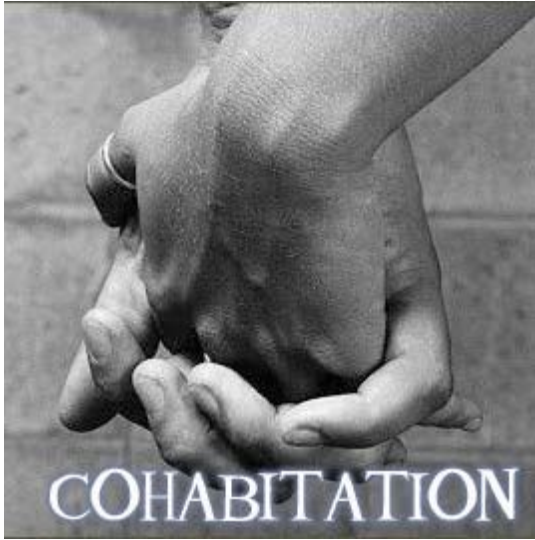


## Cohabitation

*Marriage must be respected by all, and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge immoral people and adulterers. - Hebrews 13:4 HCSB*



Cohabitation soared tenfold, from 430,000 in 1960 to 4.1 million couples in 1997.<sup>1</sup> It has replaced marriage as the dominant way male-female unions are formed in America. Yet it presents a major dilemma for pastors. How do we graciously tell a cohabiting couple that according to biblical standards, (1) they are living in sin, (2) and they are endangering their current and long-term relationship, without offending them and having angrily walk away from the church forever?

Some lower the standards and marry everyone who asks (hoping that something spiritual rubs off in the process). Others raise the standards so high that they marry an ever smaller percentage of couples each year (missing excellent and rare opportunities to evangelize). Neither choice seems very appealing or appropriate.

There is a third option: going over “Twenty Good Reasons Not To Cohabit Before Marriage”,<sup>2</sup> a paper that focuses mainly on the sociological, psychological, legal and physical reasons not to cohabit - before even mentioning Scripture. Some examples:

Those who live together before marriage are the least likely to marry each other. Only 26% of women surveyed and a scant 19% of men married the person with whom they cohabited.<sup>3</sup>

Those who live together before marriage have higher separation and divorce rates. Unions begun by cohabitation are almost twice as likely to dissolve within ten years compared to all first marriages: 57% to 30%.<sup>4</sup>

Those who live together before marriage have unhappier marriages. A study of 309 newlyweds found that those who cohabited first were less happy in marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Those who are sexually active before marriage are much more likely to divorce. A study of 2,746 women in the National Survey of Family Growth found the non-virgin brides increase their odds of divorce by about 60%. Here is secular evidence for St. Paul’s injunction, “Flee fornication.”<sup>6</sup>

Those who live together are at high risk for contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Three million teenagers alone annually contract one of five dozen STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and genital warts. If untreated, STDs can lead to brain damage, heart disease, infertility and death. Women who have three or more sexual partners in a lifetime are 15 times more likely to get cervical cancer.

Those who live together do not experience the best sex. The best sex is found in marriage. Couples who abstain from sex before marriage are 29% to 47% more likely to enjoy sex afterward.

Those having premarital sex may be fooled into marrying a person not right for them. Sex can be emotionally blind. Real love can stand the test of time without physical intimacy. The sexually active lose objectivity and actually cheat on the test of time.

Those who live together before marriage often suffer guilt and fear due to the dangers of STDs or unwanted pregnancy. Guilt can lead to frigidity and impotence.

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<sup>1</sup> The Census Bureau

<sup>2</sup> By Don Weston, Kansas City, MO, Family Life Ministries, 1998

<sup>3</sup> A Columbia University study cited in “New Woman” magazine

<sup>4</sup> The National Survey of Families and Households, based on interviews with 13,000 people

<sup>5</sup> by the National Council on Family Relations

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18