

Myths About Cohabitation

Adapted in part from All About Cohabiting Before Marriage

There are a number of reasons given today for living together, most of which are based on current popular myths. Several of the most common myths of the day are:

"Economically It's Worth It To Live Together."

First, it is cheaper for two to live together. However, whatever monetary or other savings are realized from making the choice to living together is also the price at which one will compromise, lose or sell out one's moral standards, virginity, and purity. Second, economical advantages don't in themselves determine whether something is morally right or wrong. Third, the majority of cohabitants do eventually break up and economics are obviously not an overwhelming impediment then, so why allow it to become a controlling factor from the start. The moral questions ought to be, "What is my virginity worth" and "Will I save myself for my lifelong spouse?" Kevin Leman in *Smart Kids, Stupid Choices* says, "it's kind of like giving someone a million dollars and later finding out you gave it to the wrong person, but now he's gone and so is your money. Gone for good. You don't have it anymore. And the person who should have had it will now never get it."

"Living Together Before Marriage Increases Your Chances of Having a Happy Marriage Later."

You "test drive a car" before you buy it, so why not do the same with your lifelong relationships. Another one that is heard often is "you try on a pair of shoes to see if they fit before you buy them, why not your spouse." Someone has said, when you test drive a car you don't pack your personal luggage in the trunk or when you try on a pair of new shoes you don't want everyone else's foot odor and fungus already in them. You can throw away shoes without hurting anyone, but you can't throw away a person without hurting them and possibly others. The great paradox is that research indicates just the opposite of this conventional 'wisdom'. Numerous studies (see "Reasons" below) have shown that couples who have lived together before marriage are more likely to disagree on things like recreation, household chores and finances and are more likely to seek counseling than couples who do not cohabit. The scriptures tell us to "flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18), and to "flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness" (2 Tim. 2:22). In other words, avoid all sexual looseness like the plague. The rate of divorce skyrocketing in the last three decades during the same period as the rise of "living together" is proof enough that "trial marriages" are a failure.

"Doing It Won't Hurt Anyone."

Many people are permanently hurt, either emotionally or physically, or both. Even those not directly involved such as your friends and parents may get hurt. Marco (1997) lists several statistics for college age people, including the facts that 63% of all STDs happen to people less than 25 and more than 20% of all persons with AIDS are college age. Sin is like throwing a pebble in a pond, it involves only the pebble and the water, but it sends ripples across the entire pond. Sin is never solitary. It always has rippling effects. Sin can also be compared to a spreadsheet where a change of one cell affects the entire outcome at the end. Man sometimes lives as though one single behavior or event is an isolated cell that doesn't affect another; but it does. One's philosophy of life is like the controlling formula of a spreadsheet. When one part is changed, it changes the whole of it.

"It's Nobody's Business."

It is said that "living together has much in common with marriage except for the legal imposition of the church and state" However, there are birth, health and disease issues that arise as a consequence of cohabiting which do very much become the responsibility and expense of society. The church is a vital part of society and as such, has the responsibility to uphold that which is the best for society. If the couple wants to be married in the church, then it does become church business. The church itself also has the responsibility to uphold scriptural standards of purity, which is its business. We are admonished in scripture and have the responsibility to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Also, churches help launch and keep lasting marriages. Frequent church attenders have lower divorce rates because they are exposed to teaching and instruction on marital success and because the church body lends support and accountability to couples (Mattox 1997).

"It's All-Right Because We're Really In Love!"

First, love can never be a reason for premarital sex; rather, it is one of the greatest reasons to avoid premarital sex (Martin & Myers 1996). True love would never seek the spiritual downfall of another (Rom. 13:10). The scripture says that love is patient and kind; it does not seek to please itself, nor does it delight in evil, but is always hopeful (1Cor. 13). Therefore, true love is patient in waiting for the proper time for sex. It is kind to future spouses by not pre-harming marital intimacy. True love would be unselfish in placing God's will and the needs of others above self. It would not delight in the evil of disobedience, nor would it force another to disobey God (Martin & Myers 1996). Second, the 'feelings of love' are tricky. Jim Long in Campus Life (February 1986) states, "Love can fool you. Your feelings can trick you. The line between love and infatuation is thin. And frankly, sex confuses everything. To be physically involved clouds the issue. It makes you feel closer than you really are. It makes you feel as if you are actually in love. Maybe so. Maybe not." Third, living together is a form of prostitution and love. Dunagan (1993), for example, explains the Greek word rendered 'fornication' is 'porneia', which also means prostitution, and 'porne' was the word for prostitute. God chose these words to describe and label any sexual activity outside of marriage. (1 Cor. 7:9; Matt. 19:9). Fornication is essentially the love that is bought or sold, which is not love at all. The person with whom such 'love' (lust) is gratified is not really considered a person at all, but as a thing. He or she is a mere instrument through which the demands of lust and passion are satisfied. God is letting us know, to call such 'love' is false.

"But We're Going To Be Married Anyway."

This is presumptuous, naive, and wishful thinking. There is often one person in the relationship who doesn't think in terms of a permanent, lifelong relationship. The lingering question is: "If one gives in to moral temptation before marriage, what's going to be different and prevent them from repeating the behavior once the honeymoon is over?"

"The Bible Doesn't Teach That a Civil or Religious Ceremony Must Be Performed For Marriage to Be Valid In God's Eye, So Why Have One?"

The institution of marriage was first created and ordained of God (Gen. 2) and all marriages are still blessings ordained by Him in order that two may become one. It is evident that in biblical times there was a contractual agreement, perhaps verbal, signifying marriage. The parables of "The Wedding Garment" (Matt. 22:11-14) and "The Ten Virgins" (Mt. 25:1-13) indicate that marriage took place at a given time and place. The scripture says "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17 & Lk. 20:25). The government (the 'Caesar' of our day) requires that we must have a marriage license in order to be legally recognized. Since a marriage

ceremony is a civil requirement, we are obligated as law abiding citizens and Christians to observe it.

"It'll Enhance My Self-Esteem and Inner Security."

Marco (1997) provides a quote which he believes best sums up what the studies show: "I slept with many, many people trying to find love, to find self-worth. And the more people I slept with the less self-worth I had." It makes sense he says, when you give yourself as "pieces" to a lot of people, you are no longer whole, and as a consequence, may actually feel less self-worth and inner security -- because part(s) of you is (are) missing.

"The Bible is Silent on the Subject."

A common myth heard often is that there is nothing in the Bible condemning a couple for having physical relations prior to marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:2 says, "but, because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." Dunagan (1993) explains, 'Fornication' is unlawful sexual activity of any kind. In this verse Paul places the marriage relationship in contrast to fornication. Fornication can be avoided when you have your own spouse. Therefore, 'fornication-unlawful sexual activity' exists in a relationship in which a man and woman are physically intimate, and yet not married. And the Bible is very clear regarding the consequences of fornication (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8; Heb.13:4). In addition, Paul informs those that don't have the self-control to live the single life, to marry. (1 Cor. 7:9).

"The Marriage License Is Only a Piece of Paper, and it Doesn't Automatically Make Two People Committed to Each Other."

"It won't make me love you more." "We are already committed to each other, we don't need a piece of paper to prove it." Dunagan (1993) presents the other side of the argument: "If there's no difference in your relationship, what's wrong with adding one more symbol to your total commitment?" Evidently, marriage consists of more than just a piece of paper. After all, Dunagan says, who raises strong objections over 'just a piece of paper'? Who has ever objected to buying a ring (or anything nice) just to prove their love? OR, 'We're committed to each other, we love each other, we don't need to sleep together to prove that we love each other'; OR, 'I love you . . . really committed to you, but not for a lifetime'; OR, 'I love you, but not enough to want you to be my wife'; OR, 'I love you, but not enough to want to wear your last name'; I love you, but not enough to vow such love before God, family and friends'; OR, 'I love you, but not enough to enter into a relationship that brings you honor, respect and preserves your dignity.'