

Why Are Christians Being Accused of Hate Speech? What to Do When Your Beliefs Are Called “Abusive”

Today Jesus’ followers are being accused of hate speech for saying what the Bible teaches about sex and gender. How can we make sense of this dramatic shift that has taken place in western society? How should we respond when our biblical convictions are construed as hate speech and abusive to others? In this session, we will examine the court proceedings and accusations of hate speech against Päivi Räsänen, a former Minister of Interior Affairs in Finland, for her convictions about human sexuality. From this case, we will assess the challenge that hate speech laws bring against free speech and freedom of religion for Christians across Europe.

PASI TURUNEN, theologian (M.Th), author, blogger, and apologist, has been working as a Christian radio broadcaster for over 30 years. He studied theology at Helsinki University, where his master’s thesis dealt with Jewish views on resurrection in the intertestamental Jewish literature. Turunen is a well-known Bible teacher and is often invited to speak to various apologetic seminars in Finland. He has written number of books dealing with subjects such as cult evangelism, same-sex marriage, inerrancy of the Bible, and apologetics. He has experience with Christian television and currently hosts a weekly radio program that analyzes current events and changing culture in light of the Christian worldview and the Scriptures. Turunen has also appeared on secular national television and radio programs in Finland defending Christian faith and views on contemporary issues. He is the current president of the Patmos Foundation for World Missions, an evangelical missions and relief organization bringing humanitarian aid and the Gospel of Christ to over 20 nations across the world. The Patmos Foundation has an extensive media ministry in Finland and was the first Finnish Christian organization to start broadcasting Christian programs on commercial radio stations in 1985. Pasi is married to Parvin, who was born in the Middle East and in 1984 was supernaturally led to Finland to find Jesus and be saved.

I. Price of discipleship according to Lord Jesus

1. Court awaits! – Matthew 10:17-22
2. Demonization – Matthew 10:25 / John 15:18-20
3. “Twitterstorm” in Amphipolis – Acts. 17:5-7
4. Fake News and false accusations – Mark. 14:55-58; Luke 23:2
5. How to react? – Luke 6:22-23

II. In a post-Christian Europe vaguely worded hate-speech laws can end up criminalizing almost any opinion.

1. Road to hell is paved with good intentions:
 - a) A brief legislative history of hate-speech laws from the time of cold war east-west tension: *Inciting hate or inciting violence?*
 - b) More restrictions on speech justified by extreme examples of the sort of perceived threats governments want to prevent.
 - c) Vaguely worded laws rushed through parliaments end up going well beyond their publicly stated aim.
 - d) Over time the scope of what is caught by the law broadens and the threshold for what is considered illegal lowers.

2. “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” George Orwell. / “Without the freedom to offend, free speech and free thoughts cannot truly exist.” Paul Coleman.
3. Freedom of Speech is a tool for thinking. If you restrict it in fear of somebody getting offended, you stop all critical thinking (Jordan Peterson?)
4. Freedom of speech politicized

III. Briefly: The Case of Mrs. Päivi Räsänen, former minister of Interior Affairs in Finland

1. “I never thought that the law I helped to draft as an MP would one day be used against myself!” Päivi Räsänen.
2. Finnish evangelical Lutheran pastor filed three complaints to police against Räsänen in 2019 for incitement based on her pamphlet on Christian marriage and sexual ethics (2004), one radio interview and a TV appearance; another person filed complaint on her tweet with Bible verse (Romans 1:22-27) questioning Lutheran Church’s participation in Pride-event.
3. Police preliminary investigation found no grounds for opening a criminal investigation.
 - a) Police: *“This is a permissible exercise of freedom of expression. Pre-investigation cannot be used as a channel for criticizing free religious opinions and values, even if they are perceived as disturbing and inappropriate. There is no reason to suspect a crime in this case and no preliminary investigation will therefore be opened. It follows that, as a matter of principle, the whistleblower must respond to the opinions of Räsänen, which he perceives as problematic, by debating, publishing and discussing them on the various platforms and forums of civil society.”* (Police preliminary investigation, concluding remarks)
4. To everyone’s surprise Prosecutor General decided to open criminal investigation and take the case to court.
5. Prosecution was based on Finnish law against *ethnic agitation*, section 10 under “War crimes and crimes against humanity”:
 - a) *‘A person who makes available to the public or otherwise spreads among the public or keeps available for the public information, an expression of opinion or another message where a certain **group** is **threatened, defamed or insulted**... shall be sentenced for ethnic agitation to a fine or to imprisonment for at most two years.’*
 - b) Prosecution claimed: *Räsänen has defamed and insulted homosexuals and their equal rights by claiming that homosexuality is a genetic degeneration, negative condition that needs to be treated, that God did not create homosexuals, that homosexuals are lower than other human beings and by nature prone to paedophilic child abuse.*

- c) All these claims (b) were demonstrably false and grossly misrepresented Räsänen's position and even putting words into her mouth which she had not said.

IV. As an eyewitness in the courtroom: An assessment of arguments by Prosecutor General from the Christian apologetic perspective.

1. "Trial by media: Some major newspapers and theologians falsely accused her of supporting death penalty to homosexuals (e.g., Helsinki News; Church and City)
2. Prosecutor General before trial in media: *You are allowed to quote the Bible, but not to agree with what it says.*
3. Prosecution partly based on ex post facto legislation: pamphlet on Christian sexual ethics published in 2004, new law against ethnic agitation passed in 2008
4. *Hate the sin, love the sinner* - "doctrine" attacked by prosecutor in the courtroom!
5. Moral criticism of homosexual behavior and same-sex relations as "sin" is an attack on homosexual persons and their personal dignity and value.
6. In defining homosexuality Prosecutor General clearly confused essentialism and constructionism in her arguments. Using essentialist arguments when it suited her case (e.g., comparison to skin-color) and on another occasion relying on constructionist arguments (e.g., homosexuality being "self-identification").
7. Homosexuality and genes.

V. Christian speech code in changing times – communicating with virtue

1. Because of cultural change we cannot assume people will understand Christian thinking and jargon in the context of Christian worldview in the post-Christian world.
2. We need to slow down and not assume we will be understood correctly.
3. Moderate expectations: Do your homework, be ready to clarify Christian position and clear misunderstandings, but do not aim to change people's minds.
4. Christian speech and not just free speech. We must practice higher virtues and go beyond what law allows as free speech. Even though the law should allow offensive speech to protect freedom of speech that does not mean that Christians should speak or act offensively (Matthew 5:22; 1. Timothy 2:23-26; Titus 3:2).
5. Do not expect that people will believe you act in good faith if you are nicer to them. Be nice, polite, and respectful, but remember some people will get offended no matter how hard you try to be nice and polite.
6. Get used to name-calling and misrepresentations and learn to turn the other cheek.
7. Finding the true power of the Gospel – Russell Moore: Let Christianity be strange!

YOUR NOTES:

Suggested Readings:

Why Free Speech Matters – ADF International <https://adfinternational.org/censored/>
Finnish MP wins on all charges in major free speech trial <https://adfinternational.org/free-speech-victory-finnish-mp-wins-trial-over-bible-tweet/>