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About Change In Values And In Life Conditions In The Mirror Of God's Word

Interpretation of the scripture and acting out according to it never gets around the question of historical conditions. How far is it legitimate (or even necessary) to transfer or modify biblical statements in regard to the since ancient times completely changed social and living conditions? Possibly some biblical statements were relevant only during their times. To such a conclusion Christians have come again and again in a variety of topics. Only the most conservative Christian groups still demand e.g. a headcovering for women in worship and even in evangelical churches there are long since women in teaching positions despite contrary stipulations in the letters of Paul (1 Cor 11:5 f; 1 Tim 2:11 f.). The flow of time shows that issues that were very important for Christians in past centuries, in retrospect to us seem ridiculous (up to the permission to use umbrellas or to take the tram). At that time however, these discussions were held with all passion and severity, and probably they often caused a rupture in relationships and communities. Might there come a time smiling at the marginalization of homosexuals at the instigation of Christians as an episode of a bygone era!

In the natural sciences, however, Christianity has long since come to terms with not expecting a literal understanding of all statements of Scripture, and to consider the historical involvement of the biblical authors. As for example, Joshua asks God for the lengthening of the day during the battle of Gibeon (Jos 10:12 f), he does so out of the world view of ancient people. He does not pray for a stop of the earth movement, but commands the sun to stand still, as he imagined the sun moving in a semicircle above the Earth disk during the day. In the following passage God listened to Joshua's voice. But no one today would want to deduce that God had thus raised a false scientific statement to a dogma. But during the Middle Ages these and similar passages led to the bloody persecution of astronomers who discovered the heliocentric planetary system. The church at that time felt obliged to defend the Scriptures against – according to their view - blasphemous heresies. Erroneously, as for us nowadays is quite normal concerning this issue.

Also Paul's ideas about anatomy and physiology of the human organism do not correspond to current knowledge. Today we know that the working of the body does not function from head to joints and ligaments as it is taught by ancient medicine. No one would think of declaring modern anatomy books for heretical nor of nullifying Paul's allegorical statements about the congregation based on the image of the head and the body (Col 2:19; Eph 4:16).

Why is it quite easy for us concerning the scientific field to acknowledge that the authors of the Bible wrote out of a time-bound world view that the Holy Spirit who is behind this word did not consider necessary to correct? Why do we find it much harder in moral and ethical issues? Because initially, of course, basic moral cannot be put up to discussion. The wanton killing of a human being, for example, has always been a crime and always will be one. Possibly our modern society even is ruining itself by stripping away too many moral values as outdated and obsolete.

However, we have no choice but to recognize that even in moral questions our cultural background plays a significant role. We do already touch such a border area

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in Paul's statements about the issue of hairstyle and headdress of woman. To this issue Paul dedicates quite a detailed treatise (1 Cor 11:1-16) and also obviously ascribes high moral value to it. Apart from theological justifications Paul invokes an argument which is in a typical way linked to his times: The "(Order of) Nature" (in Greek "*physis*") already teaches that men wore short, whereas women wore long hair. If Paul had been an ethnologist knowing other continents beyond his cultural space, probably he would have worded this argument differently.

Just as Jesus, the Son, as the incarnate, living word of God came into the imperfection of human physicality and into the confines of a specific temporal and cultural framework, the Holy Spirit, too, comes into and works through human narrowness. Therefore, the written word of God does not lose anything it's inspired authority, when also the Holy Spirit spoke in and through people with historical limitations. The philosopher J. G. Hamann said: "How much did God the Holy Spirit humiliate himself in becoming a historian on earth of the smallest, the most contemptible, the most insignificant events in order to reveal to man in his own language, in his own history, in his own ways the counsels, the secrets and the ways of Deity "(quoted in Newsletter Confessing Movement "No other Gospel" 4/2002, No. 211).

We will not be able to transport everything literally and seamlessly from antiquity to our time. What Paul at that time wrote about the role of women, for the women of his cultural area was not restriction but rather the opening of new perspectives. Since women in the ancient world virtually remained excluded from spiritual and theological life, Paul's permission to let them receive spiritual teaching in the domestic context and to pray or prophesy publicly in the community by the standards of those days was downright progressive (1 Tim 2:11; 1 Cor 11:5; cf. Phil 4:2f, where Paul counts two women to his colleagues and co-workers in the gospel).

This encourages theologians in the current modern environment to also call women in spiritual leadership positions, which for Paul in his contemporary historical situation was unthinkable. Here we see the historical conditionality of a human being of ancient times, who in the spirit indeed began to cross cultural boundaries, but however only up to the point, that now in our time and society again appears as a significant limitation.

Another case: Nobody is asking seriously to convert our social order to a monarchy again, even though the New Testament considers it a form of government which is taken for granted. Or this: It were downright courageous individual Christians who committed to the abolition of slavery, although the Bible does not generally condemn slavery which was in ancient times a widespread cultural phenomenon.

Here by the way we touch the frequently cited argument of lack of (church-) historical consciousness: It could not be possible that the Christian Church had been wrong in their understanding of the Bible for all the time concerning the question of homosexuality, and that only now in our century, the true divine vision would come to light. Yet the Church has been in many issues, including its position to slavery or to the Jews, on the wrong path for centuries. Thus the representatives of apartheid until recently argued cynically that the Bible "commands" slavery or at least the inferiority of black people by the curse of Noah on the Hamites (Gen 9:25). As well the sometimes euphoric (and then often completely uncritical) enthusiasm for the Israeli people that is widely found in evangelical churches is likely to have been rather unfamiliar until not too long ago to Christianity. The inglorious past with its pogroms, forced conversions and ghettoization of Jews did not only geographically happen in

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the Christian West but also on behalf of the cross. What Christians for centuries evaluated as biblically justifiable or necessary, thus at any time may very well need to be reviewed and must be reevaluated as to whether or not it actually corresponds to the spirit of Christ in the Bible.

May we in ethical concerns not question the influences of time-bound culture and worldview as well? Should the Christian congregation in some points possibly have to rethink repeatedly its teaching on morality and social order? Doesn't it have to keep looking at the change of values that has happened since biblical times in order to not only reflect the spirit of yesteryear, as it is often accused? On the other hand: No matter how time-bound some statements may be - if the Bible is God's inspired Word, then of course it is authorized to represent everlasting standards that cannot arbitrarily - perhaps even by majority decision - be changed. Many people think that just this principle is dangerously undermined on issues such as the position on homosexuality.

Many conservative Christians tend to use the Bible - especially in moral questions - as a sort of catalog in which to look up any problem as in a keyword encyclopedia which clearly answers their questions once and for all. Any attempt of differentiation, transmission or adaptation to changing historical situations thereby they easily construe as an attack on the divine authority.

But when we understand the Bible in its entirety as God's speaking to the people, we can find that within the Bible itself there are already changes taking place - because the Bible is not a book which originated during some few years such as the Koran, but spans several millennia of human history testifying of God's ways with the world. Of course, during the periods covered by the Bible humanity had already undergone significant changes - and not all of them by biblical standards were a change for the worst! And also, of course, the biblical word has taken such changes into account in itself, has undergone changes itself and has found new understanding of its statements (see also the view to Christian ethics at Douglass, K.: Belief has reasons pp. 252ff)

On the basis of some examples we want to illuminate that such variations do not repeal the Scriptures and their authority and that they are quite reasonable.

1st example: The Passover

Already in the first books of the Bible there is an example of a by God himself established adjustment of his own rules, concerning the highest festival of the people of God, the Passover. During the exodus of the Israelites God put the Passover as a "feast to the Lord, throughout your generations, as a statute forever" (Ex 12:14). He exactly defines the course of action of this feast. Two aspects are important. First: the sacrificial animal had to be "small cattle", a male lamb or a young billy goat (Ex 12:5). Whoever slaughtered a dove or a cow, would have been guilty of violating the commandment. Second: The sacrificed animal had to be consumed at home or at most at the house of the neighbors. This house was at all cost not to be left. Only behind the doorpost which was brushed with the blood of the sacrificed animal was there protection from the Angel of Perdition, who in the Passover night killed all Egyptian firstborns as punishment for having obstinately refused to give the Israelites back their freedom (Ex 12,3-5.22-24).

Christians of all times see in these regulations a theological significance extending beyond the Jewish feast in the visual reference to Christ, who was "sacrificed as our Passover Lamb" (1 Cor 5:7). The most expressive parallel to the redemptive death of

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Christ on the Cross is the solitary refuge from the judgment of God behind the wooden post which is soaked with the blood of the sacrifice. The writer of the Book of Hebrews apparently even sees the central event of the Passover in the brushing of the post (Heb. 11:28).

The mentioned stipulations are repeatedly affirmed with the words: "You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever."(Ex 12:24). In evangelical circles, it is generally assumed that the Five Books of Moses are not a collection of different eras of different authors with different, sometimes contradictory religious tendencies, but essentially are written by Moses himself as God revealed them to him on Mount Sinai. But this means that at the end of the wandering in the wilderness, so only forty years and one generation later, God changed the two basic rules for Passover. Now as a possible sacrifice in addition to lambs and goats there is named cattle. But now the sacrifice may no longer take part in the home environment, but for the whole people of Israel only at one single site, namely at the place where the shrine is located. In its vicinity also the Passover meal has to be eaten and nobody shall return home before the following morning (Dt 16,2.5-7).

Why these modifications of a previous with such strict words as "forever" reaffirmed order (Ex 12:24)? The answer can best be derived from the changed practical and cultural conditions of life. The Israelites now are no longer slaves, who primarily breed small animals (cf. Gen 46:34; 47:3), but after entering the land of Canaan also own large herds of cattle. In addition, the ritual slaughter of a bull calf during the first Passover under the eyes of the Egyptians who worshiped the sacred Apis bull, possibly would have led to conflicts and misunderstandings. Perhaps to this issue refers the somewhat vague argument Moses tells the Pharaoh, why Israel for a sacrificial feast must trek into the desert, rather than to sacrifice in Egypt: "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? (Ex 8:26).

Canaan, however, with its many holy sites where sacrifices were offered to different idols, was in danger of losing the sole reference to the God of Israel by ritual slaughter in many homes. Concentrating the celebration at a single site (initially different villages, later Jerusalem) of course lead to tremendous human crowds at the holidays. This very likely made it impossible for many people to have the meal at their own house, even at any house. So the celebration participants could no longer consequently perform the symbolic brushing of the doorpost. An approximate idea of the population ratios gives us the census of David, which, if you want to understand the figures literally, amounted to 1.3 million of military age men. According to expositors in the time of Jesus there were expected to be up to 500.000 festival pilgrims. Luke's report (2:41f) gives an idea about how great the hubbub on these days even in the "metropolis" Jerusalem was, where during the departure from Passover, the parents of the twelve year old Jesus did not even notice that the boy had not returned home with them.

What is now the significance for our central question of a "contemporary" biblical assessment of homosexuality in regard to this rule for the Passover, which seems at first glance to be of little interest? First the amendment of the previously so explicitly formulated arrangement comprises a relaxation (concerning the selection of the sacrificial animal). This was due to new living conditions and property situations, but in particular probably to the changed cultural situation, which regarding theological misunderstandings (e.g. bull calf as sacrificial animal) appeared less problematic. Second there is also a restriction again due to changed external conditions (the land

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of Canaan with numerous idol shrines), that now holds a danger to the faith. To protect the fickle people from this danger (cf. Deut 12:4-8), an amendment is made, which even levels the in the history of salvation most impressive parallel to the cross of Christ (refuge behind the bloody post).

It is crucial that a later narrower or broader grasp of the revealed will of God very well is influenced by the cultural conditions during the origination process of a law. A culture in which homosexual acts usually came along with promiscuity, because they were either a - perhaps even idealized - sexual "extra pleasure" in addition to a marriage, or were associated with violence or with idolatrous temple prostitution, has inevitably had to have an impact on the drafting of rules whose central concern was Israel's separation from Canaanite customs. Such circumstances therefore must have led to a condemnation of homosexual practice. However, it is at least open to discussion, whether the categorical rejection of other gay forms of living today still should be considered compulsorily valid.

Also interesting is that even the salvation-historical symbolism is not fixed at all costs. May the argument that the salvation-historical parallel of the marriage relationship to the relationship between God and man would forbid the acceptance of other forms of living together, therefore assert an absolute claim?

2nd example: The Understanding Of The Validity Of A Marriage

Closer to our central issue, because also concerning the sexuality, is the issue of remarriage after a divorce, which has already been touched on several times. The differences in the regulation of this issue that can be found within the Bible itself, are especially interesting for the aspect of the change of divine statements.

The Mosaic law allowed a divorce, even if the Old Testament already clearly states that it does not correspond to God's original idea of marriage (Mal 2:14-16). In the contemporary society structures the initiative to divorce mostly remained reserved for the husband. The corresponding law passage can be found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: A man could dismiss his wife by giving her a "certificate of divorce" if "she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her", with the interpretation of this "indecency" already in biblical times remaining unclear and controversial among the scribes.

Of interest is the view of marriage that becomes visible in the question of remarriage. In this passage the fact that a woman after a divorce entered into a new marriage is not discussed, but taken for granted. The former cultural conditions didn't support the idea of a modern "single life", and much less for women. Did the following marriage come to an end (not necessarily by a second divorce, but also by the death of the second husband), the first marriage could never again be reinstated as the wife had become untouchable to her first husband by the sexual communion with the second husband. The parallel passage from Jeremiah 3:1f the prophet takes this up once more (this time with respect to a non-marital relationship, which replaces the first marriage). Jeremiah calls the renewal of the old marriage a "desecration of the country", the Mosaic Law calls it an "abomination", which in both places definitely is the heaviest offense. This meaning also is not diminished by the fact that God as a sign of mercy is ready to welcome again the unfaithful Israel, which is allegorically portrayed as a divorced wife with many lovers (Jer 3:12 f). On the contrary - the "unthinkability" of the abomination of such remarriage emphasizes the "oversized" grace of God (cf. Rom 5:20).

How by contrast does the New Testament see marriage and remarriage? Jesus teaches a different way of looking at things (Mt 5:31f; 19:1-12), which he describes as the original intention of the Creator. Jesus outlines the first marriage of a man and a

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woman as a life-long, before and by God contracted conjunction, which must not be nullified. Therefore, according to Jesus' statement remarriage after a divorce corresponds to adultery. Since in the days of the New Testament the woman was usually affected by a divorce as the sufferer and for her economic survival, of course, had to enter into a new marriage, Jesus for his culture delegates the responsibility to the husband: Divorcing his wife, he delivers her to adultery; marrying a divorced woman he commits adultery. If a second marriage, therefore, is not valid, but the first marriage is a life-long commitment, then this means that the return to the first spouse does only set again in force, what never did truly end - more, it would be downright necessary as a step of repentance and reconciliation!

This is not the place to discuss the absoluteness of Jesus' requirement (which, incidentally, already alarmed his first listeners). Rather, the subject of remarriage is about the two opposing views of marriage: In the Old Testament a new marriage is quasi a seal on the irreversibility of the dissolution of the first marriage, but according to Jesus it is the breach of the first indissoluble marriage. The mutually agreed return of the first spouse in the Old Testament corresponds to an abomination sin. In the marriage concept of Jesus, however, this would be the logical consequence of repentance and recognition of existing conditions before God. People for whom the Bible is merely a historical document will have no difficulties with such inconsistency. But how can this be understood if both Testaments are accepted as inspired by the same Holy Spirit?

According to Jesus the reason why God allowed a divorce as a compromise at all is the hardness of the human heart, but as the "renewer of hearts" he possibly expects his disciples to have a different approach to marriage and marriage partners. This explains why in the Old Testament law a divorce was existing (and thus automatically remarriage because of the cultural conditions). But it does not explain why the Holy Spirit after a second marriage should strictly prohibit the return to the first spouse and call it an "abomination", although the reunion with the original spouse would be the logical consequence of Jesus' statement, which claims to reflect the original intention of the Creator.

The most logical reasoning to resolve this contradiction seems to me once again that the central concern of the law is to dissociate the moral life of God's people from the customs of the Canaanites. Wherever in the Bible we encounter the sexual habits of these peoples, their notable feature seems to be the randomness of short-lived relationships. Thus, the return to a former wife after a brief "excursion" into another relationship could mean a lack of seriousness concerning marriage, divorce and re-marriage. Then consequently the term "abomination" should make it clear that marriage cannot be a question of a changing mood. The symbolism of the wedlock for the relationship between God and his people thus gives special weight to the condemnation of human vicissitude:

God anyhow condemns the turning away from him to idolatry, but the re-conversion to him also is not just up to the capricious taste of man.

But the external dissociation from pagan Canaanite customs for Jesus does no longer have priority and he cuts this time-related connection. So once again we get to the point where a commandment - the irreversible ending of a marriage - is given for the sake of distinction and where its transgression is called abomination, even though God's original purpose is quite different. And therefore once again we are allowed to ask the question whether the condemnation of homosexual practices did not also arise because of a necessary distinction to Canaanite - and later Greek -

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practices, but perhaps does not correspond to the Creator's basic assessment towards binding and loyalty-oriented homosexual relationships!

The issue of remarrying the former partner is again a case where an out of cultural "restraints" (the distinction against the Canaanites) originated regulation is canceled, as life out of the Spirit of Jesus establishes different parameters. Does the scanning of the biblical statements on homosexuality for just such cultural conditionality therefore generally mean to encroach upon biblical authority?

By the way, considering the Old Testament understanding of marriage again we encounter God's completely unconventional, even "scandalous" acting. In the mentioned third chapter of the book of Jeremiah, God lets the prophet proclaim that the conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel and the abduction into the Assyrian captivity was not meant to be a fleeting court action. Rather, God had – in a spiritual sense - given Israel the final "certificate of divorce" (Jer 3:8) because of its continued "adultery" (referring to the idolatry). God lets Jeremiah ask his listeners, whether a husband could ever return to his sent-away wife who "married another". Immediately Jeremiah denies this rhetorical question: That would be a defilement of the land (Jer 3:1). As we have seen the testimony of Scripture for this situation is clear and unambiguous: acting like this would be an abomination to God.

And yet - already in verse 12 God lets the prophet speak to the "divorced" and forces her to return to God, her former "husband". He, God, does not want to hold something against Israel, for he is gracious. Let us be clear what that means. No less than this: Mercy moves the holy God himself to do "what to God is an abomination."

Now in this context it is important that the abomination prohibition to remarry the former partner exceeds the aspect of cultic purity and clearly touches moral dimensions. The often heard claim that the cultic abomination sins of the Old Testament were indeed outdated, while the moral atrocity prohibitions still do exist untouched, cannot so easily be maintained.

The most radical change of divine laws in the Bible anyway is the coming of Christ. Knowing that his sacrifice once and for all would free the sinners way to God, for Jesus the cultic purity regulations lost their binding character. His programmatic statement "what goes into someone's mouth does not defile them" (Mt 15:11; see also 1 Cor 10:30; Kol 2:16.20-22; Tit 1:14), was contradictory to numerous food prohibitions of law books and made them meaningless. Accordingly, later the apostles dared at least for the Gentile Christians to annul large parts of the Mosaic commandments, which already for the Jews had been a "yoke" which they "could not bear" (Acts 15:10).

The idea of "obsolete" divine laws can be found in the Bible itself and therefore is not a wrong a priori. God himself "overrules" a part of his commandments, because in Christ other postulates have been created. His overarching atoning death "set aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations" (Eph 2:15).

Jesus' statement that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, and that not even the smallest letter would by any means disappear from the Law (Mt 5:17 f) seems to contradict this verse - yes, at first glance almost to demand a "literal" obedience to the law. But with the subsequent pronouncements of the Sermon on the Mount it is clear that Jesus with "fulfilling" means something different and far more than a literal obedience. Each initiated with the famous: "You have heard ... but I say unto you" Jesus fills and "fully fills" central commandments of the Old Testament with their true meaning. This often even implies a tightening versus the literal understanding, because it covers the whole person up to its world of thought and in

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everything radically leads back to the commandment of love to God and man. But Jesus resisted the Pharisaic attempt and compulsion to appraise literal fulfillment higher than human life.

3rd example: Joseph's Handling Of The "Immorality" Of Mary

Changing circumstances led the People of God in the course of historical development to gradually changed interpretation of existing scriptural statements. Thus the pious of the New Testament obviously did not necessarily feel bound to the wording of each of the Mosaic laws, as in the society in which they lived they were not as strictly interpreted as during the days of the founding of Israel. The behavior of Joseph, the "father" of Jesus as it is reported in Matthew 1:18f is a good example for that. It also shows, in which freedom of interpretation of a law a person can act whose heart and ears are open to the spirit of love.

When Joseph found out that his fiancée Mary was pregnant "before they came together" of course he first assumed that she had had sexual intercourse with another man. The Bible sketches his thoughts before he learned through the Holy Spirit about the divine origin of the unborn child.

The legislation in such a case was clear: A fiancée's pre-marital sex with another man was a matter of stoning (Deut 22:20f; 22,23f), strongly enhanced by the addition: "You must purge the evil from among you". In Israel in the time of Jesus, the stoning was no longer performed with all its consequences, firstly because it collided with the court supremacy of the Roman occupying power (cf. John 18:31), but second probably also because the interpretation of the law in general was handled milder. Just the fact that the Pharisees concerning the caught adulteress (John 8:3ff) ever could ask their trick question "Shall we stone or not?" shows that the stoning was not an already natural sanction but subject of theological discussion. The numerous New Testament reports about stoning or attempt to stone (Lk 4:28-30; John 8,5ff.59; 10:31-33; 11:8, Acts 7:57ff; 14:19; 2 Cor 11:25) do indeed clarify that this sanction was not completely abolished. But it takes place rather as a form of lynching than as an official or deliberate judgment.

The death penalty – according to the law books the punishment for quite a few offenses - was apparently no longer necessarily imposed in the case described, which seems to apply to Mary. But of course, a "fallen woman" had to expect social stigmatization and ostracism.

Joseph now did not even want to bring this on her. He decided "to divorce her quietly" because he "did not want to expose her." Of course only the less strict enforcement of the laws in his time enabled him to react like that. Otherwise after all he would have had to expect that others would have ensured a stoning after the revelation of the pregnancy, since not even the "discretion" of the parental home could offer protection - a woman who had provable sexual intercourse before marriage according to the law had to be stoned to death before the door of her father's house. (Deut 22:21).

Noteworthy for our basic question is now the reasoning that the New Testament gives us for the behavior of Joseph: We do not find a statement as "Joseph was a very tender-hearted man who did not want to deliver Mary to the rigor of the law." But of all things the reasoning is "because Joseph was a righteous man", thus referring to an attribute that usually indicates obedience to God and his commandments.

Thus Joseph was a "child of his time", which allowed him a more lenient interpretation of the law as at the time of Moses. Moreover just his "righteousness" before God led him to not wanting to expose Mary to the hardness of a strict

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compliance with legislation. So we cannot understand this statement other than that Joseph indeed acted according to Jesus' above-mentioned understanding of Scripture, that is not in wording, but in the spirit of the law, which only in love can precisely and truly be fulfilled (Mt 22:40; Rom 13:10).

By the way, even majority decision (as cited the in the introduction) to seek the truth in disputed questions of interpretation at certain historical points is not unbiblical. The famous Council of the Apostles to the aforementioned question of the Gentile Christians' commitment to the Mosaic law ends with "The Holy Spirit and we have decided "(Acts 15:28), but not before the majority - in a lively discussion - had agreed about which laws should be retained and which not .

4th example: The Handling Of The Divorce Question

How did the first Christians behave towards God's Word – the written Word in law but also the heard Word in the statements of Jesus? They dared to interpret Jesus' precious, traditional words new according to new life situations, in each case in listening to God's Spirit and from the standpoint of the fulfillment of the love principle. Consider the handling of the divorce question. Jesus himself, as stated above, principally rejected a divorce and allowed only one exception: in case of the "immorality" of the partner (Mt 19:9; meant is probably continued and/ or repeated adultery). This exception is not even mentioned in the parallel passage in Mark (Mk 10:2 f.)

Paul, too, in Corinthians comments on the divorce problem (1 Cor 7:10-16). The occasion was the question of whether people, who became believers, could or should divorce their pagan spouses. Could Paul here not have exclusively responded with a "No" in adhering to Jesus' unequivocal opinion? With the message "... command not I, but the Lord" Paul first repeated the testimony of Jesus. But then he adds candidly, with the remark: "the rest I say, not the Lord" just another exception: Under certain circumstances the separation from a non-believing partner was allowed.

How could Paul dare to alter Jesus' law, which at first glance appeared totally plain? Since it means nothing else than an alteration, to expand a general interdiction with only one exception by adding a further exception. Perhaps Paul assumed that the general fact of an existing concession through Jesus meant, that he accepted the impossibility and hopelessness in the real life of certain marriage situations as "mitigating circumstances". Apparently Paul was of the opinion that generally changed life circumstances had to be considered. At the time of Jesus, the problem of a marriage between Christians and non-Christians, of course, did not have a special urgency, but certainly later in the new communities.

Here again criterion for Paul is the concept that the commandment should not be a prison for man ("not bound like a slave"), but shall and will bring forth good to himself and to the coexistence with others. In the argumentation of "God has called us to live in peace" Paul thus again implies the principle of love in avoiding lifelong strife and suffering. Biblically-based Christians might refer to this freedom of Paul, when they no longer basically reject a divorce today, but increasingly accept it as a way out after vain attempts to maintain an acceptable marriage.

Godly people may well run into trouble with god-made changes of previous seemingly universal and inviolable standards, even where it is (at least from today's perspective) a matter of morally sparsely contestable questions. It has already been

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mentioned, how unthinkable for the Jews of the early church initially seemed the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God. Although Jesus repeatedly and explicitly gives the Great Commission to all nations, drastic measures are needed to move the first Jewish Christians to corresponding openness, as described in the 10th chapter of Acts.

God gave Peter a vision with several (according to the Mosaic law) unclean animals – these, too, part of the "atrocities" and "abominations" of the Old Testament (cf. Lev 20:25; Deut 14:3). Peter rejects the divine call "Kill and eat!" with the understandable indignation of a law-abiding Jew: "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." But God, to whom the corresponding provisions in the Old Testament go back, declares these forbidden animals pure. Therefore Peter must not call them unclean any more.

Lukas describes that this process had to be repeated three times. Despite the explanation, even the command of God, Peter several times maintained his first indignant rejection. The sticking to what he knew from the Scriptures as law let him reject even the explicitly expressed will of God to repeal that law. The perplexing contradiction between known and novel intention of God baffled him, as the book of Acts reports (Acts 10:17), because it threw over everything, which hitherto had appeared to him correct and taken for granted. But then with remarkable flexibility Peter can leave behind an order that stood for thousands of years for the sanctification of God's people in the midst of a hopeless world (cf. Lev 12:43f), and he can publicly confess: "But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

The disgust of Peter was expressed from the heart, but ultimately wrong. That should let us remember that the usually existing spontaneous resistance against homosexuals and homosexual partnerships among Christians is not necessarily a good counselor. Whether one wants to understand this resistance as a reaction of the so-called "natural", "healthy" feeling or as an expression of the guidance by the spirit of God - Peter surely would have claimed both for himself. Nevertheless, it was exactly this that the Spirit had to correct.

So already within the Bible we see that there are changes in the interpretation and application of the law and the word of Jesus – not as a human arbitrary act, but approved by or caused by God. For the upright this might go hand in hand with a shaking up of firmly established ideas and of their sense of right and wrong. Usually Christians fear that every interpretation exceeding the literal letter inevitably brings a danger or falsification of the Word. However, the Bible itself does not confirm this view!