

# **“Are Single Women Purposeless Beings?”**

You have biblically and honestly tackled the question of the roles of women in your articles.

But I have a question concerning the meaning of women's lives. What does the Bible mean when it says that God intended to create a woman to help man? Does it then reduce single women to purposeless beings who have nothing to do on earth? I mean not the widowed, but the never marrieds.

No, the Bible does not reduce single women at all. I believe God's design of women means that when we operate in our strengths and giftings, we are helping other people in a variety of ways. People have many needs on many levels: physically, emotionally, spiritually, aesthetically. When women bring our God-given beauty and sensitivity, nurture and compassion, intellect and leadership skills to our communities, I think we are contributing in ways that matter. Please note, none of these have to do with marital status.

I think of single friends who are teachers, helping children and adults learn and grow.

I think of single friends who are medical professionals, compassionately treating the sick and helping people get and stay healthy.

I think of single friends who are interior designers and decorators or work for them, bringing beauty and order to homes and offices.

I think of single friends who are counselors, helping people deal with pain and problems and restoring them to functionality.

I think of single friends who are serving in ministry, pointing people to Jesus and helping them grow spiritually.

It's true that God created Eve as a helpmate for Adam, but not all women are called to marriage. Some women are called to help others in their singleness. Many of the women I know, regardless of career or calling, delight in helping others in a variety of ways. And lest anyone think being a helper is an inferior status, may I respectfully point out that God is glad to be our helper? The Psalms are rich with references to God as our helper, our rescuer, our protector. And that's just the beginning. He created us to need help, to need Him and each other, so there is nothing "lesser than" about orienting one's life in terms of helping others.

I hope this helps. <smile>

Sue Bohlin

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## Talking Points Against Homosexual "Marriage"

The November 2003 decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Court that gave homosexual couples the constitutional right to marry has intensified debate about same-sex marriage. There are currently six different court cases concerning same-sex marriage. The topic of same-sex marriage will be in the news and part of popular discussion. Therefore, here are a few key talking points on the subject of homosexual marriage.

**1. *Right vs. privilege:*** Gay activists talk about the "right" to get married. Yet in the next sentence they talk about obtaining a marriage license. Marriage is a privilege, not a right. Therefore, the state must have a standard for issuing a

license. We don't give a license to anyone who wants to drive a car. You must know basic information and demonstrate an ability to drive. We don't grant a medical license to just anyone. Someone must demonstrate a level of competence. Marriage isn't a right, it is a privilege that the state can and should regulate.

**2. Devalues marriage:** Giving same-sex couples the right to marry devalues true marriage. Imagine if at the next awards ceremony, everyone received an award. Would anyone value the award if everyone received one? Any adult is permitted to marry another adult of the opposite sex. But you can't marry a child, you can't marry a blood relative, you can't marry someone already married, you can't marry someone of the same sex.

**3. Basic biology:** Homosexual relations deny the self-evident truth that male and female bodies complement each other. Human sexuality and procreation is based upon a man and a woman coming together as one flesh. Marriage between a man and a woman promotes procreation and makes intimate sexual activity orderly and socially accountable.

**4. Public health:** Homosexual sex is dangerous and destructive to the human body. The International Journal of Epidemiology reports that the life expectancy at age 20 for gay and bisexual men is 8 to 10 years less than for all men. If the same pattern of mortality were to continue, researchers estimate that nearly half of gay and bisexual men currently 20 years of age will not reach their 65th birthday.

**5. Counterfeit:** Arbitrarily granting a marriage license to a same-sex couple doesn't constitute marriage. It is a counterfeit of true marriage. It is like trying to tape two same-sex electrical plugs together to form an electrical current.

**6. Monogamy/fidelity:** Same-sex marriage will not be

monogamous. One lesbian writer calls gay marriage “monogamy without fidelity.” Another homosexual columnist writes of “a broader understanding of commitment.” A recent Dutch study found that homosexual relationships last, on average, about 1-1/2 years and that men in those relationships have an average of eight partners per year outside their main partnership.

**7. *Children:*** Marriage between a man and a woman is the ideal family unit. It promotes procreation and ensures the benefits of child rearing by the distinct attributes of both father and mother. Two research papers by Timothy Dailey for Family Research Council (Homosexual Parenting: Placing Children at Risk and Homosexuality and Child Sexual Abuse) document concerns about children raised in gay marriages.

**9. *Majority rule:*** A recent poll by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that public opposition to gay marriage is increasing. In July, 53 percent opposed same-sex marriage. By October 59 percent were opposed to same-sex marriage.

**10. *Popular vote:*** States legislatures have already spoken to the issue of same-sex marriages. Thirty-seven states have already passed a Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) stating that marriage is between a man and a woman. In 1996 Congress also passed a national DOMA.

**11. *Religion:*** The Bible teaches that homosexuality is not natural and is wrong (Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Other religions also concur with this judgment.

**12. *Emotional:*** Gays and lesbians are relationally broken people. Just as in heterosexual marriage, two broken people cannot produce a whole, healthy unit. However, heterosexuals can get help for their brokenness and repair the relationship, but the relationships of homosexual couples are intrinsically and irreparably flawed.

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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

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# “Is a Marriage Ceremony Necessary?”

I have been embroiled in a recent debate over the evils of cohabitation and sex before marriage. Another Christian agrees that fornication is a sin, but he doesn't believe that two “committed” people living together should be considered fornication. In his mind, fornication is wanton sexual promiscuity with no commitment or sincerity. You know—Spring Break sex. ☐ ☐

He believes that if two people intend to spend the rest of their lives together and have pledged themselves to one another, God sees their hearts and doesn't require legality or ceremony.

I explained that this would be true if two people were stranded on a desert island with no opportunity to participate in the process. However, in America, it is our custom and law to have a ceremony, even if it is only between us and a justice-of-the-peace, and we have maximum opportunity to engage in this custom. If we choose not to then we are not recognized as husband and wife by the state. Since we, as Christians, are bound to obey the authority that God has placed over us, such a non-recognition by our culture and authorities would amount to a non-recognition by our God.

Unfortunately, though, he doesn't want to listen to what I consider sound reason. He demands scriptural proof that a ceremony is necessary for a marriage blessed by God. Do we have any other argument that may satisfy him?

God says in Genesis 2:24, “A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his WIFE and the two shall be one

flesh.” What changes a man into a husband and a woman into a wife? Only a wedding ceremony.

God says in Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” What defines a marriage bed? A place where a husband and a wife sleep.

So what makes for marriage? A social ceremony in the presence of witnesses who are there to support and ratify (in a social sense) the public commitment of two coming together to become one. The role of witnesses in the formation of social contracts is a biblical principle. (Just do a word search for “witness” in any Bible software program.) No matter where you go in the world, wedding ceremonies occur in the context of community (witnesses) because a marriage creates a new social unit that becomes part of the community.

Two unmarried people who are “committed” to each other in their hearts are still unmarried people, and their sex is fornication. It’s God’s definition that matters, not ours. Fornication, by His definition, is sex outside of marriage.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **“Jesus Contradicts the O.T. Law, Especially Regarding**



# Homosexuality!"

You point out that the Old Testament forbids homosexuality. Yes it does, but Jesus' teachings in the gospels have superseded the primitive teachings of the O.T. For example in Matthew 5:17-34 Jesus systematically rips apart some of the most important Jewish laws. When he says he has come to fulfil the Law, he is not talking about the Pharisees' law, he is talking about God's Law. People who say that Jesus agreed with the Jewish laws are completely wrong– even an idiot can see this.

People who practice homosexuality in their own homes, with each others' consent are not breaking the law "love your neighbor as yourself." They are not harming anyone! What is harmful though is the constant attack by you so-called Christians on them which provides gay people with much misery. I am not homosexual myself – the reason why I am sticking up for gay people is because I am a Christian. Wake up to the fact that the law of loving your neighbor has replaced the O.T. laws.

Your essays clearly show you have some degree of intelligence – why can't you see that Jesus' law is in contradiction to the law of the Jewish scriptures?

Hello \_\_\_\_\_, Thanks for your e-mail. I will try to respond to your comments as best I can.

*You point out that the O.T. forbids homosexuality. Yes it does, but Jesus' teachings in the gospels have superseded the primitive teachings of the O.T. For example in Matthew 5:17-34 Jesus systematically rips apart some of the most important Jewish laws. When he says he has come to fulfil the law, he is not talking about the Pharisee's law, he is talking about God's law. People who say that Jesus agreed with the Jewish laws are completely wrong – even an idiot can*

*see this.*

I'm sorry, I fail to see which laws Jesus is ripping apart in this passage. What I see is that He is going beyond the LETTER of the law, to the SPIRIT of the law, to make it abundantly clear that Yahweh is concerned with the motives and intentions of the heart and not merely surface obedience. If a person holds to the SPIRIT (or intention) of the law, he will also obey the LETTER of it. This is a long way from "ripping apart" the law.

I do agree with you, however, that the Lord Jesus did not agree with the Jewish laws that were like fences built around the inspired laws of God, but which were not, in themselves, laws of God. Those laws don't appear in the Bible though. The commandments against practicing homosexuality, however, were not Jewish laws, but God's laws.

*People who practice homosexuality in their own homes, with each others consent are not breaking the law "love your neighbor as yourself." They are not harming anyone!*

Morality aside, ask any physician how healthy the homosexual lifestyle is. Ask the Center for Disease Control how healthy the homosexual lifestyle is. Ask counselors who are trying to help people leave the homosexual lifestyle and get beyond their painful homosexual desires. Talk to the parents, siblings, spouses and children of practicing homosexuals and ask if they are not harming anyone.

Let's put the homosexual issue aside and substitute another deviant sexual lifestyle. Do you think you would write to someone and say, "Men who are attracted to pre-school children and entice them into their homes to have sex with them, are not breaking the law 'love your neighbor as yourself.' In fact, these men are loving these children—isn't that admirable? They are not harming anyone! The men are enjoying

the sex, and the children are enjoying the attention...and what child doesn't enjoy attention?"

I would suggest that you would never say something like this, and I would further suggest that the reason such a large portion of our culture has decided that sex between two men using parts of their bodies that were intended for excretion, not sex, is acceptable, is a result of a carefully-planned disinformation campaign. It is not a result of something normal and natural and God-intended.

*What is harmful though is the constant attack by you so-called Christians on them which provides gay people with much misery. I am not homosexual myself – the reason why I am sticking up for gay people is because I am a Christian.*

It's interesting to me that you seem so devoted to the issue of "love," yet do not hesitate to cast aspersions on my relationship with Jesus Christ by calling me a "so-called Christian." This doesn't strike me as very loving, or am I missing something?

I'm also wondering if you read my entire article, or just bits and pieces. Because I strongly believe that the responsible Christian response to the homosexual movement is one of deep compassion for the individuals caught in unnatural, unfortunate desires while not compromising on what God has said about the homosexual ACT. In fact, I have received e-mail accusing me of "sticking up for gay people," to use your term.

People like me who speak out, agreeing with what God has said about homosexuality, are not causing all the misery gays experience. That happens long before someone even comes out or tells their first friend of these unwelcome feelings and attractions. There is misery inherent in a homosexual orientation; it means something is wrong, in the same way that there's something wrong with someone who is sexually attracted to small children. And that's why these feelings need to be

dealt with and healed, not celebrated as something good and beautiful.

(I will admit, with a great deal of sadness, that there has been a terrible amount of judgmental condescension from Christians towards homosexuals, that has, indeed, caused grief. There is no excuse for not making a distinction between the desires, which are wrong but unasked-for, and the people experiencing them. I know God does.)

*Wake up to the fact that the law of loving your neighbor has replaced the O.T. laws.*

No, the law of loving your neighbor *sums up* the O.T. laws. At least the moral ones. If you keep all the moral laws of the Old Testament, you will be demonstrating love for your neighbor. Not stealing, telling the truth, not charging usurious interest against your neighbor, and keeping all sexual activity within marriage are all demonstrations of love for one's neighbor.

The law against homosexual actions is part of the moral code; the consequence of death by stoning is part of the civil code, which controlled how the people of God were to conduct their lives in a culture where God was their head and not a law-making king. It makes sense for the civil code to be done away with, because the people of Israel are no longer living under that system. But God has not done away with a single commandment of His moral code, because the moral laws are rooted in the person and character of God Himself.

What is it that makes homosexual activity sin? The fact that God has ordained sex to be the glue that holds *husband and wife* together. Sex is so powerful that it is only safe within the confines of marriage, because it acts like superglue between two souls. Tear them apart and you have broken hearts. So why not make homosexual marriage legal? Because Ephesians 5 says that marriage goes beyond merely a civil convenience; it

is an eloquent word picture that God ordained to help us understand the amazing unity within diversity of Christ and the church. Men and women are so different that it's a mystical union when they come together in marriage. Man and man coming together, or woman and woman, does not provide the dynamic difference that mirrors the "otherness" of Christ-and-the-church. Gay relationships are sameness, not otherness. So gay marriage can never be blessed by God because marriage means far more than simply living together, even having sex together. It's supposed to teach us something about God.

*Your essay clearly shows you have some degree of intelligence – why can't you see that Jesus' law is in contradiction to the law of the Jewish scriptures?*

Well, I do thank you for the compliment <smile>. . .I don't see it because it's not there. Have you read the whole New Testament? How about just the four gospels? If you look at what the Lord Jesus taught, one thing you'll see is that He mentioned two things people often overlook. One is references to Sodom and Gomorrah as places of judgment, which the Bible makes clear were judged for homosexual sin. Jesus believed in Sodom and Gomorrah, and He believed in the judgment they received. In fact, He was involved in sending the judgment. The other thing is His references to fornication, which means any sex outside of marriage. All homosexual sex is fornication. Even if there is some sort of religious ceremony, it's still fornication because you can't get around God's restrictions on marriage, which is one man and one woman. God is not impressed by our ceremonies when they disregard what He has established.

A lot of people like to talk about Jesus' law of love; what's intriguing to me is how they never balance it with the fact that Jesus also talked about holiness, and purity, and justice. While it's true that many homosexuals love each other, that kind of love still falls short of God's standard

of holiness. There's nothing holy about what God has called an abomination. That is not "the law of Jewish scriptures" as if they were written by scribes and Pharisees; that is the very word breathed by God Himself. There is no contradiction between the Old and New Testament when it comes to what is moral, what reflects the character of God. Homosexual sin is not love as God defines it, regardless of how the culture tries to persuade people it is.

Thank you for reading this far. I hope what I've said gives you something to think about. I also pray that the Lord gives you a higher esteem for the ENTIRE Word of God. Jesus said not one jot or tittle of it would pass away. That's a pretty high value on it. May we all value His word so highly.

Respectfully,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **"How Should We Answer Charges of Discrimination in Same-Sex Issues?"**

I'm wondering if you can point me to some good resources to help deal with the charge of "discrimination" often leveled at Christians over a stance against homosexuality and same-sex marriage (or against anyone who considers these things to be wrong). How do you answer that?

I'm not sure what resources to point you to, but I brought up your question to a number of fellow workers in the [ministry](#) to

those with unwanted homosexuality with which I serve. The best response to this charge, I believe, is that those making the claim don't understand discrimination. It is wrong to make people suffer based on unchangeable characteristics such as the color of one's skin or gender. Homosexuality, however, is a lifestyle choice, and those demanding the "right" to marry do so based NOT on an unchangeable characteristic but on the basis of a chosen behaviors. (Which, of course, is eminently changeable.) It's "apples and oranges."

Homosexuality is defined by one's behavior (acting out), but civil rights are defined by who/what you ARE, not what you DO. (Incidentally, I would argue that there is a difference between experiencing same-sex attractions, which are not chosen and which constitute temptation, and *choosing* to follow through on those attractions in ways God calls sin. I like what musician Dennis Jernigan says: "We are not defined by our temptations!")

And although this argument doesn't hold any water with those rebelling against God, I still think it's worth saying: If God says something is wrong, it's going to be harmful regardless of what the world says. That's another good reason to prevent people from getting "married," because their activity is going to be harmful, and it is in society's best interests to prevent harm. (This doesn't really have to do with your discrimination question, but I was struck by the wisdom of it when my friend mentioned it.)

So. . . there you have it. I hope it helps.

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# “What Does the Bible Say about Marrying Cousins?”

What does the Bible say about marrying cousins? Can first cousins marry? I am also interested in the relationship of third or fourth cousins. If two children of first cousins marry, is this relationship considered third or fourth cousins?

The Bible does not forbid marriage between cousins. However, marriage between first cousins is [illegal in about half the states](#) in the U.S.; the Biblical principle here is that God has instituted the government's authority, so there may be a legal issue depending on where you live. But it's not a sin biblically.

The children of one's first cousin are actually “first cousins, once removed.” The children of first cousins are second cousins to each other. Here's a helpful page to keep all that straight, an essay and chart called “What Is a First Cousin, Twice Removed?”: <https://wehavekids.com/family-relationships/What-Is-a-Second-Cousin-Twice-Removed-Chart-Explains-All>

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## “What Does It Mean for a Wife



# to Submit?"

Do you have information on what it means for a woman to submit—is obedience in some sense a part of it? When might she come out from under his “lead”?

I’m doing a bible study and the issue came up last week. In my home I basically submit to my wife because her judgement has been proven to be better in most things and I have a very flexible temperament. Am I a wimp??? Sometimes I wonder if we are doing it right.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Biblical submission is a military term meaning “to arrange oneself under,” the way a soldier places himself under the authority and leadership of his commander. God’s plan is for male leadership and authority in the marriage relationship, the home and the church. . . and for men to lead, it’s important for women to follow them. It does NOT mean being a doormat or denying one’s gifts, talents and passions; it means using those very things to help her husband be the best he can be and to help their family and home be and run most effectively.

Submission does involve obedience, as we all obey God, the governmental authorities and the elders in our churches as we submit to them; however, the submission of a wife to her husband has a different flavor because of our one-flesh intimacy. Obedience is a function of a power differential, seen best in the parent-child and government-citizen relationships. If the husband-wife relationship is characterized by the husband giving commands and the wife obeying, that kind of power inequity will destroy intimacy. Nonetheless, wifely submission does involve cooperating with and deferring to her husband.

The only time a woman should come out from under her husband’s

leadership is when that would mean sinning. For instance, I know of husbands who wanted their wives to have abortions, to dance at a strip club to make money, to engage in pornography, and other immoral, unacceptable behaviors. In those cases, to submit to their husbands would have meant taking a stand against God and His standards of right and wrong, so it is wrong to submit in those admittedly (but unfortunately real) extreme situations.

I'm glad to hear you're studying the Bible to see what God says about His intent for the marriage relationship. He has ordained that husbands be what some have called "servant leaders," serving their wives by leading them as men under submission to Christ, and He has ordained that women should serve our husbands by submitting to them as we submit to Christ. This is not an effect of the Fall, because as you read Genesis 2 you can see that Adam had authority over Eve when he named her, and Eve was created for Adam to be his helper and meet his needs. (The reason we rebel against this arrangement is our own self-centeredness, exacerbated by the effect of feminism's objection to the idea of women being submissive to their husbands.)

It's wonderful that your wife has good judgment, and I humbly suggest that you see this as an asset to your marriage. But having good judgment and being right don't have anything to do with who submits to who. If you have been gifted with a wise wife, then it is your responsibility to seek out her input and perspective before making a decision of what to do. There is a big difference between listening to your wife and saying, "That sounds really good. Let's do that," and saying "Yes dear, whatever you say dear, you just tell me what to do and I'll do it."

Are you a wimp? I don't know and sure wouldn't want to call you any names! <smile> Are you passively allowing your wife to dictate how things should be done in your home, instead of discussing things as equal partners? May I strongly suggest

you read Stu Weber's extraordinary book *Tender Warrior*, which Ray and I believe is the best book out there for men. In fact, the cover of the book is appropriately intriguing: "every man's purpose, every woman's dream, every child's hope."

I hope this helps, and I send this along with a prayer that you and your wife will find joy in God's intention for husband and wife roles and functions.

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# **Biblical Principles**

*October 11, 2007*

How should a Christian evaluate social and political issues? Here are a few biblical principles that can be used. First is the sanctity of human life. Verses such as Psalm 139:13-16 show that God's care and concern extend to the womb. Other verses such as Jeremiah 1:5, Judges 13:7-8, Psalm 51:5 and Exodus 21:22-25 give additional perspective and framework to this principle that applies to many areas of bioethics.

A related biblical principle involves the equality of human beings. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority (Philippians 2). Believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people (James 2). Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). These principles apply to racial relations and our view of government.

A third principle is a biblical perspective on marriage. Marriage is God's plan and provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). Marriage provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2). These principles can be applied to such diverse issues as artificial reproduction (which often introduces a third party into the pregnancy) and cohabitation (living together).

A final principle concerns government and our obedience to civil authority. Government is ordained by God (Rom.13:1-7). We are to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Even though we are to obey government, there may be certain times when we might be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). These principles apply to issues such as war, civil disobedience, politics, and government.

Every day, it seems, we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. As Christians it is important to consider these biblical principles and consistently apply them to these issues.

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## The Changing American Family

*Kerby Anderson looks at the latest data on the American family and highlights trends that are changing the nature of family in America as well as debunking some sensationalist headlines. From a biblical worldview perspective, Christians should be concerned about these trends which reflect an ongoing breakdown of family in America.*

# Introduction

Are we headed toward a post-marital society where marriage is rare and the traditional family is all but extinct? One would certainly think so by reading some of the stories that have appeared lately. A *New York Times* headline in 2003 warned of “marriage’s stormy future” and documented the rise in the number of nontraditional unions as well as the rising percentage of people living alone.<sup>{1}</sup> A 2006 *New York Times* article documented the declining percentage of married couples as a proportion of American households and thus declared that married households are now a minority.<sup>{2}</sup> And a 2007 headline proclaimed that “51% of women are now living without a spouse.”<sup>{3}</sup>

Well, let’s take a deep breath for a moment. To borrow a phrase from Mark Twain, rumors about the death of marriage and family are greatly exaggerated. But that doesn’t mean that marriage as an institution is doing well and will continue to do well in the twenty-first century.

Let’s first take on a few of these headlines pronouncing the end of marriage. The October 2006 *New York Times* headline proclaimed that “To Be Married Means to Be Outnumbered.” In other words, married households are now a minority in America and unmarried households are the majority. But the author had to manipulate the numbers in order to come to that conclusion. This so-called “new majority” of unmarried households includes lots of widows who were married. And this claim only works if you count households and not individuals. For example, if you have two households—one with two married people and three children and another with a single widow living alone—they would be split between one married household and one unmarried household. But one household has five people, and the other household has one person.

What about the January 2007 *New York Times* headline proclaiming that “51% of Women Are Now Living Without a

Spouse"? Columnist and radio talk show host Michael Medved called this journalistic malpractice({4}) and the ombudsman for the *New York Times* took his own paper to task for the article.{5} The most recent available figures showed that a clear majority (56%) of all women over the age of twenty are currently married.

So how did the author come to the opposite conclusion? It turns out that the author chose to count more than ten million girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen as "women." So these so-called "women" are counted as women living without a spouse (never mind that they are really teenage girls living at home with their parents). This caused the ombudsman for the *New York Times* to ask this question in his op-ed: "Can a 15-year-old be a 'Woman Without a Spouse'?"{6}

It is also worth mentioning, that even with this statistical sleight of hand, you still cannot get to the conclusion that a majority of women are living without a spouse. The article's author had to find a way to shave off an additional 2% of the married majority. He did this by including those women whose "husbands are working out of town, are in the military, or are institutionalized."{7}

## **Conflicting Attitudes about Marriage and Family**

It is certainly premature to say that married couples are a minority and women living without a husband are a majority. But there has been a definite trend that we should not miss and will now address. The definition of marriage and the structure of family in the twenty-first century is very different from what existed in the recent past.

A few decades ago, marriages were the foundation of what many commentators referred to as "the traditional family." Now marriages and families are taking some very unfamiliar shapes

and orientations due to different views of marriage and family.

Americans are not exactly sure what to think about these dramatic changes in marriage and family. On the one hand, they believe that marriage and family are very important. A *Better Homes and Garden* survey found that their readers rated their relationship to their spouse as the single most important factor in their personal happiness.[{8}](#) And a MassMutual study on family values (taken many years ago) reported that eight out of ten Americans reported that their families were the greatest source of pleasure in their lives—more than friends, religion, recreation, or work.[{9}](#)

On the other hand, Americans are much less sanguine about other people's marriages and families. I call this the "Lake Wobegon effect" where "all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are about average." In other words, *their* marriage and family are fine, but the rest of the marriages and families are *not*. While the MassMutual Family Values Study found that a majority (81%) pointed to their family as the greatest source of pleasure, it also found that a majority (56%) rated the family in the U.S. "only fair" or "poor." And almost six in ten expected it to get *worse* in the next ten years. The survey concluded that "Americans seem to see the family in decline everywhere but in their own home."[{10}](#)

Similar results can be found in many other nationwide polls. A Gallup poll found that Americans believe the family is worse off today than it was ten years ago. And they believed it would be worse off in the future as well.[{11}](#) Americans also demonstrated their ambivalence toward marriage and family not only in their attitudes but their actions. One trend watcher predicted more than a decade ago in an article in *American Demographics* that marriage would become in the 1990s and the twenty-first century "an optional lifestyle."[{12}](#)

# Changing Trends in Marriage

While it may be too early to put the institution of marriage on the endangered species list, there is good reason to believe that changing attitudes and actions have significantly transformed marriage in the twenty-first century. The current generations are marrying later, marrying less, and divorcing more than previous generations.

A major transition in attitudes toward marriage began with the baby boom generation. From 1946 to 1964, over seventy-six million babies were born. By the 1960s the leading edge of the baby boom generation was coming of age and entering into the years when previous generations would begin to marry. But baby boomers (as well as later generations) did not marry as early as previous generations. Instead, they postponed marriage until they established their careers. From the 1960s to the end of the twenty-first century, the median age of first marriage increased by nearly four years for men and four years for women.

Some of those who postponed marriage ended up postponing marriage indefinitely. An increasing proportion of the population adopted this "marriage is optional" perspective and never married. They may have had a number of live-in relationships, but they never joined the ranks of those who married. For them, singleness was not a transition but a lifestyle.

Over the last few decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has documented the increasing percentage of people who fit into the category of "adults living alone." These are often lumped into a larger category of "non-family households." Within this larger category are singles that are living alone as well as a growing number of unmarried, cohabiting couples who are "living together." The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in 2000 there were nearly ten million Americans living with an unmarried opposite-sex partner and another 1.2 million



Americans living with a same-sex partner.

These numbers are unprecedented. It is estimated that during most of the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half a million Americans were living together. And by 1980, that number was just 1.5 million.[\[13\]](#) Now that number is more than twelve million.

[Cohabiting](#) couples are also changing the nature of marriage. Researchers estimate that half of Americans will cohabit at one time or another prior to marriage.[\[14\]](#) And this arrangement often includes children. The traditional stereotype of two young, childless people living together is not completely accurate; currently, some 40% of cohabiting relationships involve children.[\[15\]](#)

Couples often use cohabitation to delay or forego marriage. But not only are they postponing future marriage, they are increasing their chance of marriage failure. Sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, in their study for the National Marriage Project, wrote: "Cohabitation is replacing marriage as the first living together experience for young men and women." They conclude that those who live together before they get married are putting their future marriage in danger.[\[16\]](#)

Finally, we should note the impact of cohabitation on [divorce](#). When the divorce rate began to level off and even slightly decline in the 1980s, those concerned about the state of marriage in America began to cheer. But soon the cheers turned to groans when it became obvious that the leveling of the divorce rate was due primarily to an increase in cohabitation. Essentially the divorce rate was down because the marriage rate was down. Couples who break up before they marry don't show up as divorce statistics.

Many marriages today are less permanent than in previous decades. There have always been divorces in this country, but

what used to be rare has now become routine. Changing attitudes toward marriage and divorce in this country are reflected in the changing divorce rate.

A graph of the divorce rate shows two significant trends. One is a sharp increase in divorces in the late 1960s that continued through the 1970s. The second is a leveling and even a slight decline in the 1980s. Both are related to the attitudes of the baby boom generation toward marriage and divorce.

The increasing divorce rate in the 1970s was due to both attitude and opportunity. Baby boomers did not stay married as long as their parents due to their different attitudes towards marriage and especially their attitude toward commitment in marriage. It is clear from the social research that the increase in the divorce rate in the 1970s did not come from empty nesters (e.g., builders) finally filing for divorce after sending their children into the world. Instead it came from young couples (e.g., baby boomers) divorcing even before they had children. [\[17\]](#)

The opportunity for divorce was also significant. When increasing numbers of couples began seeking divorce, state legislatures responded by passing no-fault divorce laws. Essentially a married person could get a divorce for any reason or no reason at all.

Economic opportunity was also a significant factor in divorce. During this same period, women enjoyed greater economic opportunities in the job market. Women with paychecks are less likely to stay in a marriage that was not fulfilling to them and have less incentive to stay in a marriage. Sociologist David Popenoe surveying a number of studies on divorce concluded that “nearly all have reached the same general conclusion. It has typically been found that the probability of divorce goes up the higher the wife’s income and the closer that income is to her husband’s.” [\[18\]](#)

The second part of a graph on divorce shows a leveling and even a slight decline. The divorce rate peaked in 1981 and has been in decline ever since. The reasons are twofold. Initially, the decline had to do with the aging of the baby boom generation who were entering into those years that have traditionally had lower rates of divorce. But long term the reason is due to what we have already discussed in terms of the impact of cohabitation on divorce. Fewer couples are untying the knot because *fewer couples are tying the knot*.

## Changing Trends in Family

We have already mentioned that starting with the baby boom generation and continuing on with subsequent generations, couples postponed marriage. But not only did these generations postpone marriage, they also postponed procreation. Unlike the generations that preceded them (e.g., the builder generation born before the end of World War II), these subsequent generations waited longer to have children and also had few children. Lifestyle choice was certainly one factor. Another important factor was cost. The estimated cost of raising a child during this period of time rose to over six figures. Parents of a baby born in 1979 could expect to pay \$66,000 to rear a child to eighteen. For a baby born in 1988, parents could expect to pay \$150,000, and that did not include additional costs of piano lessons, summer camp, or a college education.[{19}](#)

When these generations did have children, often the family structure was very different than in previous generations. Consider the impact of divorce. Children in homes where a divorce has occurred are cut off from one of the parents and they suffer emotionally, educationally, and economically.

Judith Wallerstein in her research discovered long-term psychological devastation to the children.[{20}](#) For example, three out of five children felt rejected by at least one

parent. And five years after their parents' divorce, more than one-third of the children were doing markedly worse than they had been before the divorce. Essentially she found that these emotional tremors register on the psychological Richter scale many years after the divorce.

The middle class in this country has been rocked by the one-two punch of divorce and illegitimacy, creating what has been called the "feminization of poverty." U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that single moms are five times more likely to be poor than are their married sisters.[{21}](#)

An increasing percentage of women give birth to children out of wedlock. This increase is due in large part to changing attitudes toward marriage and family. In a society that is already changing traditional patterns (by postponing marriage, divorcing more frequently, etc.), it is not surprising that many women are avoiding marriage altogether. Essentially, the current generation disconnects having children and getting married. In their minds, they separate parenthood from marriage, thus creating an enormous increase in the number of single parent homes.

Greater social acceptance of out-of-wedlock births, divorce, and single parenting tends to reinforce the trends and suggests that these percentages will increase in the future. Young adults who contemplate marriage may be less inclined to do so because they were raised in a home where divorce occurred. A young woman raised by a single mom may be less inclined to marry when they are older, convinced that they can raise a child without the help of a husband. Better employment options for young women even encourage them to "go it alone."

These changes in attitudes and changes in the structure of marriage and family have created a very different family in the twenty-first century. One writer imagined the confusion that children would feel in this futuristic 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 stepcousins. 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.*[\[22\]](#)

## Notes

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