

Go on Speaking

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to God's Word, and our reading this evening comes from Acts chapter 18. And I think Nigel will be speaking a bit on this a bit later, particularly looking at verses 4 to 10.

I'm going to pick up the reading from verse 1, just so we can see where Paul is at this point on his journeys moving from Athens and on to Corinth. So Acts chapter 18, and I'll begin there from verse 1.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently came from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome, and he went to see them.

And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

[1 : 19] And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.

And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next to the synagogue.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am with you.

And no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

[2 : 24] Amen. May God bless his word to us this evening. Well, it's a huge honor and a very great pleasure to be with you this evening.

Thank you very much for your kind invitation. I guess most of you will know who I am, but for those who don't, my name is Nigel Kenny. I've been with the Christian Institute exactly ten years.

Ten years ago tomorrow was when I started with the Institute down in Newcastle for the first nine months or so. And then I was made Scotland officer, the first Scotland officer for the Christian Institute.

And I've been doing that since summer 2011. And my work involves me speaking in churches around the country. Obviously, I've been having to do that via Zoom for the most part over the past eight months or so.

But it's great to be here this evening. Now, I wonder if you have ever said something that you've regretted.

[3 : 29] Maybe not immediately, but perhaps a day or so later. Maybe not immediately, but perhaps a day or so.

I've obviously read the verses already. So if you could ask the tech guys just to skip the first couple of slides.

This is such an exciting section in the Book of Acts, isn't it? Paul has been on this great missionary journey with a number of his colleagues.

And he's reached the city of Corinth. And as was his custom, he preaches the gospel in the synagogue. And as was always the case, there were some that believed.

But there were also those who opposed what he had to say. And that's the first point that I want us to notice from these verses.

[4 : 55] And that is that Paul knew the power of words under God to bring about faith. Just look at the words that Dr. Luke writes for us.

He said that Paul reasoned with them. He sought to persuade the Jews and Greeks. He was occupied with the word. He was testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

And this was his method wherever he went. That he knew that as he writes to the church at Corinth in the first letter that we have recorded for us.

That it's through the foolishness of the message that God is pleased to save those who believe. And that has been the pattern not only at the time of the apostles, but of course down through the centuries.

That faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, as Paul says in Romans. So Paul knew, and you can see from passages like this, that it was through the words that he spoke.

[6 : 16] And spoke in a persuasive way. It wasn't just some flat, uninspiring reciting of some kind of creed that people had to sign up to.

No, he was passionate in his preaching, wasn't he? The words that Luke uses here, that he was really seeking to win those who were listening to him.

But as well as Paul knowing the power of words to bring about faith, he also knew that they had the power to harden men's hearts.

I think it was Spurgeon that said, The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. And this wasn't the first time that Paul had experienced that opposition, but it seems to have been particularly intense in Corinth.

We find Luke saying that the Jews opposed Paul. They reviled him. They got very angry indeed at what he was saying.

[7 : 17] And the difference between how he, certainly from what Luke records, how he dealt with that on this occasion, he ramped things up a bit, you might say, from what he'd said previously, or how he dealt with it previously.

Remember, he had some horrific experiences. He was thrown out of Thessalonica in the previous chapter. Going back to Acts 14, he was so badly beaten up, he was left for dead, thrown outside the city in Lystra.

So he certainly hadn't had an easy time of it. But on this occasion, he uses quite shocking language. Because look how he says there to the Jews, he shooed out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads.

I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. Now you may be aware, and certainly his hearers, as Jews would be aware, that what he was doing there was he was referring to the prophecy of Ezekiel.

In particular, I think, chapter 33. We could maybe just read the opening verses there, where we read, He heard the sound of the trumpet, And did not take warning.

[9 : 01] His blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.

And I'm certain that Paul realized that in a New Testament context, in the Gospel context, that he was a watchman, not just appointed by the people, but appointed and called by God himself to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, to warn those of his own people, that they must believe in Jesus as the true Messiah who had come to save them.

And he found wherever he went that Jesus was rejected. But he brings the same message time and time again, testifying to the Jews that the Christ that they were waiting for was Jesus.

Jesus born in Nazareth, living that life in Galilee and the surrounding area, and dying on the cross in fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophets, dying for the sins of the people on the cross, and then rising again from the dead on the third day.

So what Paul does here is really momentous because he's basically saying, right, I have discharged my responsibility to warn you, my fellow Jews, and because you have rejected the Gospel, unless you repent, you can only expect judgment to come.

And he was innocent of their blood. And again, that's what the passage in Ezekiel speaks of. So as if that wasn't bad enough, saying you think you're the people of God, but if you reject Jesus, that's not going to end well for you.

[10 : 49] But an even bigger insult you might see, where he says, from now on I will go to the Gentiles who were despised by the Jews who consider themselves better than the Gentiles, consider themselves as the, the people of God, whereas the Gentiles were just Gentile dogs to be

despised.

So it's really strong language that Paul uses here. And as we'll be coming to Luke in a few minutes, if the hate crime bill that we're following, going through its parliamentary stages, were to be enforced here, there's no question that there would have been a report made to the authorities, as indeed happens later in the chapter.

You can go on and read it with Gallio, the proconsul, that the Jews certainly felt that Paul had committed some kind of hate crime against them that was worthy of being taken to the criminal courts for prosecution.

So, as we do read in the following verses, it wasn't just opposition that Paul experienced, but there was tremendous encouragement. We find that Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue and his entire household, they respond to the gospel, they believe in the Lord, and many other Corinthians as well after hearing Paul's message.

And you would think that that tremendous encouragement there of people coming to saving faith in Christ would have been enough to have dispelled any nagging doubts that Paul had that there was going to be some terrible consequences awaiting him because of what he said to the Jews.

[12:42] But it would seem that for the next couple of days, perhaps restless nights that Paul had, that he was beginning to realize the enormity of what he had said to the Jews.

And I believe that's why we read there in the passage, and the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision. Now, this was a very rare occurrence, an unusual occurrence for Paul.

Why was it that the Lord appeared to him in a vision? Well, I believe it was because he was afraid of the consequences, even though he had been delivered by God, particularly in Lystra.

Sometimes it can be just wearing the amount of opposition that can come in. And let's not pretend that Paul was some kind of superman, some kind of super Christian that was immune to all the difficulties and stresses and strains that we face ourselves as Christians.

I believe that he was really concerned and really afraid about the consequences of what he'd said. So the next point that we can draw from this passage is that Paul was afraid.

[13:57] That's why I believe that the Lord says, the first thing the Lord says to him in the vision is do not be afraid. It was because he knew that Paul was afraid. And we can be afraid of all that's happening in our culture.

It's becoming increasingly hostile to the gospel, not only through the media and culture, but through public policy and lawmaking in the parliaments.

And that can make us afraid too. So Paul was afraid just as we can be. But God knew how to help him and he knows how to help us.

So let's look at three things very briefly. There's a problem, there's a solution, and there is a warning.

And the problem Paul faced was, as we've just said, that he was afraid. And the Lord comes to him and encourages him not to be afraid.

[15:02] I mean, most of you are probably aware that Willie Phillip is one of our trustees at the Christian Institute and what we've been doing in recent times is having one of our trustees lead one of our prayer meetings each week.

And it was great to have Willie a few weeks ago. And he was focusing on this theme that is one of the most, possibly the most common thing that the Lord says to his people throughout the whole of the Old Testament and the New Testament, that we shouldn't be afraid.

And there are all sorts of reasons we can have for being fearful. But this was the problem that the Lord addressed here. And what's fascinating is that it wasn't simply don't be afraid, but the solution is for him to keep doing what God has called him to do.

To go on speaking and not to be silent. And there's a hint of a warning there, isn't there? That really, he really mustn't be silent.

It's not just a positive and negative way of saying the same thing. But it was really important, as we'll see in a minute, why Paul had to keep on speaking. So let's look then at the Lord's reasoning for speaking to Paul in this way.

[16:20] Because I think that he gives what would seem to be possibly a parallel explanation for why he says, do not be afraid, go on speaking, do not be silent.

And the first reason he gives is because his presence would go with Paul. So don't be afraid, Paul, because I am with you. And that reminds us, doesn't it, of how often in Isaiah 41, I think, is one

example.

There are many examples in the Old Testament of God saying to one of the prophets, perhaps, don't be afraid because I am with you. But in particular in the New Testament, we think of the wonderful promise the Lord Jesus gives in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel when he sends his disciples into all the world to make disciples of all nations.

And at the end of that, he says, as you go, that's really what the Greek means, literally, as you go into the world making disciples of all nations, I will be with you, I am with you, even to the end of the age.

And that's the wonderful encouragement for us is even though we may be fearful of speaking about the Gospel or speaking about certain aspects of the Christian faith, we need to realize that as we go and make Christ known and make the Word of God known, the truth of Scripture known, God's presence goes with us too and we can have that wonderful assurance.

[17 : 55] The next thing that the Lord says is that he's to keep on speaking because there's going to be special providential protection for him.

God's providence would protect him. It's really interesting to see how that actually worked out in those coming verses.

There is an attempted criminal prosecution for Paul later on in the chapter but proconsul Gallio sees through it and sees that it's quite incompetent to have raised those proceedings and the whole thing gets thrown out.

So Paul's protected in that way. And then in Ephesus where there's a riot in chapter 19 and there's this baying mob that's chanting for a couple of hours and Paul and his colleagues are almost certainly in hiding but it's actually the town clerk that calms the crowd and reasons with them, appeals to their reason, I guess, appeals to their common sense and in an amazing way that the crowd calms down and is dispersed.

I mention that because there you've got a court, the proconsul and you've got the local authority, those whom God has placed in authority in different ways being used by God to protect Paul, to protect Paul's freedom and to protect Paul's life because I'm sure that if that baying mob in Ephesus had found Paul, if the riot hadn't been put down and quelled, then he would almost certainly have been lynched.

[19 : 39] We find in chapter 20 as well when he learns of the plot, a plot from the Jews to kill him, he applies a bit of what we might call sanctified common sense rather than going on the boat with some of his colleagues, he goes with, it would appear, some of his other colleagues a different route, not the route that the Jews would have expected.

Of course, they could have very easily got on the ship and thrown Paul overboard and he would have drowned. So, God's providence protecting us can take many shapes or forms but we see in particular in these verses that it's often through the governing authorities or the legal authorities that the protection comes.

But then finally, and this is really the key point I think from what the Lord is saying to Paul in this vision, is he's not to be silent because God's people would come to faith through Paul's words. And we have the mystery here of divine sovereignty. These are the only people that were Christians in Corinth at the time were the ones that have just been mentioned, Crispus and his household and many other Corinthians.

But God says there's many more people who are his people. He knows who they are even though they've yet to believe. But we see as scripture always has that perfect balance of, as again Paul says in 2 Timothy, the Lord knows those who are his but everyone who names the name must turn from iniquity.

[21 : 10] There needs to be repentance. There needs to be faith. And there's the human responsibility balancing that divine sovereignty. And we see that in these verses here as well. That yes, the Lord has his people, many people in Corinth.

but the way that they are going to become the people of God as such is the only way that ever happens which is through hearing the gospel and responding in faith.

And then they become Christians and have that right standing with God with their sins forgiven and peace with God. And the way that that happens is always through the proclamation and the sharing of the gospel.

So what God is saying here, the Lord is saying to Paul, you need to keep on speaking and not to be silent because that's how these folks in Corinth are going to become Christians through hearing

your message.

And that's still the way today. So that's why it's so important for all of us and in particular we need to pray for those who regularly preach the gospel that they will continue to have the courage and the strength to go on speaking and not to be silent.

[22 : 24] And in all the opportunities that come our way with our work colleagues, with our friends, perhaps just even chatting on social media or posting on social media that we can be maybe fearful of what's going to happen if I say X, Y, or Z.

But it's so important, it's absolutely crucial that we continue to make the gospel known and to make the message from God's word known to everyone.

So I hope that's been helpful just to set the scene for what I'm going to be saying next about some of the things that are facing us within our own nation just now. If we could have the next slide, please.

I'm going to look at the hate crime bill in particular and I'm sure that many of you, probably all of you, will be familiar with this, although I was doing a Zoom meeting recently, I'll not say what part of the country it was, but there was a lady during the Q&A; who just was completely unaware of it, so it showed me that I can't make any assumptions at all.

But just a little encouragement from this first slide here. You may remember a couple of years ago these posters were up in Glasgow City Centre and I'm sure we all know that Kate Forbes, of course, she and her family were menacing members here a few years ago and she's now our finance secretary.

[23 : 49] Before she had that role, there were a number of her constituents up there in Skye, Le Chabra and Badenoch who were really concerned. They'd seen these in Inverness and there was another Christian MSP in Edinburgh, Gordon Lindhurst, and both of these MSPs were contacted.

Kristen's raising real concerns about the very intimidating message that these posters were sending. It was basically that traditional Christian teaching and Christian beliefs were no longer acceptable either to the Scottish government or to Police Scotland or to the Scottish people themselves.

And thankfully, through the good offices of Kate Forbes and Gordon Lindhurst, those posters were withdrawn. So it shows what can be achieved if you get in touch with your MSP.

Now, looking at the bigger picture of the hate crime bill, I found a number of Christians that just struggle to understand why we're so concerned about it.

They'll say the Christian message is all about love. It's about loving God, seeking to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It's about loving our neighbours as ourselves.

[25 : 01] Ultimately, of course, it's about the love of Christ that has come to us in the gospel. But in terms of how we live, what the Christian faith and the Christian life is about, it's first of all loving God, loving our neighbour, loving one another as Christians, as Christ has loved us.

Or as this verse that's about to come up shows us, even those who oppose the gospel, even those who are our enemies or think themselves as our enemies or our enemies of the gospel, however we would understand that, we're even to love them.

So there's nothing about hate whatsoever in the Christian life, as far as other people are concerned. So why should we be concerned about a hate crime bill when, of course, we would never be guilty of such a thing?

Well, George Orwell has something to say about this that is very helpful and very incisive. He wrote towards the end of his life, the further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.

Or we could maybe add to that, accuse those who speak the truth of being hateful. And that is what seems to be happening in our culture. There are those who, again, getting back to Paul's experience with the Jews, he wasn't being hateful at all towards them.

[26 : 22] He was being incredibly loving, warning them, as he ought to have done, of what awaited them if they continued to reject their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the way that the Jews perceived that was that he was the one that was being hateful. He was hating them, and he was to be opposed, he was to be reviled, he was to be taken to court for saying such things.

So, totally different perspectives. And that's what we find in our own day and generation as well, where there are, it's different people, it's different groups, so to speak, in our day and generation,

but they're still just as opposed to the gospel, just as intolerant of what we would believe as Christians.

So, that seems to be what is driving this bill, is because certain groups within society find the Christian gospel, the Christian message, so offensive, so intolerant, so hateful even, towards their lives and their lifestyles, that it ought to be criminalized.

So, just over a year ago, Nicola Sturgeon announced for the legislative program for the year 2019-2020, that a new hate crime bill was going to be introduced that would consolidate and update, that's the key words, that means new hate crimes, existing hate crime legislation.

[27 : 48] Now, I hoped, perhaps rather naively, that with the pandemic and lockdown in March, that everything would have grown to a halt. But no, just a month later in April, the bill was launched.

One of the incredible things that we have been so encouraged by at the Christian Institute is the huge public outcry that there has been about this bill.

I could give you a number of quotes, but one in particular I think is really helpful, from Chief Superintendent Stuart Carle, representing the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents. He said to the Justice Committee when he submitted his written submission earlier in the summer, a mature, tolerant, and truly democratic society should be able to negotiate robust and even rude and insulting public and social discourse without recourse to the criminal law.

And he was sending a very clear message that it really isn't the police's job to police these kind of rigorous debates and to police what people think.

[28 : 59] So let's look very quickly at a number of existing or ongoing problems, we could say, with the hate crime bill. I'm just going to rush through these very quickly.

An opportunity now just to plug our briefing, which I've got a number of copies of, all carefully sanitised at the back of the hall there on the table.

This is our briefing that has these eight points that goes into a bit more detail than I'm able to do just very briefly at this time. You can take that away with you at the end. First problem is that the term abusive is just too vague.

If you look up dictionary definitions, I've put three here together. One dictionary describes it as using offensive or insulting language. Another, extremely rude and insulting.

And another, harsh and insulting. So there's a very mild definition, a stricter definition, and a kind of in-between definition. So which one are they going to go with? I mean, pretty worrying if they go with the first one, using your offensive or insulting language.

[30 : 07] That's a pretty low threshold altogether. So that's a real concern for us. The next problem we see is that religious debate will be stifled.

The little kind of meme I've got up there, religion is too sensitive to discuss and better to avoid it. And so many Christians will feel just not worth the risk of saying anything that might be contentious. Not just about certain moral or ethical issues, but the gospel itself, let's remember, is absolutely exclusive, that Jesus is the only way to God. God. And I think a lot of people, a lot of ordinary Christians will be thinking, I'd better play that down or maybe just say nothing at all because I don't want to be guilty of a hate crime.

So that's a real concern. Of course, when we think about those who preach the gospel Sunday by Sunday with sermons that are recorded and are available online, certain passages in scripture, how terrible it would be if a preacher of the gospel, if a pastor or minister were to think twice.

About preaching in the book of Romans, especially chapter one. We'd think twice even about preaching in the book of Genesis. Chapter one, chapter two, certainly chapter 19.

[31 : 25] So many passages, even Matthew's gospel. Imagine a church thinking, not sure what to go through chapter by chapter of Matthew's gospel because of chapter 19. What Jesus had to say about marriage, what Jesus had to say about God making them male and female.

These are terrible things. Surely no pastors, no minister should even have to think about, will I preach on this passage? Or if I do, I'll need to think very carefully about what I say.

The freedom to proclaim the whole counsel of God is one of the most important freedoms that we have in our nation. And again, getting back to the apostle Paul, that's what he said just a couple of chapters later, didn't he?

And he was saying for a while to the Ephesian elders that he'd not held back from saying anything that would be profitable for them. But indeed, he'd proclaimed both in public and from house to house the whole counsel of God.

Surely that is one of the most important freedoms that we must do all that we can to seek to preserve. Next concern we have is the fact that there is no free speech clause at all, unlike with the Westminster legislation, to allow us to say that same-sex marriage is not real marriage.

[32 : 40] And pointing to passages like Matthew 19 to say it is clearly, in the Bible, an exclusively heterosexual institution. And because that, there's no free speech clause there in the bill to allow that to be said without risk of prosecution, we could see that the bill is saying we better back gay marriage or else.

Now, we've had it, obviously, we've had same-sex marriage in our legislation for almost seven years now, come February next year. But there's nothing in that law that says that we must go along with it, we must agree with it, we must affirm it.

There's nothing about that at all. But as time goes on, the feeling is that somehow you're homophobic if you don't agree with same-sex marriage. Another thing that is really shocking and has been raised even by many non-Christian bodies is that there is no free speech clause at all to criticize transgender thinking, transgender ideology.

And when we remember that this bill has a maximum jail sentence of seven years, that's the sort of jail sentence that is given out to drug dealers, to rapists, those involved in really serious assault and robbery.

And this bill allows for a jail sentence up to seven years. Really, really serious that there is no free speech clause on the trans issue at all at present.

[34 : 11] One of the things you may have seen in the news just in the last couple of weeks is what's called the dwelling defence, which currently exists for the only hate crime that is currently the law in Scotland which is stirring up racial hatred.

That's been on the statute book since 1986. But that law has what's called a dwelling defence, which means that anything said in private within your own home doesn't get prosecuted.

But because that's not included in this bill, there is a real prospect that discussions in the home could be criminalised. Let me give you a couple of examples obviously where it's not too easy for us just now to have home Bible studies or house groups, but hopefully next year at some stage they'll be able to recommence.

What if we have a non-Christian that comes along to one of these? And some of the subject matter that we've been considering this evening comes up in the passage that's being looked at in the Bible study.

And the historic Orthodox Christian position is raised and is agreed upon by the Christians in the group. But the non-Christian there thinks that this is shocking.

[35 : 22] This is, how can this be? And reports the Bible study, the home group, to the police. Or as has been raised by one commentator, what if, as we'll be coming to look at in a minute, children are taught in primary school that they can choose whether they're a boy or a girl.

They go home, they tell their parents that, and it doesn't even need to be Christian parents.

Because we know that many, many of those who have no Christian faith know the difference. Know that boys are boys and girls are girls.

And what if the mum or dad says, no, no, no, don't listen to what the teacher says. You're obviously a little girl or you're obviously a little boy. And that can't change. And the next day, the child says this in the playground.

And one of the other children says, that's terrible. Goes to tell their parents who may be really in favour of the whole transgender agenda. And as a result, mum and dad get investigated by the police.

It absolutely could happen very, very easily. So the next concern that we have is what's called the prosecution lock. Now, a little bit technical this, but just very briefly.

[36 : 40] For other parts of the UK, hate crime is seen as so serious, because the similar sentences apply there, that in England, for example, the Attorney General has to approve of every hate crime prosecution.

In Northern Ireland, it's the Director of Public Prosecutions. But in Scotland, the Lord Advocate doesn't have to sign off any prosecution in in the bill at present.

And that's a point that we have raised ourselves with Hamza Youssef. And at present, he's saying, nope, there's not going to be a prosecution lock. And that will mean that there could be many, many hate crime prosecutions going ahead if they're treated in exactly the same way as any other kind of

prosecution.

There's no special seriousness being given to them, basically. Then moving quickly on to the next point, which is that hatred is not defined in the bill, in the legislation.

I was speaking to a top QC about this just last year. And he was saying, well, one of the real problems of this bill comes ahead is how do you define hatred? Again, let's look at diphthany definitions.

[37 : 52] One of them is an intense dislike or an extreme aversion or hostility. And if you look at the definition of hostility, one of them is opposition or resistance to an idea, a plan or a project.

Now, of course, we are going to be opposed and resistant to any non-Christian worldview or ideology or thinking. But if that's seen as hostility, it's a very short distance between hostility and hatred, simply to express disagreement, simply to express opposition or dissent to an ideology. Because with the identity politics of our own day and generation, someone's lifestyle is equated with their identity. So we disagree with the lifestyle, we're accused of hating the individual.

That's unfortunately the society that we live in just now. And then lastly and most seriously, could possession of a Bible be a crime?

This is not as far-fetched as it sounds because there is a clause within the Hate Crime Bill that criminalizes the possession of what's called inflammatory material.

[39 : 08] And it has been raised with the Scottish government that possession of a Bible could be a crime. Now, again, you may think, that's really too far-fetched.

Well, there was a letter sent to the Courier newspaper in Dundee earlier in the summer by Ian Stewart, who's the convener of Atheist Scotland. And he said in that letter, we fully intend to monitor all holy books, sermons and places of worship and the social media accounts of the various religions and report any hatred to Police Scotland for criminal investigation.

Now, you might think, well, surely the police would realise that this is just a lot of nonsense.

The police would be bound to be even-handed and give equal treatment to Christians as they would to anyone else that was clearly being falsely accused of a crime.

So, will there be equal treatment? If we could have the next slide up, please. That was a photograph that was taken here in Glasgow just a couple of years ago at the Pride Parade in the city centre.

[40 : 26] Now, clearly, the police have a legitimate role to police such an event. But surely not to participate in it. They're meant to be totally neutral on political issues.

And even the BBC has conceded last year that these issues are political issues that their presenters should not be tweeting about because that's what had been happening on the Twitter sphere.

So, these are really concerning matters for us. So, let's think. What's happening next with the bill? Well, it's currently at what's called Stage 1.

It's with the Justice Committee who are considering the merits of the bill. And another encouraging piece of news, oral evidence is being heard over these next few weeks.

And this past week, on Tuesday, our friends from the Free Church and Evangelical Alliance were heard and they gave an excellent account of their concerns, which are exactly the same as our concerns.

[41 : 37] So, we'll come on to a prayer point about that just shortly. So, how long is this Stage 1 going to go on? Well, it's due to finish on the 18th of December.

But if you can have the next slide, Professor Adam Tompkins, who's the convener of the Justice Committee, has said, given the importance of this legislation and the strength of feeling it is generating, it's vital that sufficient time is allowed for scrutiny.

Our committee has already agreed that it will revisit the deadline of 18th of December should it become necessary. So, it may be shunted into the new year. Another encouraging development is there's been an encouraging climb down already from the Justice Secretary.

Now, this is extremely unusual at an early stage of any bill, but it reflects the huge concern, the public concern, that has been about it. Hamza Youssef has already conceded that the threshold for a hate crime will be raised so that you can't commit a hate crime without realising it.

The courts will have to be satisfied that you intended to commit the crime. And he's also made some encouraging noises about free speech clauses, which he has promised will be broadened and deepened.

[42 : 54] But there's no question that more needs to be changed. If we can have the next slide, just a few quick prayer points. Let's pray for members of the Justice Committee to take the widespread concerns seriously, for Christians to realise the threats to gospel freedoms that the bill poses and to speak out, for major amendments to part two of the bill, and for ourselves at the Christian Institute and the Free to Disagree campaign that we're supporting to have wisdom and to be effective.

Now, moving on just very quickly to the other major issue that is facing us just now. You probably won't have heard too much about it unless you're a parent, in which case you're probably aware that what's actually happening in your children's schools just now, there isn't much in the way of legal statutory guidance as yet, but it is coming.

And that's what I want to speak about just now. So we're going to look at the question of gender ideology in schools. This is teaching that, even though it's patently obvious that just about every single child that's born is obviously either a boy or a girl, no, no, no.

That's a very wrong assumption. Children are told from a very early age that they, and we're hearing this, that they're given homework to go home and think about whether they are a boy or a girl, whether they want to be a boy or a girl.

This is primary school children already being encouraged to do this. Can I have the next slide, please? It's come about through a number of different lobby groups, in particular this one, the Time for Inclusive Education campaign, that have been incredibly successful in persuading the Scottish Government to accede to all of their demands.

[44 : 50] Next slide, please. So there's already materials being used in Scottish schools prepared by, in this case, LGBT youth Scotland. And the next one, thankfully, we were able to have the Scottish Government withdraw their recommendation, their endorsement, of this particular material, but a lot of schools have already been using it.

And John Swinney said, exactly two years ago, he gave a speech to the Scottish Parliament, where he was basically saying there was going to be huge changes to Scottish education, that there was going to be new statutory guidance coming in.

He said, we will work with key partners to fully update the existing statutory guidance, to ensure it covers themes relating to LGBTI equality and inclusion. So, that is one of the things that has been delayed because of the pandemic.

But a few things for us to be praying about. Let's pray, first of all, that the final statutory guidance, which still hasn't been issued, it was meant to have been issued maybe late May, early June, still hasn't been issued, that it's delayed until, or at least its implementation is delayed until after the election next May.

In other words, in almost all likelihood, for the next academic session next August. Let's give thanks that there will be, first of all, a public consultation on the updated statutory guides, and that's where all of us can have a say about it.

[46 : 24] So, we can really give thanks. That wasn't guaranteed that was going to happen, but it was promised back in February when a couple of my colleagues met with civil servants. Next, let's pray for protection of Christian teachers.

We deal with a number of Christian teachers that get in touch with us to say, I'm being, you know, lent on to teach this. My own freedoms, I feel, are very much under threat.

I'm compelled to say things that I really don't want to say. So, Christian teachers really need our prayers. But also, Christian parents and Christian pupils.

It's a really hostile environment, Scottish education, at this time. So, what we've done is we've brought out a really helpful briefing called Equipped for Equality, and you can access that online on our website, christian.org.uk, and we've found that a number of our supporters have been really helped by that in knowing what their rights are as parents because there are human rights for parents to have their children educated in accordance with their wishes and their religious and philosophical beliefs.

So, I recommend that for further reading. Okay, so let's just wrap things up with a few things that are kind of coming up over the next few weeks and months.

[47 : 55] I'm sure you're aware that during lockdown, there was emergency provisions brought in which allowed DIY home abortions.

At the time, it was told that these would simply be for during lockdown, but there is a public consultation that is ongoing now and will be for the next few weeks that we'll be getting in touch with

our supporters about to look to make it permanent even though there have been at least two instances of women dying at home as a result of taking the home abortion pills and there have been other instances where basically the mother has lied to the doctor at the consultation and the child that has aborted was beyond the 24 weeks.

So, we're really, really concerned about that. That's something that's coming up over the next few weeks. Certainly, our briefing will be coming out over the next few weeks. Next, another consultation that's ongoing and that is being run by the General Teaching Council of Scotland. That consultation is about making it mandatory, compulsory for all teachers, existing and new teachers, to sign up to the whole social justice agenda.

You've probably heard the word woke. Well, that's really, unless you're a woke teacher, you can't be a teacher. That's effectively what this consultation is about. Intersectionality, that may be a term that you're not familiar with, but it's there very much in the philosophy of teaching in Scotland today. [49 : 36] These are ideologies that derive from cultural Marxism and just on that front actually, a book to plug here. great from our good friend Melvin Tinker, That Hideous Strength, A Deeper Look at How the West Was Lost.

So I recommend that book. Melvin came to speak to us recently. There's an interview of our director with him available on our YouTube channel. And really, we need to be aware of what is actually happening in our culture with these very anti-Christian ideologies.

policies. Next, assisted suicide is going to be debated at the end of this month at the SNP's party conference. At present, they have no policy. They allowed a free vote the last time.

Assisted suicide was debated some five years ago in the Scottish Parliament. But there is pressure for them to have a policy in favour of it coming up at their party conference at the end of this month. And there's a likelihood of another bill coming before the Parliament after the May elections.

And then, finally, you'll probably recognise this chap, Steve Chalk, caused a huge controversy maybe some 12, 13 years ago accusing the historical understanding of the Gospel, the penal substitution of Christ on the cross as cosmic child abuse.

[51 : 01] You may remember that phrase then. Well, tragically, Steve Chalk has just gone from worse to worse in terms of abandoning his evangelical faith. And now it's quite correct for us to say that he is a former evangelical and his latest crusade, really, is to seek to have a law introduced.

And this only applies to England and Wales just now, but we're sure that it will be coming to Scotland as well if it's successful in England. To ban, amongst other things, our concern about it is that he seeks to have all prayer, preaching, and Christian counselling outlawed that would encourage people to repent of the LGBT lifestyle.

Really, really sinister, as our director has put it. He's wanting to use the criminal law to settle a theological debate. So these are serious, serious issues for all us to consider.

If we could have the last slide, please. Another quote to finish with from George Orwell. During times of universal deceit, and there is so much deceit around in our culture, about things that God's word is so clear about, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.

But we shouldn't be afraid, coming back to the book of Acts, to be a bit subversive, to be a bit revolutionary, in one sense. The Christians, Paul and his colleagues, were described as those who turned the world upside down in the book of Acts.

[52 : 35] And maybe that's what we need to be doing on these issues in our own day and generation. So if we just come to the next slide.

As I say, we have this briefing here on the hate crime bill at the back, and there's an older one there available as well. Just to be aware too, that in a couple of weeks' time, we have our week of prayer, and we commend the briefing that we've put together for that, for the end of November, beginning of December.

And so, what I would be just so delighted, for those of you who are not already on our mailing list, I know that Willie has very kindly encouraged you already, those of you who get the Tron emails, to sign up to the mailing list, but those of you who don't get the emails, who may be watching online, please, please do.

These are hugely important issues for our day and generation, for our gospel freedoms, not only for this generation, but for our children and our grandchildren.

So, the website is christian.org.uk, and there's a little sign-up icon at the top there you can click on to, it just takes a few seconds. There's no financial commitment whatsoever, but we want you to be informed, we covet your prayers for all that we seek to do, and it will help you to develop a robust

Christian worldview about all these issues so that you can be a more effective witness for Christ in the public square.

[54 : 07] Just very briefly before I close in prayer, a couple of books to plug, our own Sharon James has done a fantastic one on gender ideology. If you want to look in a bit further into this, then that's a really excellent book that is available online for just around about seven pounds, and not often that we will plug a non-Christian book, but certainly Douglas Murray's *The Madness of Crowds*, it is from a non-Christian perspective, but it's an incredible insight into what is happening in our culture, and there's a huge amount of it that we would agree with ourselves, so just for further reading, these books will be very helpful for you.

Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the freedom that we have to proclaim the whole counsel of God.

We thank you that that's something that we have enjoyed for centuries in our nation. We thank you that it is your will and your good purpose that all the truth that you have revealed in your word should be shared with everyone.

We thank you that that's something that we are encouraged to seek and to pray for, in particular as we pray for those in authority that they may act in such a way that we are able to lead peaceful and quiet lives in all Godliness and holiness.

And that's something that is good and acceptable to you because it is your desire that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth as the gospel is spread to one and all.

[55 : 49] And so we do pray, Lord, for the preservation and the protection of these glorious gospel freedoms that we have enjoyed for so long. We acknowledge the threat that there is to them and we do pray that in your grace and in your mercy you would be pleased to preserve them in order that we may continue to proclaim the whole counsel of God God.

Because we ask it all in Jesus' name and for his glory's sake. Amen.