

My View

How A Bible-Based Tweet Led To A Criminal Investigation

By Dr. Päivi Räsänen, MP

Are people holding public office allowed to express their deeply held beliefs?

As a Christian and a democratically elected member of the Finnish Parliament, I never thought I would face a criminal investigation for sharing what I believe. But I was accused of hate speech after I publicly questioned my own church leaders' decision to endorse LGBT pride.

Last summer, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland announced that it would become an official partner of Helsinki's "Pride 2019" event. I was shocked. I am a member of the church, and serve on my local parish council.

I posted a tweet directed at my church's leadership, asking, how could the church's doctrinal foundation, the Bible, be compatible with the sponsorship of a "gay pride" march?

I didn't hesitate to express my thoughts about the church's decision, because in Finland it is legal to speak and preach about what the Bible teaches. But my tweet created a huge uproar, and a criminal investigation for an alleged "hate crime" began. I was summoned to a police station, where I was interrogated for almost four hours.

It is a baffling, surreal experience to be ordered into a police interrogation over the teachings of the Bible, in a country that has deep roots in freedom of speech and of religion. We are accustomed to hearing news like this from places like North Korea or the former Soviet Union. The freedoms of speech and of religion are the cornerstones of democracy.

As it turned out, the grueling interrogation was just beginning. The Prosecutor General (head of the prosecution service) later initiated a second, third, and fourth investigation. The first concerned a pamphlet I wrote 16 years ago on the biblical view of marriage. The others involved a television interview and a radio interview.

In all of these cases, I am suspected of "agitation against an ethnic group" — an offense that carries a fine or a prison sentence of up to two years. I'm told that the police investigations will probably result in prosecution.



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But the real difficulty here is greater than the threat of a fine or imprisonment. I worry that my case might cause some Christians to keep silent about their beliefs. Christians in my country now seem to be hiding in fear of a vocal minority intent on censoring views with which they disagree. We must not yield to the vicious circle of fear.

If expressing Bible-based views becomes intolerable, then teaching the Bible will logically be criminalized. In my opinion, Christianity itself is being attacked and will be attacked even more aggressively in the future. We are clearly living in a time when the core of Christianity is being questioned.

Regardless of the outcome of the criminal investigations, I am going to use my freedom of religion — which is strongly guaranteed in both our Constitution and in the international human rights treaties — and publicly speak about the teachings of God's holy Word. I encourage others to do the same.

In all this I have complete peace. *"In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* (Psalm 56:11) **A**

WATCH: Hear Päivi Räsänen tell her story at ADFlegal.org/fj-Finland