

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Developing A Biblical Sexual Worldview Chapter V

Cohabitation vs. Marriage

A Bible Study for Mature Christ-followers

~by Dr. John P. Splinter

*When I think of Lorelei my head turns all around
As gentle as a butterfly she moves without a sound
I call her on the telephone, she says be there by eight
Tonight's the night she's moving in and I can hardly wait
Lorelei let's live together, brighter than the stars forever
Lorelei let's live together, brighter than the stars forever
Dennis Deyoung and James Young ~ Styx*

It's the decision of this generation ~ to live together without marrying ~ to have "all the benefits and none of the liabilities" of marriage ~ at least that's the theory. People ask, "Isn't it wise to "test run" a marriage before actually making things formal?" Since 1960 the percentage of couples cohabiting has increased by 1,000 percent in the USA¹. The next few pages will present research findings, as well as scripture, as we compare/contrast cohabitation and marriage.

On the plus side of the ledger are several reasons why cohabiting is often seen to be a good thing:

- Living with a close friend
- Having sex any time
- Saving money by renting or buying one place instead of two
- Giving a potential marital relationship a trial run
- Providing a two-parent environment for the children of single parents

Of course, in this discussion there's a negative side too. Here are a few downbeat thoughts:

- Inability to commit ~ perhaps fear of commitment
- Fear of intimacy
- Broken sense of morality ~ morality treated as either irrelevant or situational
- Inability to delay personal gratification
- Emotional damage caused by sexual intimacy outside of marriage
- Worrisome existence of a quick exit in case a better option comes along

In the last 20 years cohabitation has been thoroughly studied by professional researchers ~ from university professors to therapists, from primary research to literature reviews ~ and it's safe to say the research findings are not encouraging. Indeed, one Ph.D.² concludes that there *is no* research favorable to cohabitation. Perhaps a quick review of some actual research may shed better light on the issue. What follows are references from mostly non-religious clinical literature pertaining to cohabitation.

Lower probability of marriage: People who live together before marriage appear to be much less likely to marry one another. Researcher Hilda Rodriguez (1988) writes, "Women who cohabit have a lower probability of marriage than women who do not. If a woman does not marry her first cohabiting partner, her chances of marriage decrease even further."³ In their study of cohabitation, socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity, researchers Manning and Smock⁴ (2002) write, "cohabiting unions are increasingly not resulting in marriage." In research published by Leadership University,⁵

"A Columbia University study cited in New Woman magazine found that 'only 26% of women surveyed and a scant 19% of the men married the person with whom they were cohabiting.' A more comprehensive National Survey of Families and Households, based on interviews with 13,000 people, concluded, 'About 40% of cohabiting unions in the U.S. break up without the couple getting married.'"

Lower trust: MacLean & Peters⁶ found that cohabiting couples showed significantly lower trust of one another than did married couples. Nock⁷ found that cohabiting couples expressed lower....