



# Living Together

## Intro

We live in a world where things that used to be black and white are now seen as much more grey or multicolored. One of those areas is marriage. In the past, sex was something that was to be saved for marriage and marriage was seen as a sacred bond between a man and a woman that was blessed by God. All these things were the way God intended the relationship between a man and a woman to work and when combined within a giving and forgiving relationship, successful marriages often resulted.

However, over the last 50 years or so, a huge change has swept through our culture. The sexual revolution changed sex from a blessing between a husband and a wife to something to do for fun. (Not that husband and wife didn't use the blessing for fun but it was used within that marriage covenant) People began to reject God's ideas on how marriage was to be and began substituting their own. Living together became the norm because popular wisdom said that it would allow a prospective mate to be "test driven" first and therefore result in a happier marriage. All in all, God's wisdom was replaced with humanity's, and fairy tale marriages were expected.

So what has been the result? We have now had over half a century to see the results. Divorce rates have steadily increased to a now common 50% divorce rate. It's a number that we hear so regularly that it no longer fazes us, even though it should appall us. Living together without marriage has increased 1500% in the last fifty years and 40% of children are now born out of wedlock.

Most everyone would agree that a skyrocketing divorce rate is a bad thing for families and society but does cohabitation have anything to do with it? Well it is definitely not the only cause, but it is definitely a major component. In the following pages we will take a look at some of the statistical information about living together and then more importantly what God says about it.

## Some Research

An article in *Psychology Today* (July, 2005) warned against the co-habitation of couples prior to marriage. The article pointed out that:

"...couples who move in together before marriage have up to two times the odds of divorce, as compared with couples who marry before living together. Moreover, married couples who have lived together before exchanging vows tend to have poorer-quality marriages than

couples who moved in after the wedding. Those who co-habited first report less satisfaction, more arguing, poorer communication and lower levels of commitment."

Another article from Psychology Today (March 2010) said:

"Well, most studies done from 1995 forward showed that couples that lived together before marriage had higher divorce rates as compared with couples that didn't. Other findings included poorer mental and physical health, including depression, especially for women. Other studies like Hewitt et al, Stanley & Markman, Baxter & Gray, and a more recent study by Robyn Parker in Australia continue to show advantages for marrieds over cohabitators and again especially for women. One explanation for these findings is that the burden placed on women is not compensated for in a living together environment. Since women are known to do the lion's share of housework, the thinking is that a woman would go from taking care of her own place to having to do the housework and other domestic errands in the two-person apartment or house that she shared with her boyfriend. All this extra work occurs without the benefit of the financial and emotional security that comes with the commitment of marriage."

"Most current studies show that if a person has lived with multiple partners, she/he will likely end up in a break-up or divorce. Other studies of living together show that after about a year and a half, the cohabitators either marry or break up. And the break-up rate is about 50%. So living together for many couples is a coin flip and does not ensure a happy marriage."

In spite of these observations, the 2005 article stated that:

"Thirty or forty years ago, co-habitation was relatively rare, mainly the province of artists and other questionable types, and still thought of as 'living in sin.' In 1970 only about 500,000 couples lived together in unwedded bliss. Now, nearly 5 million opposite-sex couples in the United States live together outside of marriage; millions more have done it at some point ..... Some evidence indicates that women have less control over the progress of the co-habiting relationship. She may assume they're on the road to marriage, but he may think they're just saving on rent and enjoying each other's company ..... Co-habiting men may carry their uncertainty forward into marriage, with destructive consequences. A 2004 study ..... found that men who had lived with their spouse before marriage were on average less committed to their marriages than those who hadn't . . ."

"Co-habiting relationships, by their nature, appear to be less fulfilling than marital relationships. People who co-habit say they are less satisfied and more likely to feel depressed..... While the precarious finances of many co-habitors has something to do with it, [another factor is] the inherent lack of stability. Long-term co-habitation is rare: most couples either break up or marry within five years ..... As a result, co-habitation is not an ideal living arrangement for children."

And the article from Psychology Today, (March 2010) said:

"Once upon a time, all the way back in the 50s, there was only marriage and sin. And then

came the 60s and 70s and alternative lifestyles popped up all over the place. Most especially couples simply living together. Since then marriage rates have declined while couples living together has gone up tenfold. Cohabiting has morphed into a virtue in the eyes of most Americans. In fact, for the first time in U.S. history more couples are living together compared to those who are married and this trend is continuing. About a quarter of unmarried women age 25 to 39 are living with a partner. And about 53% of all first marriages were preceded by living together.”

Now in the last few years certain groups have been fighting hard against this research because it goes against what they want to hear. Articles have been written that claim that the “Cohabitation effect” no longer exists. It is important to note that most of those articles get their statistics by ignoring certain information while emphasizing other material or phrasing their questions in a very biased way.

However, even if every survey and study said that living together was just as good as not living together, it would still not be in line with God’s will for our lives.

## **God’s Opinion on Love and Marriage**

It always amazes me how many times God has said we are to live one way and humanity has said, “God you are so uptight. We are going to do it this way and we know it’s going to be better.” It amazes me even more to see how many times God has said one thing and we have said another, only to find out that God’s way is the right way, leads to happier lives, and brings us into harmony with Him and each other.

So what is God’s way? God’s plan for marriage is a lifelong, exclusive union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife. That’s why God says in Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5-6 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” Marriage is so important and such a blessing that St. Paul described marriage a snapshot of Christ’s relationship with the church (His bride).

Marriage is a blessing ordained by God and that is why living together as husband and wife without being married is sin. As Christians we take the words of the book of Hebrews very seriously when it says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Hebrews 13:4) By living together and by “testing out marriage” we are openly going against God’s will and as we saw in the secular studies we greatly increase the chance of our marriage failing.

## **Why does the church care?**

Now some may say, “What does the church care about what two consenting adults do?” Well, we care because God cares and we are concerned for your spiritual wellbeing. God’s way is a way that leads to a happier life here on earth, and God’s way is also a way that leads to eternal life through His son. Sin, *all sin*, separates us from God and leads to a fate even worse than divorce or a broken relationship. As St. Paul said in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians and Galatians.

“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers. . . will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor.6:9-10).

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery. ... I warn you as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal.5:19–21).

It is at this point that people often says, “The church down the road doesn’t have a problem with us living together, why are you being so unloving? Can’t you be more loving like them?” It’s a good question and the answer lies is what is truly loving. If you see a friend or loved one doing something that you know will hurt them what is more loving, to say, “Keep doing that, it won’t hurt you.” and let them get hurt, or is it more loving to say, “Don’t do that, it will hurt you?” They might get mad at you for telling them what they are doing is wrong but it is the right and loving thing to do because you care about them.

Today many churches have chosen to ignore God’s word because they feel they might offend someone or because someone might get mad. But by making someone happy in the short term they are ignoring the long term damage that is done to marriages and the individuals spiritual wellbeing.

## **The Good News**

Now it is important to remember, as said before, that all sin separates us from God and even though the world may not take sin seriously, God does. It is so serious that the only cure was for it was for Christ to come into this world and give up His life to pay the price for it. That means that every sin has been paid for and forgiven. Christ died for every sin, including living together before marriage. All of it is forgiven when we turn away from our sin and turn to God for His forgiveness. No if’s, ands, or buts, all of our sin is taken away. And God doesn’t stop there. Through His Holy Spirit He also gives us a new and forgiven life.

## **New and Forgiven life in Christ**

So what does that new life look like? Well, since the forgiven life of faith involves turning from our previous sin, our new life involves responding to God’s will for our relationships. For instance, God has placed marriage as a building block for our families and as an analogy of the church’s relationship to Him (Eph.5:22–33). So marriage is to be...

- 1.) ...a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. (Gen.2:24; Matt.19:5–6; Eph.5:31)
  - In what ways is this different from the living together?
- 2.) ...God’s way of filling the earth. (Gen. 1:27-28).
  - How would living together conflict with this goal of marriage?
- 3.) ...a way for men and women to find companionship/friendship. (Gen 2:20-24)
  - Since living together is often seen as a way to find companionship and friendship, how would marriage be an improvement?
- 4.) ...for men and women to become one physically, meeting each other’s sexual needs. Marriage provides a healthy place to express sexuality. (1 Cor. 7:1-2).
- 5.) ...a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. The body of believers that make up the Church are collectively called bride of Christ. As groom, Jesus gave His life for His bride, “to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word” (Ephesians 5:25–26), and His selfless act provides an example for all husbands.

That is the desire God has for all His children. Marriages that keep Christ as their center are marriages that are stronger and healthier. That is why those who are living together have a good incentive to move from where they are to where God wants them to be.

A commitment to live together or an engagement can be broken at a moment’s notice. Even the most sincere feelings of love can fail but when a couple moves from living together, to repentance, to a marriage before God, they have **His** promise of support and blessing, and many of the horrible statistics can be avoided. For instance the article below was written by Glenn Stanton about the difference God makes in a marriage.

### **“The Christian divorce rate myth (what you've heard is wrong)”**

**By: Glenn T. Stanton**

"Christians divorce at roughly the same rate as the world!" It's one of the most quoted stats by Christian leaders today. And it's perhaps one of the most inaccurate. Based on the best data available, the divorce rate among Christians is significantly lower than the general population.

Here's the truth.... Many people who seriously practice a traditional religious faith -- be it Christian or other -- have a divorce rate markedly lower than the general population. The

factor making the most difference is religious commitment and practice. Couples who regularly practice any combination of serious religious behaviors and attitudes -- attend church nearly every week, read their Bibles and spiritual materials regularly; pray privately and together; generally take their faith seriously, living not as perfect disciples, but serious disciples -- enjoy significantly lower divorce rates than mere church members, the general public and unbelievers.

Professor Bradley Wright, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut, explains from his analysis of people who identify as Christians but rarely attend church, that 60 percent of these have been divorced. Of those who attend church regularly, 38 percent have been divorced.

Other data from additional sociologists of family and religion suggest a significant marital stability divide between those who take their faith seriously and those who do not. W. Bradford Wilcox, a leading sociologist at the University of Virginia and director of the National Marriage Project, finds from his own analysis that "active conservative Protestants" who regularly attend church are 35 percent less likely to divorce compared to those who have no affiliation. Nominally attending conservative Protestants are 20 percent more likely to divorce, compared to secular Americans.

Professor Scott Stanley from the University of Denver, working with an absolute all-star team of leading sociologists on the Oklahoma Marriage Study, explains that couples with a vibrant religious faith had more and higher levels of the qualities couples need to avoid divorce:

"Whether young or old, male or female, low-income or not, those who said that they were more religious reported higher average levels of commitment to their partners, higher levels of marital satisfaction, less thinking and talking about divorce and lower levels of negative interaction. These patterns held true when controlling for such important variables as income, education, and age at first marriage."

These positive factors translated into actual lowered risk of divorce among active believers. "Those who say they are more religious are less likely, not more, to have already experienced divorce. Likewise, those who report more frequent attendance at religious services were significantly less likely to have been divorced."

### **The Take-Away**

The divorce rates of Christian believers are not identical to the general population -- not even close. Being a committed, faithful believer makes a measurable difference in marriage.

Saying you believe something or merely belonging to a church, unsurprisingly, does little for marriage. But the more you are involved in the actual practice of your faith in real ways -- through submitting yourself to a serious body of believers, learning regularly from Scripture,

being in communion with God through prayer individually and with your spouse and children, and having friends and family around you who challenge you to take your marriage's seriously -- the greater difference this makes in strengthening both the quality and longevity of your marriage. Faith does matter and the leading sociologists of family and religion tell us so.

*Glenn T. Stanton is the director for family formation studies at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, Colo., and is the author of the new book, "Secure Daughters Confident Sons: How Parents Guide Their Children into Authentic Masculinity and Femininity" (Multnomah, 2011).*

## **So what's the next step?**

God calls you to begin your marriage in His grace. If you have started out your life together in your own way, instead of His, bring it to the Lord. You have a Savior that not only forgives past mistakes and sins but promises to give you His Holy Spirit to help you live your life in His will in the future. He will enable you to move from where you are, to a marriage that He will bless.

In the desire to help you move from where you are to where God wants you to be the pastors of Messiah usually take 3 steps. The first is that as Christian men and women we are to take our sin to the Lord. Knowing that when we do we will be forgiven because Christ has taken away that sin.

The second thing we do is, through God's Holy Spirit, we respond to God's grace by trying to live in a way that is God pleasing. We begin this by making a promise to refrain from sexual activity until after the marriage. God is the one that created Sex. It is a wonderful blessing but it is only to be used within the marriage covenant. That's why after we receive God's forgiveness we respond by beginning to use God's gift the way it was created to be used.

Third, a change in living arrangements is in order. This can be done in different ways.

- 1.) The first way is that one of the parties can move out and move in with family or friends until the wedding. This can be simply moving back home for a time or working out a roommate plan with a friend. The pastors will be happy to help you find a way to work this out.
- 2.) Another way to accomplish this is by moving up the wedding date. This works very well if there are kids involved. Instead of having the wedding in a year and a half in the future the couple can get a marriage license and Pastor Klaus or Kollmann will be glad to marry them within a short period. (That timetable will vary with the individual situation) To make this a possibility

Messiah and the Pastors have agreed to wave any wedding fee for the Sanctuary or the pastors for this event. Most of the time this takes place within a few months. If the couple would still want an event on the originally scheduled date that can be arranged. That event would then change from being a wedding to a blessing of the marriage.

Couple after couple has come back to Messiah after they moved up the wedding and said they couldn't have asked for more and are super happy they did it. Many couples who planned to do a big blessing of the marriage on the original date have often have decided not to do it because their wedding was so intimate and special that they have no desire to have a second event with 400 people, 300 of which they barely know.

Our Lord came into this world to save us. He regularly met people who had taken their lives in directions that were completely against His will. In those times Jesus didn't turn his back on them but offered them His forgiveness and a chance at a new life. Messiah Lutheran and it's pastors want to help you to know that Savior and help your marriage start off in a God pleasing way. We want you to look back on this time as the beginning of a new relationship with each other and with your Lord. If you have any questions, want to talk further, or we can help you in any way on that path, let us know.