

**Biblical Pleas Against The Discrimination Of Homosexual People**

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Matthew 15, 21-28 and Mark 7, 24-30

Bread, Not Only For The Children

One of the greatest stories in the New Testament reveals once again how Jesus dealt with people from marginalized groups. Matthew and Mark describe the moving encounter and confrontation of an outcast woman with Jesus and her struggle for acceptance against all opposition - even against the opposition of Jesus until he, finally overwhelmed, attests to her to have a great faith.

The story according to the text of Mark is about a "Syrophenician woman, a Gentile." If Matthew, however, tells of a "Canaanite" woman, he purposely arouses associations with the peoples of Canaan in the time of ancient Israel, with whom the Jews were forbidden at all costs to socialize. For the New Testament Jews, too, this term automatically contained associations: idolatry, "kinky" sins and being excluded from God's people. Jews frequently gave the Gentiles very derogatory names; among other things, they named them "dogs" (which in the oriental cultural sphere until today is a grave insult).

Such a woman now is following Jesus and his disciples crying out to Jesus begging for the healing of her demon-possessed daughter. The disciples are embarrassed; they want to get rid of the woman. Their request to Jesus can be translated "be brief with her" or "send her away"; in any case it reflects their contemptuous opinion towards the pagan woman.

But at first Jesus himself does not respond. What might be hidden behind his silence? It seems hardly conceivable that the Saviour of the whole world should not have been stirred by her suffering. What might he, who claimed at all times to only do what his father taught him (John 8:28 f), have thought (and prayed) at this moment? At first he felt bound to the assignment and to the order, which God had given him for his time on earth: to be sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

He rejects the request of the woman with at first glance very rude sounding words. He even picks up the insult of the term "dogs", and tells her, that it would not be right to take away the childrens (that is the chosen people of God, Israels) bread and to throw it to the "dogs". One is reminded of his words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (Mt 7:6). But it is precisely this obvious comparison that reveals the crucial difference between the two statements.

The term "dog" which is used in the Sermon on the Mount and in similar places, where it is meant in a contemptuous sense, like "cur" (Phil 3:2; 2 Peter 2:22 and

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Revelation 22:15), reads *kyon* (of *kyeo* = to swarm, alluding to the proliferation of dogs). Solely in the story of the syrophenician woman another word is selected: the rather twee diminutive *kynarion*. Therefore, in some translations we find the more precise term "doggy" to illustrate its meaning as a lap dog and housemate in contrast to the half-savage, despised and annoying street dogs.

Therefore in Jesus' words of rejection there is already hidden a golden bridge, on which the woman sets foot immediately. In the following we read a moving plea: "Yes - you're right, Lord," is the humble reply. We can add: Yes - I do not belong to Israel, I'm "foreigner to the covenants of the promise, without hope (Eph 2:12). Yes - the original order is: Israel is God's legitimate child, but I do have no rights. You are right, Lord".

But - and here comes the big "But" of her "great faith" which reaches directly to Jesus' heart. She takes up his image of the "doggy" as housemate, and postulates that he, who richly blesses all who call on him" (Romans 10:12), should still have enough leftovers of the children's bread, too, to give it to the dogs who are waiting for it around the table. She appeals to God, who turns towards the poor and redresses the orphans, widows and strangers. She is undeterred by not being among the foremost chosen because she believes that this very God of Israel always has been a God of "second "choice. As once Jacob did she clings to God – even seizes him: "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (Gen. 32:27).

And exactly through these words she wins Jesus over. "For such a reply," he answers her "your request is granted". As in those days of Jacob, she virtually gets a certificate of approval: "You have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." (Gen. 32:29). Though Jesus exceeds the original commandment of his father by giving her this promise, he is apparently convinced in so doing he is acting in accordance with God's heart.

Could not even a homosexual in the same way come before God and might he not ask for the blessing, which is rich and abundant enough even for the ones who wait beside the table/ the altar- although the original order seems to exclude him from a partnership which appears to be reserved for marriages? Do those, who want to deny homosexuals the allowance to reach for the merciful God in the same humble-insolent way, perhaps resemble the disciples, who want to get rid of the unpleasant matter by pushing the woman away? Does Jesus need their "assistance", by which they want to prevent his reputation being jeopardized through this women? Can he not have "mercy on whom he wants to have mercy" (Rom. 9:18)? Would it be the first time that an honest fighter for God's law is restrained through the words: What "God has made clean" (in a sovereign decision contrary to his original commandment) you must "not call impure" (Acts 10:15)