

So Happy Together?

Should Christian Couples Live Together Before Marriage?

No. At least, that is the answer that has been historically given from Christians for all of Christianity. But increasingly, our culture is questioning that answer or rejecting it all together. More and more Christian couples are living together, believing that the Bible either doesn't address the issue, that their particular situation justifies them, or that the Bible is just outdated on this issue. After all, there are great benefits to living together before marriage. For one thing, you can get to know the person before making a lifetime commitment. There is also great economic benefit to having one house payment rather than two. And if we are being honest, there is no explicit verse in the Bible which says "Do not share an apartment with your girlfriend or boyfriend."

How should Christians respond? Should we simply get with the times and just move on to other issues? This article will argue that we should not give up this belief and should wait until marriage to live together for five reasons.

1. Living Together Leads To Sexual Immorality.

While there are no Bible verses that explicitly say not to live together, there are many that command sexual purity. Paul writes, in no uncertain terms, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God."¹ God commands us to be sexually pure.

Sex is a good thing and it was God's idea! In Genesis, when He created man and woman, the very first time God spoke to man, He told him to have sex!² But He also intended this activity to be in the context of a permanent relationship between the man and woman. That is why we read, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."³ After this explanation, there is a beautiful statement: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."⁴ They were not ashamed because they were using sex the way God had intended, and it was beautiful.

But in our culture, sex is treated as purely biological, like an itch that needs to be scratched, nothing more. Or, it is treated as simply a way for

people to express how they feel about each other. But regardless of the particular view, the foundation is the belief that sex is ok outside of marriage because sex is whatever we want it to be. But that is a lie!

Sex is what God wants it to be and anything outside of God's design is sin and it was the very thing for which Jesus died on the cross. And He didn't just die to forgive sin, but to stop it! Paul also writes, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."⁵ Christ died to purchase us so that we would no longer live for the lusts of the flesh, but for the God who created us in His image, for His glory, and our good! So Paul, in an extended discussion of this very topic, argues,

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him...Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."⁶

To engage in sexual activity, any sexual activity, outside of marriage is sin and it treats the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf with contempt and indifference.

2. Living Together Creates The Temptation To Sexual Immorality.

"But we aren't having sex, we are just living together" is usually the response at this point. First, that's a lie and everyone knows it!

Second, even if it were true, it isn't worth the temptation. In the same section of Paul's argument against sexual immorality, we are given the command to, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."⁷ Flee doesn't mean hang out with it, try to endure it, or take it in little

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

² Genesis 1:28

³ Genesis 2:24

⁴ Genesis 2:25

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:15-17, 19-20

⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:18

doses. Flee means to run away for fear of one's life! It is not only unwise, but unbiblical to put oneself in the face of temptation to sin needlessly out of a sense of loneliness and a desire for companionship, economic stability, or cultural acceptance.

But what is one to do if the desire for sexual activity is present and tempting and there is economic advantage to living together? Get married! That is what Paul goes on to teach when he writes, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."⁸

3. Living Together Causes Others To Stumble.

After Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy that God had accepted Abel's sacrifice rather than his, God approached Cain and asked, "Where is your brother?" And we all know how Cain responded, "Am I my brother's keeper?"⁹ For the Christian, the answer is: yes!

In the context of asking a different question about eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, Paul argues that there is nothing wrong with doing so because those idols don't actually exist. Yet there were people who had been saved out of that idol worship that were not yet mentally past their past. When they ate of the meat, it violated their weaker consciences. Thus, out of love, Paul responds "And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."¹⁰ Paul was willing to lay down his freedom to do certain things for fear that it would cause others to suffer or sin.

We are called by God to look out for one another and to use our freedoms to serve others rather than to serve ourselves. In our world, couples who live together have sex together. That is just how the world is and for Christians to live together, whether they are having sex or not, gives the world the impression that they are doing so in violation of the Christian belief that sex is to be reserved for marriage. It gives the world one more reason to see Christians as hypocrites and phonies. If you care about reaching non-Christians, you won't reach them while giving them the impression you don't actually live the message you proclaim. It would be like a cell phone salesperson trying to sell you a plan for one company while using another company themselves. If they don't use the company, why would the person they are trying to sell to use it?

4. Living Together Before Marriage Is Counter-Productive To A Healthy Marriage.

This reason is not rooted in an explicit biblical command, but rather in the wisdom of experience. When a couple commits to living together as if they were a married couple without ever actually making a commitment to each other, this creates intimacy without commitment. You see each other at your best and at your worst, you develop a lifestyle together and a unique culture in your home, and you engage in the most intimate of behaviors that two people can share. And while there can be great pleasure in intimacy with no strings attached, this is not a good foundation for a healthy relationship.

Healthy intimacy is the result of commitment, not the basis for it. This is because healthy intimacy grows out of trust. When two people are committed to one another, openness and honesty can flourish. But where no commitment has been made, there is the fear that if I am too open or too honest, I will be rejected. But while marriage does not completely erase the problem because people do leave marriages, that is the fault of the people, not of marriage. Marriage is a commitment of two people to be committed to another "for better or for worse." The greater a couple's commitment to each other, the greater opportunity for trust to be built and for honesty and openness to develop.

5. Living Together Places Children In An Unstable Environment.

Whether children are present when the couple moves in together or if they are a result of living together, this practice does not provide a stable home in which to raise children. Children need to know that their mothers and fathers not only love them, but love each other enough to be committed to one another. If couples live together without a lasting commitment, there is no form of stability for the child to count on.

In the end, the couple that chooses to live together before marriage is choosing to live outside of God's boundaries for His gift of love and sex. They are also choosing to live selfishly, disregarding how their decision will affect non-Christians and weaker Christians, as well as their own children. Finally, they are setting a poor foundation for their relationship in the future by failing to build intimacy on commitment and are instead building it on lust.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:9

⁹ Genesis 4:9

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 8:12-13