

Myths About Cohabitation

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All About Cohabiting Before Marriage
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"The truth is that wherever a man lies with a woman, there, whether they like it or not, a transcendental relation is setup between them which must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured." C. S. Lewis, Screwtape Letters

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

Myth # 1:

Everybody's Doing It!

First, Everybody is not "doing it." Statistics show that of the college-age people, 65 to 80 percent are sexually active and some of those are living together (Marco 1997). Johnson (1996) estimates 30 to 40 percent of college students cohabit during their time at college. Although this is a large number, this also indicates that somewhere between 20 and 35 percent are not sexually active and somewhere around 60 to 70 percent of students do not cohabit. Therefore, to say "everybody's doing it," is a myth and does not hold up as a valid justification for cohabiting.

Second, A 1994 poll by ICR Survey Research Group for USA Weekend asked more than 1,200 teens and adults what they thought of "several high profile athletes (who) are saying in public that they have abstained from sex before marriage and are telling teens to do the same." Seventy-two percent of the 12 to 17 year-olds and 78 percent of the adults said that they agree with the pro-abstinence message. Moreover, 44 percent of those under the age of 18 said, "today's teenagers hear too little about saying no to sex." (Tom McNichol, "Sex Can Wait," USA Weekend, March 25-227, 1994, pp. 4-6.)

Third, In a recent statement by the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania they said, "just because everyone does something doesn't make it right or any less serious. A couple's choice to live together is not simply made in isolation. It affects everyone in relationship with these two people—parents, brothers, sisters, friends, and even other members of the parish. A cohabiting couple implicitly communicates that there is nothing wrong with breaking God's law. This can be especially misleading to young children - nieces, nephews, and children of friends—who are impressionable and whose moral reasoning is immature."

Myth # 2:

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."

A 2005 study, published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (Smock) looked at the relationship between economic uncertainty and relationship conflict. Researchers interviewed 115 young adults in the vicinity of Toledo, Ohio, who were cohabiting or had recently cohabited, and found that among cohabiters financial uncertainty and a lack of money were associated with relationship conflict and the lack of a "sense of a stable future," thus inhibiting the decision to marry.

In a recent statement by the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania, they said, sure, you might save the price of monthly rent, but you're sacrificing something more valuable. Engagement is more than just time to plan the party. It is a time for deeper discussion and more thorough reflection, which are best carried out in a detached way. Couples who are living together do not have the luxury of such detachment. So whatever expenses you save, you'll likely pay more in the end.

Dr. Joyce Brothers said it well in an article on cohabitation: "short-term savings are less important than investing in a lifetime relationship."

A study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* (Wilmoth 2002) of 9,137 retired individuals looks at the relationship between marital status and wealth. It found that cohabiters who never marry have 78 percent less wealth than the continuously married, and cohabiters who have been divorced or widowed once have 68 percent less wealth. Cohabiters who have been divorced or widowed twice are not significantly different from the continuously married group.

Myth # 3:

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.

Commentator Andrew Greeley (1991) states, "There is no support for the folk wisdom that premarital sex of one variety or another is a preparation for marital happiness."

A study (Kamp Duch 2003) of 306 married individuals between the ages of 19 and 40 who had married between 1981 and 1997 and 1,119 married individuals who were married between 1964 and 1980, looked at the relationship between marital quality and conflict and cohabiting for cohabiters of two different age cohorts. It found that respondents married between 1981 and 1997 as well as for those married between 1964 and 1980, those who cohabited before marriage reported less marital happiness and greater marital conflict than those who did not cohabit.

Myth # 4:

Doing It Won't Hurt Anyone.

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. 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. 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. One's philosophy of life is like the controlling formula of 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. When one part is changed, it changes the whole of it.

Myth # 5:

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 attendees 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).

"The Church is particularly concerned about cohabitation because the practice is so common today and because, in the long run, it is causing great unhappiness for families in the Church. This is true, above all, because—although society may approve of the practice—cohabitation simply cannot be squared with God's plan for marriage. This may be why most couples who live together before marriage find married life difficult to sustain for very long. The Church does not invent laws. It passes on and interprets what God has revealed through the ages. No one in the Church has the right to change what Jesus has taught. To do so would be to deprive people of saving truths that were meant for all time. Our Christian faith teaches that a sexual relationship belongs only in marriage. Sex outside of marriage shows disrespect for the institution of marriage, the sacredness of sex, and human dignity" (Bishops of Pennsylvania).

Myth # 6:

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 a thing. He or she is a mere instrument through which the demands of lust and passion are satisfied. God is letting us know that to call such 'love' is false.

Myth # 7:

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?"

Myth # 8:

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.

Myth # 9:

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.

Myth # 10:

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 before marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:2 says, "but, because of fornication, 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).

Myth # 11:

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, (makes the following questions and statements:)

- 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?
- We're committed to each other, we love each other, we don't need to sleep together to prove that we love each other.
- I love you (and I am) really committed to you, but not for a lifetime.
- I love you, but not enough to want you to be my wife.
- 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;
- I love you, but not enough to enter a relationship that brings you honor, respect, and preserves your dignity.

Myth # 12:

Cohabitation, marriage, and divorce is, can be, or should be, just another lifestyle choice, a purely personal relationship created by and for the couple.

This is the "most powerful and dangerous myth," according to Waite and Gallagher (2000:6) because it goes to the heart of the issue. There is an increasing tendency today to view marriage not as objective fact, but a subjective emotion—an inner feeling rather than an outer relationship. We have been duped into thinking that cohabitation, marriage and divorce is primarily for and about adult happiness. We evaluate our relationship primarily according to how well it satisfies my own personal need (Cherlin 1992:71).

In a recent statement by the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania, they said sex is intensely private and personal, but it also has deep moral and social dimensions. Sex works as a primary bonding agent in families and the family is the building block of society. Sexual rights and wrongs influence the health and happiness of individuals, families, and neighborhoods. That's why sexual behavior has always been the subject of much civil law. The Church, of course, wishes to safeguard the family and society. But, more than that, the Church wishes to safeguard your relationship with your future spouse and with God. Sex is the act that seals and renews the couple's marriage covenant before God. Sexual sins, then, are not just between a man and a woman, but between the couple and God. And that's the Church's responsibility. Sex is not simply a private matter. If it's between you and God, it's between you and the Church. You need to ask yourself: "When do I stop being a Christian? When I close the bedroom door? When does my relationship with God cease to matter?"

Myth # 13:

What we do with our own bodies does not affect our relationship with each other or our spiritual relationship with God.

Again, the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania offer good advice: the gift of your body in sexual intercourse is a profound symbol of the giving of your whole self. In making love, the husband and wife are saying to one another in "body language" what they said to each other at the altar on their wedding day: "I am yours, for life!" God created sex to be physically pleasurable and emotionally fulfilling. But it is even greater than all that. It is, above all, the deepest sign of the complete gift of self that a husband and wife pledge to each other. This mutual gift empowers the couple to become co-creators with God in giving life to a new person, a baby. According to God's design, the gift of sexual union has two primary purposes: strengthening married love and sharing that love with children.

The only place where this total self-giving between a man and a woman is to take place is in marriage. It is the only place where children can be raised with the secure, committed love of a mother and a father. So sexual intimacy belongs only in marriage. Outside of marriage, sex is a lie. The action says, "I give you my whole self." But the man and woman are really holding back their commitment, their fertility, and their relationship with God. Before giving your body to another person, you need to give your whole life, and you need to receive your spouse's whole life in return—and that can only happen in marriage.

Myth # 14:

We can have sex together and not become involved, even on an emotional level.

Dr. Neil Clark Warren of eHarmony, who has heard this numerous times says, "we know from our own studies that sexual involvement prior to a committed relationship of two persons who have vowed to remain faithful to each other for a lifetime always turns out to be problematical. When you get sexually involved with another person, you become highly dependent on them. You become deeply involved at the most profound levels of your being. It is as though your psyche, your soul, your body, becomes totally interrelated with the other person's psyche, soul, and body, such that the two of you really are bonded on the most fundamental level possible." As soon as there is sexual involvement before marriage, the decision to get married becomes a foregone conclusion. "In other words, the sexual bonding caused them to assume that the decision about getting married had already been made. I believe that sexual bonding often takes place far before intercourse," says Dr. Warren.

"The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does not mean that there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than the pleasure of eating. It means that you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of taste without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again."

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

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