

Boyd K. Packer, "The Equal Rights Amendment,"
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The following address was given at Pocatello, Idaho, on January 8, 1977, and subsequently at other locales in the United States. Elder Packer was invited to speak at the Pocatello public meeting with other speakers representing organizations opposed to ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The invitation to me, an officer of the Church, to speak in this public meeting, came, I suppose, because the Church has taken a position with reference to the Equal Rights Amendment.

Concern for this issue is not limited to one political party or another, to any church as compared to the others, to any organizations, but indeed is an issue that should be of critical concern to everyone in this land.

I was invited to speak, as compared perhaps to any of the other general officers of the Church, because my area of assignment includes a broad section of the United States and Canada, and includes the state of Idaho.

Our concerns, of course, are basically moral and spiritual. This is that kind of an issue. It is quite as difficult to separate the spiritual and moral implications from some issues as it is to include them with some others.

I came to speak my own mind, to tell you what I believe and what I think about the Equal Rights Amendment. But more than that, to emphasize if I can, how I *feel* about this issue.

There are feelings, you know, more important than believing or thinking.

It has been explained to me that others will present an analysis of how this amendment will affect local institutions, and yet others will explain how to go about doing something about it.

I want to emphasize early in my remarks that I recognize, with the proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment, that there are some things that need doing to elevate the status of women in society. Some of them desperately need doing.

Where there are inequalities, they are to be deplored. To emphasize this point, I read the official statement of the First Presidency of the Church, in which they take note of these inequities and yet, recognizing them, they set the Church in opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment as a means to remedy them.

"From its beginnings, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has affirmed the exalted role of woman in our society.

"In 1842, when women's organizations were little known, the Prophet Joseph Smith established the women's organization of the Church, the Relief Society, as a companion body of the Priesthood. The Relief Society continues to function today as a vibrant, worldwide organization aimed at strengthening motherhood and broadening women's

learning and involvement in religious, compassionate, cultural, educational, and community pursuits.

“In Utah, where our Church is headquartered, women received the right to vote in 1870, fifty years before the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted the right nationally.

“There have been injustices to women before the law and in society generally. These we deplore.

“There are additional rights to which women are entitled.

“However, we firmly believe that the Equal Rights Amendment is not the answer.

“While the motives of its supporters may be praiseworthy, ERA as a blanket attempt to help women could indeed bring them far more restraints and repressions. We fear it will even stifle many God-given feminine instincts.

“It would strike at the family, humankind’s basic institution. ERA would bring ambiguity and possibly invite extensive litigation.

“Passage of ERA, some legal authorities contend, could nullify many accumulated benefits to women in present statutes.

“We recognize men and women as equally important before the Lord, but with differences biologically, emotionally, and in other ways.

“ERA, we believe, does not recognize these differences. There are better means for giving women, and men, the rights they deserve.”

I recognize that the proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment may be well intentioned in their desire to improve the status of women.

We need to be very alert as to what the amendment would do besides what is intended. It is so easy to set about to solve a problem and end up creating yet a greater one.

Most of our problems, someone has said, came from solutions.

Should the Equal Rights Amendment pass, it threatens to be chief among the problems which were intended to be solutions.

Even with good intentions, so many adverse things can unwittingly be brought about.

When I was in junior high school we had a mandatory health class. There was a chapter in our textbook on contagious diseases which included the account of an incident that had occurred in the early part of the century. The events recorded were these:

The children came home one day and reported that the neighbor child had the chicken pox. The mother was upset! The matter of trying to keep her children from being exposed was a nuisance. Often they caught the disease anyway.

About the time one would be recovering, another would come down with it, and by the time the disease had run its course from one to another, that telltale chicken pox sign would be in their window for weeks.

Finally, determining that this could be resolved in another way, she called on her neighbor.

“I’m sending my children over,” she said. “They might just as well all get the chicken pox at once and then we’ll be done with it. They will be immunized thereafter and won’t have to put up with that for the rest of their lives. We can solve this problem once and for all.

“I’ll send them over to play and perhaps they could have a meal with your child. I wouldn’t even care if they ate off the same dishes.”

And so it was done. Some days later, after the normal incubation time for the disease, her children showed signs that the plan was indeed working. They were irritable, and fevered, and the rest.

That afternoon word was sent to tell her that things had not gone well at the neighbor’s house. They finally had called in the doctor. It was not chicken pox at all, the doctor had told them. It was smallpox. That night the neighbor youngster died.

How often it is that our solutions become problems. This, it seems to me, is particularly true in the government. One of the major issues, perhaps *the* major issue, of both parties in the recent political campaign, was big government.

The bigger the government becomes the more lost we are as individuals. Somehow, always under the notion that our rights are being protected, webs are combined with threads, and threads are added to strings, and strings are fashioned into cords, and cords into ropes, and ropes into bonds.

An excellent example of how things can get tangled up is the regulation issued under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972.

The intent of that act was to prevent sex discrimination in federally assisted educational programs. As passed by Congress, Title IX was stated in twenty-seven words.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare, charged with its enforcement, published extensive regulations to enforce those twenty-seven words in Title IX.

The regulations put together at sublevels in the bureaucracy amounted to about *20,000* words!

Those who made these interpretations are neither known to be representative of the general feelings of the public, nor to understand the far-reaching effect of the regulations.

Those 20,000 words of regulation are now being vigorously applied as law. They involve issues that Congress neither acted upon nor intended.

Some of the results must be termed as preposterous: others of them surely must be unconstitutional.

One interpretation, for example, caused the prohibition of schools from sponsoring father-and-son activities of any kind, or mother-and-daughter activities of any kind.

It took a presidential order from a very irate president of the United States to get some sense into that.

But the rest of it is still being imposed. And the requirements seek to compel all public schools to abandon standards of personal morality and conduct.

Should the Equal Rights Amendment pass, those few words would be open to interpretation—not at the local or state level.

The amendment is so undesirable because it would remove the power of interpreting the meaning of laws relating to sex discrimination from state courts and vest it in federal courts.

The way opens then to endless litigation with webs and strings and cords and ropes and bonds.

Existing laws, if properly enforced, could effect the corrections necessary.

Even some proponents of ERA have admitted that a Constitutional amendment is not really needed to achieve the desired legal reforms.

They argue, however, that its adoption represents some kind of a symbolic gesture, some overcorrection of a long neglected cause.

The more strident supporters will view it, no doubt, as symbolic support for antifamily and unisex values.

The states presently retain significant powers to regulate family relations and property rights, and some working conditions in harmony with the customs and ideals of the people in their state.

All of this would be gobbled up in the great bureaucracies of the federal government. And like Title IX, a few words intended as a protection will become a threat.

The effort to cure a threat of chicken pox may once again see us exposed, dangerously exposed, to a virulent and deadly smallpox.

Among the great dangers in the amendment is the fact that it would deprive lawmakers and government officials alike of the right by legal means to honor the vital differences in the roles of men and women.

Some government officials are sure to see their responsibility, not just to effect *equality* between men and women, but to attempt by regulation to remove all of the *differences* between them.

If we are subjected to the same excesses as under Title IX, men and women would be subjected to precisely the same regulations of all kinds, at all times. (Many thoughtful wives haven't the slightest desire to be reduced to equality with their husbands.)

We cannot eliminate, through any pattern of legislation or regulation, the differences between men and women.

There are basic things that a man needs that a woman does not need. There are things that a man feels that a woman never does feel.

There are basic things that a woman needs that a man never needs, and there are things that a woman feels that a man never feels nor should he.

These differences make women, in basic needs, literally opposite from men.

A man, for instance, needs to feel protective, and yes, dominant, if you will, in leading his family. A woman needs to feel protected, in the bearing of children and in the nurturing of them.

Have you ever thought what life would be like if the needs of men and women were naturally precisely the same?

What would it be like if they both naturally needed to feel dominant all of the time, or both naturally needed to feel protected all of the time?

How disturbed and intolerable things would be.

When God created male and female, He gave each important differences in physical attributes, in emotional composition, in family responsibility. We must protect and honor the vital differences in the roles of men and women, especially in respect to the family.

These issues were raised, not successfully, in the Congress. Senator Irvine introduced an amendment to the Equal Rights Amendment, which I quote:

“This article shall not impair, however, the validity of any law of the United States, nor any state, which exempts women from the compulsory military service or which is reasonably designed to promote the health, safety, privacy, education, or economic welfare of women, or to enable them to perform their duties as homemakers or mothers.”

His amendment was defeated, and leaves the home and the family vulnerable.

In the Church we show intense and constant concern for the home and for the family. I think it can be truly said that the ultimate end of all activity in the Church is to see a father and a mother and their children happy at home, to see them happy as a family—eternally.

If the efforts of our Church officers and organizations and the influence of our Church building programs and curriculums are not ultimately to effect the happiness of the individual and the strength and stability of the family, there is grave question as to whether they are any good at all.

We care about the family. We study the family. We pray over the family. We work for the stability of the family. We work to preserve and protect the institution of the family.

We analyze the effect of every influence that comes along, as it may ultimately change by way of strengthening, or threaten by way of weakening, the family.

We have the lingering, ominous suspicion that the proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment have paid little, if any, attention to the family at all.

I personally deplore the fact, one apparently conceded by some of the proponents, that the Equal Rights Amendment would make it impossible for the government to make any distinction between men and women for military service.

They would be compelled to draft women in time of war in order to draft men, and they would be compelled to force women into combat, lest they could not force men to do likewise.

The proponents of ERA stress that none of these things will happen. A study of how government works, especially in recent years, will not sustain them in that assurance.

Whatever the intention of the advocates may be, the effects of sowing this wind will be the reaping of the whirlwind for all of us and for our posterity.

It is not quick immunization from an aggravating case of social chicken pox they pursue. It is exposure, without thoughtful diagnosis and without prior vaccination, to smallpox of a most lethal kind.

There is something else I call to your attention, another fundamental reason to face these issues and resist the Equal Rights Amendment now. There is something beyond more frightening even than this.

Already, children's rights emerges as an issue. The ugly specter of child abuse, a malignancy that is spreading itself through our society, has social workers, educators, clergymen, political and government leaders restless and anxious and disgusted.

Before any careful diagnosis of what causes this sickening problem, some, no doubt, will try to solve it through sweeping legislation. And they'll do this before we recognize the fact that child abuse is a pure symptom of broken down families or disturbed relationships between fathers and mothers and between parents and children.

The cure for it lies in the strength and stability of the American home in the spiritual and moral and emotional health of families.

Before we diagnose that correctly, we could further weaken the family with threads and cords and bonds—and smallpox.

One so-called authority has written on the subject and proposes that children should have the right to complete sexual freedom. "Other societies don't worry about it. It's just a big idea in our society. People are so worried about children having sexual intercourse."

When asked if pre-teens should engage in sexual relations, his answer was, "Sure, why not. You can't keep the child systematically ignorant of how they come into this world when they're sexual from birth."

He favors ending compulsory education, giving children the right to choose a home other than that of their parents, and the right to work as an alternative to compulsory education, and the right to vote.

And he states, and I think not without some truth. "Most of my ideals are not radical to people who are professionals in the field." Then he adds, "We are in a position with respect to children that we were to women in 1958."

He then predicts that the move to liberate children "will make the women's movement seem small by comparison."

In the Church we have a deep and abiding faith in the sacred nature of family ties and the sanctity of marriage, in the exalted station of women.

I read earlier the statement released by the First Presidency of the Church. Recently a letter was sent by the President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles to the leaders of stakes and missions throughout the United States. I quote a paragraph.

“As the Equal Rights Amendment issue is activated in some states, we suggest that you urge members of the Church, *as citizens* of this great nation, to join others in efforts to defeat ERA.”

And a further sentence:

“Please keep in mind that Church buildings and organizations are not to be used for this or any other political or legislative purposes.”

We claim the right as citizens to have opinions on these matters and to express them, and to stand in opposition to legislation that threatens the home and the family.

Last June 5th on a Saturday morning, the Teton Dam collapsed. The little community of Wilford, immediately in the path of the flood, disappeared.

A mile or two downstream, Sugar City was likewise completely destroyed.

A few miles further was Rexburg, with seven or eight thousand people in the path of the water.

And farther down the valley, almost to here where we stand, another 25,000 or 30,000 people were in terrible danger.

You know of those events. Some interesting lessons came out of that.

A few days after the flood, in company with President Spencer W. Kimball, I attended a meeting at Ricks College where the flood victims were being housed.

A double session with over four thousand attending each session was held, because the fieldhouse was not large enough to get them all together at once.

Near the close of the second session, President Kimball leaned over to me and whispered. “I haven’t seen a really unhappy person in the audience.”

A strange statement indeed!

You could see courage, and resilience, relief and determination; but there was no evidence of misery or defeat.

They had lost their home, their farms, their automobiles, their boats, their livestock, their furniture, their personal treasures, but all of that seemed secondary.

I have gone over reports and read very carefully many personal accounts written by victims of the flood.

What did they think of first in the moment of great crisis? What was uppermost in their minds? They thought of their *families!*

When the issues of life and death were at hand, the one thing more valuable than all else, more important than all other things that they possessed, was their family.

The water was controlled behind the Teton Dam. When metered out *judiciously* (and I emphasize that word) and wisely, the water was life-giving and fundamental to the well being of the people.

When the controls collapsed, all at once it was devastation!

We have something ahead in our society if some of us are foolishly permitted to pull down all of the controls at once.

We might well pray that God would grant that the proponents of equal rights for women will go about their work wisely and judiciously. If they do, we should all join them and should be among them.

I said to begin with that I was here to speak my own mind and give my own feelings, and they are that the Equal Rights Amendment is not the answer.

One might ask then, if you are against the Equal Rights Amendment, then what are you for?

I am for the equitable enforcement of existing laws. There are sufficient of them to protect the rights of women and of children and of men. Or to enact judiciously and wisely any needed legislation to correct particular circumstances.

I am for protecting the rights of a woman to be a woman, a feminine, female woman; a wife and a mother.

I am for protecting the rights of a man to be a man, a masculine, male man; a husband and a father.

I am for protecting the rights of children to be babies and children and youth, to be nurtured in a home and in a family.

I am for recognizing the inherent God-given differences between men and women.

I am for accommodating them so that we can have physically and emotionally and spiritually stable, happy individuals and families and communities.

Without that, when the floods come, in the end what will really be worth saving?

May God bless us and preserve the sacred institution of the family, to the end that this generation and future generations can be preserved. May He bless fathers and mothers and their children to be happy in the life pattern He has ordained.