

***O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!*** (Jeremiah 22:29) (NIV)

Peter and John healed a man who had been paralysed for 40 years. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!” Peter and John did not dwell long on the fact that they unjustly ended up in prison because of this. With great inner freedom, they appeared before the high council, the religious leaders, and confessed their faith in Jesus. The council then emphatically forbade them ever to speak publicly about Jesus again. But Peter and John replied: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). This response is the basis of all Christian resistance against the powers of this world that seek to prevent the spread of the Good News of Jesus.

Freedom of speech and religion is actually guaranteed in international laws and the EU treaties. But many Christians in Europe currently complain about a ‘cancel culture’ that no longer tolerates certain opinions. In fact, there are laws in European countries that can be considered restrictions on freedom of speech. For example, it is illegal to ‘impose an opinion on a pregnant woman's decision to continue with her pregnancy’ in the vicinity of a clinic or doctor's surgery (German law on conflicts in pregnancies). Unpopular expressions of opinion can be labelled as ‘hate speech’. However, ‘hate speech’ has no uniform definition. Another area where freedom of expression can be restricted is social media. This also occasionally affects Christian content, for example when certain films are blocked or even an entire account. Freedom of expression in society also has its limits. All regulations concerning the necessary limits of freedom of expression are extremely susceptible to abuse. As Christians in Europe are experiencing their freedom of expression being challenged, CARE (UK) has written ten ways to pray about freedom of speech.

1. THANK GOD FOR LAWS PROTECTING FREEDOM OF SPEECH

‘Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do evil ... Show respect for all people.’

1 Peter 2:16-17 (New Century Version)

God of justice, may our laws continue to uphold freedom of expression and opinion with which others disagree, whilst wisely protecting people from violence, discrimination and marginalisation.

2. REMEMBER THOSE UNABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR FAITH OPENLY

‘May God comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (ESV)

Holy Spirit, please inspire and empower Christians who are not free to speak and live out the gospel openly to still find ways to grow in faith, and to lovingly share Your truth with others.

3. PRAY FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN THE WORKPLACE TO BE ACCOMMODATED

‘Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.’ Matthew 7:7 (ESV)

Lord, may many countries adopt the Council of Europe recommendations protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief in the workplace. May employers accommodate their staff so that they do not have to choose between their job and living out their faith.

4. ASK GOD TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN UNIVERSITIES

‘But if you show partiality [prejudice, favouritism] you are committing sin.’ James 2:9 (Amplified Bible)

We pray for universities to be places where people are open-minded, willing to learn, question and debate respectfully, and defend everyone’s right to be heard, even if their views are unpopular.

5. GIVE THANKS FOR LAWS PROTECTING FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

'Do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.' Micah 6:8 (NKJV)

God of truth, please grant politicians and other leaders the courage to govern with integrity and transparency: willing to be accountable and to apologise for errors.

6. INTERCEDE FOR OUR CONTINUING FREEDOM TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.' Romans 1:16 (NIV)

Lord Jesus, you commissioned us to preach the gospel to everyone. Please watch over and give wisdom, holy love and boldness to all who minister in this way.

7. REMEMBER MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS FACING ISSUES OF CONSCIENCE

'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' Job 28:28 (RSV)

Gracious God, we pray that doctors, nurses and others will be released from duties that involve procedures and treatments that they believe to be against their conscience. Grant them courage.

8. PRAY THAT FALSE 'HATE SPEECH' ACCUSATIONS WILL BE DISMISSED

'Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil...' Zechariah 8:16-17 (NIV)

God, please grant that people who disagree about contentious issues, but not hatefully, will be able to speak out freely. Give them strength to be truthful and kind.

9. PRAY FOR FAIRNESS IN DISPUTES ABOUT SEX AND GENDER ISSUES

'A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger ... The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch.' Proverbs 15:1-3 (NIV)

Loving Lord, we recognise the deep feelings involved in disputes about sex and gender issues. Help us to engage in fair honest debate that always values people whatever their convictions.

10. PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS TO ALWAYS SPEAK THE TRUTH WITH GRACE

'Be a good worker, who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. Avoid worthless, foolish talk ...' 2 Timothy 2:15-16 (NLT)

Father, may we not demand our own rights but honour and serve You with compassion and grace by speaking up for the voiceless and defending vulnerable people who are unjustly treated.

Source of prayer points (used with permission):



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