



An open Letter from the Presidium of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches to the Congregations

Dealing with the Question of Homosexuality in the Congregation and in the Union

Why we are addressing the question of homosexuality

Many congregations are discussing how they should behave towards people with homosexual tendencies. Furthermore, we are challenged as a Union to decide how we should deal with ordained ministers in this matter.

In addition, the subject has a great relevance in society. It has become a yardstick of political correctness. In the meantime it is no longer about accepting homosexuality, but rather in many cases about propagating the possibility of choosing between hetero- and homosexuality. This subject matter has been thrust into the limelight, so that it has become necessary to integrate it into the whole area of ethical questions. This is also true for Christians. For some Christians, the question of how one deals with the matter of homosexuality has become a test of who is still standing on the fundament of the bible.

At the same time it concerns people whom we meet. For this reason, some see our behaviour with respect to people with homosexual feelings as a litmus test for our openness for the people of our times.

We are convinced that dealing with controversial and tabooed themes is both rewarding and necessary. We can thereby not only learn to speak openly about taboos, but also develop our competence in dealing with people of different opinions.

How we shall approach the subject

Some desire that "the Union" should make a definitive pronouncement. However, we are living in a Union fellowship of independent and self-reliant congregations. The Presidium gives of course recommendations, but these are no substitute for the treatment of the subject in the local congregations.

Where the subject is openly discussed in our congregations, there is an extraordinary range of thoughts. We emphasize freedom of conscience, and that holds too for this subject. Before we can set boundaries pertaining to what is tolerable for Christians, we should first of all listen to one another, without "disavowing their faith". The subject does not belong to the central confession of faith and should therefore not be made into a touchstone for being a true Christian.

Biblical evidence

Homosexuality is spoken of in seven places in the bible, which are in different degrees important for the ethical evaluation.



Gen 19:4-11 and Judges 19:22-26 give report of the attempted homosexual rape of guests of the head of a household. Rape in itself is an offence against the right to hospitality and a contravention of human rights and should be condemned as such. Therefore the passages do not say anything specific about the evaluation of homosexuality.

Lev 18:22 and 20:13 condemn sexual intercourse between men as a “perversion”. In the greater context, along with heathen practices like sacrifices to Moloch, sexual deviations especially like sexual intercourse with close relations and animals are condemned. The rejection of these practices is based on Israel’s belonging to the holy God. A direct acceptance of these commandments in the directives of a Christian ethics is nevertheless not permissible, because even Jesus bypassed the commandments of the Thora in a nuanced manner, e.g. concerning the Sabbath commandment or the commandments concerning foods (Mk 2:23-36; 7:1-22). These commandments are at one with passages in which, for example, consumption of particular foods (Lev 11:10; Dtn 14:3ff) or the wearing of particular garments (Dtn 22:5) are also condemned as “perversions”.

In 1 Cor 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:8-11 a long list of practices is put together, which are contrary to sound doctrine, or with which it is impossible to inherit the Kingdom of God. Along with thieves, the greedy, drunkards, adulterers, murderers etc. are also mentioned men who practise homosexual acts either actively or passively. All of these had been present among people who belonged to the church, but now they had been washed clean and made righteous. Such practised homosexuality is placed alongside other sins and was not unknown in the church. However, as with every sin, it is not compatible with living as a follower of Jesus.

Admittedly, the meaning of the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in this context is disputed. Luther translated these as “Lustknaben” (toy boys) and “Knabenschänder (pederasts). Is it a case of pederasty? Was Paul not writing about homosexuality as such, in particular not about a loving relationship between equal partners, but rather of practised homosexuality between men in a relationship of dependency? The Greek words do not seem to be unambiguous – more modern German translations give these with “men who have intercourse with boys or such people” (Gute Nachricht-Bibel) or speak in general of those “who live as homosexuals” (Hoffnung für alle). In any case it is clear that Paul is not writing about homosexual tendencies as such, but of men who practise homosexual intercourse.

Rom 1:18-32 stands in the context of Paul’s argument concerning the culpability of all humans. As the (non-Jewish) people do not honour God as God, but rather exchange the worship of His glory with that of an idol, God therefore has given them over in the “sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity” and “in shameful lusts”. As examples of these, Paul names the unnatural sexual intercourse between women and between men and summarizes: „They have received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.“ The practising of homosexuality is for Paul, therefore, an indication, a proof that makes explicit the depravity of humans who serve other gods instead of the God who created the world.

The relevance of these bible verses for evaluating homosexuality has been judged in various manners. The lines of argument clearly indicate the differences in understanding scripture as well as various approaches in making ethical judgements.



Some deduce from these verses that the bible fundamentally rejects every form of practised homosexuality. They say that marriage between a man and a woman is the only legitimate place for living out sexuality.

Others are of the opinion that these texts do not make any explicit statements about homosexuality, but rather condemn its degeneration (e.g. through the combination with idolatry or paedophilia). Committed homosexual partnerships based on love and faithfulness are not envisaged in the bible.

We have to state that homosexuality is never mentioned in a positive manner in the bible.

Jesus emphasized (in the question concerning adultery) that a man and a woman should live their whole lives together, as an expression of the original will of God in creation for a man and a woman to spend their lives together (Matt 19:4-7; Mk 10:5-9; taking up Gen 1:27f; 2:24). In this context human sexuality also belongs to a man's and woman's "becoming one flesh".

The Tension between Love and Knowledge!

In following Jesus we desire to take God's Word seriously and at the same time to give God's unconditional love and grace to men and women.

The commandment to love and different scriptural insights can in the daily life of the church stand in tension to another. Which is more important? Love toward other humans or faithfulness to one's own scriptural insights with regard to God's commandments? These two may not be pit one against the other, nor may one of them be one-sidedly emphasized. One has to endure this tension, even when no clear answers can be found.

Jesus loves the sinner but hates the sin. That is a helpful differentiation, which can help us to keep in contact with people who are "different", or who in our opinion are "living in sin", while not making us open to the charge that we call their actions good. For this reason Jesus was not afraid to interact with the sinners of his time, even though he was a devout Jew. And he has encountered us in a like manner. We are all sinners, justified sinners, who daily depend on his forgiveness. A classification in sins of differing degrees must therefore be contradicted.

When we work on this subject, we shall always be confronted with this tension. The challenge remains: to name different insights with regard to God's Word and at the same time to deal with one another in the love of Jesus.

Homosexuality – a Variant of Creation?

God created humans as male and female. In Gen 2:24, exclusively the marriage relationship between a man and a woman is described as an ordinance of God. The judicial form is not fixed, but it is clear that a public and binding heterosexual relationship is being described and founded. For this reason, homosexuality is not a variant of creation.

Every human being is a person whom God has willed and loved, a creation of God. Nevertheless, since the fall, we are all sinners. We cannot automatically assume that God legitimises what we find in our lives.

Some things are simply there, whether they please us or not. Among these is the whole breadth of human predispositions and personality structures. And we do not always have a choice in these matters. Everyone has to deal with these realities for himself and learn to live with what he cannot change. In spite of this, we are and remain originals, loved by God.

It is not our task to judge if homosexuality can be changed.

There are some signs that homosexuality may sometimes be changed, and also some that it may sometimes not be changed. There is no fixed form of homosexuality. Many different explanations of the causes, and differing and even contradictory results of research, show that, in view of the multiplicity of differing approaches and positions, we have neither the competence nor the task of making an authoritative statement about this subject. In addition, it may be that a change in a person is not possible at present, but we cannot make a statement about future development possibilities in a person. If we apply pressure, pastoral accompaniment is made more difficult. It is important that people be free to develop themselves further.

The subject of homosexuality is not the one, with which the Church of Jesus stands or falls.

The theme of homosexuality does not belong to the core of the Christian faith. At present congregations and churches are being judged according to their position on this subject. That makes a differentiated handling more difficult. Apart from that, this thematic is integrated in a host of ethical themes, which challenge us. Of course this is always connected with the question of an adequate understanding of Scripture, and many important areas of the Christian faith are touched upon (e.g. the doctrine of creation). But is this the theme that decides if one is a Christian or if the church can exist? We recognize an overemphasis of this theme, which leads to a debasing of central questions. Holding the theme homosexuality to be the measure of being a Christian, or giving it a decisive character in the question of salvation, is to go on the way of error.

Recommendations for Handling Homosexuality

Church – room to live for all the faithful

The church should be an area where all persons are accepted. Alone the faith in Jesus Christ is the basis of acceptance into the membership through baptism. This holds too for homosexual people. We see the church of Jesus Christ as a room where we can experience acceptance and the wholesome influence of the gospel.

Voluntary Work

The same standards and criteria hold for all church workers. They should be carried by the trust of the whole church. This also holds for homosexuals. It is expected from them, that they will not advertise their own sexual orientation.



Ordained Persons

Ordained persons should enjoy the trust of the church and of the Union. This holds too for homosexuals. In the same manner it is expected that they will not advertise their sexual orientation. Living out their homosexuality (this includes being in a civil partnership) precludes ordination, or leads as a rule to being struck off the list of ordained workers.

Marriage and blessing of homosexual partners

Marriage in the bible is the bond between a man and a woman. We cannot recommend a marriage service or public blessing ceremony of homosexual partners.

Encouraging conversations in the churches

We wish for our congregations, that they in their responsibility before God and in the spirit of love may strive for the right way. This also means confronting the subject openly. Many various people live among us. If we are missionary congregations, many people will (hopefully) come to us. When this happens we will encounter many very different and for us strange life concepts. We are always dealing here with people and with personal destinies. Our faith obliges us, not simply to seek to categorize and evaluate them, but to meet these people in a loving manner. This loving encounter also entails conducting some controversial conversations about behaviour and attitudes in life. In such confrontations we express our esteem for our counterpart.

Concluding remarks

In the presidium we have experienced in our struggle for an adequate understanding of Scripture and love towards other humans, that at some points we have had to remain with differing understandings. Nevertheless, we are convinced that this too can strengthen us, and our wish for the churches is that they too may experience in their dealings with this subject, that the faith in Jesus Christ overcomes unfamiliarity and leads people together into the love of God.