

“An Expensive Counterfeit - Cohabitation”

Hebrews 13:4

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(Marriage; Sexuality; Singles)

In Hebrews 13:4 God says, “Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

She volunteered that she was 24 years old, said she knew she didn't look it but she was. She was right, she looked younger.

She had struck up a conversation with me toward the end of a flight to San Francisco last weekend.

She was on her way to visit her nearly 7 year old son whom she had given up for adoption when she was 17 and unmarried.

She introduced herself as “Kim” and she initiated the conversation when she overheard Sam Kimbriel and me talking about the Lord.

She had a Bible with her, which she proceeded to take out of a bag, and asked where she should begin reading.

She said she was a Christian but her live-in boy friend was more knowledgeable about the Bible and she wanted to learn more.

Sam and I talked to her until the end of the flight but I couldn't help wondering what would cause this young woman to allow her boyfriend to move in?

A person doesn't even have to be a Christian to know that “living together” is at least socially frowned upon in our culture.

Certainly as professing Christians she and her boyfriend must have had some conscience about this living arrangement - how did they justify it or rationalize it?

Didn't especially this young woman know the potentially tragic consequences of sex outside of marriage - after all, she was on her way as a stranger to visit her own young son.

Did she think she could convince her live-in to love her if she allowed him into her home and bed?

Did he think it was safer to see if the relationship would work out before he made any commitments?

My Oxford Dictionary calls it “living together as husband and wife without being married.”

The clinical name is “cohabitation”.

The more vulgar term is “shacking up”.

And it used to be called “living in sin”.

No matter what we call it, a growing number of Americans are doing it - living together as lovers without being married.

The number has grown 700 percent in the last 20 years.

According to a survey of Colorado adults, 21% are now or have been in a cohabiting relationship. (1997 RMFC report - 21)

And 60% of Colorado adults say it is not a bad idea to live together without marriage. (1997 RMFC report - 21)

And it is not just college age and twentysomethings - it's also adults with children - in 40% of the homes of cohabiting couples children are present. (Stanton 65)

A friend of mine who employs many people told me last week, as I recall it, that of nine of his engineers, seven were in cohabiting relationships.

It's not just a phenomenon of the lower class or less educated.

You work with them, they are in your neighborhoods, and increasingly they are coming from our own families.

“Yes, Mom, we're living together, why not?”

Some think of living together as a good way to find out if they are compatible - a “trial marriage” - thinking thereby to increase their chances for a good marriage.

Others think of living together as a more loving and beautiful relationship than marriage with its contracts, legalities and bondage.

They don't want to corrupt true love with legal papers and conventional institutions - like a wedding.

But how satisfying are these relationships and how successful are they?

Again I am indebted to Mr. Glen Stanton and the reviews of the research he has done in his book Why Marriage Matters.

I'm also using some information from the Rocky Mountain Family Council and its 1997 survey of Colorado adults.

How satisfying is "living together" without marriage?

1. Cohabiting women are 3.5 times more likely to be depressed than women who have never been divorced and 2 times more likely to be depressed than women who have never married - and even more likely to be depressed than women who have been divorced.

It is the living arrangement that is most likely to be associated with depression. (Stanton)

2. Cohabiting men and women are twice as likely as married people to think their relationship is in trouble and be anxious about it.

Cohabiting does not produce a purer love it produces a more anxious love. (Stanton)

How satisfying is living together without marriage?

3. "The public image of sex in America bears virtually no relationship to the truth."

The University of Chicago and the State University of New York at Stony Brook conducted the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs) using 220 interviewers talking to 3,432 scientifically selected people.

Contrary to Red Book, the Kinsey, the Masters and Johnson, and many other studies - this was done with an accepted scientific methodology employed.

One summary statement bears repeating: **"The public image of sex in America bears virtually no relationship to the truth."**

The myth is that it is the single and newly married who have all the fun when in truth "in real life, the unheralded, seldom discussed world of married sex is actually the one that satisfies people the most."

It seems that it is the security, the permanence, the commitment of life-long marriage that unlocks real sexual satisfaction.

"It is hard for sex to be satisfying if it has to be approached with the same precautions used in handling toxic waste."

(Stanton 44)

5. Cohabiting people are more likely to be sexually unfaithful to the relationship - they are cohabiting but they are not monogamous.

And Andrew Greeley of the University of Chicago found that those who engage in sex before marriage are 6 times more likely to be unfaithful to their spouse in marriage. (Stanton)

How satisfying is "living together?"

1. When married couples are compared to cohabiting couples, the married couples are more likely to share roles and be equalitarian in their relationship.

The idea that living together will give women greater liberty is a myth - in fact she is more likely to be treated as subservient.

The male chauvinist Archie Bunker is more likely to be found in a cohabiting home than in a married home.

It doesn't look like "living together" is very satisfying. And how **successful** is living together?

2. "Cohabitors are much more violent than marrieds."

Cohabitors are two to three times more likely to abuse each other physically. (Stanton)

Some suggest that because boundaries aren't established in cohabiting relationship ("after all it's not like we're married or something!") there is a greater likelihood of misunderstanding and the disagreements that can follow.

In 1994 the Centers for Disease Control reported that 6% of all pregnant women were battered by their husbands or partners.

For every one married pregnant woman battered by her husband there were four unmarried pregnant women were battered by their boyfriends. (Stanton)

How successful is it for children when their mothers or fathers moves in with someone else?

As I mentioned earlier, children are in 40% of the homes where adults are cohabiting.

It is not a particularly safe place for children.

Live-in boyfriends make up only 2% of the non-parental child care in America but they account for 64% of the non-parent child abuse. (Family Research Council)

One of the reasons people give for living together is to increase the likelihood of a good marriage.

Many, if not most, people who live together plan to sometime get married.

What does living together do to their chances of a successful marriage?

First of all 40% of all cohabiting unions break up before marriage.

And of those who do marry there is a 50% higher likelihood of divorce. (Stanton)

In the Journal of Marriage and Family, Thomson and Colella found in a study of 13,000 adults that those who cohabited before marriage “reported greater marital conflict and poorer communication than marrieds who never cohabited.” (Stanton and JMF 54 1992)

The very things that people say they are seeking by living together without marriage is what they are in fact less likely to get by living together.

Cohabiting is an expensive counterfeit - the toll it exacts on the emotional well-being of men and women and even the physical toll it takes on especially women and children make it a very expensive counterfeit - very high cost without ever getting the real thing.

But it is not just that cohabiting doesn't work in preparing for good marriages or for providing for children or even for satisfying physical relationships.

It is that cohabiting doesn't work at the most basic level of human need - intimacy-belonging.

It's not "rocket science" to understand why cohabiting men and women are more likely to be depressed than people in any other living arrangement.

Pardon the expression but it's a little like trying to find **true love** in a whore house.

While living together has the appearances of the real thing - everything about the living arrangement is stacked up against obtaining the genuine love people are seeking.

While I suspect that some people live together because it is a cheap and convenient way to get sex, I truly believe most men and women who cohabit, do so because they want to belong.

Some, out of fear or hurt, have suppressed that desire, but most people long to belong.

They long for a relationship - a oneness of soul, an intimacy that is more than just physical - an intimacy at the real core of their being - an intimacy of spirit.

But today they seek it in another person without building the foundation that will make it both **satisfying and successful**.

I think we must make a personal appeal today to men and women who are living together or are thinking about it.

And the appeal is that they would not settle for an expensive counterfeit in place of the real thing.

An appeal to them to seek intimacy in the way that will allow them to know the fullness of a genuine relationship and not get short-changed by only part of one.

How many rationalize that if he or she won't marry me then at least by living together, we can be together - "Isn't half a loaf better than no loaf at all?"- they reason.

As we have already seen - "No it isn't!"

All cohabiting insures, is that the best of what marriage offers can't happen and that the worst of what marriage might offer is more likely to happen.

**There is a better way! - the only way that truly works.
It's called marriage.**

"Wait a minute!" someone thinks, don't most marriages end in divorce or at least a loveless coexistence?

Haven't we proven in this culture that marriage is a failure?

Marriages don't fail - people do!

It is true that many men and women abuse their marriages but that doesn't discredit marriage any more than drunken driving discredits automobiles.

Look briefly with me at how God designed us and marriage and see how it is the way to gain the intimacy people futilely seek in so many other ways - including living together.

I want you to look at Genesis, chapter 2, with me.

I know it is a little trite but isn't it at least interesting that of everything God made in chapter 1 he said it was "good" except Adam.

Of Adam, God said in 2:18 "It is not good for man to be alone..."

Years ago, Dwight Small wrote, "Man was not complete in himself but had need of intimacy with God. Man's nature had an appointed

deficit that could only be filled by means of union and communion with God. But man was given an appointed deficit that made him dependent in still another way. Just as he could complete himself spiritually only in personal interaction with God, so likewise he could complete himself.. only as he lived in interaction with other human persons... p27 Design for Christian Marriage

Here's how God demonstrated that relational deficit so dramatically:
 Look at Genesis 2:19 "Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them...
 But for Adam no suitable helper was found."

All the rest of creation could not meet the need that was Adam's.
 Man was still alone.

So what did God do?

Genesis 2:21-22 "So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, **and he brought her to the man.**"

Relationship, connectedness, belonging to another human was the missing piece and when God brought the man and the woman together the creation was complete.

Here's the way Adam said it, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man."

"God made the woman with a complementary nature that there might be a basis for attraction and mutual fulfillment. An individual man is attracted to an individual woman and each finds the possibility of fulfilling the life of the other. Each has the capacity to complete the other; they complement in order to complete... (Small p27)

That is what people seek yet today!

That is what people are seeking in "living together" - a

complementarity that completes.

So why don't they find it?

Because they omit the foundation.

Look at the next part of the text where Moses, the author of Genesis, gives a commentary.

He draws from this first "coming together", of a man and a woman, to comment on how it is supposed to be among all people.

Genesis 2:24 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

In Genesis 2:21 when it says God created woman and brought her to the man, **God officiated not at a cohabitation but at a marriage.**

In Genesis 2 God did the wedding ceremony.

Am I reading too much into this passage?

I don't think so - look at what Moses says: "For this reason"

What God did in Genesis 2:21 is the prototype of all other unions of men and women.

And what is that union to look like? Leaving, uniting and one flesh.

Those words define marriage.

They define the context in which men and women can find the connectedness, the intimacy they long for.

Gordon MacDonald wrote "Biblical marriage in its most profound sense is a stepping off into the recovery of the original state of humanness when a man and a woman were not exploiters of each other but were helpers of one another." (Magnificent Marriage p7)

Isn't that what we long for?

And the foundation of that kind of relationship is marriage.

God said first of all we "leave".

This is a point in time decision to separate from the past.

This says there is no going back.

I am changing my relationship to the past and past people.

In marriage it means I will no longer relate to my parents, my past friends or anyone else in the way I used to.

But in “living together” people leave the door open to going back.

They intentionally leave it open - fearful of cutting off a retreat.

And so they fail to put in place the first building block of a relationship that can provide what they long for.

But God said to have a marriage we not only “leave” but we must also be “united” to another.

This is a point in time declaration and commitment to a new way of life, a new loyalty.

Several times in the Bible (Prov 2:17; Eze 16:8; Mal 2:14) marriage is called a “covenant” between two people and before God.

That is not coincidental, but it is what this “uniting” is about - it is a covenant.

There are several characteristics of “covenants” in the Bible:

1. A Covenant is stated and specific.

It is not assumed, it is declared.

It is not general it is very much to the point.

People who just live together so often have just assumptions and hopes (along with a lot of fears) - no stated and specific commitments.

For it to be a covenant, for it to be a marriage - there has to be a “Will you?” and an “I will”, a “Do you?” and an “I do.”

2. A covenant is permanent.

Of those who live together only about half even expect it to be permanent.

And even those who desire it to be permanent can't ignore the statistics - many don't become marriages and those who do are more likely to end in divorce.

There's nothing permanent about it.

Listen to this wedding pledge and ask what permanence is implied here: “We pledge, **while in this union**, to be responsible to each other and to be committed to a relationship of loyalty and mutual caring.” (1996 news article about homosexual union in San Francisco officiated by Willie Brown)

By contrast, in a marriage, a relationship of real intimacy grows out of the soil of trust and the bedrock of that trust is permanence.

When Jesus was commenting on this same passage in Genesis 2 he said that permanence is an essential element of this being “united”.

Matthew 19:6 “What God has joined together let man not separate.”

Living together provides only an illusion of permanence.

3. Covenants had signs or symbols attached to them to tangibly illustrate the covenant.

God gave the sign of the rainbow to corroborate his covenant with Noah.

God initiated the sign of circumcision to corroborate the covenant with Abraham.

When covenant-marriages were initiated they were accompanied by gifts or symbols.

Today the ring is a sign, a symbol of the covenant.

4. Covenants had witnesses who could confirm the content of the covenant.

It was required that people making a covenant have witnesses to that covenant - people who could affirm the intent and the content of the commitment being made.

Just living together is the opposite of all aspects of a covenant.

And thus the last part of God’s definition of marriage is never achieved: “and they will become one flesh.”

One flesh is not just sexual but is also emotional, mental and spiritual.

The “one flesh”, the oneness, the connectedness, the unity, the intimacy at every level of life, is the very relationship that men and women seek.

That doesn't automatically happen in a marriage but a life-long covenant marriage is the protective environment in which, over a life-time it can happen by God's grace.

The tragedy of our time is that many are attempting to meet their need for connectedness, for relationship, for intimacy, without attending to the essentials of "leaving, uniting, and one flesh-ness" that comes in a covenant marriage.

Survey after survey demonstrate that the loneliest people in America are those who cohabit - live with someone else without marriage.

Listen again to Dwight Small:

"Loneliness on the human plane results in part from the illusion that (some) people indulge that they can live with other persons without committing themselves to share in their concerns or entering into **responsible interdependence**. Probably the loneliest person in the world... is the one who apparently has everything except a reverence for other personalities, and so does not know what it is to be committed to the needs of others, or creatively to fulfill his life through interaction. The walls between persons which are created by our culture (of sin) can only be scaled by the kind of concerned love that does care and share. The deepest needs in human life are met by love and acceptance. " p28

And I add, the **illusion of intimacy** in living together without marriage only exacerbates the loneliness.

Sex is used by men and women alike to **create** intimacy instead of **expressing** intimacy.

Our culture has separated sexuality from real humanity and treated it as a commodity to be taken and received.

But sexual oneness outside of spirit oneness perverts the whole conception and intention of physical intimacy as God designed it.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside of marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union."

(Mere Christianity)

If we love people, we must tell them - just living together doesn't work!

God loves us and he said, "Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

I beg you, don't just live together - it will defraud you of the very life you seek.

It is an expensive counterfeit.