

The Gospel Standard Trust

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To correspondents of Gospel Standard chapels

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Dear friends

Equality Law

As you know, the Charity Commission is the regulator of all charities in the UK. Churches occupying chapels with trust deeds are deemed charities in the eyes of UK law. The Commission requires that all charities be faithful to the terms of their constitutions as laid down by their founding trustees. In the case of churches these terms are the trust deed articles of faith. Most of these include an article which requires adherence to the scriptures as the church's authoritative guide in all matters.

But equality legislation which is being enacted in the UK is conflicting increasingly with the scriptures. Churches are therefore on the one hand, by law and by their own will subject to scripture rule, and on the other hand, by law subject to equality legislation in conflict with scripture rule.

Legal advice obtained by the Trust is that the churches can strengthen their position by defining their understanding of what scripture teaches on equality issues. By doing this, they evidence to the Authorities their faithfulness to the scripture rule of their charity's articles, and their faithfulness in giving serious consideration to the laws of the State. They could draw up an affirmation of their position for approval at a church meeting. We do have an example of such a statement (which has been considered by our solicitors) which is available on request.

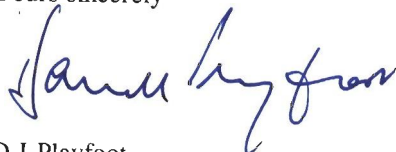
This could be particularly beneficial for churches registered for marriages but might also be relevant with respect to applications for membership, discipline and exclusion of members, appointment and removal of ministers and deacons. The church might define its understanding of scripture teaching on such subjects as marriage, same-sex relationships, transsexualism, all-male ministry, female head covering, the headship of the man exercised in church meetings etc.

We are advised that by agreeing, as a church, how the scripture rule determines the church's handling of such matters, some protection can be afforded against legal challenge under discrimination law by aggrieved individuals. For example, a practicing homosexual might challenge a rejection of his application for membership; a same sex couple might seek to force a perceived right to a civil partnership ceremony in a chapel; a female member barred from preaching might claim discrimination. If the church has approved a statement which has defined its scriptural position on such matters before they arise, and to which all the members have agreed, then legal challenges would be weakened.

It is important to note that the exceptions available under the Equality Act 2010 apply only to situations where Gospel Standard churches are considering matters related to their local church membership and beliefs. Interactions of the church, or individual church members, with the general public in such things as commercial or professional transactions will not attract the protection of the exceptions in the Act.

It is grievous that such steps have to be considered after hundreds of years of Christian history in this nation during which the scriptural teaching on these issues has been generally upheld by Church and State. May it be, as it was in corrupt Corinth, that the Lord still has many elect people in our country whom He will call from nature's darkness into His most marvellous light.

Yours sincerely



D J Playfoot

