

Why Can't We Live Together?

We've come to a particularly sad time in the church today where sin is no longer sin. I'm speaking in particular about the tendency of Christians, or at least professing Christians, in a relationship who decide to live together before marriage.

It's incredible, the amount of calls I get from concerned parents and Christians regarding a couple who claim to be believers but have chosen to live together before marriage. All the counselling, warnings and advice seem to bounce off them. They believe what they're doing is not sin at all, and lacking Biblical advice, all too many people back off from getting involved.

I'm heartbroken to think of the damage this is doing. Young people who do this have no idea of the impact it will have on them down the road. Churches allow unrepentant sin in their midst to fester, and above all, the name of Christ is reproached as the ones bearing His name do exactly as the unsaved do.

Well, what's so wrong with it? I mean, everyone's doing it today, right? Plus, what if the couple is not indulging in sexual sin? Does that make it okay? Firstly, to make your standard of behaviour what everyone else is doing is a very poor standard indeed:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

On those words alone, Jesus is clearly teaching that following the momentum of the majority is in fact a deadly way to live your life. Something does not become okay because everyone is doing it, nor does it become okay once we think it is.

Proverbs 16:2 says, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits." In other words, men are self-righteous, but God is the standard. He sits with the scales of justice to declare if what you are doing is right and wrong. You can complain with the judge that you think His opinion is wrong, and it will not change the verdict. In His eyes, you are either guilty or not guilty.

Now when it comes to a couple living together before marriage, we can say on the authority of Scripture you are guilty of, at best, sinful foolishness – and from there it descends into uncleanness and fornication. Now before you get angry, please give the Bible a chance. James says that the anger of man does not work or produce the righteousness of God. You'll never make progress if you get furious at the Word. Please hear the Word of God on this issue and use it to grow.

See, living together before marriage violates a number of principles and commands in Scripture, whether or not the couple is involved in sexual sin. The behaviour is clearly condemned and discouraged in Scripture, not, as some have said, silent on the issue.

According to the Bible, living together before marriage is three things:

1. A biblical pattern violated
2. A biblical vow scorned
3. A biblical testimony destroyed

Let's unpack these to see how.

1. A biblical pattern violated

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This is God's pattern for male and female relationships. There is to be a moving on from one family to create another family. The pattern is as obvious as the words: a man will leave his father and mother, cleave unto his wife, they will be one flesh. Once there is a formal leaving of the one family, which is done in public marriage vows, there is to be sexual union, and the two are one.

The verse also does not say, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his girlfriend, and thus shall they be married.' No, the Bible says – cleave unto his *"wife"* – the Bible is implying that there is to be a marriage, and then a cleaving. First a covenant of marriage should take place, and then the consummation. The sexual union itself is not what marries. It is a vow before God that marries, and the sexual union seals the covenant.

Also, notice the verse does not say, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall live with his woman for a trial period to test if the marriage will be workable.' No, it says, once the decision is made to marry, that is when the leaving and the cleaving takes place.

Now, God is a God of order. He has clear patterns and designs. None is more beautiful than His pattern for love between man and woman. In there, He has hidden all the manifold beauties of his love for the church. God's pattern for marriage according to **Ephesians 5** is that both parties be Spirit-filled: then the husband will be sacrificially loving, so the wife can lovingly submit. This causes the man to feel significant, which causes the woman to feel secure. Such beauty, and pleasure – when done God's way.

However, God's design can be twisted. That is has been Satan's strategy from the word go – to twist the beauty of God's design, till his substitute tastes like sand in your mouth. God has a purpose in His pattern of waiting till marriage. That wait includes not only abstinence from sexual relations; it includes much of the intimacy as well. See, many Christians today have missed the point of the pattern. The point of God's pattern is for there to be deep anticipation prior to marriage, and deep satisfaction in marriage.

Now the world tells you that waiting and anticipation is foolish – like Esau, trade your birthright for the pleasure of a bowl of soup now! Why wait? With that thinking, too many Christians think it is acceptable to plunder marriage of all its privileges, without taking upon themselves the responsibilities. But God has set the world up for privilege to follow assumed responsibility.

When a man or woman tries to get money without work, honour without humility, rest without sacrifice, they find life will eventually unravel under their feet. So with the pattern of male-female relationships. The privilege of not only sexual relationships, but of living with a person of the opposite sex, sharing your rising up and going to sleep, sharing every meal, simply walking together in intimate fellowship, or romantically loving, belongs in marriage. That's the pattern.

Too many Christians allow their dating to be a mini marriage in which they do everything except sleep together. Finally, if they do get marriage, they find they have sucked all the privileges out, and all that remains that is new is the responsibilities. All the joy of discovery and novelty is removed, by those who think they are authorised to live as married before marriage.

Research from the Gottman Institute shows that people who live together before marriage often do not stay married for long. The longest lasting marriages tend to be between people who neither lived together before marriage nor even slept together before marriage. Studies like these don't surprise me. Violate God's pattern, and you bring all sorts of variables in that weren't meant to be there.

The man and the woman who wait for all that marriage will bring have so much more of a stronger bond, a glue that holds them together. God meant for there to be a growing anticipation, which is gloriously satisfied in marriage. He did not mean for the anticipation to be continually quenched in spurts, or leaked, or drained and then filled.

This is what happens in a romantic co-habiting relationship. There can never be intense satisfaction, because there has never been intense anticipation. Instead there is something else – frustration. For those who violate the pattern, and even those who believe they can live together and not sleep together – there will be intense frustration. The pattern of **Genesis 2:24** doesn't allow for a man leaving his father and mother, moving in with his wife-to-be, and not cleaving unto her. That is a recipe for sexual frustration of the highest degree.

To think that two people who are in a romantic relationship and living together will be able to withstand the temptation to sleep together is foolishness and pride taken to an extreme. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:12**: *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* In other words, those who overestimates their ability to withstand temptation are often just about to fall.

And of course, the desire for full union will inevitably become unbearable. Indeed, even if the couple claims to be able to withstand the temptation to physically sin, I would call into question your mental purity after even a short time of co-habiting. How foolish to place before your eyes the object of your affections literally all day, and have no chance of the union your heart and body craves. Your mind will commit adultery all day, even if your body does not.

I cannot imagine how any young person living together can honestly believe that they are obeying the command to *"flee fornication"* in **1 Corinthians 6:18**. It's far more likely to be

following fornication. Now fleeing fornication involves making sure you are never alone in private with the person you are dating. Moving in with them? I'd say that's the complete opposite end of the scale.

Romans 13:14 says, *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."* Living together is not simply making provision for the flesh – it is laying out an unguarded feast for it! But not only is co-habiting before marriage a biblical pattern violated – it is also:

2. A biblical vow scorned

I've heard it said like this: 'We're engaged. We're going to get married anyway. So what's the big deal? We're just getting a head start' or else, 'By living together, and sleeping together, we are married in God's eyes. So what if we didn't have a ceremony in front of the church?' These attitudes reflect a scorning of the biblical vow of marriage. See, marriage in Scripture is not simply a logistical arrangement to live together. Biblically, marriage is a covenant.

A covenant in the Bible is taken from a Hebrew word which literally means to make a cutting in the flesh. Covenants were, in biblical times, sealed with blood. Indeed, part of the modern handshake comes from the ancient practice of cutting the hand and shaking the cut hand of the one you were making a covenant with. It speaks of a permanent, intimate sharing – a binding effect. In fact, covenants being sealed in blood, another strong reason for virginity to be intact for the sealing of the covenant of marriage.

Marriage is a covenant made by two people to God. It is a covenant with each other, but it is a Godward covenant – a vow to God to stay with this one. Living together before marriage, whether in sexual sin or not, scorns this vow, this covenant. How? Well, hear **Hebrews 13:4**: *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."*

Marriage is precious to God, and His design is for two people to pledge their commitment to each other before Him. However the form, and it will differ from place to place – there needs to be a formal vow made before God, and witnessed by others. Some say, "Well, we made the vow privately." I don't think there is a single culture on earth that has allowed marriage to take place by the secret vow of the two.

Even pagan cultures have understood that the marriage vows must be publicly declared. I believe the vow of marriage needs to be declared to God and witnessed by man. Solemn promises are made in the presence of believers who will hold them accountable. From there, the pattern of **Genesis 2:24** is now in effect – a man must cleave unto his wife.

It's rather like a person who claims to be a Christian by doing some good Christian things like giving or acts of kindness, but has never 'formally', as it were, repented and received the Lord Jesus Christ. They never cried out to God for mercy at a particular time. They think now that

doing Christian things will sort of make them that way, by default. No, there has to be that event of reconciliation to God.

In the same way, acting like you are married and doing all the things of marriage does not make you married by default. Rather, it makes you a thief of what is not yours. There needs to be the vow of responsibility before God and man, before the privileges may be enjoyed. Others say, "Well, we are married already by sleeping together." But they are deceiving themselves.

Yes, according to **1 Corinthians 6**, the one who commits fornication with a prostitute is bound to that person. There are mental, emotional and even spiritual bonds formed by sexual intimacy. But Paul does not say that the person is now married to that prostitute. Sex will always have that binding effect. But that binding effect is not marriage in itself. Marriage is a covenant, and sex was meant to bind that covenant.

Such reasoning is like a man who commits adultery turning around and saying, 'No, it wasn't adultery, I'm just marrying someone else.' That's preposterous. The Bible is not unclear on what fornication is. Fornication is sex outside of the covenant of marriage. People living together who have not covenanted to marry, before God and man, are living in fornication. To claim that your fornication actually married you is to scorn the vow of marriage.

Those who say, 'Well, we will get married, so let's sleep together anyway' are also pouring scorn on the vow of marriage. They are saying, 'It's okay to commit fornication now, since in a few months, our marriage will legitimise it.' Does sin become righteousness because of what you plan to do? Is it okay to steal from you today, if I promise to return the goods in six months' time? God's pattern is wait – leave and then cleave.

To say it's okay because you're going to get married is to make the principle of waiting for the wedding night meaningless. It says God's pattern can be moulded for our situation. Sex before marriage, including promised marriage, is sin. Indeed, Jesus Himself was accused of being 'born of fornication,' because His mother Mary fell pregnant (by the Holy Spirit) while engaged. The Pharisees regarded his mother as having therefore slept with Joseph during the engagement period – making her a fornicator.

If it's okay to sleep together when engaged, then what is the point of having a wedding day at all? Why separate engagement and marriage, if they are really the same thing? Experience tells us that often engaged couples do not end up getting married, that the betrothal period is simply another part of the wait. To then take what belongs only in marriage, before the actual vow is made before God, is presumptuous.

The wait ends only on the wedding night – not a day before. **Hebrews 13:4** says the marriage bed must be undefiled, and I do not believe that dipping your feet in the waters of the marriage bed in any way obeys this command. Experimenting or trying it out in whatever form is defiling that bed.

It's also sad to hear this excuse for sin: 'We're living together to see if it would work if we got married.' That is wrong. You don't try marriage out before marriage to see if it will work. You

either take the whole deal, or nothing at all. You find the right one, and you make it work. As someone put it, choose your love, and then love your choice.

You do not assume half the responsibilities, and all the privileges, and see if you like it or not. That's a recipe for heartache and destruction. You do not try and make it work with some, and then marry the one it seems to work with. Marriage is not supposed to work outside of marriage! God made it that way.

Marriage is supposed to be a single, celebratory event. There is meant to be a preparation on the part of the husband – preparing a place for her, as **Proverbs 24:27** instructs him – a clear public decision to come together, and a particular day when the vow and covenant is made before God and man.

We have dealt with the pain and stain of sexual sin in another Bible Perspective series. Anyone who violates God's plan for sexuality and intimacy is storing up a harvest of grief and regret for the future. *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (**Galatians 6:7**).

Those who regard living together before marriage as acceptable scorn the public vow and covenant – they trample it underfoot, and pour contempt on the idea of promising to God to stay together. To do so is foolish, because **Psalms 127:1** says, *"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it."* Go ahead and try to build a male-female relationship without God. The Bible has warned you in advance: it will be in vain. Finally, living together before marriage is:

3. A biblical testimony destroyed

To say that living together brings doubt and question on your morality goes without saying. The world knows what it means to live together. A Christian couple who live together should remove the title Christian from their spiritual surname, because they are in violation of **Ephesians 5:3**: *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints."* It should not be close to our reputations, far from even the mention of it in our conversations – to say nothing of indulging in it.

Realise, the issue is not: 'is it legal to live together?' The issue is: does it glorify God? I mean, would you ask your doctor, 'Is it legal for me to take this tablet for my headaches?' The doctor would consider the question strange. Sure, it may be legal, but that's not the point. How many are you taking? What else are you taking? How often will you take them? How severe are the headaches? What brings them on?

The same is true of moral issues. It is extremely immature to say, 'Nothing in the Bible expressly forbids this.' I could say the same of pornography. There are many commands in Scripture that pornography violates, without it being specifically mentioned. The same is true of living together before marriage.

Paul's point in **1 Corinthians 6:12** is that even if something may be legal, he will not do all legal things if they are not spiritually helpful and if it will enslave – which co-habiting before marriage definitely will do. The fact is, Christians who live together bring the reputation of Christ into question with questionable behaviour. They are clearly not fleeing fornication, or fleeing temptation. They are meddling with things that will enslave if indulged in. All this adds up to not walking in a way that becometh or is fitting to saints.

Sometimes, we must maturely seek to uphold something greater than our own pleasure or desires, and consider the reputation of the local church, and the name of Christ in the eyes of unbelievers. **Colossians 4:5** says: *“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.”* Co-habiting certainly doesn't qualify as a wise thing to do in the eyes of unbelievers, regardless of your inward motives, or even your purity in that relationship.

The bottom line is **1 Thessalonians 5:22**: *“Abstain from all appearance of evil.”* If it looks bad, and it certainly has the potential for evil – throw it out. Live your life to be above reasonable question. It does not matter if the finger pointed at you is an untrue accusation, if you foolishly left the door wide open for such accusations. All that then matters is that you have lost your status as blameless, and it is your own fault. Protect the reputation of Christ, and your own reputation – do it God's way.

I plead with you – obey God's way. It works 100% of the time. God is not the cosmic killjoy. His plans are for the fullness of our joy, not the diminishing thereof. To live together before marriage is to violate the biblical pattern of **Genesis 2:24**, it is to scorn the biblical vow of marriage, and it is to destroy the Biblical testimony of a blameless believer.

If you're engaged – just wait for the day. If you're not planning on getting married yet but are dating – don't try to have a mini-marriage outside of marriage. Use your dating as a learning period to see if this person is God's choice for you. If they are, then get married and make it work. If you find yourself co-habiting with or without sexual intimacy before marriage, repent of an unbiblical arrangement.

God give us the wisdom to call good 'good' and evil 'evil', and not to invert these values. God grant us the boldness to speak these things to those who need to hear, and the courage to obey. Above all, may He grant us the faith to trust that His way works best.