

Resolution on the Distinction Between Marriage and Same-Sex Relationships (2002)

In the case of *Halpern v. City of Toronto*, the Ontario Divisional Court ruled on July 12, 2002 that the common law definition of marriage as “the lawful and voluntary union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others” is constitutionally invalid and inoperative.

Since that time the federal government appealed the Ontario Court’s ruling and announced that a Parliamentary Committee will examine the issue of marriage in the Fall of 2002. The committee will review the current court decisions (the Ontario case and a previous British Columbia case) as well as hold hearings across Canada. The committee will report back to Parliament with a recommendation as to how same-sex relationships should be recognized under law.

At the present time, the various levels of Canadian government have recognized the unique role of marriage, and a distinction between marriage and other types of domestic relationships has been maintained.

It is possible, however, that provincial legislatures and parliament eventually will recognize some sort of domestic relationship in addition to the traditional view of marriage. Currently, at every level of society, many benefits are guaranteed and extended to these other relationships. Since July 2001, the Province of Nova Scotia has recognized domestic partners. The Province of Quebec also has passed legislation recognizing same-sex “civil unions.”

The recent court cases regarding the recognition of same-sex relationships have the potential to radically change the definition of marriage. It is our conviction that marriage should not be redefined or undermined. Its unique status and special protection under law should be maintained for the good of families and society.

If legislators choose to recognize other forms of domestic relationships, it should be done without redefining or undermining the distinct role of heterosexual marriage. If other domestic relationships come to be recognized under law, we believe that a separate legal term should be applied to the “union” of these relationships.

This issue presents an enormous challenge to our elected officials. They listen to conflicting arguments from their constituents, and, whatever their own personal opinion and conviction might be, they find themselves pulled in different directions. We believe they need our prayerful support and that they need to hear from concerned Christian citizens on this matter.

We need to hear and understand the mind of God, but we must also communicate it in a way that builds bridges, not walls. We will not gain access to the minds of the legislators if we are caustic and bitter in either word or attitude. Let us approach our elected officials in the Spirit of Christ with due respect, kindness and courtesy, as the Scriptures admonish us.

Resolution

Whereas the federal government has announced that a Parliamentary Committee will examine the issue of marriage in the Fall of 2002, and the Committee will recommend how same-sex relationships should be legally recognized;

And whereas we believe that heterosexual marriage is distinct from other domestic relationships and has a unique role as the cornerstone of society;

And whereas we believe that heterosexual marriage should be recognized distinctly and protected vigorously under Canadian law;

Therefore, be it resolved, that we, the delegates to the 156th Annual Assembly of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches,

1. Understand and affirm the biblical view of marriage to be the life-long union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others; and
2. Pray specifically for the elected officials across Canada who need our prayers and our informed input as they wrestle with this critical issue;

Be it further resolved,

3. That we urge our constituent churches and our Convention leaders to speak to the appropriate levels of Canadian government on the issue of same-sex domestic relationships and its impact on the unique nature of marriage and the family; and
4. That we urge the Members of Legislative Assemblies and Members of Parliament to continue to affirm the distinctive nature of heterosexual marriage and to seek to protect it and uphold it in law and public policy.