

What About Living Together Before Marriage?

Our world thrives on innovation. We ask how can we improve? What could make it better? Few are the souls as interested in right and wrong as they are in escaping tradition.

In the area of human relationships this is apparent as well. As modern man has sought to redefine marriage, what God has to say seems to matter little.

One example of this move toward innovation in male-female relations is what is euphemistically called “living together.” This state involves a couple cohabitating together and engaging in sexual intimacy without following through with the commitment of legal marriage. This may be entered into with one of two attitudes. The first says—“Our love isn’t defined by some piece of paper. We know how committed we are to each other.” This was very popular thinking in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The second says—“Let’s just try it for awhile and see how it goes. If things work out, then we will think about marriage.” In this mindset, the misnomer “trial marriage” is sometimes used to describe this condition. If a person has any regard for truth, he or she must ask three questions about such innovations:

- 1.) What is God’s attitude toward this?
- 2.) Is Living Together Marriage to God?
- 3.) Is this really such a good idea?

God's Attitude Towards Living Together

God's attitude is clear in this matter. Sexual intimacy before marriage is sin! This has been true in all three periods of Bible history. During the time of the Patriarchs we read in Genesis 34:1-31 of an incident involving Dinah, the daughter of Jacob by Leah (vs. 1). The son of a Hivite prince whose name was Shechem—**“Saw her, took her and lay with her”** (NKJV). Although this is sometimes referred to as the “Rape of Dinah” we are actually told very little about whether it was consensual or not. We are told, however, three things about this behavior: 1) It **“violated her”** (vs. 2); 2) It **“defiled Dinah”** (vs. 13); and finally, 3) It was **“a disgraceful thing...which ought not to be done”** (vs. 7).

When the Law of Moses was binding upon the Jews, the same principle was equally clear. In Deuteronomy 22:13-29 several relevant laws were spelled out: 1) If it was discovered that a woman was not a virgin when she was married she was to be stoned—**“because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel”** (vs. 21). 2) If a betrothed woman had sex with another man in the city, both the man and the woman were to be stoned (vs. 23-24). 3) If a man had sex with a betrothed woman in the countryside he alone was to be stoned, because although she may have cried for help no one could hear her (vs. 25-27). 4) If a man took a virgin who was not betrothed and had sex with her, he had to pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver, and he was never allowed to divorce her (vs. 28-29).

Christ's law is equally clear. First Jesus echoes the previous laws in a broad condemnation of "fornication" which he claims may **"defile a man"** (Matthew 15:20). Jesus used the word translated "fornication" in four passages – Matthew 5:32, 19:9, 15:19, and Mark 7:21. In each of these instances He speaks of it as sinful. New Testament writers teach the same thing, declaring **"the body is not for sexual immorality"** (1 Corinthians 6:13); **"he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body"** (1 Corinthians 6:18). They describe it as something that must be repented of (2 Corinthians 12:21), put away from our conduct (Colossians 3:5), and refrained from (1 Thessalonians 4:3), for no one practicing it may inherit eternal life (Ephesians 5:5).

Is Living Together Marriage to God?

In John 4:1-42 we are told of an encounter Jesus had with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (vs. 12). In the course of their discussion Jesus said to her **"go call your husband and come here"** (vs. 16). When the woman replied that she had no husband Jesus demonstrated His Divine knowledge in proclaiming to her—**"you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband"** (vs. 18). We note, the woman "had" someone but not a husband.

This makes it clear that a simple relationship of commitment does not constitute a divinely joined union.

Marriage is a beautiful relationship that entitles a man and a woman (who have the right to marry) to the most intimate and rewarding of all human relationships. It is a covenant witnessed, sanctified, and joined by God (Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:6; Hebrews 13:4). It occurs in truth only when a man and woman *LEAVE* the home of their youth, are *JOINED* to one another (fulfilling the recognized customs within a culture to acknowledge a marriage covenant) and *BECOME ONE FLESH* (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5-6). Only under these terms does God join a man and a woman together in marriage (Matthew 19:6).

Is This Really Such A Good Idea?

Some important information related to this subject came to light in 1992 from a United States Justice Department study. The study entitled "Female Victims Of Violent Crime" found that in any year in the 1980's 56,000 women were assaulted by their husbands. During those same years however 198,000 women involved in "live in" arrangements were assaulted by their companion. That is nearly four times as many, making it clear that women cohabitating were statistically more likely to suffer violence than married women. Apparently, men who are unwilling to make a permanent commitment to a woman they live with feel little need to "nourish and cherish" her as the Bible instructs (Ephesians 5:29).

The study further revealed that 40 out of 100 of these couples break up short of marriage. (This appears to be a major reason that

40 million adults have never married—double the figures from 1970). Of the 60 couples who do marry, 45 will divorce. That is a 50% higher divorce rate than married couples that did not first live together. Thus out of 100 “trial marriages” only 15 resulted in lasting marriages. This may mean danger ahead. A University of Wisconsin survey of Families and Households reports that two-third’s of those who marry now have lived together first. That is six times higher than in 1970 when only 11% lived together first.

To alter God’s arrangement is not only an offense to Him, but it deprives those engaged in it of the joyous union that God intended for them. God’s ways are always best.

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