THE QUESTION

What did early Christians mean by the sin of Sodom?

Asked by a THF member on August 27, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 27 early Christian passages and 91 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-the-sin-of-sodom

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

In these passages, the sin of Sodom mostly means sex between men and the abuse of boys, which the writers call against nature. They judged sex by whether it fits God's design for marriage and children. They praise married union as clean, but they do not plainly say whether "sodomy" covers acts within marriage.

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 7

Origen ties sodomy to men with men

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

Origen contrasts simple believers who live in purity with pagan thinkers who fell into sodomy. He explains the word at once with Paul's phrase from Romans 1 about men with men. Here the term clearly points to sex between men.

1

> “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)
THF's updated English

Source 20, page 7 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

The sin of Sodom is against nature

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

The Apostolic Constitutions sort sexual sins into two kinds. The sin of Sodom and sex with animals are against nature, while adultery and fornication are against the law. They then quote the law forbidding a man to lie with a male as with a woman.

2

> “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** (c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 21, page 7 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Clement names luxury, adultery and love of boys

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

Clement of Alexandria says the people of Sodom slid into uncleanness through luxury. He names shameless adultery and a mad lust for boys as their sins, and he treats their punishment as a warning to us.

3 “The Sodomites, through much luxury, had fallen into uncleanness. They practiced adultery shamelessly, and burned with insane love for boys.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** **Source 12, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
Instructor 3.8 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Against nature means turning sex from its purpose

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

Clement uses the hyena as a picture of lust that goes against nature and does not lead to children. He then quotes Paul, who says even women exchanged natural use for what is against nature. So for him, against nature is not only about men, but about turning sex away from what it is for.

4 “For this animal does not often conceive, since in them there overflows in abundance that satisfaction which is against nature.”

later in the same passage

“For even their women exchanged the natural use for that which is against nature.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** **Source 11, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
Instructor 2.10 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Sex was made for the bearing of children

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

Arnobius says the Creator made male and female so the human race could go on through their union. The Apostolic Constitutions fault fornication because it is used only for pleasure and not for bearing children. Both measure sex by its God-given purpose.

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5 “For who, no matter how limited his understanding, does not know that the sexes were appointed and formed by the Creator of earthly living things for this reason alone: that through intercourse and the union of bodies, what is passing away and temporary may continue by being constantly renewed and preserved?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Arnobius,** *Against the Heathen* 3 (c. 290–330 AD) **Source 25, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “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 21, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Married union is clean and honorable

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

The Apostolic Constitutions teach that a husband and wife who come together in lawful marriage are clean and may pray without special washings. They also call lawful marriage and having children honorable. The early writers did not treat married love as shameful.

7 “Therefore, when a husband and wife come together in lawful marriage and then rise from one another, they may pray without any special observances, and they are clean without washing.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 24, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “We believe that lawful marriage and the begetting of children are honorable and undefiled, for the difference of the sexes was formed in Adam and Eve for the increase of mankind.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 23, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Desire must be ruled, not obeyed

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

Clement explains the command not to lust as a call to rule the flesh instead of serving it. The flesh pushes toward what goes against nature, while the Spirit leads a person to live according to nature.

9 “So then, the commandment, "You shall not lust," means this: you must not serve the fleshly spirit, but must rule over it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 6.16 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 14, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not directly say whether any act between a husband and wife counts as sodomy.
- They do not give a full list of which acts the writers counted as against nature.
- 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 27 early Christian passages and 91 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–27, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 28–31, in Bible order), then 87 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 *27 passages from 13 writers*

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistle of Barnabas* (on point 4) “shall not be an adulterer, nor a corrupter, nor like them." Why? Because that animal changes its sex annually, being male at one time and female at another. Moreover, he… [continues online] **read ›**

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Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 2*

2 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 7) “of all is the desire after another's wife or husband, and after extravagance, and many useless dainties and drinks, and many other foolish luxuries… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 3*

3 *Epistle to the Philippians* (1885 English; on point 1) “it is well that they should be cut off from the lusts that are in the world, since “every lust warreth against the spirit;” and “neither fornicators, nor effeminate, nor… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 4–6*

4 *First Apology* (on point 1) “even prostitute their own children and wives, and some are openly mutilated for the purpose of sodomy; these acts are attributed to the mother of the gods, and with each… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Second Apology* (1885 English; on point 1) “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 ›**

6 *Second Apology* (on point 4) excesses, distancing her through his behavior. She considered it wicked to continue living as a wife with a husband who sought pleasure in ways contrary to natural and moral law… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 7*

7 *Address to the Greeks* 19 “who made his nest in the great city, surpassed all men in unnatural… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *A Plea for the Christians* 32 (1885 English; on point 7) “we are so far from practising promiscuous intercourse, that it is not lawful among us to indulge even a lustful look… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *A Plea for the Christians* 34 (1885 English; on point 3) “adulterers and pederasts defame the eunuchs and the once-married (while they themselves live like fishes… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 10–16*

10 *Stromata* 3 (on point 5) appears in a generated human being is what the emission of seed accomplishes. Therefore, many sexual unions are not many generations. Rather, the receiving womb shows generation, when in the… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Instructor* 2.10 **Quote 4, page 3** from violent desires, and mutual sexual encounters, and intercourse with pregnant women, and relations in turn one after another, and the corruption of boys, and adultery, and lust. For this… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Instructor* 3.8 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** “Sodomites having, through much luxury, fallen into uncleanness, practising adultery shamelessly, and burning with insane love for boys… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Instructor* 2.10 (1885 English; on point 4) “many think such things to be pleasures only which are against nature, such as these sins of theirs… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Stromata* 6.16 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, Galatians 5:17 and excites to disorderly conduct against nature… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *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 ›**

16 *Stromata* 2.23 (1885 English; on point 6) “those seeds temperate husbandmen ever sow. Every foul and polluting practice must therefore be purged away from marriage… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 17*

17 *Against Marcion* 29 (1885 English; on point 2) “who threatened with death the unchaste, sacrilegious, and monstrous abomination both of adultery and unnatural sin with man and beast… [continues online] **read ›**

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

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

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 19–20*

19 *Against Celsus* 42 (1885 English; on point 5) “were there among them women who sold their beauty to any one who wished to have sexual intercourse without offspring, and to cast contempt upon the nature of human generation… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Against Celsus* 49 **Quote 1, 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 ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 21–24*

21 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quotes 2, 6, pages 2, 4** “such are enmity to God. For the sin of Sodom is contrary to nature, as is also that with brute beasts… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) “shall not corrupt boys: Leviticus 18:22 for this wickedness is contrary to nature, and arose from… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “abhor all unlawful mixtures, and that which is practised by some against nature as wicked and impious… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 7, page 4** all times. For if you are in every way surrounded by her friendship, you will be happy in her company." Love them, therefore, as your own members, as your very… [continues online] **read ›**

Arnobius, *c. 290–330 AD · source 25*

25 *Against the Heathen* 3 **Quote 5, page 4** when we speak of Him, we use a masculine word, let him understand this: what is expressed is not sex, but His name, its customary meaning, and the way we… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · sources 26–27*

26 *Divine Institutes* 23 (1885 English; on point 3) “enim potest esse sanctum iis, qui ætatem imbecillam et præsidio indigentem, libidini suæ depopulandam fœdandamque substraverint… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Divine Institutes* 10 (1885 English; on point 4) “is true adultery, which is done against nature… [continues online] **read ›**

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

28 **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 ›**

29 **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 ›**

30 **Galatians 5:17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. **read ›**

31 **Jude 1:5** Now I wish to remind you, though you already know this, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *87 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 · 4:25

Leviticus 11:4 · 15:18

Deuteronomy 8:18 · 14:8 · 20:5 · 20:19

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Esther 5:1
Psalms 1:1
Proverbs 9:17
Isaiah 29:15 · 50:9
Jeremiah 23:24
Matthew 5:28 · 5:39 · 5:40 · 5:42 · 5:45 · 5:46 · 6:19 · 6:24 · 7:21 · 15:11 · 18:20 · 19:6 · 20:28 · 22:39 · 23:9 · 27:5
Mark 10:43 · 12:32
Luke 6:29 · 6:32 · 6:46 · 8:18 · 20:25 · 20:27 · 20:34
John 1:5 · 3:6 · 6:27 · 12:6
Acts 1:18
Romans 1:20 · 7:4 · 7:12 · 14:19 · 14:21
1 Corinthians 6:9 · 6:12 · 6:18 · 7:5 · 7:8 · 7:9 · 7:14 · 7:29 · 7:32 · 7:39 · 15:53
2 Corinthians 11:3 · 11:23 · 12:9
Galatians 3:28 · 5:13 · 5:16 · 6:7
Philippians 1:27 · 4:3 · 4:8
Colossians 2:16 · 2:20
1 Timothy 3:2 · 3:8 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 5:14
2 Timothy 2:12
Titus 2:3
Hebrews 5:14 · 12:14 · 13:4 · 13:5 · 13:14
1 Peter 1:6 · 2:11 · 3:6

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 the sin of Sodom?” 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