

Should Dating or Engaged Couples Live Together?

The Bible is unambiguous in relating God's declaration that all sex outside of the marriage relationship is overtly sinful behavior. This includes, but is not limited to premarital sex.¹ What, however, of those who live together out of wedlock and yet are not sexually active? Is such behavior sinful? Is it acceptable?

For the most part, living together has historically been a less binding means of experiencing the benefits of sexuality without the commitments inherent to the marriage relationship. As former generations stigmatized all extramarital sexual behavior, cohabitation was traditionally deemed socially inappropriate. Given that the idea of non-sexual "shacking up" is a relative novelty, we should certainly reexamine the issue taking into account this new perspective. Does the lack of sexual intimacy shed new light that such behavior is appropriate from the perspective of Scripture? For two reasons in particular, it should be concluded that even this new concept of non-sexual cohabitation is inappropriate and foolish.

First, the Bible is explicit not only that one should abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5), but additionally that one is to flee from it (1 Corinthians 6:18- 20). The Greek word translated "flee" (*feugete*) in most modern translations is rendered elsewhere "escape," "avoid," or "shun" and is a source for our English word, "fugitive." Like Joseph when confronted by Potiphar's wife, one is commanded to not merely resist the temptation, but to flee from it.² This is not a passive response, but is an active and passionate run in recognition of the entangling power of the flesh and a desire to please the Lord. It would be extremely naïve to think that living with someone of the opposite sex would not present definite temptations toward explicit sin, especially when engaged with that person in a romantic relationship. How inappropriate it would be to pray "lead us not into temptation" when we willingly reside in a tempting environment. For this reason, wisdom would strongly suggest that one not cohabit. As Jesus has said in regards to temptation, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38).

Second, the Bible says quite a bit about the importance of one's behavior from the perspective of the world.³ Believers are said to be lights shining in the midst of a crooked generation (Philippians 2:15) and are therefore to display the gospel with their behavior to the larger culture in which we find ourselves. Given that culture naturally assumes that cohabitation includes sexual activity, obedience to the command for excellent conduct suggests that we should refrain from the action. Even if cohabitation did not present the problem of temptation to sexual

immorality, it would still be wise to renounce the practice in order to properly display the radical call to discipleship which flows out of belief in the gospel to the world at large.

It seems that our evangelical culture has grown accustomed to asking "can I" rather than "should I." We have gotten comfortable with merely restricting overtly sinful behavior while largely ignoring the greater demands of wisdom, whereas the Scriptures call us to do all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). On the issue of cohabitation without sex, it is certainly true that there is not a single text which explicitly condemns the action, but it is just as true that there is an abundance of Scriptural themes and commands which should cause those who love the Lord Jesus to gladly and humbly abstain.

In those instances in which cohabitation seems to be a necessity for financial or other reasons, we highly encourage one to think through whatever other options might be available. Where the situation seems hopeless, please speak with the church to see what options might be available from our end. Bring those contributing factors into the light and ask for help. Regardless, do not allow the harsh realities of life and all of its circumstances to give a foothold for sin in your life.

"Wisdom cries aloud in the street..." (Proverbs 1:20). May we have ears to listen and hearts that are willing and wanting to obey for our joy and the glory of our King.

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¹ The Village Church has a brief article written up regarding the issue of premarital sex available in our resource library.

² The same Greek word is used in the Septuagint's (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) Genesis 39 account of Joseph and Potiphar as is used in the Corinthians passage.

³ See in particular 2 Corinthians 8:21 and 1 Peter 2:12.