THE QUESTION

What did early Christians mean by sodomy, and did it include acts between a husband and wife?

Asked by a THF member on August 27, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 29 early Christian passages and 87 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-early-christians-mean-by-sodomy-and-did-it-include-acts-between-a

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

In these passages, sodomy and the sin of Sodom point mainly to sex between males, which the writers call against nature. None of them defines sodomy as anal or oral sex between a husband and wife. Some writers do teach that sexual pleasure should serve the having of children, but they do not apply this to named married acts.

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.

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POINT 1 OF 7

The sin of Sodom is called against nature

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

The Apostolic Constitutions separate two kinds of sexual sin. The sin of Sodom and sex with animals are against nature, while adultery and fornication are against the law. The same passage then quotes the law against a man lying with a male as with a woman.

1

> “The sin of Sodom is against nature, and so is intercourse with brute beasts. But adultery and fornication are against the law.”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. For such a person is accursed, and you shall stone them with stones; they have committed abomination.”"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 22, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Origen links sodomy with men with men

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

Origen describes so-called wise men who wallowed in sodomy, and he explains it with Paul's words about men with men. In this passage, sodomy plainly means sexual acts between males.

2

> “Meanwhile, those who call themselves wise have despised these virtues, and have wallowed in the filth of sodomy, in lawless lust, men with men working what is unseemly.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 49 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 19, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Sodomy is listed beside incest, taught to boys

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

Theophilus blames some philosophers for teaching incest and sodomy so that boys learned it young. Aristides makes a similar charge against the pagan world, listing incest and lying with males. Both treat these as the sins of the surrounding culture.

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3 “Why then do Epicurus and the Stoics teach incest and sodomy, filling libraries with these teachings, so that this lawless intercourse is learned from boyhood?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 6 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “To this day they imitate their gods, and they practice adultery and defile themselves with their mothers and their sisters, and by lying with males.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Aristides,** *Apology* 9 (c. 125–140 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Scripture's lists name abusers of themselves with mankind

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

Irenaeus and Polycarp both quote Paul's list of those who will not inherit God's kingdom. It names the effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind beside fornicators and adulterers. Polycarp uses it to urge young men to keep pure.

5 “Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.'”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “Similarly, let the young men be blameless in all things, being especially careful to preserve purity and restraining themselves from every kind of evil.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 5 OF 7

Clement calls lust turned from conception unnatural

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

Using an old belief about the hyena as a picture, Clement describes lust aimed where no child can be conceived and calls it against nature. He ties it to Plato's rejection of the love of boys and to Romans 1. He is speaking of male vice here, not of married couples.

7 “It only has a large hollow, which receives empty lust when the passages occupied in conceiving young are turned away.”

later in the same passage

“For this reason, it seems to me that Plato in the Phaedrus, when rejecting the love of boys, called it a beast.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.10 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 12, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Sexual pleasure was meant to serve having children

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

Lactantius says desire should stay within marriage and serve the begetting of children. The Apostolic Constitutions fault fornication because it is used only for pleasure, not for children. This idea could bear on acts within marriage, but neither passage names any such act or calls it sodomy.

8 “Let lust not go beyond the marriage bed, but be subject to the begetting of children.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Lactantius,** *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 62 (c. 290–320 AD) **Source 28, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

9 “And fornication is the ruin of one's own flesh, since it is not used for the bringing forth of children, but entirely for pleasure, which is a mark of lack of self-control and not a sign of virtue.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 22, page 7** Read it in the library ›

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POINT 7 OF 7

Those who sinned this way can be washed

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

Cyprian quotes Paul's list, including those who abuse themselves with mankind, and then Paul's words that some had been such people but were washed and made holy. He asks God daily to keep that holiness safe by His grace.

10 “And such indeed were you; but you are washed; but you are justified; but you are sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.””

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

Source 20, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages defines sodomy as anal or oral sex between a husband and wife, or names those acts at all.
- The teaching that sex should serve having children is stated in general terms; these passages do not apply it to specific married acts.
- 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 29 early Christian passages and 87 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–29, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 30–33, in Bible order), then 83 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).

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *29 passages from 15 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistles of Ignatius* (on point 4) “and righteously, he shows again when he says, “Do not be deceived: neither adulterers, nor effeminate persons, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor fornicators, nor revilers, nor drunkards, nor… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 2*

2 *Epistle to the Philippians* **Quote 6, page 3** “that are in the world, since "every lust wars against the spirit," and "neither fornicators, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, shall inherit the kingdom of God," nor… [continues online] **read ›**

Aristides, *c. 125–140 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Apology* 8 (on point 3) themselves into the form of animals to seduce mortal women, and some defiled themselves by lying with males. And some, they say, were married to their mothers and their sisters… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Apology* 9 **Quote 4, page 3** and they practice adultery and defile themselves with their mothers and their sisters, and by lying with males. Some even dare to kill their own parents. For if the one… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 5–6*

5 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 2) “there are some who prostitute even their own children and wives, and some are openly mutilated for the purpose of sodomy… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Second Apology* (1885 English; on point 3) “imitating Jupiter and the other gods in sodomy and shameless intercourse with woman, might we not bring as our apology the writings of Epicurus and the poets… [continues online] **read ›**

Minucius Felix, *c. 150–270 AD · source 7*

7 *Octavius* 24 “before it shames them. Abomination! They suffer on themselves such evil deeds as no age is so effeminate as to be able to bear, and no slavery so cruel as… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 8*

8 *To Autolycus* 6 **Quote 3, page 3** “then do Epicurus and the Stoics teach incest and… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 9*

9 *A Plea for the Christians* 34 (1885 English) “adulterers and pederasts defame the eunuchs and the once-married (while they themselves live like fishes… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *Against Heresies: Book V* (on point 4) “of God? Do not be mistaken," he says: "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor revilers, nor rapacious… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Against Heresies: Book IV* **Quote 5, page 3** “the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 12–15*

12 *Instructor* 2.10 **Quote 7, page 4** be used with more modesty than any other. For nature has allowed us to use food, and also lawful marriage, as much as is fitting and useful. And it has… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Instructor* 2.10 (on point 6) in us much occupation that is good and honorable. In short, a person ought either to be joined in marriage, or to remain altogether free from marriage. For the question… [continues online] **read ›**

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14 *Stromata* 4.20 (1885 English; on point 6) “13:14-16 And then, as putting the finishing stroke to the question about marriage, he adds: Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Instructor* 3.11 (on point 4) “adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers," and whatever else he adds to these… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 16–17*

16 *Against Marcion* 29 (1885 English; on point 1) “who threatened with death the unchaste, sacrilegious, and monstrous abomination both of adultery and unnatural sin with man and beast… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Against Marcion* 8 (on point 6) “Thessalonians 4:5. Concupiscence, however, is not ascribed to marriage even among the Gentiles, but to… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 18*

18 *Refutation of All Heresies* 1 “likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 19*

19 *Against Celsus* 49 **Quote 2, page 2** “those who call themselves wise have despised these virtues, and have wallowed in the filth of sodomy, in lawless lust, men with men… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 20–21*

20 *Treatises* **Quote 10, page 5** “God's condescension, when he says, “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor those who abuse themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor deceivers, nor drunkards, nor revilers… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 2) “would see what people embruted with the madness of vice deny that they have done, and yet hasten to do — men with frenzied lusts rushing upon men, doing things which… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 22–24*

22 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quotes 1, 9, pages 2, 4** “practice, because such things are hostility to God. The sin of Sodom is against nature, and so is intercourse with brute beasts. But adultery and fornication are against the law… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) “shall not corrupt boys: Leviticus 18:22 for this wickedness is contrary to nature, and arose from… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 6) “the conjunction of man and wife, if it be with righteousness, is agreeable to the mind of God… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 25–29*

25 *Divine Institutes* 10 (1885 English; on point 1) “is true adultery, which is done against nature… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Divine Institutes* 23 (on point 6) of chastity. God limits this not only within private walls, but also to the lawful bounds of the marriage bed, so that when a man has a wife, he should… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Divine Institutes* 9 (1885 English) “prostitute their own persons to lust; who, in short, unmindful of what they were born, contend with women in passivity… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 62 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “lust not go beyond the marriage-bed, but be subservient to the procreation of children… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Divine Institutes* 13 (1885 English; on point 6) “therefore, He had first formed the male after His own likeness, then He also fashioned woman after the image of the man himself, that the two by their union might… [continues online] **read ›**

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

30 **Romans 1:26** For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For their women changed the natural function into that which is against nature. **read ›**

31 **Romans 1:27** Likewise also the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their desire for one another, men committing shameful acts with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error. **read ›**

32 **1 Corinthians 6:9** Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor men who have sexual relations with men, **read ›**

33 **1 Corinthians 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *83 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.

Genesis 1:12

Leviticus 11:4

Esther 5:1

Amos 9:6

Matthew 5:39 · 5:40 · 5:42 · 5:45 · 5:46 · 8:22 · 19:4 · 20:28 · 21:23 · 21:31 · 25:41 · 27:5 · 27:52

Mark 9:23 · 10:43 · 12:32

Luke 6:29 · 6:32 · 8:18 · 22:31

John 5:25 · 5:29 · 12:6 · 19:36

Acts 1:18 · 2:30 · 9:20 · 24:15 · 26:6

Romans 1:20 · 2:4 · 2:14 · 7:18

1 Corinthians 2:15 · 3:11 · 5:11 · 7:29 · 10:5 · 11:22 · 12:4 · 15:13 · 15:32 · 15:44 · 15:53

2 Corinthians 11:23 · 12:9

Galatians 2:12 · 3:28 · 4:26 · 5:16 · 5:19 · 6:7

Ephesians 4:8 · 5:3 · 5:6

Philippians 1:27 · 4:8

1 Thessalonians 2:15 · 4:3 · 4:5 · 4:14 · 4:15 · 5:19 · 5:20 · 5:23

1 Timothy 2:4 · 3:8

2 Timothy 2:12

Titus 2:3

Hebrews 12:14 · 13:4 · 13:14

1 Peter 1:6 · 2:11 · 4:6

2 Peter 2:22

1 John 3:1 · 5:1 · 5:6

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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 early Christians mean by sodomy, and did it include acts between a husband and wife?” on August 27, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY