

Invisible Women

Sue Bohlin addresses the call for the church to meet the needs of single moms and those widowed by death, divorce, desertion, and imprisonment.

The other morning at church, I was talking to one of our church leaders as he spotted one of our three-year-olds making a run for the lobby. He called the boy's name three times, including extending his hand for a high-five, and was ignored all three times. (I'm a boy mom. I get it. The little guy was completely focused on escaping the worship center—no room for any other thoughts!) Laughing, I asked my friend, "Hey, how are you doing with that 'feeling invisible' thing?"

He was fine with it. But there are a number of people in our churches for whom feeling invisible is no laughing matter. It hurts.

A few days later, I was privileged to teach on 1 Timothy 5, where Paul gives Timothy direction on caring well for the widows in his congregation. In preparing for my message, I learned that in the first century, "widow" referred to a much larger group of women than just those whose husbands had died.

Widows could be women who had lost husbands through death, divorce, desertion, or imprisonment. (We have all four of those in our church.) They could even be women whose polygamist husbands had come to faith in Christ and learned that God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman, and they sent all but one wife away. Widows could also refer to unmarried women; the sense of "widow" in the first century was a "without-a-man woman." And of course in that time, when women had so few rights and privileges, that was a scary situation.

Paul's instruction to Timothy on superintending the care of widows resonates with how important vulnerable women are to

God. The Old Testament has 32 references to widows or widows and orphans! If God says something once it's important . . . but THIRTY-TWO TIMES??!! In the New Testament, the Lord's brother James sums up this Old Testament value, defining true religion as caring for widows and orphans in their distress (1:27).

How should the church care for vulnerable women today? The ones who can easily feel invisible in the church?

One group we need to take better care of is single moms.

I asked my dear friend, a single mom, about her experience. She was grateful for the ways in which a few people from her church stepped in to provide physically in various ways:

- A new friend brought her son to the hospital when she was suddenly admitted, and then cared for him until she was discharged.
- They mowed her lawn
- Some folks gave her a break by taking her son for a few hours to several days
- One especially memorable year, a man took her son to the store to get my friend her one and only Mother's Day gift

But she was always plagued by a constant longing—for belonging, for protection and help, for men to provide balance to her over-protective feminine mothering.

- She longed for a healthy family to draw them into their home and invite them for meals and family times together so they could see what "healthy" and "loving" and "respectful" looked like.
- She longed for a man to invest in her son so he could see how the boy treated his mom and take him aside to say, "Hey buddy, it's not OK to talk to your mom that way."
- She longed for a family to say, "Come spend Christmas

with us” so it wasn’t just her and her son alone with the Christmas tree—again.

In addition to relational needs, many single moms have needs for practical assistance concerning their homes and cars. And another group of “invisible women” with the same kinds of needs are older single women.

Typical practical needs:

- Help with assembling furniture such as from Ikea
- Trimming trees and other kinds of yard work
- Home repair
- Changing out-of-reach light bulbs
- Winterizing (and then summerizing) a house
- Organizing a closet, room, or garage
- Changing the oil in the car
- Moving stuff (both to a new home and just moving heavy furniture in the house)
- Plumbing help such as installing a new faucet, fixing a dripping faucet or running toilet
- Installing a ceiling fan
- Grocery shopping
- Rides to the doctor, chemo appointments, tests, surgeries and procedures
- Babysitting and carting kids places they need to go
- Helping with budgeting and financial direction
- Meals: home-cooked and delivered, gift cards to restaurants

Just as in the church at Ephesus when Paul was helping Timothy love his people well, we need to connect those with needs, with the people gifted to serve. Or even those without supernatural giftings for service, but a generous, Christlike heart to love others. That’s how the church cares for its own.

So they don’t feel invisible.

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blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/invisible-women/ on October 25, 2020.

“Should I Divorce My Wife Since I’m Not Attracted to Her Anymore?”

Hi my name is _____ from Burundi. My question is about divorce. My wife told me about her past but I am still bothered by it whereby she slept with old men and foreigners, and aborted many times, so since I heard that I have lost even the appetite of being sexually attracted to her, so should I go for divorce?

I was born with a heart for preaching to people about the heaven and the hell, and I am still jealous to find out that Satan has many people I am determined to bring them to God and create a church similar to what apostles were doing whereby they were sharing everything together.

Churches of today especially in Africa, they get an Aid and share it among elders instead of helping some church members who are facing troubles, lucky enough I am rich blessed by God. But all the work of I am afraid that it would be compromised by the divorce I am thinking to go through.

Please your advices. God bless you.

I am so glad you wrote. Your desire to serve God is admirable, and you are correct in thinking your ministry would be compromised by divorce.

God's best is always, ALWAYS forgiveness and reconciliation. That is how He is most glorified in our relationships, especially marriage. Please read the book of Hosea for an excellent example of God's heart of forgiveness and reconciliation as He had his prophet Hosea marry and then continue to extend forgiveness to his wife Gomer as an illustration of God's relationship with His unfaithful earthly wife, Israel.

This does not mean that your heart is not broken by your wife's sin before your marriage. Her sin required the death of the Son of God—it's serious! But brother, YOUR sin also required the death of the Son of God, and you had to go to God with humility and repentance, asking for His forgiveness, in order to become a believer in Jesus Christ and enter His family. He is asking you to extend to your wife the forgiveness that He so graciously gave you. Please read Matthew 18, the whole chapter, at least three times so that you can grasp God's heart for the lost, and the importance of forgiving those who hurt us. Divorcing your wife out of a hard-hearted bitterness and unforgiveness will not only block the flow of God's grace in your life, but it will keep you open to the "tormentors" (Matthew 18:34). Here is a link to a very good, biblically sound message and explanation of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ff7whIExhk

I strongly believe that if you forgive your wife and seek to love and serve her as Christ loves and serves the church (Ephesians 5:25-30), your desire to be with her sexually will return as you allow God to soften your heart.

Please, brother, take seriously Jesus' command that "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mark 10:9). His plan for marriage is lifelong commitment between husband and wife, with ongoing forgiveness between us.

Blessing you,
Sue Bohlin

Muslim Beliefs on Sexuality

Islamic teaching on sexual issues varies significantly from a Christian biblical position in several areas. But, as we have seen in other areas, the beliefs of average Muslims do not necessarily follow the teachings of Islam.

[Over the last several months](#), we have been looking at the religious beliefs and practices as expressed by a worldwide, Muslim population in an extensive Pew Research Center survey^{1} taken in 2012. We have compared those beliefs and practices with those of Americans toward the Christian faith as documented in several recent surveys.

Now, I would like to turn our attention to some cultural beliefs and behaviors. In particular, we will begin by looking at beliefs concerning sexual behavior. Once again the survey data on Muslims will be divided into five regions: North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Russia, and Turkey), the 'Stans (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this evaluation, we will use questions asked in the Pew survey. The questions are worded, "I personally believe that _____ is morally acceptable, morally wrong, or it is not a moral issue." The five topics considered (as they are worded in the survey) are:

1. Sex between people who are not married
2. Homosexual behavior

3. Having an abortion
4. Polygamy (having more than one wife)
5. Divorce

A person following the Qur'an and the Hadith would say that the first two items above are morally wrong while the last two items would be considered morally acceptable with some constraints. The question about abortion is not directly addressed in the Qur'an or Hadith. The way in which Muslims actually responded is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Muslims Believing a Behavior is Morally Wrong

	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	'Stans	South Asia
Sex outside marriage & Homosexuality	84.7%	88.7%	68.9%	77.2%	84.1%
Abortion	73.2%	64.4%	72.0%	52.6%	83.6%
All of the above	67.5%	66.9%	56.5%	44.3%	77.3%
Polygamy	25.2%	30.1%	73.0%	57.7%	39.8%
Divorce	17.0%	34.2%	20.2%	30.4%	27.8%
All behaviors	7.2%	13.6%	11.6%	13.5%	13.9%

As shown, they are fairly consistent on fornication and homosexuality, with strong majorities stating that they are both morally wrong. However, Eastern European Muslims appear to have been influenced by the culture around them, falling about 16 percentage points lower than the average for other areas in the world.

On the question of abortion, we find a greater variation across geographic areas. Those Muslims in South Asia are most united in their views, with well over 80% of them saying that abortion is morally wrong. In contrast, the Muslims of the 'Stans are about evenly split with just over half saying it is morally wrong. The Middle East is not as strong as one might expect, with about two out of three people agreeing that abortion is morally wrong.

Polygamy, seen as acceptable in the Qur'an with a man allowed to have up to four wives, is seen quite differently in different geographic areas. In North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the majority of Muslims **do not** consider it to be morally wrong. In contrast, in Eastern Europe and the 'Stans, a strong majority of Muslims consider it **to be** morally wrong. Of course most of the Muslims in Eastern Europe and the 'Stans grew up in the Soviet Union or Soviet bloc countries where polygamy was presumably illegal.

Finally, we see that most Muslims across all geographic locations do not believe that divorce is morally wrong.

If we consider that the Christian Bible teaches us that all of these actions are morally wrong (with some exceptions for divorce), we realize (looking at the bottom row of the table) that nine out of ten Muslims do not agree with that perspective.

Looking at data on similar topics from residents of the United States, we find the following:

Table 2: American Christians Believing a Behavior is Not Right

	All	Born Again Christian	All Others	Source
Sex before marriage & Homosexual relations	16.9%	32.8%	7.0%	GSS 2014 ^{2}
Abortion	44.9%	62.0%	34.5%	GSS 2014
All of the above	13.2%	25.6%	5.4%	
Homosexual relations	23.3%	41.7%	13.4%	Baylor 2010 ^{3}
Divorce with children	29.2%	47.1%	19.4%	Baylor 2010

Comparing the two tables and focusing on the Born Again Christian column, we observe that worldwide Muslims are much more likely to see sex outside of marriage and homosexual relations as morally wrong. On abortion, born again Christians have a similar response as Muslims. But born again Christians are more likely to oppose divorce when children are involved than Muslims.

On the whole, it appears that Muslims are more likely to agree with the teachings of the Qur'an than born again, American Christians are to agree with the teachings of the Bible. However, Muslims do not agree with the full set of biblical stances on sexual issues.

Notes

1. The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by James Bell, Director of International Survey Research.
2. General Social Survey 2014 conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith of the NORC.
3. Baylor University. 2010. The Baylor Religion Survey, Wave III. Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Kevin D. Dougherty, Paul Froese, Andrew L. Whitehead, Jerry Z. Park, Mitchell J. Neubert.

Divorce – A Biblical Christian Perspective

Kerby Anderson examines the epidemic of divorce from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. He presents data on its impact on families and society and compares the trend with biblical teaching on the subject.

Families are experiencing many problems today, but the role of divorce in this picture has been frequently overlooked because its destructive effects have been subtle, yet insidious. When the divorce rate increased in the 1960s, few would have predicted its dire consequences three decades later. Yet divorce has changed both the structure and the impact of the family.

This is not just the conclusion of Christians, but also the conclusion of non-Christian researchers working in the field. Clinical psychologist Diane Medved set out to write a book to help couples facing transitions due to divorce. She begins her book with this startling statement:

I have to start with a confession: This isn't the book I set out to write. I planned to write something consistent with my previous professional experience helping people with decision making. . . . For example, I started this project believing that people who suffer over an extended period in unhappy marriages ought to get out...I thought that striking down taboos about divorce was another part of the ongoing enlightenment of the women's, civil- rights, and human potential movements of the last twenty-five years...To my utter befuddlement, the extensive research I conducted for this book brought me to one inescapable and irrefutable conclusion: I had been wrong."(1)

She titled her book *The Case Against Divorce*.

Until the 1960s, divorce has been a relatively rare phenomenon. Certainly there have always been some couples who have considered divorce an option. But fundamental changes in our society in the last few decades have changed divorce from being rare to routine.

During the 1970s, the divorce rate doubled (and the number of divorces tripled from 400,000 in 1962 to 1.2 million in 1981).(2) The increase in the divorce rate came not from older couples but from the baby boom generation. One sociologist at Stanford University calculated that while men and women in their twenties comprised only about 20 percent of the population, they contributed 60 percent of the growth in the divorce rate in the 1960s and early 1970s.(3)

This increase was due to at least two major factors: attitude and opportunity. The baby boom generation's attitude toward such issues as fidelity, chastity, and commitment were strikingly different from their parents'. Their parents would stay in a marriage in order to make it work. Baby boomers, however, were less committed to the ideal of marriage and quite willing to end what they felt was a bad marriage and move on with their lives. While their parents might keep a marriage going "for the sake of the kids," the baby boom generation as a whole was much less concerned about such issues.

Economic opportunities also seem to be a significant factor in divorce. The rise in divorce closely parallels the increase in the number of women working. Women with a paycheck were less likely to stay in a marriage that wasn't fulfilling to them. Armed with a measure of economic power, many women had less incentive to stay in a marriage and work out their differences with their husbands. A study of mature women done at Ohio State University found that the higher a woman's income in relation to the total income of her family, the more likely she was to seek a divorce.(4)

Divorce and Children

Divorce is having a devastating impact on both adults and children. Every year, parents of over 1 million children divorce. These divorces effectively cut one generation off from another. Children are reared without the presence of their father or mother. Children are often forced to take sides in the conflict. And, children often carry the scars of the conflict and frequently blame themselves for the divorce.

So what is the impact? Well, one demographer looking at this ominous trend of divorce and reflecting on its impact, acknowledged:

No one knows what effect divorce and remarriage will have on the children of the baby boom. A few decades ago, children of divorced parents were an oddity. Today they are the majority. The fact that divorce is the norm may make it easier for children to accept their parents' divorce. But what will it do to their marriages in the decades ahead? No one will know until it's too late to do anything about it.(5)

What little we do know about the long-term impact of divorce is disturbing. In 1971, Judith Wallerstein began a study of sixty middle-class families in the midst of divorce. Her ongoing research has provided a longitudinal study of the long-term effects of divorce on parents and children.

Like Diane Medved, Judith Wallerstein had to revise her previous assumptions. According to the prevailing view at the time, divorce was seen as a brief crisis that would resolve itself. Her book, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*, vividly illustrates the long-term psychological devastation wrought not only on the children but the adults.(6) Here are just a few of her findings in her study of the aftershocks of divorce:

- *Three out of five children felt rejected by at least one parent.*
- *Five years after their parent's divorce, more than one-third of the children were doing markedly worse than they had been before the divorce.*
- *Half grew up in settings in which the parents were warring with each other even after the divorce.*
- *One-third of the women and one-quarter of the men felt that life had been unfair, disappointing and lonely.*

In essence, Wallerstein found that the emotional tremors register on the psychological Richter scale many years after the divorce.

In addition to the emotional impact is the educational impact. Children growing up in broken homes do not do as well in school as children from stable families. One national study found an overall average of one lost year of education for children in single-parent families.(7)

Divorce and remarriage adds another additional twist to modern families. Nearly half of all marriages in 1990 involved at least one person who had been down the aisle before, up from 31 percent in 1970.(8)

These changing family structures complicate relationships. Divorce and remarriage shuffle family members together in foreign and awkward ways. Clear lines of authority and communication get blurred and confused in these newly revised families. One commentator trying to get a linguistic handle on these arrangements called them "neo-nuclear" families.(9) The rules for these neo- nukes are complex and ever-changing. Children looking for stability are often insecure and frustrated. One futuristic commentator imagined this possible scenario:

On a spring afternoon, half a century from today, the Joneses are gathered to sing "Happy Birthday" to Junior.

There's Dad and his third wife, Mom and her second husband, Junior's two half brothers from his father's first marriage, his six stepsisters from his mother's spouse's previous unions, 100-year-old Great Grandpa, all eight of Junior's current "grandparents," assorted aunts, uncles-in-law and step-cousins. While one robot scoops up the gift wrappings and another blows out the candles, Junior makes a wish ...that he didn't have so many relatives.(10)

The stress on remarried couples is difficult enough, but it intensifies when step-children are involved. Conflict between a stepparent and stepchild is inevitable and can be enough to threaten the stability of a remarriage. According to one study, remarriages that involve stepchildren are more likely to end in divorce than those that don't.(11) Fully 17 percent of marriages that are remarriages for both husband and wife and that involve stepchildren break up within three years.(12)

No Fault Divorce

Historically the laws governing marriage were based upon the traditional, Judeo-Christian belief that marriage was for life. Marriage was intended to be a permanent institution. Thus, the desire for divorce was not held to be self-justifying. Legally the grounds for divorce had to be circumstances that justified making an exemption to the assumption of marital permanence. The spouse seeking a divorce had to prove that the other spouse had committed one of the "faults" recognized as justifying the dissolution of the marriage. In most states, the classic grounds for divorce were cruelty, desertion, and adultery.

This legal foundation changed when California enacted a statute in 1969 which allowed for no-fault divorce. This experiment has effectively led to what could now be called "divorce-on-demand." One by one, various state legislatures enacted no-fault divorce laws so that today, this concept has become the de facto legal principle in every state.

The fault-based system of divorce law had its roots in the view that marriage was a sacrament and indissoluble. The current no-fault provisions changed this perception. Marriage is no longer viewed as a covenant; it's a contract. But it's an even less reliable contract than a standard business contract.

Classic contract law holds that a specific promise is binding and cannot be broken merely because the promisor changes his/her mind. In fact, the concept of "fault" in divorce proceedings is more like tort law than contract law in that it implies an binding obligation between two parties which has been breached, thus leading to a divorce. When state legislatures implemented no-fault divorce provisions, they could have replaced the fault-based protections with contract-like protections. Unfortunately, they did not. In just a few decades we have moved from a position where divorce was permitted for a few reasons to a position in which divorce is permitted for any reason, or no reason at all.

The impact on the institution of marriage has been devastating. Marginal marriages are much easier to dissolve, and couples who may have tried to stick it out and work out their problems instead opt for a no-fault divorce.

But all marriages (not just marginal marriages) are at risk. After all, marriages do not start out marginal. Most marriages start out on a solid footing. But after the honeymoon, comes the more difficult process of learning to live together harmoniously. The success of the process is affected by both internal factors (willingness to meet each other's needs, etc.) and external factors (such as the availability of divorce). But even these factors are interrelated. If the law gives more protection to the marriage contract, a partner may be more likely to love sacrificially and invest effort in the marriage. If the law gives less protection, a partner may be more likely to adopt a "looking out for number one" attitude.

Biblical Perspective

The Bible speaks to the issue of divorce in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The most important Old Testament passage on divorce is Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

These verses were not intended to endorse divorce; just the contrary. The intention was to regulate the existing custom of divorce, not to put forth God's ideal for marriage. Divorce was allowed in certain instances because of human sinfulness (Matt. 19:8).

Divorce was widespread in the ancient Near East. The certificate of divorce apparently was intended to protect the reputation of the woman and provided her with the right to remarry. This public declaration protected her from charges of adultery. The Mishnah, for example, stated that a divorce certificate was not valid unless the husband explicitly said, "Thou art free to marry any man." (13)

Key to understanding this passage is the definition of "something indecent." It probably did not mean adultery since that was subject to the penalty of death (22:22), nor did it probably mean premarital intercourse with another man (22:20-21) since that carried the same penalty. The precise meaning of the phrase is unknown.

In fact, the meaning of this phrase was subject to some debate even during the time of Christ. The conservative school of Shammai understood it to mean a major sexual offense. The liberal school of Hillel taught that it referred to anything displeasing to the husband (including something as trivial as spoiling his food). The apparent purpose of this law was to prevent frivolous divorce and to protect a woman who was divorced by her husband. The passage in no way encourages divorce but regulates the consequences of divorce.

Another significant Old Testament passage is Malachi 2:10-16.

Have we not all one Father ? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?...Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel.

This passage deals with breaking a prior agreement or covenant. It specifically addresses the issue of illegal intermarriage and the issue of divorce. Malachi specifically teaches that husbands and wives are to be faithful to one another because they have God as their Father. The marriage relationship is built upon a solemn covenant. While God may tolerate divorce under some of the circumstances described in Deuteronomy 24, the instructions were given to protect the woman if a divorce should occur. This passage in Malachi reminds us that God hates divorce.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, we have the clearest teachings by Jesus on the subject of divorce.

It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a

woman so divorced commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31 32) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)

In these two passages, Jesus challenges the views of the two schools of Jewish thought (Shammai, Hillel). He teaches that marriage is for life and should not be dissolved by divorce.

Defining the word *porneia* (which is translated marital unfaithfulness) is a key element in trying to understanding these passages. While some commentators teach that this word refers to incestuous relationships or sexual promiscuity during the betrothal period, most scholars believe the word applies to relentless, persistent, and unrepentant adultery. Among those holding to this exception clause for adultery, some believe remarriage is possible while others do not.

The other significant section of teaching on divorce in the New Testament can be found in Paul's teaching on divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15.

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

In the first section, Paul addresses Christians married to one another. Paul was obviously aware of the prevalence of divorce in the Greek world and of the legal right that a wife has to initiate a divorce. He gives the command for believers to stay married.

In the next section, Paul addresses the issue of mixed marriages. He says that even in spite of religious incompatibility in such a marriage, Paul teaches that the believing spouse is not to seek divorce. Some divorces may have been initiated because of the command of Ezra to the Israelites in Jerusalem after the exile (Ezra 10:11) to divorce themselves from pagan spouses. Paul affirms the same biblical principle: do not seek divorce. However, if the unbelieving spouse insists on divorce, the believer may have to concede to those proceedings and is not bound in such circumstances.

Based on the preceding verses, we can therefore conclude that a Christian can acquiesce to divorce in cases of marital infidelity by the other spouse or in cases of desertion by an unbelieving spouse. Yet even in these cases, the church should not encourage divorce. Certainly in very troubling cases which involve mental, sexual, and/or physical abuse, legal separation is available as a remedy to protect the abused spouse. God hates divorce; therefore Christians should never be in the position of encouraging or promoting divorce. Instead they should be encouraging reconciliation.

One final question is whether a divorced person is eligible for a leadership position within the church. The key passage is 1 Timothy 3:2 which calls for a church leader to be above reproach and "the husband of one wife." Rather than prohibiting a divorced person from serving in leadership, the language of this verse actually focuses on practicing polygamists. Polygamy was practiced in the first century and found among Jewish and Christian groups. The passage could be translated "a one-woman man." If Paul intended to prohibit a

divorced person from leadership, he could have used a much less ambiguous term.

As Christians in a society where divorce is rampant, I believe we must come back to these important biblical principles concerning marriage. Christians should work to build strong marriages. Pastors must frequently preach and teach about the importance of marriage. We should encourage fellow Christians to attend various marriage enrichment seminars and ministries in our community.

As Christians I also believe we should reach out to those who have been through divorce. We must communicate Christ's forgiveness to them in the midst of their shattered lives. They need counseling and support groups. Many times they also need financial help and direction as they begin to put together the shattered pieces of their lives.

But as we reach out to those whose lives are shattered by divorce, we must be careful that our ministry does not compromise our theology. We must reach out with both biblical convictions and biblical compassion. Marriage for life is God's ideal (Genesis 2), nevertheless, millions of people have been devastated by divorce and need to feel care and compassion from Christians. Churches have unfortunately erred on one side or another. Most churches have maintained a strong stand on marriage and divorce. While this strong biblical stand is admirable, it should also be balanced with compassion towards those caught in the throes of divorce. Strong convictions without compassionate outreach often seems to communicate that divorce is the unforgivable sin.

On the other hand, some churches in their desire to minister to divorced people have compromised their theological convictions. By starting without biblically-based convictions about marriage and divorce, they have let their congregation's circumstances influence their theology.

Christians must simultaneously reach out with conviction and compassion. Marriage for life is God's ideal, but divorce is a reality in our society. Christians should reach out with Christ's forgiveness to those whose lives have been shattered by divorce.

Notes

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LET IT GO

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January 1, 2013

Most people's New Year's resolutions involve things to add or incorporate into your life: losing weight, reading through the Bible, decluttering your house, filing your income tax before April 15. (I hereby make a public commitment on that last one. Feel free to ask me about it.)

But some people don't need to add anything else, they need to LET GO.

Judy's ex-husband made some horrifically sinful, deceived, foolish choices that culminated with sex-change surgery. For months she has been tormenting herself daily with false guilt: if she had loved him more, if she had changed this or that, he wouldn't have mutilated himself, now preening before a mirror at how beautiful he thinks he is. She needs to let go of the fantasy that it was within her power to fix him or change him.

She needs to let go of the refusal to accept reality.

Polly is married to a difficult man. Neither one knew the other well when they married after a short internet courtship. She believed that marriage was an endless supply of unconditional love, acceptance and conversation. He believed that marriage was an endless supply of sex multiple times a day. Fifteen years later, she sees women she thinks are released from their sin-wracked marriages and doesn't understand why God keeps telling her to stay put and trust Him. She needs to let go of the fantasy of an easy out that would solve her problems.

Diane dances at the brink of disaster, focusing on how wonderful it would feel to nuzzle and cuddle the other women she's attracted to. When she crosses the line into flirting, touching inappropriately, and making suggestive small talk, she destroys one friendship after another. She needs to let go of the resentment that God says same-sex relationships are wrong and let go of the fantasy that if He would just say it's okay, she could cross the line with impunity and she could get what she's sure would make her happy. Finally.

Colleen bought into the lie that she could get away with cheating on her husband. When she came to her senses after the divorce was final and her husband had custody of their children, she begged for forgiveness and reconciliation. But he had given himself permission to move on, and refused to consider it. Now she beats herself up regularly: "I can't do this! I want my family back! What can't I have my family back?" She also needs to let go of her refusal to accept reality, pushing back with, "I don't want reality! Why can't I have my family back?"

Brae carries deep wounds from her family. Unrelenting shame often erupts in rage, but Brae cannot imagine being able to express her rage at her shaming parents. So she directs it at herself through life-threatening self-injury. She needs to let

go of the belief that watching her blood flow into the bathtub is a solution to the emotions that overwhelm her. And she needs to let go of the belief that hurting herself is the only way to release the rage inside.

We all cling to wrong beliefs and sometimes demonic deceptions that we trust to make life work, but they are our blind spots. We can no more identify those false idols than a fish can tell you what water is.

That's why one of the best prayers we can pray is, *Lord, show me where I'm being deceived. Reveal my idols to me. Show me what I'm trusting to make life work instead of You. Shine a light on where I need to let go of every thought, every habit, every burden, every encumbrance that so easily entangles me* (Heb. 12:1).

And then LET GO of whatever He shows us.

Often, God uses other people who are "doing life" with us, who don't have blinders on like we do, to point out the self-sabotaging or dangerous or foolish things we cling to-or which we allow to cling to us. This is yet another reason He wants us to live in community, where we know and are known and people will speak the truth in love to us.

When they point out something that is a self-sabotaging or dangerous or foolish encumbrance, we need LET IT GO.

Lord, I need You to help me LET GO of whatever You convict me of. In Your strength, I set it down, relinquishing it into Your hands. Receive this thing as an act of worship. I can't do it on my own.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/let_it_go

Glee-tastic!

May 4, 2010

I love this show. I'm not afraid to admit it. The raw talent of the cast, the character development, the geekiness, the music (duh), and the wonderful caricature of the American high school experience. I come back week after week for the clever plot lines and dialogue, and the overall impeccable artistry. I know what some of you are thinking—*Glee is just a show about sex-crazed teenagers, pushing a liberal agenda! How can you watch that stuff and call yourself a Christian?* And you're right... on the surface. If you look deeper, you'll find more depth—just like with teenagers, come to think of it. They can be a mess on the outside, seemingly concerned with nothing but what's superficial, shiny, sexy; but if you take the time to look deeper, wow: what perspective, passion, potential. (Whereas we adults tend to keep our messiness better concealed.)

Glee has such high appeal in part because almost everyone, both in and out of high school, feels like somewhat of a misfit; and *Glee* is a show which highlights that fact and how essential it is for us as unique and even flawed human beings to have a safe place to be unique and even flawed, giving us our common ground back and showcasing what the Church ought to: hospitality. The show also has lots of appeal because it's good art: it's well made and speaks to the human condition. If we don't want to forfeit our influence in our world, then we need to be more discerning about art: just because a show (or song or sculpture or painting or novel) depicts unChristian ethics or values doesn't mean it's bad art. Likewise, just because a piece of art depicts Christian values doesn't mean it's good art.

Sometimes the art we come in contact with will match up pretty solidly with the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of Scripture. Sometimes it represents the complete opposite ideas about what life is like and what it means to be human. But most of the time, as with the TV show *Glee*, we are presented with ideas that partly conform to Christian doctrine or ethics, or are but a shadow—"All truth is God's truth." Art comes out of the ideas in the heart and minds of the women and men who create the work, and Romans 2 tells us that God has written his truth on the hearts of all people. Certainly *Glee* is a shadow, and at times, in that shadow are moral messes and liberal agendas. So we have to watch *Glee* through the lenses of our biblical worldview. We have to watch *Glee* [with our brains turned on](#).

Watching *Glee* with our brains turned on, we can be aware of and reject what goes in opposition to a biblical framework, and affirm what is good, even if those good qualities and ideas about life fall short of what Christ gives as we pray his Goodness come; his Good be done (Mt 6:10). My favorite quality about *Glee* is the unexpected dives into full-bodied, deeply human characters. And it's *Glee*'s knack for flipping expectations and busting through the stereotypes, stereotypes *Glee* has set up itself, that allows me to write the following as a way of merely observing while withholding judgment, because you never know when *Glee* will flip something.

So what are *Glee*'s flat places that I'm hoping will curve and plunge and flip? Well, I'm afraid they're pretty typical: a woman's choice; hypocritical, asinine Christians; "I knew you were gay when you were three"; and my personal favorite, feelings-driven love. That's where I'm going to camp out, but I will make a small note about a woman's choice. This problem goes deeper than abortion. Because regardless of whether or not we murder the child (and the good news is that more and more people [and movies and other social media] paint abortion in a negative light and [favor life](#)), when the choice is all

Hers, we kill off the humanity of the father too. He becomes just a sperm donor. There's a very important episode of *Glee* admonishing young men to treat women like persons and work against objectifying them. There needs to be one about how women objectify men.

Which leads me to feelings-driven love and false romantic ideals. Have you ever stopped to think about what books and movies and TV shows and pop songs are all telling us about what love is and what ideal romance looks like? If you haven't noticed, love is a feeling. And romance is an intense, often tumultuous, chemistry-infused whirlwind affirmed by ~~good~~ sex great sex.

Already there are some elements of the romantic plot-lines in *Glee* that cause me to be hopeful that things will flip, but until they do, the following scenes perfectly expose the love = feelings definition that we know in our heads isn't right but aren't doing much to counter in our own lives.*

Before I dive into the scenes, a little Will & Terri Schuester background:

Once upon a time Will, the goody choir boy had a crush on an older girl named April. That didn't work out so he dated and subsequently fell in love with Terri. Together for many years, their marriage [sic] appeared to grow stagnant until Terri announced she was pregnant. Will was quick to step up to be the daddy despite his wandering eye for the ginger co-worker [Emma]. ([Glee Wiki](#))

Okay. Scene: Will finds out Terri's been faking the pregnancy and freaks out (naturally). After ripping the pregnancy pad from Terri's waist, Will tearfully tries to make sense of his upside-down world:

Why did you do this to us? I don't understand.

I thought you were leaving me. You're so different, Will. We both know it; I can feel you, you're pulling away from me.

Why, because I – I started standing up to you, trying to make this a relationship of equals?

No, because of the damn Glee club! Ever since you started it you just started walking around like you were better than me.

I should be allowed to feel good about myself!

Who are we kidding, Will? This marriage works because you don't feel good about yourself.

[...]

I loved you Terri, I really loved you.

I'm so sorry, Will. I'm so sorry. Do you remember at that appointment? Do you remember what we said? That at that moment, no matter what happened, we loved each other. We could get that feeling back again. You could love me back, Will. ("Mattress")

Exit Will.

Next episode. The Glee Club kicks tail (and Lea Michele does the best ["Don't Rain on My Parade"](#) I've ever heard) and take Sectionals, after which Will comes back home for the first time since he left to change clothes for Emma's wedding.

Enter Terri:

I want you to know I've been seeing a therapist. It's just at the local community center, but still.

Good. I hope it works out for you.

I'm taking responsibility, Will. I mean, I'm weak, and I'm selfish, and I let my anxiety rule my life. But you know I

wasn't always that way. It's just that I wanted so many things that I know we're never gonna have. But that was okay as long as I still had you. Will... say something.

I'm looking at you, and I'm trying... I mean, I really want to feel that thing I always felt when I looked at you before, that feeling of family, of love. But that's gone.

Forever?

I don't know. ("Sectionals")

So there it is. Love = feelings and this distorted love defines our relationships and whether or not they're worth fighting for. At least for episodes 12 and 13... The writers have very cleverly set things up so that we experience the relationship almost entirely from Will's perspective; and we are set up to dislike and distrust Terri and root for Emma. We soothe ourselves for hoping Emma and Will get together even though Will is married to Terri because Terri is selfish, often mistreats Will (and others), and is antagonistic toward Glee, the one thing outside of family that makes Will come alive. While Emma is adorable and caring and seems to have more in common with Will; she's entirely the lovable underdog we love to cheer for.

But... I kind of feel as though *Glee* is setting us up to see ourselves for what we really are: unsympathetic, quick to judge and slow to search for the whole story, quick to follow and go after what feels good rather than what is good. Because while Terri Schuester says and does a lot of things that make us question her right to take up space (without the comic relief of Sue Sylvester), there are these deftly placed moments—those *Glee* -moments—where Terri is human, vulnerable and hurting. And you begin to feel sympathy and find yourself thinking... *Is this a trick?*

So we'll see what happens. With each new episode I look

forward to more plot twists, magical musical numbers, Sue Sylvester quotes, and busting of social myths and categories.

*[A 2008 survey](#) on the divorce rate in America: about one in three. (And Christians? Largely the same: about one in three.) Christian porn and masturbation and the connection to [fantasy-inflated expectations](#) of real life. [“Christian” novels](#) are just as bad, if not worse, at proliferating a false romantic ideal.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/05/04/glee-tastic/

“Should a Husband Divorce His Unfaithful Wife?”

Hi, Greetings in Jesus name, I would like to know what the Bible teaches about when a wife is having sex with other men. What should the husband do in this case—should he divorce her and remarry? Will that be a sin in the sight of God according to the Bible?

Wow. There’s a lot of pain and anger connected to the situation that would result in asking this question! I’m sorry.

I do realize that some women are driven by such relational and sexual brokenness that their pathological pursuit of sexual partners outside the marriage indicates something is terribly wrong and needs attention. Telling such a woman, “Stop it!” will not have much of an impact. There’s much more going on.

But because God created women to be so relational, and because we long for safety and security in our relationships, if a wife is having sex with other men, that is not the norm. Something is driving her to do that, and I would want to know what it is. Since the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31), we need to pass your question through the filter of love: what is the most loving response to this situation?

Because I am a wife, and because I know how much my heart, like most other women, longs to be loved and respected and cherished by my husband, my question is, "Why is this lady going outside her marriage for sex?" I wonder how her husband is treating her. A woman who feels cherished and respected and valued by her husband usually does not have any interest in going to other men for attention, affection and affirmation.

There is obviously conflict here, and the Bible instructs us how to resolve conflict in God-honoring and people-honoring ways. First, it is always up to us to examine ourselves for our role in the conflict. "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3) So I would counsel the husband to ask himself, "What have I done to drive my wife to the arms of other men? Have I loved her as Christ loves the church, sacrificially? What part have my attitudes and choices played in what my wife has done?" Since there is a good chance that he has a blind spot about this, it would be wise to ask others who know the couple for their honest input: "Have you seen anything in me that is less than loving and kind toward my wife?" Whatever the answer is, the husband needs to acknowledge it, confess it to his wife, and ask her forgiveness—as well as change his ways of relating to her.

The next step of biblical conflict resolution is to talk to the other person in private. "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother" (Matt 18:15). This would mean a private

husband-wife conversation where the husband talks to his wife about her sin, leading off with taking responsibility for any part he has played. It would be appropriate to share how her choices have deeply hurt him and ask her to stop and repent of her sin.

The third step, if the offender will not repent, is to escalate the conflict to involve others. "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (Matthew 18:16). This would mean bringing the situation into the light with others who are "doing life" with the couple.

The fourth step is to broaden the scope of the conflict to the larger community. "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17).

If a husband has gone through all the steps of godly, biblical conflict resolution, and his wife is still hard-hearted and will not repent, then he does have the option of divorcing her. Jesus did give that option, but note the role of hard hearts in His teaching on divorce: "He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery'" (Matthew 19:8-9). I find it interesting in view of your question about a man possibly divorcing his wife, that Jesus ascribes hard-heartedness to the men seeking divorce. Of course some women are hard-hearted and unrepentant, but I'd be interested in asking the unfaithful wife, "Why are you doing this? Tell me about your relationship with your husband. Do you feel safe, secure, respected and loved? Do his eyes light up when you enter a room? Do you feel God's love for you through your husband? What are you looking for in other men that you're not getting from your husband?"

Finally, you asked about remarriage. According to the Matthew 19 passage, it does appear that a husband whose wife was unfaithful has the freedom in the Lord to remarry without it being adultery for him. But I earnestly want to impress on you that what would far more please and glorify God is to find the reasons for the broken relationship and repair it with the glue of grace and forgiveness. Ephesians 5:9-10 exhorts us to “live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord.” Reconciliation pleases the Lord, and that is far more important than what a spouse is technically allowed to do in the wake of unfaithfulness.

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“Can I Divorce My Bipolar Wife for Cheating Unawares?”

My wife is bipolar. I have read that someone with this disease can have a sexual encounter and not remember it. If this is so and I find out, could I divorce her for adultery or cheating?

This is difficult situation, and you have my sympathy. It's hard to live with the extreme mood swings of someone with bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression). But it's even harder to BE that person, I assure you!

When people experience blackouts during manic episodes, they are not in control. Their mental illness is in control. Like those with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID, formerly known as multiple personality disorder), they can discover that they

did things they would never have chosen if they were in their “right mind.” A dear friend of mine tells me that one of her “alters” (personalities) was a smoker although she was not. She would just find the cigarette butts and wonder why the car smelled like smoke!

This means that if you learn your wife had a sexual encounter that she did not choose and does not remember, it would be unfair and unloving to hold it against her.

Do you remember the part of your wedding vows that says, “in sickness and in health”? Your wife has a sickness. If she got cancer, would you divorce her for not being healthy? If you became disabled, would you want her to divorce you because you couldn’t provide for her?

It sounds like you might be looking for a loophole to justify divorcing your wife. I respectfully urge you to close down that search and open up a new one for a marriage counselor.

Cordially,

Sue Bohlin

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“Will I Go to Hell For Getting Divorced?”

If I get a divorce, does that mean I will spend eternity in hell? I am saved so I don’t think I would be forgiven for it. I know that if someone gets divorced and then gets saved then

they will be forgiven but I am saved so I'm supposed to know better. And I think the only acceptable reasons for divorce are abuse or infidelity and neither are true in this case. So does that mean I have to spend the rest of my life with someone incompatible just to avoid the lake of fire??

Sorry to be so intense but I really need to know, and could you use specific evidence from scripture to explain your point? Thanks.

Bless your heart. I can only imagine the pain that would bring you to the point you're at.

No, divorce does not send anyone to hell. Refusing to be reconciled to God through Jesus is the only thing that sends anyone to hell. If you have been saved by trusting in Jesus, you have been sealed to Him through the Holy Spirit, and your eternity is secure. (We have a few articles on that subject that I think you will find helpful:

- [“How Can I Know I’m Going to Heaven?”](#)
- [“Can a True Believer Commit the Unforgivable Sin?”](#)
- [“I Fear I Have Committed the Unforgiveable Sin!”](#)

Back to your question: consider what the Lord Jesus said about divorce in Matt. 19:3-8—

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the

beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Yes, God’s intention is for our marriages to be forever. However, because God is good and because He understands the wickedness of the human heart, he allows for divorce; note His reason: “because your hearts were hard.” He knows that being married to a person with a hard heart is like a prison sentence, and He provides a way out. I think the issue is more remarriage than divorce. If nothing has broken the marriage covenant, then when a divorced person remarries, he or she commits adultery.

So if your husband’s heart is unrepentantly hard, know that divorce is God’s grace in that situation. If it’s YOUR heart that’s hard, then the order of the day is confession and repentance, asking for His help to make it soft.

But please know, regardless of what happens, that divorce will not send you to hell. Jesus forever indwells your heart through faith, and the Father would not send Him there!

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Do I Recover From My Husband’s Adultery with

Prostitutes?"

I have only been married four short years this December. I just learned my husband committed adultery on at least 2 occasions with a prostitute. He says he is sorry and wants to salvage the marriage. I have conflicting emotions from moment to moment. If we as Christians are supposed to forgive others for their sins, why does God allow for divorce when a spouse is unfaithful? I find it hard to believe that a marriage can survive infidelity and I am wondering how one ever trusts their spouse again after this type of betrayal? We are both Christians. He was saved three years ago, no religious upbringing. We do not have a Church home and share no Christian friends. We sought counsel from a Christian and that counselor told me that I had approximately 30 days from discovery to either remain, forgive and never speak of the adultery again or divorce. He says that the 30 days is biblical. I have never heard of this nor have I read it in the Bible. I think if I choose to stay within the marriage it should be based on my spouses behavior. I appreciate any information you may have and I thank you for your time.

I am so very, very sorry for the pain you are experiencing. Your conflicting emotions are totally normal and to be expected.

The biggest thing you need to know is that there is a difference between forgiving someone and trusting him again. They are not the same. When we forgive, we release the other person from our desire to exact revenge on them for hurting us. We let go of their sin against us into God's hands so that He can deal with them. But broken trust is another matter; it needs to be earned back, and that takes time. A good amount of time, consisting of one faithful, responsible, caring choice after another.

In order to understand God's allowance for divorce, consider

what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 19:8—"Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." The Lord allows for divorce as a matter of love and grace for the one being hurt by a hard-hearted spouse. In the case of infidelity, when a spouse is repentant and truly wants to mend the marriage, God's desire is that He glorify Himself in the marriage by demonstrating His power and grace in the relationship.

There are many spouses who will attest to the fact that there is indeed trust after betrayal if the unfaithful one truly repents and commits to faithfulness. But it takes time, like I said. Probably close to a year minimum.

I disagree with the 30-day ultimatum. I see nothing in the Bible that says that. I do agree that if you choose to stay in the marriage it would depend on whether your husband shows remorse, demonstrates repentance, seeks accountability and is willing for his whereabouts to be checked on at all times. People who are hiding nothing have nothing to fear from accountability.

Here is a link to the Midlife Dimensions website, which offers help and resources for dealing with an affair: www.midlife.com/html/resources/articles/category_affairs.htm.

I am concerned that you two are not plugged into a church home and therefore do not have any support system. This is going to make recovery unnecessarily difficult. I would hope that one way your husband could show you he's serious about mending your marriage is to find a church home and get connected to other people who will help support your marriage. God never intended for us to be "Lone Ranger Christians." His intent is for us to be knitted into the body of Christ for support and as a way to receive His various kinds of grace. You are cheating yourself and yourselves to not be connected to an important source of life and strength. I want to strongly suggest that you make this a priority.

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

P.S. You might also poke around the New Life website (www.newlife.com) and educate yourself on sex addiction. If it were me, I would want to know what drove my husband to a prostitute. I would also want to know if my actions played any part in it. (For example, this is one reason the apostle Paul tells married people not to deprive each other sexually.) It sounds like you have an opportunity to each look at your own “stuff” and see what you can both do to build the marriage, as long as he’s serious about it.

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