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## **Homosexuality - Closing Up To A Term**

The first edition of this book has been criticised several times for not including a sufficient definition of *homosexuality* or *homosexuals*. Since I would like to focus on biblical evaluation and not on a scientific analysis, I'd rather give an explicitly wide definition of the two terms. This is also due to the fact that a thorough examination would have to investigate the manifold and very controversially discussed historical, anthropological, psychological and developmental aspects to this topic. But such a proper examination would inevitably distract attention from the theological discussion, on the one hand, and, on top of that, couldn't replace any biblical statement.

The concept of homosexuality is defined as erotic attraction between two people of the same biological sex. However, the wording homosexuality is rather unfortunate because this attraction doesn't only include mere sexual response and more or less loose sexual contacts, but every kind of erotic affection up to deeply felt love, unselfish support, solidarity and long – partly life-long – partnerships. It mustn't be confused with being sexually attracted to children or with sexual abuse of minors. Unfortunately, this is exactly what is often mentioned in the same breath as male homosexuality – with which it has as much, or as little to do with as heterosexuality does.

The concept of 'homosexuality' defining a character trait as well as an individual's specific sexual orientation was only coined during the late 19th century. Prior to that, it was more or less assumed that same-sex sexual acts were merely an abnormal behavioural pattern that people chose freely. At the beginning, it went without saying that this evaluation, at the same time pathological and morally motivated, easily found its way into psychological approaches, particularly since homosexual activity often had to take place on the fringe of society or even in illegal contexts. Above all, psychoanalytical research on homosexuality concentrated on patients within the scope of psychiatric-psychological experience, but hardly any information was gained through field studies of everyday lives of homosexuals. For this reason, homosexuality was classified as an illness.

Nowadays, this disorder model is only shared by a tiny minority of scientists who are mostly influenced in their statements by their personal world-view. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses, a decision that was soon adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO), too. As a consequence, scientific standards have classified homosexuality as a variation within the normal range of human sexuality because the existing scientific

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data haven't supported the theory that the personality of homosexuals might be any more pathological than that of heterosexuals.

Depending on their psychological background, sexologists have been and still are evaluating homosexuality very differently, not as to whether it's an illness, but rather as to what might cause and shape it in the individual. Thus, there is no exclusive and universally accepted definition of homosexuality that goes further than the one given above.

Scientifically spoken, there are some indications of a homosexual disposition, which could be ascribed to genetic reasons or to influences during pregnancy, but no clear evidence has been found yet. Similarly, Freudian theories, which assume early childhood influences to be the reason for homosexuality, couldn't be proven with certainty. For instance, what would be considered a feasible interpretation for a child's experience of alienation or non acceptance by its parents or concerning its expected gender role? This experience could be interpreted either as the cause of a subsequent homosexual development in the child, or as a sign of a pre-existing homosexual disposition, or the adult could be reading this experience into their own life story retrospectively. Whichever explanation we might favour depends on the particular psychological theory, however, all of them don't correspond with scientifically proven facts. The fact remains despite numerous research projects about homosexuality: a lot is still unclear and very little is indisputable.

Some scientists believed that homosexuality could be measured on a scale. Others tried to define various forms of homosexuality. Still others would even love to do away with the term altogether since it is understood as a fixed definition of an individual whereas, in their opinion, sexuality should be understood more comprehensively and lived more freely. Each classification actually does entail the problem that it won't do justice to a complex matter as a person's sexual identity with all its smooth transitions, reciprocations and exceptions.

An especially hotly debated issue that has been repeatedly raised in Christian circles – as a question and a demand – is the matter whether homosexual feelings might be subject to change and "healing", since here people still assume that homosexuality is a pathological problem. This whole subject, however, will be discussed in one of the following chapters about the order of creation.

Irrespective of a psychological evaluation, some phenomena are self-evident. To begin with, they can be observed when it comes to the development of homosexual feelings and the resulting interpersonal contacts. Probably, it's a more common potential for human sexuality to be able to experience erotic satisfaction in homosexual relationships – if maybe only temporarily – than is generally assumed. Still, the majority of people feels and lives almost or exclusively heterosexually in the course of their lives apart from some momentary homosexual or homoerotic puppy love that might occur during adolescence.

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On the other hand, there are people whose feelings are directed predominantly or exclusively towards their own sex. These sensations are very often present in one way or the other already in early childhood, even if those concerned are not able to identify their feelings as such in that phase or if they repressed their feelings as nonconformist. Here, it is appropriate to talk of homosexuality and homosexuals in the proper sense of the word.

And yet again, there are more than just a few people who simply cannot be reduced to and fitted into this polarising pattern. Their sexual perception can be directed predominantly towards one of the two sexes, or more or less equally towards both of them. These feelings can happen simultaneously or at different phases during a person's lifetime, people might live them very consciously or they might be surprised by them themselves. It is these people who frequently emphasize that they love their partner as the person he/she is irrespective of their sex. This so-called bisexuality has been disputed heavily from many different psychological and political points of view, though. Partly, it is understood as a form of denial of one's homosexuality, partly the concept is considered superfluous since all human beings are believed to have a manifold sexual potential anyway. Theologically, I'd like to assume that the same applies for someone who feels homosexual sensations to be existentially relevant as for a homosexual person as classified above.

On the other hand, we can isolate a different phenomenon from the emotional states discussed above: that is same-sex sexual activities merely as the acts themselves. These activities might indeed be experienced as pleasurable, but they don't correspond to a permanent disposition. They include for instance situational homosexuality, also called "emergency homosexuality", which includes homoerotic activities due to the lack or absence of partners of the opposite sex caused by external force, such as in prisoner-of-war camps. Also cultural factors cause this behaviour, as can be observed in a native tribe in New Guinea where young boys have sexual contact with adult men of their tribe in order to reach manhood. Situational homosexuality can also occur rather passively if it constitutes a behaviour that was adopted under force or on material grounds, for example in prisons or as homosexual prostitution. In addition to that, we can assume that there is also an often overrated escape from traumatic heterosexual experiences to homosexual relationships, which can hardly be identified as homosexual orientation.

On the other hand, someone who has homosexual feelings will stay homosexual even if he never acts accordingly. Especially in societies that have developed a very strong conception of male and female roles, homosexuals often live in heterosexual relationships – which is a distressful situation causing a great burden for the respective partner. Here, people act heterosexually, even though their wishes and feelings are directed permanently at the same sex. If, in those cases, the social external – often, however, also the internalised– constraints were to be removed,

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people's behaviour would certainly correspond to their inner sensations and feelings.

Then again there is another point to consider. Of course, homosexual feelings and behaviour can also become part of neurotic coping strategies and psychopathological or even criminal activities. However, this applies to sexuality in general and can, therefore, not be regarded as a specific characteristic or even as an explanation for homosexuality as such. Even higher tendencies to suicide or depression among (especially teenage) homosexuals in comparison to heterosexuals, that are considered evidence for the "inferiority" of homosexuality in some places, can just as well be explained with reference to experienced discrimination, recently or in the past. Only few parents believe that homosexuality is a completely equal alternative to a heterosexual life, and even fewer explicitly talk about it. Children, however, are very sensitive to mocking, bashful or derogatory remarks by parents, teachers and peers and internalize them easily. They will then go through puberty and adolescence as suffering, but mostly invisible outsiders and often enter adulthood with a lack of self-esteem or even with self-rejection. If, on the other hand, homosexuals experience external acceptance, but above all can truly accept themselves and their own sexual identity, they can describe their relationships and their sexual emotions as equally uplifting, enriching or mentally beneficial as heterosexuals, too.

All of these thoughts will play a role in the following biblical considerations. In this respect first and foremost, one thing is noticeable: The Bible doesn't distinguish between homosexual activities and a homosexual disposition – which is also due to the shortness of the concerned passages, that don't aim for a close analysis. We can draw two different conclusions from that: Either, the biblical authors considered this an irrelevant difference since, to them, every aspect of homosexuality is to be condemned categorically. Or they didn't ask this questions because a homosexual orientation as we understand it today didn't play any, or at least not a predominant, role in ancient society and, hence, no one took a position on a same-sex disposition. This might seem insignificant on the first glance, but it is the essential question. The words of our time, "homosexuality" and "homosexual", are modern concepts and are foreign to the Bible and its cultural environment where merely paraphrases for specific homosexual activities are used.