

Beyond Gay Marriage

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Political conservatives have little difficulty establishing that they are against gay marriage. The difficulty comes when politicians seek to curry the favor of conservatives and still try to find a middle ground on this issue to attract moderate voters. Many suggest they would support civil unions or domestic partnerships. They try to have it both ways. In doing so, they violate one of our most fundamental principles of the role of government. That principle is that the least government necessary to solve a problem is usually the best government.

Let's look at the purposes of government in defining marriage. The best way to do this is to review the appropriate role of government in regulating private affairs.

What if we did not have a government institution called marriage? In that case, people would choose to live together based on their feelings for each other or for achieving some common purpose. We would recognize very quickly that only one type of relationship would rise to the level of critical government interest and concern. That is the relationship between one man and one woman, because it produces offspring.

Society would quickly determine that providing incentives to keep these relationships intact, for as long as possible, is a very high priority. Through reasonable legal means, we would make provisions for these relationships to hold property, share benefits, and provide the best possible nurturing environment for the next generation. We would spell out responsibilities in these relationships. We would also determine the conditions for the resolution of these benefits and responsibilities in the event that the marriage is terminated. That is exactly what we have done in defining marriage.

The failure of traditional marriages has a devastating impact on peoples' lives, most often the lives of women and children. We need to look no further than the poverty statistics for single women with children. Such failures often have negative impacts on society as well, and increase the demands for government resources and services. No other relationship rises to this level of government concern. No other relationship is as important for the protection and provision of the next generation. For exactly those reasons, government has limited the definition of marriage to the union of one man and one woman.

One might argue that many other types of relationships have value for those who choose to participate in them. Why not include them in the definition of marriage?

First, it is important not to change the focus of people entering into the marriage contract. This is not about feelings and it is not about the mutual benefit of the two parties. It is about the next generation. If we change the definition of marriage solely to accommodate these other purposes, then the expectation of people entering into marriage will change.

Marriage will become a decision to stay together as long as two people love each other or as long as it is to their mutual benefit. Unfortunately, this is not sufficient for the welfare of our children. Marriage needs to be a commitment that goes beyond the moment and looks to what is best for the children in spite of these other considerations.

A second argument is that we could easily include other relationships without hurting the traditional institution of marriage. There are many valid two-party relationships that could easily be added to the list. The homosexual community says gay marriage is one of those. What about brothers and sisters, same sex siblings, an elderly parent dependent upon an adult child, two good friends, and so forth? All of these relationships have value for the parties involved. Why not include them as well?

Of course, the answer is that we need to keep government intervention in relationships to a minimum and focus our resources on the critical group we originally identified, the children. To do otherwise would simply reduce resources available to sustain children and families of traditional marriages and diminish the level of societal commitment to this one most important union.

Government has a compelling interest to intervene in this one relationship and define marriage as it has traditionally done. Other relationships do not rise to this level of government involvement and government should stay out of them!