

Christian Preacher Arrested for Saying Homosexuality is a Sin

A Christian street preacher was arrested and locked in a cell for telling a passer-by that homosexuality is a sin in the eyes of God.

By [Heidi Blake](#) -

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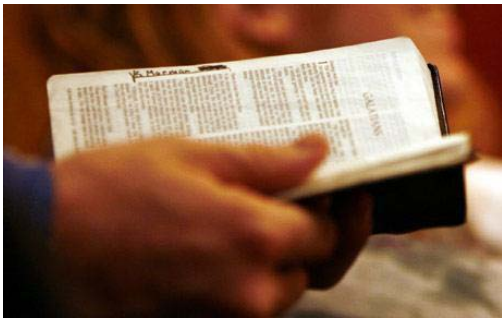


Photo: REUTERS

Mr McAlpine was handing out leaflets explaining the Ten Commandments or offering a 'ticket to heaven' with a church colleague on April 20, when a woman came up and engaged him in a debate about his faith

Dale McAlpine was charged with causing "harassment, alarm or distress" after a homosexual police community support officer (PCSO) overheard him reciting a number of "sins" referred to in the Bible, including

blasphemy, drunkenness and same sex relationships.

The 42-year-old Baptist, who has preached Christianity in Workington, Cumbria for years, said he did not mention homosexuality while delivering a sermon from the top of a stepladder, but admitted telling a passing shopper that he believed it went against the word of God.

Police officers are alleging that he made the remark in a voice loud enough to be overheard by others and have charged him with using abusive or insulting language, contrary to the Public Order Act.

Mr McAlpine, who was taken to the police station in the back of a marked van and locked in a cell for seven hours on April 20, said the incident was among the worst experiences of his life. "I felt deeply shocked and humiliated that I had been arrested in my own town and treated like a common criminal in front of people I know," he said. "My freedom was taken away on the hearsay of someone who disliked what I said, and I was charged under a law that doesn't apply."

Christian campaigners have expressed alarm that the Public Order Act, introduced in 1986 to tackle violent rioters and football hooligans, is being used to curb religious free speech.

Sam Webster, a solicitor-advocate for the Christian Institute, which is supporting Mr McAlpine, said it is not a crime to express the belief that homosexual conduct is a sin.

“The police have a duty to maintain public order but they also have a duty to defend the lawful free speech of citizens,” he said. “Case law has ruled that the orthodox Christian belief that homosexual conduct is sinful is a belief worthy of respect in a democratic society.”

Mr McAlpine was handing out leaflets explaining the Ten Commandments or offering a “ticket to heaven” with a church colleague on April 20, when a woman came up and engaged him in a debate about his faith.

During the exchange, he says he quietly listed homosexuality among a number of sins referred to in 1 Corinthians, including blasphemy, fornication, adultery and drunkenness.

After the woman walked away, she was approached by a PCSO who spoke with her briefly and then walked over to Mr McAlpine and told him a complaint had been made, and that he could be arrested for using racist or homophobic language.

The street preacher said he told the PCSO: “I am not homophobic but sometimes I do say that the Bible says homosexuality is a crime against the Creator”.

He claims that the PCSO then said he was homosexual and identified himself as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender liaison officer for Cumbria police. Mr McAlpine replied: “It’s still a sin.”

The preacher then began a 20 minute sermon, in which he says he mentioned drunkenness and adultery, but not homosexuality. Three regular uniformed police officers arrived during the address, arrested Mr McAlpine and put him in the back of a police van.

At the station, he was told to empty his pockets and his mobile telephone, belt and shoes were confiscated. Police took fingerprints, a palm print, a retina scan and a DNA swab.

He was later interviewed, charged under Sections 5 (1) and (6) of the Public Order Act and released on bail on the condition that he did not preach in public.

Mr McAlpine pleaded not guilty at a preliminary hearing on Friday at Wokingham magistrates court and is now awaiting a trial date.

The Public Order Act, which outlaws the unreasonable use of abusive language likely to cause distress, has been used to arrest religious people in a number of similar cases.

Harry Hammond, a pensioner, was convicted under Section 5 of the Act in 2002 for holding up a sign saying “Stop immorality. Stop Homosexuality. Stop Lesbianism. Jesus is Lord” while preaching in Bournemouth.

Stephen Green, a Christian campaigner, was arrested and charged in 2006 for handing out religious leaflets at a Gay Pride festival in Cardiff. The case against him was later dropped.

Cumbria police said last night that no one was available to comment on Mr McAlpine’s case.