

The Cost of Failing to Defend Marriage

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Last month, the Supreme Court of California handed down a ruling that many of us concerned about the institution of marriage in this country had feared. In a 4 – 3 ruling, the court struck down the state’s one-man one-woman marriage laws—including a voter-approved law passed by referendum in 2000 by a wide margin—and mandated same-sex marriage.

When debating the need for a constitutional amendment to protect marriage in 2004 and again in 2006, some who opposed the amendment argued that, despite their firm belief that marriage should be between a man and a woman, the specter of a rogue judiciary poised to overturn the will of the people of the states was a fantasy concocted by the amendment’s proponents. A constitutional amendment, they argued, was not necessary to protect the people against the bogeyman of “judicial activism.”

Apparently, judicial activism is alive and well, since the will of the people of California was not enough to prevent the justices on California’s Supreme Court from imposing their own redefinition of marriage on the state.

In the wake of this decision, it is apparent that the marriage laws of all 50 states continue to be at risk from judges who desire to legislate their views on important social issues from the bench, and that only a constitutional amendment will suffice to protect marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

Why is it so imperative that we protect and preserve the traditional definition of marriage in the United States?

In the long view of history, it seems likely that we will look back at the social changes identified with the decline of marriage and the family, which began to make cultural inroads in the 1960s, and conclude that this vast cultural experiment has been a very harmful failure, particularly harmful for our children.

That experiment, of course, continues apace today, but there are indications that America is beginning to reevaluate the matter, to assess where it is headed and whether, as a people, we need to correct this course.

If the experience of the last 40 years tells us anything, it is that the consequences of weakening the institution of marriage are tragic for society at large. The percentage of children born out of wedlock has increased **almost ten-fold** during this period. And the jury is in on our experiment in raising children without a mom and a dad: the verdict is that it increases the risks for children substantially.

Marriage is designed to maximize the chances that each child will be provided with a mother and a father, in a stable family setting, during the years when children are too young to fend for themselves. To redefine marriage in such a way as to remove its essential connection to parenthood is to take away its very purpose.

Study after study shows that children do best in a home with a married, biological mother and father. Children who grow up in such homes, compared to children in other types of households, are about 3 times less likely to repeat a grade in school, 5 times less likely to have behavioral problems, one-half as likely to be depressed, 3 times less likely to use drugs, one-half as likely to be sexually active, and 14 times less likely to suffer parental abuse. It is clear that the government has a special responsibility to safeguard the needs of children by upholding marriage; the social costs of *not* doing so are tremendous.

Those costs are financial as well as social. A recent study concluded that the breakdown of marriage costs taxpayers at least \$112 billion each year.

The establishment of same-sex marriage in the United States can only further weaken an institution already in jeopardy. If you want to understand what same-sex marriage could mean, take a look at the countries in Europe where they've had same-sex unions longer than anywhere else in the world. In Scandinavia, marriage was already on the rocks, even before they created same-sex partnerships. I don't think it's a coincidence that the one place in the world where marriage was weakest was the first place to try same-sex partnerships. And that step seems to have locked in and reinforced the problems with marriage that already existed in that region.

But the clearest example of the problems with same-sex marriage is The Netherlands. This is a country where out-of-wedlock births were actually relatively low.

But after formal same-sex marriage came in, out-of-wedlock birthrates shot up. It looks as though same-sex marriage had a lot to do with that. So it seems to me that in light of the European experience, the burden of proof is on those folks who would challenge our current definition of marriage. I don't want to take a chance on bringing Europe's weakened system of marriage here to the United States.

The moral imperative today is to do things that will *strengthen* marriage and help children, like eliminating disincentives to marriage in our welfare benefit system and reestablishing a culture that values moms and dads who get married and honor their commitments in marriage. Now is not the time to take the enormous risk of further weakening this vital foundation of our society.