues online] **read ›**

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

8 *Stromata* 1.10 (1885 English) "as those whose speech is evil are no better than those whose practice is evil (for calumny is the servant of the sword, and evil-speaking inflicts pain… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Stromata* 5.5 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "is, not to receive a loquacious, whispering, garrulous man, who cannot contain what has been communicated to him… [continues online] **read ›**

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

10 *Ad Nationes* 7 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "it creeps on somehow to ears and tongues which pass it on and so obscures the humble error in which it began, that no one considers whether the mouth which… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Apology* 7 (1885 English; on point 1) "is rumour such an evil thing? Is it because it is fleet… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 12*

12 *Exegetical Fragments* 1 (on point 2) with bitter envy. They used the glory of which He could not be deprived as the basis for their slander, and attacked Him in many ways. For Christ did raise… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 13*

13 *Against Celsus* 40 (on point 2) this, Celsus seems to me to act like people who, because of their intense hatred of Christians, claim in front of those who know absolutely nothing about the Christian faith… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 14*

14 *Epistles* (1885 English) "the envenomed tongue of the devil, who from the beginning of the world, always deceitful and lying, lies that he may deceive, cajoles that he may injure, promises good that… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 15–16*

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "whether they do not accuse out of ill-will or envy: for there are many that delight in mischief, forward in discourse, slanderous, haters of the brethren, making it their… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "You shall not speak evil; for says He, Love not to speak evil, lest you beest taken away… [continues online] **read ›**

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

17 *Writings* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** "mock him, or detract from your neighbour's reputation… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *sources 18–20*

18 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 5, page 3** "if we follow the way of truth, casting away from us all unrighteousness and iniquity, along with all covetousness, strife, evil practices, deceit, whispering, and evil-speaking, all hatred of… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 6, page 3** "us clothe ourselves with concord and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all whispering and evil-speaking, being justified by our works, and not our words… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) "thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *62 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

21 **Leviticus 19:16** You shall not go about with deceit among your nation; you shall not rise up against the blood of your neighbor. I am the Lord your God. **read ›**

22 **Psalms 15:3** who has not deceived with his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbor, nor taken up an insult against those nearest to him; (Septuagint Psalm 14:3 (Psalm 15:3 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

23 **Psalms 41:7** All my enemies whispered against me; against me they devised evil for me. (Septuagint Psalm 40:8 (Psalm 41:7 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

24 **Psalms 101:5** Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I drove away; with one who is proud in eye and whose heart is never satisfied, with him I would not eat. (Septuagint Psalm 100:5 (Psalm 101:5 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

25 **Proverbs 10:18** Righteous lips cover hostility, but those who utter abuse are most foolish. **read ›**

26 **Proverbs 11:11** but by the mouths of the ungodly it is torn down. **read ›**

27 **Proverbs 11:13** A double-tongued man reveals counsels in the council, but he who is faithful in spirit hides matters. **read ›**

28 **Proverbs 16:28** A crooked man sends out evils, and will light a torch of deceit with evils, and he separates friends. **read ›**

29 **Proverbs 16:30** And he who fixes his eyes devises perverse things, and marks out all evils with his lips; he is a furnace of wickedness. **read ›**

30 **Proverbs 17:4** A bad man listens to the tongue of the lawless, but a righteous man does not pay attention to lying lips. **read ›**

31 **Proverbs 18:8** Fear casts down the lazy, and the souls of the unmanly will hunger. **read ›**

32 **Proverbs 20:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

33 **Proverbs 25:23** The north wind stirs up clouds, and a shameless face provokes the tongue. **read ›**

34 **Proverbs 26:20** With much wood a fire flourishes, but where there is no double-minded man, a quarrel is quiet. **read ›**

35 **Proverbs 26:22** The words of the cunning are soft, but they strike into the chambers of the inward parts. **read ›**

36 **Proverbs 26:28** A lying tongue hates the truth, and an unguarded mouth causes disorders. **read ›**

37 **Isaiah 3:4** And I will make youths their rulers, and mockers shall have dominion over them. **read ›**

38 **Jeremiah 9:4** Beware, each one, of his neighbor, and do not trust in your brothers; for every brother will trip up with the heel, and every friend will walk deceitfully. (Septuagint Jeremiah 9:3 (Jeremiah 9:4 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

39 **Jeremiah 11:3** and you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Cursed is the man who will not listen to the words of this covenant, **read ›**

40 **Jeremiah 20:10** For I heard the blame of many gathering round about: "Conspire, and let us conspire against him"—all his friends. "Watch his intention, whether he will be deceived, and we will prevail against him and take our vengeance on him." **read ›**

41 **Jeremiah 30:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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42 **Jeremiah 33:14** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

43 **Jeremiah 37:21** The king gave orders, and they put him into the prison house, and gave him one loaf a day from outside, where they bake, until the bread was gone from the city. And Jeremiah stayed in the court of the prison. (Septuagint Jeremiah 44:21 (Jeremiah 37:21 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

44 **Jeremiah 40:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **Jeremiah 49:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

46 **Ezekiel 15:3** Will they take wood from it to make it into anything for work? Will they take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? **read ›**

47 **Ezekiel 20:12** And I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. **read ›**

48 **Daniel 11:13** And the king of the north shall return and bring a multitude greater than the first; and at the end of the times of years an invasion shall come with a great army and with many possessions. **read ›**

49 **Amos 1:10** And I will send forth a fire upon the walls of Tyre, and it shall devour its foundations. **read ›**

50 **Amos 1:11** Thus says the Lord: For three ungodly deeds of Idumea, and for four, I will not turn away from them, because they pursued their brother with the sword, and he destroyed the mother upon the earth, and seized his trembling for a testimony, and kept his onrush forever. **read ›**

51 **Wisdom of Solomon 1:10** For a jealous ear hears all things, and the muttering of complaints is not hidden. **read ›**

52 **Wisdom of Solomon 1:11** Beware, then, of useless grumbling, and keep your tongue from slander; for no secret word goes out empty, and a lying mouth slays the soul. **read ›**

53 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:13** Glory and dishonor are in speaking, and a man’s tongue is his downfall. **read ›**

54 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:14** Do not be called a gossip, and do not lie in ambush with your tongue; for shame is upon the thief, and an evil condemnation upon the double-tongued. **read ›**

55 **Wisdom of Sirach 9:18** A talkative man is feared in his city, and he who is rash in his speech will be hated. **read ›**

56 **Wisdom of Sirach 11:31** For he lies in wait, turning good things into evil, and on choice things he will lay blame. **read ›**

57 **Wisdom of Sirach 12:16** The enemy will speak sweetly with his lips, but in his heart he will plan to throw you down into a pit; the enemy will weep with his eyes, but if he finds an opportunity, he will not be satisfied with blood. **read ›**

58 **Wisdom of Sirach 19:15** Question a friend, for slander often happens; and do not believe every word. **read ›**

59 **Wisdom of Sirach 19:16** There is one who slips, but not from the soul; and who has not sinned with his tongue? **read ›**

60 **Wisdom of Sirach 21:25** The lips of strangers will be weighed down by these things, but the words of those of sound judgment will be weighed on the scale. **read ›**

61 **Wisdom of Sirach 21:28** The gossip defiles his own soul, and will be hated where he lives. **read ›**

62 **Wisdom of Sirach 22:22** If you have opened your mouth against a friend, do not be afraid, for there is reconciliation— except for insults and pride, the revealing of a secret, and a treacherous blow; because of these things any friend will flee. **read ›**

63 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:6** A wife jealous of another wife is grief of heart and mourning, and a lash of the tongue that communicates with all. **read ›**

64 **Wisdom of Sirach 27:15** The fighting of the proud is bloodshed, and their abuse of one another is painful to hear. **read ›**

65 **Wisdom of Sirach 27:22** He who winks with the eye devises evil, and no one will turn him away from it. **read ›**

66 **Wisdom of Sirach 27:23** Before your eyes he will make your mouth sweet, and he will marvel at your words; but afterward he will twist his mouth, and set a stumbling block in your words. **read ›**

67 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:9** And a sinful man will trouble friends, and he casts slander among those who are at peace. **read ›**

68 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:13** Curse the gossip and the double-tongued, for they have destroyed many who were at peace. **read ›**

69 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:14** A third tongue has shaken many, and driven them from nation to nation; it has pulled down strong cities, and overthrown the houses of nobles. **read ›**

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70 **Wisdom of Sirach 28:15** A third tongue has driven out courageous women, and deprived them of their labors. **read ›**

71 **Wisdom of Sirach 51:5** from the depth of the belly of Hades, from an unclean tongue and a lying word— **read ›**

72 **1 Maccabees 11:11** Ptolemy found fault with Alexander because he coveted Alexander's kingdom. **read ›**

73 **4 Maccabees 3:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

74 **Acts 9:15** But the Lord said to him, "Go your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my name before the nations and kings, and the children of Israel. **read ›**

75 **Acts 28:11** After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island, with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. **read ›**

76 **Romans 1:29** being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness; secret slanderers, **read ›**

77 **Romans 9:4** who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service, and the promises; **read ›**

78 **Romans 9:7** Nor are they all children because they are Abraham's seed. But, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." **read ›**

79 **1 Timothy 5:13** At the same time they also learn to be idle, going from house to house; and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. **read ›**

80 **James 4:11** Do not speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. **read ›**

81 **1 Peter 2:1** Putting away therefore all wickedness, all deceit, hypocrisies, envies, and all evil speaking, **read ›**

82 **Jude 1:16** These are grumblers and complainers, walking according to their own lusts; their mouth speaks boastful things, flattering people for gain. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *61 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.

Job 11:2

Psalms 34:11 · 34:14 · 50:16 · 50:18 · 133:1

Proverbs 1:33 · 3:34 · 27:2

Matthew 3:14 · 5:34 · 5:42 · 6:12 · 7:9 · 8:4 · 12:37 · 18:3 · 18:33

Mark 14:44

Luke 1:17 · 6:37 · 21:14

John 2:3 · 3:19 · 8:12 · 8:44 · 10:16 · 12:25 · 12:28 · 14:6 · 17:5

Acts 8:30 · 28:25

Romans 1:26 · 1:32 · 3:15 · 12:8 · 12:9 · 13:14

1 Corinthians 1:23 · 8:6 · 9:23 · 14:13

2 Corinthians 6:14

Galatians 5:10 · 5:19

Ephesians 2:14 · 2:20 · 5:14 · 6:12

Philippians 2:7 · 3:15

2 Timothy 4:8

Titus 3:2

Hebrews 13:17

James 4:6

1 Peter 4:3 · 5:5

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1 John 2:3

2 John 1:10

Revelation 3:21

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Why do people gossip and slander, according to the early Christians?” on May 25, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY