

A Sad Day for Australia

On December 7, 2017, the Australian Parliament voted to legalise gay “marriage.” The civil definition of marriage was re-written to refer to “the union of two people,” instead of a man and a woman.

Now that the Marriage Act has changed, what does this mean for us as a church in the eyes of the state. Hopefully, for now anyway, not much.

According to the Australian government, the AELC is not a recognised denomination. For such churches, its ministers have been registered as ‘civil celebrants.’ Now, with the change to the Marriage Act, the marriage licence of pastors of non-recognised denominations have been changed. They are now registered as “religious marriage celebrants.’

This has happened in order to protect pastors from having to go against their faith and conscience in marrying couples of the same sex. Section 47A of the Marriage Act states that *a religious marriage celebrant may refuse to solemnise a marriage if the celebrant’s religious beliefs do not allow the celebrant to solemnise the marriage. This means that a religious marriage celebrant may act in accordance with their personal religious beliefs, in deciding whether to solemnise a marriage. This includes decisions about whether to solemnise a same-sex marriage.*

Also, under subsection 40(2AA) of the Sex Discrimination Act, *a religious marriage celebrant may refuse to solemnise a marriage because of a party’s sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, or marital or relationship status if that refusal is consistent with the religious marriage celebrant’s personal religious beliefs.*

When it comes to protections for a church body or congregation, there is nothing mentioned in the Act that protects churches, unless they are a recognised denomination. Subsection 47(3) of the Marriage Act states that *a minister of religion from a recognised denomination has the right to refuse to solemnise marriage if that marriage is not consistent with the doctrines, tenets or beliefs of the minister’s religious body or organisation.*

Since the AELC is not a recognised denomination, there really are no lawful protections put in place for us. However, it is rather unlikely that any gay marriages will be carried out in any of our congregations!

So again, I don’t believe things will change much for us, and yet, while we certainly would not marry same-sex couples simply because such an act is contrary to the Word of God, and an absolute abomination, as society continues to break down, we could easily find ourselves in the firing-line for taking a stand against same-sex “marriage.” Our preaching and teaching in regards to the true definition of marriage as God has ordained, namely between man and woman, and the warnings we give of the evils of same-sex marriage, could find us on the wrong side of the law. Already in some countries like Sweden, any anti-homosexual speech is a criminal offense, including sermons or Bible

readings that condemn homosexual behaviour. Pastors can be fined and cited for ‘unacceptable’ sermons. Earlier this year a Christian evangelist was accused of a hate crime and locked up in a cell after preaching from the Bible to a gay teenager in England. His crime? He referred to the Book of Genesis and stated that God created Adam and Eve to produce children. And in overseas countries where same-sex “marriage” has become law, many organisations (including church organisations that help the poor and needy through many different programs) have lost their tax-free status, and other concessions afforded to them by the State. We can expect that to happen in the future here too.

What shall we do? First of all, we ask God to forgive our nation, asking Him to turn such people away from homosexuality in repentance back to Him. We ask Him to guide those in authority over us, giving our elected leaders the courage and strength to stand up against this evil. And we ask Him to guide and protect us, His church. We ask for boldness to proclaim His Word of truth in an ever-increasing hostile world. For those who struggle with this sin, we help them to overcome such sin by reminding them of the free forgiveness God gives to those who repent, and warning those who do not repent that eternal judgment and condemnation awaits.

Regardless of what the government says, same-sex “marriage” violates God’s design for marriage, so it’s not real marriage. God as the Creator has defined marriage (Genesis 2:24) as between one man and one woman, and we don’t have the authority to redefine what God has created. As a church, we will continue to proclaim what the right and proper definition of marriage is, as ordained by God. Even though for a marriage to be legally recognised by the state, the words “the union of two people...” must be spoken, in the eyes of God, proper marriage is only between man and woman.