

What do the Writings say about homosexuality?

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1. Christianity has long relied on a few Biblical references to support the idea that homosexuality is wrong.

There are quite a few Bible passages that touch on the subject of homosexuality, but a few in particular have been commonly referenced by Christians:

Leviticus 18:22 “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.”

Genesis 19:4 “The men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. 5 And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.’”

1 Corinthians 6:9 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Timothy 1:9 “The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers.”

Romans 1:26 “...vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

Although most Christians have found these references, plus a few others, to be convincing, they are explained away, and even mocked, by people who disagree that homosexuality is wrong. These arguments can easily be found on the internet by searching on words such as “homosexuality” and “Bible.”

Do the teachings of the New Church shed light on this? This article discusses passages in the Writings from such books as *Conjugal Love* and the *Arcana Coelestia* on this topic.

2. Homosexuality is not mentioned explicitly in *Conjugal Love*

The chapter in *Conjugal Love* on adultery (478-500) does not mention homosexuality, but dwells on the kinds of things that are more common roadblocks to conjugal love. People sometimes think that this omission means that homosexuality is not a form of adultery, and that it is not mentioned in the Writings.

In one sense the term *adultery* describes only “*lust with the wife or husband of another*” (CL 444). Other sexual disorders are given other names, such as fornication and debauchery (CL 444). In a wider sense, however, adultery describes all the practices, and even the thoughts and desires, that are opposed to conjugal love. The explanation of the sixth commandment in True Christian Religion states that, “*In the natural sense, this commandment means not only not to commit adultery, but it refers also to willing and doing obscene things and thinking and speaking about lascivious things*” (TCR 313). The word *adultery* is therefore used to describe any sexual evil, whether it is child sexual abuse, bestiality, or any of the many sexual sins that are common

in our world. In an even wider sense, all evils relate to adultery, since adultery is the fundamental love of hell, just as the love of marriage is the fundamental love of heaven (AE 981.2). Where does homosexuality fit here?

3. The Writings seem to call homosexuality “sodomy,” and link it with the incident at Sodom.

*“Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them.”
Genesis 19*

*“Although in the following chapter it seems as if the **evil of the worst adultery** is meant by ‘Sodom,’ in the internal sense nothing else is meant than evil from the love of self...In the Word the abominations that well forth from the love of self are depicted by adulteries of various kinds.” Arcana Coelestia 2220*

*“They who apprehend the Word according to the sense of the letter alone, may suppose that by “Sodom” is meant **a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature**; but in the internal sense by “Sodom” is signified the evil of the love of self.” Arcana Coelestia 2322*

Some have been misled by the wording of the above two passages into thinking that sodomy is not being condemned here. The passages simply say, however, that although you would expect the internal sense to treat of homosexuality, it actually treats of the love of self. This in no way exonerates homosexuality, since the passages call it “*the worst adultery*” and “*a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature.*” People are often unaware that the Latin superlative, used here, (*malum pessimi adulterii - evil of the worst adultery*), is different than the English superlative, meaning simply a very, very bad form of adultery, and not the worst possible form of adultery. There is no such thing as the absolute worst form of adultery, since evils can be indefinitely compounded. **In the internal sense this corresponds to the love of dominion from the love of self, a correspondence that may indicate that homosexuality is more common in cultures that struggle with issues having to do with authority, control, and persecution. This is speculation, but it may suggest that a real solution to this problem would need to deal with these underlying issues and not just their sexual manifestation.**

Many passages speak of sodomy and sodomites:

***Spiritual Experiences 1977:** “It was said to me that (those who share wives and husbands) were not far from being Sodomites, wherefore let those who are conscious to themselves of such a course of life beware, for they are not spared in the other life.”*

***Spiritual Experiences 2675:** “**CONCERNING SODOMY:** There are those in the other life who have committed the sin of Sodom during life. In the other life they are treated most miserably. They are punished with infernal torments, which are so terrible that they can scarcely be described. Moreover they inhabit the region of the tail, where the feces are, because they are manure, and dwell in outhouses.”*

***Spiritual Experiences 3768:** “These sexual acts were much more abominable than those of the Sodomites.”*

***Spiritual Experiences 3796:** “They craftily suggested that they still had children, even though they shared wives. It was answered that Sodomites also have children; but how abominable this was, they knew full well.”*

***Spiritual Experiences 5939:** “All degrees of criminality correspond to such things as are spiritual sins...Those who are in the love of self, and whose love is to rule over others, are Sodomites.*

Spiritual Experiences 6096: "The following things correspond to the acts of adulteries in the next life:..Those in the highest degree of the love of ruling from the love of self, and not for the sake of use, are in Sodom."

Apocalypse Explained 1006.2: "There are sodomitic hells for those who were in evils from a love of ruling over others from mere delight in ruling, and who were in no delight of use."

TCR additions 9.12: "The hell of robbers and pirates smells like the carcasses of cows and sheep; the hell of murderers and assassins like a human corpse; likewise the hell of the Sodomites."

De Conjugio 86 speaks of "adultery such as there was at Sodom; which is why they demanded the angels from Lot's house."

Last Judgment Posthumous 135 and Spiritual Experiences 4932 recount stories similar to Genesis 19, using the word "adultery" to describe what happened.

4. Is it possible that the word "sodomy" does not refer to consensual homosexuality, but only to homosexual rape?

The Writings clearly label what happened at Sodom as a form of adultery - "adultery such as there was at Sodom; which is why they demanded the angels from Lot's house" (*De Conjugio 86*). A further question, however, is whether what happened at Sodom can be equated with homosexuality, since it seems that it would be more accurately described as attempted homosexual rape. Is it possible that when Swedenborg refers to sodomy and sodomites he is only speaking of those who commit homosexual rape? Is it possible that when Swedenborg speaks of the evil of Sodom as being "the worst form of adultery" (*AC 2220*) and "a certain kind of foul behavior that is totally unnatural" (*AC 2322*), he is referring to rape rather than the practice of homosexuality?

It is certainly possible to interpret these passages that way, but it is an unlikely interpretation. "Sodomy" and "the sin of Sodom" are terms that have universally been used to refer to homosexual practices, as much in Swedenborg's day as today. The wealth of current literature on the subject of homosexuality shows that what we call "homosexuality" was normally called "sodomy" in eighteenth century England. For example:

- Quote from a book review: "Randolph Trumbach posits significant changes in sexual mores during the eighteenth century. His focus is on London. He argues that changes in male sexual behaviour were due to the rise of a perceived '*sodomite identity*' in urban locales during the early eighteenth century... The early eighteenth century saw the rise of a distinctive 'molly' subculture of men who defined themselves by their sexual interaction with other adult males like themselves and were perceived as a third, transgressive, gender. The imputation of being a *sodomite* came to be regarded as a deleterious slur upon manly reputation." (*Review of Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, by Randolph Trumbach. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.)
- Quote from 18th century newspaper account: "T R Y A L EXAMINATION and CONVICTION Of several Notorious Persons call'd **SODOMITES**, At GUILD-HALL on Monday the 20th of October, 1707. With a List of the Names of those that were Try'd & Convicted. On Monday the 20th of October, 1707, the Tryals of Will. Marriot, Ben. Buttler [sic], Thomas Lane, William Hubbins, John Williams, & W—H—d, & others who were upon Bail, came on at the Queens-Bench Bar at Guild-hall; where their several Indictments were Read, setting forth the Loathsomness [sic] of their Wicked Crimes of *Un-natural [sic]*

Leudness with their own Sex, contrary to the order of Humane Nature, & that not having the Fear of God before their Eyes, did Commit, or attempt to Commit, **very filthy & unseemly Actions, not fit to be named in a Civilized Nation**; to which Indictments most of them pleaded not Guilty, and thereupon put them selves upon their Tryal.

- Accounts like the above are common in 18th century English news sources. Many examples can be found on the internet at a site titled: Rictor Norton (Ed.), *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. Updated 7 December 2008 <<http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/>>.

5. The Writings confirm the statement of Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13: “You shall not lie with a male as with a female. It is an abomination.”

Other passages confirm that consensual homosexuality is a form of adultery, not relying on any reference to the Sodom story. Passages about what are called the "forbidden degrees", including Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13, say that the adulteries that these chapters and verses describe correspond to forms of the adulteration of good and truth, and call them "*foul conjunctions*", "*foul adulteries*", "*unmentionable sexual unions*", and "*abominable copulations*" (Apocalypse Explained 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, Arcana Coelestia 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, and Conjugal Love 519).

6. The passages about “secret evils not to be named” in Conjugal Love almost certainly refer to homosexuality.

“In some men the love of the sex cannot without harmful effects, be totally restrained from going out into fornication. In their case it gives rise to the origins of certain physical maladies and mental illnesses, not to mention secret evils which are too unspeakable to be named.”
Conjugal Love 450

“By (limited fornication) adulteries are likewise guarded against, which are illicit affairs with married women, and also debaucheries, which are violations of virgins; not to mention criminal acts too villainous to name.” *Conjugal Love 459.5*

“CONCERNING CHARLES XII... He constantly desired to become greatest of all; but when this was denied him, he determined to destroy the name of the Lord, by atheistic doctrines; and then he began to love persons of such a character, or atheists, from his heart, and to look out that he might have such at hand when he should annihilate religion; and then, also, he rushed into abominable things, that ought not to be named (dog), and similar atrocities.” *Spiritual Experiences 4763*

Homosexuality was commonly called the “*sin that cannot be named.*”

- Sir Edward Coke, famous English jurist (died 1634) called homosexuality "a detestable and abominable *sin among Christians not to be named*" (quoted in *Fletcher's Moral Responsibility, Phila., 1967, p. 96*).
- William Blackstone, in his “*Commentaries on the Laws of England*” wrote that sodomy is “*an offense of so dark a nature, the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature, a crime not fit to be named.*” (vol 4, 1769).
- “Few if any other major cultures have made homosexuality the primary and singular moral taboo it has long been in western society: ‘*the sin that cannot be named,*’ ‘*the unmentionable vice,*’ ‘*the love that dare not speak its name.*’” *Same Sex Unions in Pre-*

Modern Europe, by John Boswell, Random House, 1994, p. xxiii

- ““In the whole world I believe there are no two sins more abominable than those that prevail among the Florentines’ commented Pope Gregory XI in 1376. ‘The first is their usury and infidelity... The second is *so abominable that I dare not mention it.*’ The sin the pope deftly avoided naming, using a standard euphemism for what the late medieval church deemed the most evil and dangerous of carnal vices, was, of course, the ‘*unspeakable*’ practice of sodomy.” *Forbidden Friendships – Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence, by Michael Rocke, Oxford University Press, 1996, page 3*
- The language of Victorian England was rife with “ridiculous euphemisms, evasions and circumlocutions, like ‘*the love that cannot speak its name* (homosexuality).’” *The Pleasures of the Past, by David Cannadine, Norton, 1989, page 226*
- “Even more than male sodomy, sodomy between females was ‘*the sin that cannot be named.*’” *Immodest Acts, by Judith C. Brown, Oxford University Press, 1986 page 19*
- “*GABRIEL LAWRENCE* was indicted for committing, with *Thomas Newton*, aged thirty Years, the heinous and detestable Sin of Sodomy, *not to be named among Christians*, July 20, 1725.” (*Select Trials at the Sessions-House, in the Old-Bailey, London, 1742, vol. 2, pp. 362-4.*)

7. Although passages about sodomy seem to refer exclusively to male homosexual relationships, other passages apparently refer to lesbian relationships.

*“Certain female spirits...removed themselves to the rear, saying they neither had had nor wished to have anything to do with men, but that they had lived among themselves without men...seeking a place where they might be alone by themselves, receding at length to the bounds of the universe... When they came to the bounds of the universe from behind, they then spoke with each other [saying], that there were no men present and that they might begin. But their obscenities were not shown me, except that there was a woman appareled like a man. There they were delighting themselves in abominable lewdness... What they at length become in the other life was also shown. They appear as bony skeletons. It was said that they thus lose everything vital.” *Spiritual Experiences 3895-3900**

8. “The Christian conjugal alone is chaste.” Conjugal Love 142

Even if there were no specific passages about homosexuality in the Writings, it would be easy to conclude that it is contrary to order because of the overwhelming emphasis that the Writings give to conjugal love. No sex outside of marriage is consistent with order, and no marriage is possible except between two of the opposite sex (*Arcana Coelestia 2740; Conjugal Love 48, 55, 423; De Conjugio 119*). A desire for sex without the purpose of marriage and offspring is condemned (*Arcana Coelestia 828; Spiritual Experiences 1202, 1976, 2704, 3924*). Huge sections of the Writings are devoted to carefully defining the masculine and the feminine and the principles behind their union (*Arcana Coelestia 2727-2758, Heaven and Hell 366-386, Conjugal Love 57-138, 156-183*). No one but married pairs are permitted in heaven. Even sincere celibates are unable to enter heaven, but remain on its borders, because “*the sphere of perpetual celibacy infests the sphere of the love of marriage, which is the very sphere of heaven*” (*Conjugal Love 54*).

The testimony of the Writings is that supreme happiness resides in marriage, and everything that opposes marriage is condemned, because “*Conjugal love is the fundamental love of all loves* (*Arcana Coelestia 3021, 3960, 5053, 9960; Apocalypse Explained 981, 993, 997; Conjugal*

Love 57, 58, 65, 67, 68, 71, 143, 203, 240, 457; De Conjugio 19), and “*Conjugal love is the precious treasure of human life*” (*Conjugal Love 457*).

As we have seen above, the Writings describe homosexuality as a form of adultery (*Arcana Coelestia 2220, 2322, etc*). But even without that description, conjugal love is by its own definition restricted to the union of two of the opposite sex (*Conjugal Love 48, 55*). Sexual unions between two of the same sex would fall outside of that definition. The idea that there is both a feminine and masculine aspect to each sex, suggesting a possible union between these in members of the same sex, is refuted, for “*nothing in the two sexes is the same, although there is nevertheless a capacity for conjunction in every detail. Indeed, masculinity in the male is masculine in every part, even in the least part of his body, and also in every idea of his thought, and in every bit of his affection. So, too, with femininity in the female*” (*Conjugal Love 33*).

The point is that the prohibition of homosexuality does not rely on a few passages, but on the entire body of teachings about conjugal love. Conjugal love is heaven itself. Loves that lie outside of it also lie outside of heaven. According to the Writings, conjugal love is an essential part of what it means to be human (*Conjugal Love 230; Spiritual Experiences 2675*).

Judge not

I would add that homosexual sex acts are only one of many issues that people can be caught up in. It has not historically been among the most common forms of adultery in most cultures and as such receives no major attention in the Writings. Other forms of adultery pose a more likely threat to most marriages. **Homosexuality is not a special class of evil, but a part of what many people in this day and age are subject to for a variety of reasons. The practices can be less grievous or more grievous depending on many factors.** People are lured or even forced into these practices, sometimes from an early age, as is true with many evils. People have hereditary inclinations to them, just as all people do to a whole host of problematic predilections. The point of calling homosexuality evil is not to blame or condemn, but to point out the unhappiness that is inherent in it. This unhappiness is perpetuated when the practices are justified, and so it is mainly those attempts at justification that I am addressing. **The Writings are clear that homosexuality does not offer eternal happiness, but rather unhappiness, to those who practice it.**

Summary

To summarize, do the Writings speak of homosexuality? The answer depends on how you view thirty passages in the Writings that make reference to

- a. "sodomy" (*Spiritual Experiences 2675*);
- b. "sodomites" (*Spiritual Experiences 1977, 3768, 3796, 5939, 6096; Apocalypse Explained 1006.2; True Christian Religion additions 9.12*);
- c. "adultery such as there was at Sodom" (*De Conjugio 86; Last Judgment (post.) 135 and Spiritual Experiences 4932*);
- d. "evil of the worst adultery meant by Sodom" (*Arcana Coelestia 2220*);
- e. "a foulness that is contrary to the order of nature" (*Arcana Coelestia 2322*);
- f. "secret evils which are too unspeakable to be named" (*Conjugal Love 450, 459.5; Spiritual Experiences 1354, 4763*);
- g. "women delighting themselves in abominable lewdness" (*Spiritual Experiences 3895-3900*);
- h. The "forbidden degrees" of Leviticus 18, calling them "foul conjunctions", "foul

adulteries", "unmentionable sexual unions", and "abominable copulations."
(*Apocalypse Explained* 235.8, 410.11, 434.16, *Arcana Coelestia* 3703.17, 4434.10, 4868, 6348.2, and *Conjugal Love* 519).

In addition to those passages, the answer also rests on many more passages that show that:

1. **Conjugal love is required for entrance into heaven:**

"Heaven and the church are with all who are in true conjugal love and with no others. For heaven and the church is the marriage of good and truth, from which is conjugal love. And this is why through conjugal love man has peace, which is inmost joy of heart from a complete safety from the hells and a protection from infestations of the evil and falsity therefrom." *Apocalypse Explained* 999

"The church, with its truths and goods, can by no means exist with any others than those who live in truly conjugal love; for the marriage of good and truth is the church with man." *CORONIS* 44.6

"Marriage is heaven itself, because all there live in a state of conjugal love, each in his own degree. That that love is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven, because by it an angel becomes an embodiment of love, because those who are there possess a marriage of good and truth. And that therefore heaven is likened to marriage and a wedding, and hell to adultery and licentious liaisons." *Last Judgment (posthumous)* 346

"Heaven is formed upon love truly conjugal, inasmuch as conjugal love is from the conjunction of good and truth, and therefore is of heaven and of the essence of heaven; which [essence] is that conjunction. Wherefore, they who do not possess the fundamental constituent of heaven, because they have perceived delight in adulteries, are not able to love their married partner, nor, consequently, to receive heaven." *Spiritual Experiences* 5538

"All the blessings of heaven flow from the delights of conjugal love, like sweet waters from a sweetly gushing spring." *Conjugal Love* 316

"The atmosphere of conjugal love is the essential atmosphere of heaven. The atmosphere of conjugal love is the essential atmosphere of heaven because it descends from the heavenly marriage of the Lord and the church." *Conjugal Love* 54

2. **And that this love is only possible between one man and one woman:**

"The law of Divine order (is) that it is not marriage unless it is a marriage of one man to one wife." *Arcana Coelestia* 1907

"Genuine conjugal love is not possible except between two married to each other, that is, within the marriage of one man and one wife." *Arcana Coelestia* 2740

"But no others come into that love and no others can be in it but those who go to the Lord and love the truths of the church and do the good things it teaches. No others come into this love but those who go to the Lord, because monogamous marriages, which are marriages of one man with one wife, correspond to the marriage of the Lord and the church, and they have their origin from the marriage between goodness and truth." *Conjugal Love* 70

"Chastity is ascribed only to monogamous marriages, or to marriages of one man with one wife." *Conjugal Love* 138

"Only a Christian conjugal relationship is chaste. This is because truly conjugal love

advances in a person in the same degree as the state of the church in him and because that love is from the Lord... By a Christian conjugal relationship we mean a marriage of one man with one wife.” *Conjugal Love 142*

“This union of souls is possible only in monogamous marriages or marriages of one man with one wife.” *Conjugal Love 482*

“True conjugal love is impossible except between couples, that is, in the marriage of one man with one wife.” *De Conjugio 119*

If conjugal love is required in heaven, and if it is only possible between one man and one woman, then there is no homosexuality in heaven, and therefore no long-lasting happiness in homosexuality.