

worshipping an idol. Paul says that if that should happen, while there was no sin in eating the meat, such a person would “**sin against the brethren**” and “**sin against Christ**” (1 Cor. 8:12). In order to avoid this, Paul commanded, “**It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak**” (Rom. 14:21).

Now then, what does this show about the issue of living together before marriage? If a Christian should be willing to give up meat in order to avoid leading others to sin—If making someone think you are worshipping an idol is a “**sin against the brethren**” and “**against Christ,**”—then making someone think we are fornicating by choosing to live together before marriage is also to “**sin against the brethren**” and “**against Christ.**”

“**Be An Example.**” Our generation struggles as a whole with truly understanding how our example to others influences the lives of those around us. Couples who make this

choice probably don’t see how their actions could cause someone else to sin. Paul told Timothy to “**be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity**” (1 Tim. 4:12). What example does a choice like this offer to others? Let’s say that a couple is able to control themselves before marriage—will everyone have that same strength? *No, they do not!* Will their example help teenagers set limits on their own closeness when dating? *No, it will not.* Will their behavior show concern for their brethren who may face the discouragement of feeling as if no one does right anymore? *No, it will not.* Will their behavior help little children understand the importance of godly marriage, and godly homes? *No, it will not.* How will they answer little children who may ask...

- “Why aren’t you married if you are living together?”
- “So, it’s ok for people to live together without being married?”
- “Do you sleep in the same room?”
- “Why do people have to get married?”
- “Why are you waiting to get married?”

What Lies Behind This? In addition to the dangers this poses to the couple and those around them, it’s important to ask why such a choice would even be made? If it is a matter of financial concerns why not just go ahead and get married? Are we so in love with fancy decorations and pretty dresses that we are unconcerned about doing what glorifies God? Is our choice just a matter of letting the attitudes of the world influence us? If so, where will it end? Is this coming from a desire to simply resist authority, custom, or tradition? Do we just want to be different? Not all customs are bad—many exist to help us safeguard our influence and behavior. Does this come from a selfish desire to do whatever we want to do, regardless of its impact on anyone else? If so, the Holy Spirit reminds us “**Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others**” (Phil. 2:4).



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Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Eddie Cook
Steve Dixon
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Andrew Dow



Christians Living Together Before Marriage

By Kyle Pope

Since the so-called “sexual revolution” of the 1960s Americans in alarming numbers have chosen to either reject marriage all together or “test the waters” (so to speak) by first living together before marriage. Among those unconcerned with God’s word this has generally involved an unmarried man and woman allowing themselves all of the privileges afforded to a married couple, without the formality of “a piece of paper” between them (as they might put it). In other words, they share an address, share the bills, share responsibilities, and share a bed.

Those who look to the guidance of God’s word will recognize at once the Scriptures teach that sexual behavior outside of the marriage covenant is sinful. Sex before marriage is “**a disgraceful thing**” which “**ought not to be done**” (Gen. 34:7). It is among those things that can “**defile a man**” (Matt. 15:20). Although we were created as sexual beings, “**the body is not for sexual immorality**” (1 Cor. 6:13). Such behavior is not only a sin against God; it is a sin against one’s own body (1 Cor. 6:18). While most serious Bible students recognize that sex is sinful before marriage, a disturbing trend has begun among Christians which argues that a couple planning to get married can begin to live together, so long as they are not having sex. *Does the Bible authorize this?*

The rationale in support of this practice contends that the Bible does not specifically condemn living together so long as there is no fornication. This ignores, however, a few basic questions that must be considered:

I. What Dangers Does this Pose to the Couple?

By living together under the same roof a couple would expose themselves to the temptation of fornication in ways that they would not if they were living separately. Jesus warned that to avoid lust a Christian should be willing to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand (Matt. 5:27-30). We must ask, if this is what should be done to avoid lust, what about those kinds of things that could lead to fornication? Consider some of these issues as it relates to living together before marriage. Would the closeness a couple would enjoy under the same roof promote lust? Yes! If a couple plans to get married, it is likely that they both long for the lawful intimacy of marriage. Could anyone honestly argue that being alone with each other with no one else around would not promote lust? If so, shouldn't Christians do whatever is necessary to avoid such unlawful desire? Absolutely! The lax attitude of our culture toward lust can easily blind us to the real danger here that we may minimize sin. Jesus said that lust can lead one to hell (Matt. 5:29-30). What if such a couple while living together became guilty of a sustained

sinful desire that they have no right to indulge, and the Lord returned? Their souls could be lost! Now, clearly the desire a husband and wife share for one another is appropriate (Gen. 3:16), but that same desire outside of a marriage covenant is sinful. The wise man described the foolishness of imagining that we can expose ourselves to temptation without falling, when he asked, **“Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned?”** (Prov. 6:27).

I imagine that such a couple might say to themselves, “Well, even if we do stumble, we are going to be married soon.” Yes, but there are other dangers. What if the Lord returned before they could be married? In Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well nothing was said about any sexual behavior, but Jesus made it clear that to live with someone to whom one is not married is inappropriate. He asks for the woman's husband, and she is forced to confess that the man she currently lived with was not her husband (John 4:16-18, 29). What if Jesus asked a Christian woman who had chosen to live with a man who is not her husband, “call your husband”—How would she answer? Like the Samaritan woman, she would be in a condition in which she *had* a man who was not her husband.

What this mindset actually tries to do is to take on other privileges of marriage before two people have actually made a lawful covenant with each other. Genesis 2:24 teaches that marriage involves: 1) *Leaving* father and mother, 2) *Being joined* to one another, and 3) *Becoming one flesh*. It begins when a covenant is actually made. It is then that God witnesses their promise and makes the man and woman one (cf. Mal. 2:14-15; Matt. 19:6). Just because a couple has not yet involved themselves in the one flesh (sexual) aspect of marriage, does not mean they have a right to the other privileges of marriage before the covenant is actually made.

II. What Dangers Does this Pose to Others?

It is often very easy for us to feel as if things like this have no effect on anyone else. We must recognize, however, that being a Christian means that we must always be conscious of how our life affects those around us. We are to be **“the salt of the earth”** (Matt. 5:13) and the **“light of the world”** (Matt. 5:14). All of our works should bring glory to God (Matt. 5:15). In this issue we must ask, would two Christians choosing to live together before marriage glorify God or risk causing His name to be spoken against?

Let's think about how this could play out. What if the couple should try to influence two non-Christian friends to obey the gospel? What if these friends happen to live with one another in a sexual relationship? Would their choice to live with one another before marriage help or hurt their effort to convert them? What effect will their choice have upon their neighbors who are non-Christians? Perhaps the couple can resist temptation and maintain a non-sexual cohabitation, but will that be clear to those who see them living together? Will they go and tell each and every one of their neighbors—“Oh, by the way, we are not having sex”? If they don't do this what will most of their neighbors assume? They will assume the couple is having sex. What will they think when they hear (or see) that the couple finally got married? They will assume that the couple had been having sex all a long. They will assume that that they did this all while they were acting as if they were serving God faithfully. Now, someone might say, “Who cares what people think!” We must care because the appearance of hypocrisy can cause the name of God to be **“blasphemed”** (Rom. 2:21-24). Would such a choice make it harder or easier to convert their neighbors and friends? Clearly it would make it harder.

How will this choice affect things in the future? What if the couple has kids? Will they tell their children in the years to come, “Mommy and daddy lived together first—but we didn't have sex”? Perhaps they will, but how easy will it be to discourage their future children from living together with a companion in a sexual relationship? Will their children be quick to listen to their warnings? How will this couple answer when their children say, “Why shouldn't I live with someone?— You did!”

As “salt” and “light” we not only have the responsibility to act in ways that glorify God, but we also must act in ways that avoid causing others to stumble. The same extreme measures that Jesus taught we must take to avoid lust, He also taught when it comes to influencing others to sin. We should be willing to poke out an eye or cut off a hand rather than act in any way that could lead another person to sin (Matt. 18:8-9). Jesus even goes so far as to say that it would be better to die than to cause someone else to sin (Matt. 18:6-7).

Does that only concern things that clearly involve sin on our part? No. It can even concern things that might appear to others as sinful. Take for example what Paul taught about eating meats. In both Romans and First Corinthians Paul addressed issues about eating meat. There were two problems, but very similar solutions. The Roman problem primarily concerned Jews who were coming to understand that Mosaic dietary restrictions were no longer in place. The Corinthian problem concerned Gentiles who used to eat meat sacrificed to an idol. His instructions illustrate a great deal about the question before us. For example, Paul told the Corinthians if a Christian ate with a non-Christian he could eat whatever was set before him without asking about it (1 Cor. 10:27). However, if the person should say, “This was offered to idols,” we must note what he commanded. Paul tells Christians not to eat it! (1 Cor. 10:28). Now clearly, nothing changed about the meat because of what their host said. It didn't go from being clean to unclean or unclean to clean. What changed was the influence this could have upon another person! Although the Christian may not *actually* be sinning by eating the meat, he was to avoid eating it because it could give the impression that he was