

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

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**Preface*****Some personal remarks***

Why and for whom did I actually write a book about the Bible and homosexuality and for whom was it intended? I am not primarily addressing those who fear they might have to protect the church of Christ against homosexual 'propaganda' or infiltration. But I write for those people who might have had the same or at least similar experiences as I have, and for those who ask themselves how they can support their sisters and brothers in faith who are still looking for a place in the church as homosexuals.

For I am a Christian.

And I am homosexual and I live my homosexuality.

As for many evangelical Christians to whom these aspects are irreconcilable, my own way of thinking also was conditioned by this preconception. However, what might by some be considered an issue of dogmatic theology is an existential question for others that needs to be answered in real life.

Those who don't consider themselves Christians probably won't know the difficulties that people like myself have to face, maybe it's even hard for them to be able to understand the problem at all. Christians with more liberal personal beliefs will also live their faith as homosexuals more easily. For these reasons, this book is meant for those coming from conservative, evangelical denominations, which I also consider my religious home and that I will continue to support and defend. In fact, I consider it a miracle of the Lord that I still feel there to be my home despite the fact that it wasn't always made easy for me. I do not necessarily share all of the conservatives' more or less rigid – and very rarely biblical – ideas about what a good Christian does and doesn't do, but what is essential to me within this religious orientation is that people focus on a deep, personal relationship to Christ, on the believer's love to the Bible and on attentively listening to God. Readers with a different spiritual background I am asking to forgive me for using evangelical vocabulary and expressions that simply cannot deny their source. The delight I take in studying the Bible may from time to time force the reader to immerse himself in difficult, partly little known biblical texts.

At the age of 17 coming from a rather nonreligious background, I discovered the Christian faith and gave my life to Christ my Lord and Savior. The very same year, I also realized that I was gay. According to all I had been taught with being a good Christian this was not reconcilable, and I didn't even think of questioning this as a

fact. I started fighting against my sexuality, tried to find a heterosexual way of life with the help of God and the people around me, struggling to redefine myself and to have my whole identity be redefined. However, my homosexual feelings continuously proved to be deep and deeper seated within myself and my identity than anything else. After many years of futile struggle, I began to accept my homosexuality as a given situation - under the condition that I remained celibate. According to all I was taught in the churches that shaped me and the literature I had access to celibacy seemed the only remaining solution: not being a homosexual is sinful but living a homosexual lifestyle.

At the age of 35, I was at my wits' end. Lifelong abstinence just seemed to be arduous enough, if not impossible. In contrast to heterosexuals living in abstinence, I did not only have to deny my wishes, thoughts and feelings to a certain degree, but I had to refuse them as something fundamentally wrong. I had to deny myself and my identity, with the prospect of never being allowed neither to have a partner nor to live as the person I was.

In the meantime, Christian healing homosexuality schemes didn't do anything anymore for me. Neither penitence nor prayer, neither fight nor psychological analysis of my childhood had done anything to change me. At the same time to keep living with this inner conflict meant to be ruined more and more. How was I supposed to live before God if the Bible didn't seem to leave any room for a life corresponding to my identity? Then again as for me and for every homosexual, who doesn't want anything else than to live and grow old together with the person beloved in mutual respect and love, it is very hard to identify with the biblical passages about homosexuality, that describe something very different from what homosexuals experience in their relationships.

Common ideas about the homosexual lifestyle are molded by clichés and bias as well as by the strident self-portrayal of some gay and lesbian groups. Not least public media do their own bit do promote the shrill picture of homosexual "lifestyle". In contrast to that there are numerous less flamboyant, inconspicuous homosexuals whose lives hardly differ from those of heterosexuals. It goes without saying that displaying oneself on a Christopher-Street-Day-Parade in a very sexualized way or having constantly changing sex partners (a common practice in gay saunas) are problematic according to biblical principles and so don't require any further discussion to homosexual "evangelical" Christians. What is much more interesting to them is whether God and His Word also unquestioningly disapprove of a homosexual partnership that aims for lifelong fidelity and all the other values and rules constituting a 'normal' marriage.

As a Christian that imbibed the love and respect of the Bible and the Word of God in a manner of speaking "with my spiritual mother's milk", I simply could be neither consoled nor helped with superficial encouraging attempts such as: 'Since God is love, every kind of love must be good.' On the other hand, I was almost despairing of

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life because of the general hopelessness awaiting me that seemed to be predestined by what the Bible was saying, as well as by the position that Evangelical Institutions were taking. Ultimately, the distress I found myself in drove me to confide in the God of mercy and to give myself over to him exactly as the person that I really was. Certainly I do not intend to encourage anyone to distance himself arbitrarily from the biblical word. But as I found myself in a long spiritual struggle, I realized that real life can never be fully seized through black and white literalism.

This step was an existential one born out of an existential desperation. But what about the theological part? Now, in my opinion it is possible to read and study those passages in the Bible talking about homosexuality in a more differentiated way, than people might generally assume.

You could blame my explanations for being biased and written for obvious reasons. Indeed, in a certain way they are – since I haven't examined the Bible as a distant observer but as a human being desperately looking for a way out, yearning for a solution for my life. However, I firmly believe that I do not only summarize what revealed itself to me objectively while studying the Bible. It constitutes much more the gist of what I have experienced as God talking to me over the years – He opened up perspectives in order to answer my distress and to lead me to times of peace and refreshing (Act 3,20).

Strangely enough people seem to assume that homosexuals take pleasure in continuously trying to sneak past the Scripture or that they are easily ready to ignore God's laws without giving them any further thought. As if a homosexual Christian didn't already suffer enough from not fitting to God's standards – at least what seems to be "not fitting". However, these Christians are explicitly not merely looking for a sort of 'loophole' in the law, but they are longing and crying for a way out of their hopelessness, for them it is an existential quest for a homeland.

I will inevitably talk a lot about sexual morals in this book and my readers will discover that in this respect I, in accordance with my theological and spiritual background, also adhere to the ideal of love relationships based on loyalty and fidelity (even if this doesn't and shouldn't exclude the possibility that people can fail this ideal and that new chances might offer themselves to them). Now there are numerous Christians who do not consider a more liberal sex concept contrary to their belief. I personally do have difficulties to bring my understanding of biblical criteria in line with some of that. And yet, far be it from me to bring myself to fight for strict sexual morals or even to use them as a marker for Christian righteousness.

Neither is the Bible itself a reference book for rigid sexual morals, nor are those its central topic. It is rather concerned with the relationship between God and man, i.e. mankind's reconciliation with God and their mutual relationship, which, as a consequence, is intimately connected to the relationship between man and man, and that, too, is determined by love. The commandment of love doesn't imply that we

should demonize either desire or passion nor the pleasures of life. Love is embodied in confidence and reliability, respect and responsibility, in self-confident unselfishness, consideration and having a willingness to reconcile.

Those who read the Bible attentively will find traces of these guiding principles again and again even in the mosaic laws that appear so archaic today. They set the standards for social interactions from regulations on how to dig a foundation ditch to the highest of politics, and also, yet only among other things, for sexual morals.

Sexual behavior that conflicts with these standards is frowned upon in the Bible, and I feel bound to these codes. Naturally, I do know Christians who don't share my quite literal understanding of biblical moral teachings when applying it to modern life, but whose relationship to Christ I can still admire. Let alone all those – heterosexual as well as homosexual – people who don't share any Christian morals with me at all and whom I can only compliment on their humanity. Christians would be better off in general not to look for splinters in other people's sex lives when the beams that cause the more important problems in relationships and interactions may be found in quite different areas. Shouldn't they rather have the confidence to leave it to their Lord who views their whole life to judge how his children practice their sexuality?

In the end, I think it wrong altogether to define people by their sexuality alone. This is why I will say only very little about sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular, surprisingly little for some of my readers, since this book isn't meant to be a comprehensive volume about homosexuality at large. The main part is still dedicated to the question what the Bible has to say to this topic – and what it doesn't or doesn't want to say.

In my exegesis, I've taken an effort to interpret the Bible mainly with the Bible and I've only consulted a limited number of commentaries. I owe many first ideas to the notes taken from a series of lectures about the topic 'Homosexuality and the Church' held in 1993 by the Baptist pastor Paul Duke, who has dealt with this problem very emphatically.

In the USA and in England there are numerous explicitly evangelical organizations by and for homosexuals as for example 'Evangelicals Concerned', 'Evangelical Fellowship of Lesbian and Gay Christians' or 'Courage'. Interestingly enough, the English organization 'Courage' set out as a pastoral 'deliverance ministry' for homosexuals. Only a couple of years ago, its leader Jeremy Marks and his colleagues decided due to their pastoral experiences that they couldn't continue insisting on a change to heterosexuality, but felt the need to support Homosexuals in their identity, and to accept and support binding same-sex partnerships.

In Germany an initiative called 'Zwischenraum' (literal translation: *room in-between*) has provided space for Christians coming from an evangelical, charismatic or conservative background for some years now. Its founder, Günter Baum, had originally built up the German branch of the organization 'Desert Stream' (*called* Wüstenstrom in Germany), that aimed at 'healing' homosexuals through therapeutical

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and pastoral counselling. He finally left the organization when he increasingly realized that, despite his constant efforts, he himself couldn't obtain the cure he was preaching to others.

The evangelical literature about this topic, admittedly, leaves the reader feeling deserted and abandoned. Depending on the nature of the publication, be it rather dogmatically or psychologically oriented, the homosexual readers will find themselves categorically judged or condemned either as malicious sinners or as unhappy neurotics. Some essays even raise the question whether the author knows any homosexuals personally at all and, if so, which particular fringe group within the vast homosexual spectrum, since I myself have never been able to identify with any of the above-mentioned literature.

The ecumenical movement in Germany has had its own lobby group for homosexual Christians since 1977. The organization called *HuK* (abbreviation for *Homosexuelle und Kirche*, which translates as 'Homosexuals and the Church') has a quite liberal self-concept. Publications from these respective church circles do comprise passionate passages in favor of practiced homosexuality. Especially those passages that portray the difficult situation of a homosexual Christian seem to express exactly what concerned people might experience themselves. And yet the problem often lies in the approaches to the interpretation of the biblical texts which is usually a historical-critical one, which cannot satisfy an evangelical Christian's understanding of the Scriptures and of belief – but which may, from the conservative evangelical point of view, possibly encourage the existing bias that homosexuals distort the Bible to justify their godless lifestyle anyway. Global anti-evangelical polemics could finally annoy and deter some of the readers that the author actually wants to convince and by this unwillingly do a bad turn to homosexuals from more conservative Christian circles<sup>1</sup>.

As explained above, to me the Bible itself was still much more important than any theological statement or commentary. So, what was the Bible able to tell me?

Homosexuality constitutes a rather marginal topic in the Bible. The passages referring to this matter in general are few and they partly don't even discuss homosexuality as such but simply serve as examples to illustrate an independent complex theological problem (e.g. in the Pauline epistles). Thus the passages related to the issue are far away from offering a biblical definition of homosexuality – a problem that will persist throughout all following interpretations.

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1 cf. P. Bürger. *Das Lied der Liebe kennt viele Melodien. Eine befreite Sicht der homosexuellen Liebe*. Oberursel 2001, e.g. page 80f.