Playing House: Cohabitation

Prepared by Nathan L Morrison for Sunday March 24th, 2024

Text: Hebrews 13:4 Scripture Reading: John 4:16-19

### Intro

1. **Hebrews 13:4:** Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.
2. \*The Forbes Study on Divorce Rates, dated 01/08/2024, trumpeted the good news that divorce rates are falling!
3. The bad news is that the rate of marriage is dropping too!
4. The number of people choosing to live together is continuing to increase dramatically. Couples Who Live Together Before Marriage Are More Likely to Divorce!
5. **John 4:16-19:** Jesus called out the Samaritan woman at the well for living together with a man.
   1. As this woman began to draw water from the well, Jesus asked her for a drink, and then proceeded to tell her that He is the Living Water and that she should ask Him for a drink.
   2. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Jesus told her to call her husband and have him come.
   3. After stating that she had no husband, Jesus said, “You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly” (NAS).
   4. ***Here is a situation of cohabitation in the Bible!***
   5. **NET:** “for you have had five husbands, and the man ***you are living with*** now is not your husband. This you said truthfully!” (John 4:18)
   6. This woman was living a life that was far outside of God’s plan, and Jesus wanted to bring her life back in line with God’s will.
   7. This woman’s life had been caught up in one bad relationship after another, husband after husband, and the man she was currently living with was NOT her husband.
   8. We notice that Jesus made a clear distinction between the men who had been her husbands, and the man she presently lived with, whom Jesus did not consider a husband. ***(Living together does not make a marriage!)***
   9. This is an important distinction: Jesus did not affirm cohabitation as a good alternative to marriage, nor did He affirm that living together makes people married in God’s sight!
6. \*While browsing through other CoC websites I came across this letter to a church of Christ:
   1. Hi, I have a question. It lies heavy on my heart, and I have talked to many people about this and I still don't have a correct answer, since everyone's meaning and opinion differ from one another. But I would like to have the Christian way of doing it and understanding the situation correctly. My partner and I have been together for a while now. After several months of dating, we moved in together. Soon after that one thing led to another and we had sex. I know it's wrong since we are not married yet. I pray about it every night, and I have asked the Lord to forgive me for I know that we have sinned. Is it still considered a sin if you keep on living together and keep on having intercourse? We both know and want to get married. We are currently engaged and we want to spend the rest of our lives together. The only thing standing in our way of getting married is expenses; it is expensive. We barely get by every month and for us to pay for a wedding now is too costly.
   2. I don't know what to make of this. Are we still living in sin? What can we do, what are we supposed to do? Please, please help! Are we as a couple supposed to stop having intercourse and move out after we already created a life together, even if we know we are going to get married? The reason for this confusion is that I consider myself a child of God, and I know He forgives all our sins, but today a friend I know from church said God will only forgive your sins if you truly mean it, never do it again, and if you know in your heart what you are doing is wrong then it is wrong. And that after this life you will be punished for what you have sinned on earth? Is that true? Is what my partner and I are doing is just sinning over and over again? I am not sure what to make of it.”
7. It has become an accepted “lifestyle” to “live together” or “cohabit” before marriage (or no marriage at all)!
   1. Cohabitation used to be called “living in sin” or “shacking up”:
      1. Today those labels have been replaced by more neutral terms like “living together” or “cohabitation.”
      2. I Corinthians 6:9-10, 13, 18: Fornication is still sin despite a “nicer” way of putting it (Hebrews 13:4: God still judges).
      3. There are still those who say they are “living in sin” but without remorse, and some even say it in a proud way.
8. The reasons and justifications for it have even crept into the Lord’s church.
   1. Many people claiming to be Christians are cohabiting before marriage or in lieu of marriage and offer up many excuses for doing so, all the while thinking they are right before God!
   2. I Corinthians 6:9-10, 18: Fornication is sin and will keep a person from entering Heaven!
9. To live together before marriage is to commit fornication and is really “playing house!”

#### Reasons for Cohabitation (Living Together)

* 1. The stigma of having sex outside of marriage has been removed.
     1. **Hebrews 13:4:** People are not concerned about being accountable to God.
     2. Psalm 50:16-22: People only give lip service to God.
     3. \*Common Law Marriages were once widespread because of distance to the courthouse in some states, and to cover the shame of pregnancy out of wedlock. *(See Sources Section for further info)*
     4. As of 2023 8 states still allow Common Law Marriages. 27 states that once did no longer allow it. Some of the reasons are there is no longer shame at being a single parent.
  2. Technology has allowed people to have sex without producing children – with the consequence removed, people are no longer restrained.
     1. **Ecclesiastes 8:11:** Without consequence, people tend toward evil.
     2. Proverbs 29:15: Just like a child unrestrained.
  3. If a child is produced, many people have no shame at removing the inconvenience by aborting the child.
     1. \*Currently there are about 960,000 abortions occurring per year in the US!
     2. Exodus 23:7: God will not justify the wicked (Isaiah 59:7).
     3. In describing the moral decline of society Paul says they will commit fornication and murder – **Romans 1:29 (1:28-32)**
  4. People are choosing not to marry. Not to remain celibate either or to abstain.
     1. Why marry if “living together” is acceptable without commitment?
     2. **II Timothy 3:1-4:** People are lovers of self, unholy, without self-control, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Fornication is selfish!
  5. Feminism emphasizes independence from men. Dependence on a man in any way is seen as offensive – ***Ephesians 5:22-24*** (Want to remove the “wives be in subjection” part!)
  6. Without shame and consequences for sin, many see fornication (“living together”) as a viable option (alternative “lifestyle”) to getting married!

#### Common Defenses for Cohabitation

1. “Cohabitation is a good way to prepare for marriage.”
   * 1. This defense sounds logical and reasonable, but it is a myth that could not be any further from the truth!
     2. **Galatians 5:19 (NKJV):** Fornication (NKJV) is a work of the flesh! (NET: “sexual immorality”)
     3. **I Corinthians 7:2 (ESV):** To avoid the temptation of sexual immorality, let them marry! **(I Corinthians 7:9: Better to marry than to burn with desire)**
     4. They are “playing house!” and are endangering their souls! Marriage is the only way to have sex and avoid committing fornication!
     5. The divorce rate is higher among those who lived together before marriage (\*Forbes, 01/08/2024).
2. “But We Love Each Other”
   * + 1. If you love each other, then the greatest expression of that love is to commit yourselves to one another in marriage. **(I Corinthians 13:4-7: Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth)**
       2. When people decide to have sex without marriage, the emphasis is on sex – the sensual feelings (pleasure). (I Corinthians 6:13)
       3. Love seeks the best interest of another – if you love the other person, you will not want them to commit sin that could cost them their soul! (I Corinthians 6:9-10; 13:5-6: “Love does not seek its own, does not rejoice in unrighteousness”)
3. “But We Are Going to Get Married Anyways”
   * 1. Plans change! (James 4:14: We do not know what tomorrow brings!)
     2. How long to continue in sin? Days, weeks, months, years? (Even many saints fall prey to this line of thinking! – **Ephesians 5:3 (NET):** Not to be named among saints)
     3. But even if it is true that you are going to be married, and you do marry, a future marriage does not make right the sin you commit now! **(Romans 6:1-2)**
        1. What if someone had a problem with shoplifting, could they say to God, “I know that stealing is wrong in your eyes, but I plan on quitting sometime next year,” and be acquitted?
        2. Does God say, “Because you are going to stop in the future it is okay to shoplift in the present?”
     4. God doesn’t say to the cohabiting couple, “Because you have the invitations to the wedding in the mail, it is okay for you to fornicate now.”
     5. **I Corinthians 7:2, 9 (ESV):** The answer is to marry to avoid fornication. Move the date! Go before a Justice of the Peace and have a reception later!
4. “But we are married in God’s eyes, so why does it matter if we have a marriage license? It’s just a piece of paper!”
   * 1. A statement like that brings up a couple of different issues.
     2. First, God has told us to be submissive to the authorities, because God has ordained and works through the government *(Romans 13:1-7).*
        1. As long as the government is not demanding us to do something contrary to God’s authority, then we are to be good citizens and follow the law of the land – to be recognized as married by the state requires a license!
        2. And even though the most important aspect of marriage is the “spiritual” aspect, there is also a “legal” aspect that is important. **(I Peter 2:11-15)**
        3. Government doesn’t marry a couple – God marries a couple, but to do it legally requires a license.
     3. Second, cohabitating couples are not married in God’s eyes because they are living contrary to God’s and legal guidelines for marriage; they are not married in their own eyes because they have specifically decided NOT to marry!
     4. The Samaritan woman at the well was not married to the man she “lived with” in John 4:18. Jesus pointed that out. ***Living together doesn’t make it a marriage.***
     5. A man and a woman are married, in God’s eyes, when they publicly make a covenant *(Malachai 2:14)* before God to be faithful to their spouse in marriage, and legalize the marriage according to the government of the country they live in. Different countries have differing laws.
5. “We have to do it for financial reasons.”
   * 1. Those who cohabitate are most often younger people, however, more and more seniors are following their example, and both generations use the same defense – it saves money.
     2. With the younger ones it is an issue of paying bills. With the older ones it is often an issue of keeping individual pensions or social security benefits that they might lose if they married. (Follow the money!)
     3. We must ask ourselves: “Is the monetary savings worth the loss of morality and spirituality?” **(Mark 8:36: No profit in forfeiting one’s soul)**
     4. What is right and wrong is never determined by what makes the most sense economically! *(To use sin as defense to save money is a lack of faith in God)*
     5. God has promised to provide all our needs if we seek first His kingdom – do we trust Him? **(Matthew 6:33)**
6. “You wouldn’t buy a car without a test drive, would you?”
   * 1. That is certainly a good rule for buying cars, but it is not a good way to deal with people – *Real romantic reason to be sure (dripping with sarcasm)*
        1. If I decide not to buy a car after a test drive, the car doesn’t feel rejected.
        2. Rejecting a car doesn’t cause that car to bring emotional damage into the next test-drive.
        3. The car doesn’t need psychological counseling so it can trust the next car buyer.
     2. If we are completely honest, this “test driving a car” way of thinking is rather selfish and definitely NOT love **(I Corinthians 13:4-6: Love does not seek its own)**
        1. Instead of putting God first and putting the other person ahead of ourselves, this lack of commitment puts *me* first.
        2. It has to do with what *I* want and with what *I* think is best for *me.*
     3. **I Corinthians 7:1-4, 9 (ESV):** To avoid sin, a commitment to marriage must be made!
        1. 1  Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”
        2. 2  But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.
        3. 3  The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.
        4. 4  For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.
        5. 9  But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.
     4. God says to marry lest you burn up with passion. Burning up with passion if unchecked leads to fornication.
   1. God’s way means we look to God and His plan for marriage above all things, and it means making a commitment to the other person by entering the marriage covenant.
   2. Marriage isn’t just about feelings, preferences, and compatibility, though these are all important, marriage first and foremost is about commitment to God and one’s spouse!

## Conclusion

1. Fornication is sin, no matter what it’s called: “living together” or “Co-habitation.”
2. This is a big subject with a lot of implications for individuals, families, churches and societies.
   1. Not only are those defenses (justifications, excuses) offered by those in the world, even Christians have been heard using every one of them!
      1. I Thessalonians 4:3-8: We are to hold our body in honor and set it for holy purposes.
      2. We are not to use it for impure purposes, such as sexual sins *(I Corinthians 6:13, 18).*
   2. Those who give such defenses have a twisted, selfish sense of love *(I Corinthians 13).*
   3. If you love someone you will not want them to commit sin with you or to “live in sin” with you (*Romans 6:1-2),* but rather than “playing house,”you will make a house with God at the center!
      1. **Psalm 127:1:** Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.
3. Living together before marriage is “playing house” and just like the pretend game, there is no real commitment, and it can end, but unlike the game, it will cost one their soul!
4. Fornication is just one of many sins that can keep one out of Heaven (I Corinthians 6:9-10).
5. When one turns from sin, he or she can have forgiveness, even from fornication!
   1. **I Corinthians 6:11:** “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”
   2. If not a Christian, it begins with the right relationship with God – Acts 2:38; 22:16
   3. God forgave the Corinthian saints – God will forgive you!
6. Let us not “play house” but “Flee sexual immorality” *(NKJ: I Corinthians 6:18)* and create the family God designed for us to have *(I Corinthians 7:1-4, 9; Hebrews 13:4)!*
7. If not a Christian, you need to be! Repent & be baptized for the forgiveness of sins! *(Acts 2:38)*
8. If you are a child of God with sin in your life, you can be forgiven! *(I John 1:9)*
9. Whatever your request, let it be known ***NOW*** while we stand and sing!

**\*Sources:**

* Forbes Study: <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/divorce/divorce-statistics/#sources_section>
* LaVista church of Christ: <https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/if-we-continue-to-live-together-and-have-sex-are-we-still-in-sin-if-we-are-planning-to-get-married/>
* Common Law Marriage: <https://wisevoter.com/state-rankings/common-law-marriage-states/#:~:text=There%20are%20currently%20eight%20states,Carolina%2C%20Texas%2C%20and%20Utah>
* Abortions:
  + <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/11/what-the-data-says-about-abortion-in-the-u-s-2/>
  + <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2024/number-abortions-united-states-likely-be-higher-2023-2020>
  + <https://www.numberofabortions.com/>