

SHOULD DATING OR ENGAGED COUPLES LIVE TOGETHER?

Adapted from the Village Church and HDC's Philosophy of Ministry

The Bible is *clear* that all sex outside of the marriage relationship is sexual immorality. This includes, but is not limited to, premarital sex. However, many might wonder or ask if it's ok to live together out of wedlock but not be sexually active. Is such behavior sinful?

Is it acceptable?

As former generations denounced all extramarital sexual behavior, living together or cohabitation was traditionally deemed socially inappropriate. Today, it seems that "*shacking up*" or living together is seen as socially needed if you're going to be married. Many in today's culture see living together as the next step before marriage. In fact, many see it as a need and prerequisite to getting married, even if sexual intimacy isn't occurring. After all, conventional wisdom says, "*we need to test drive the relationship before we solidify the commitment with a marriage ceremony and declaration.*"

Does the lack of sexual intimacy justify cohabitation and is it appropriate from the perspective of Scripture? For three 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 when it comes to sexual immorality. Christians should abstain (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5) from it, flee from it (1 Corinthians 6:18- 20), and avoid any hint of it (Ephesians 5:3). For the Christian, Jesus just doesn't ask His followers to avoid sin, but to live in such a way that, if an accusation of impropriety would come, there would not even be a hint of such behavior.

It would be extremely naïve to think that living with someone of the opposite sex would not present definite temptations toward sin, especially when engaged with that person in a romantic relationship. For this reason, wisdom would strongly suggest that one would not cohabit.

Secondly, the Bible speaks of marriage as a covenant. A covenant is a blood bond of life and death—it's an "*all or nothing*" commitment. The Bible says that our two most intimate relationships, our relationship with God and our relationship with a spouse, are both founded on covenants.

We live in a contractual culture. That means that everywhere you look you run into fine print. Most of the couples who choose to live together before they marry or choose cohabitation rather than marriage, make their decision believing that marriage is just another contract. Actually, their logic is sound—but it's based on a faulty premise. In the eyes of the state, marriage might be a simple contract, but in the eyes of God, it is not a contract—it's a covenant. Whenever a man's and a woman's love reaches the point where sexual intimacy or starting a family becomes part of the discussion, God insists that we first enter into a marriage covenant.



Lastly, the Bible says quite a bit about the importance of one's behavior from the perspective of the world. More specifically God has given you **8-15 people** to influence, and your behavior of living together doesn't display the power, love, and self-control found in the Gospel of Jesus. Our culture naturally assumes that cohabitation includes sexual activity; therefore, living with someone would greatly limit yours and your fellow believers' influence to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. We've all heard it said that "**Christians are hypocrites**" and the reality is that your behavior affects your witness and vice-versa. Even if cohabitation did not present the problem of temptation to sexual immorality, it would still be wise to not live together in order to properly display your faith in Jesus to your *oikos*.

It seems that many Christians have grown accustomed to asking "*can I*" rather than "*should I*." Many Christians want to get as close to the line of sin as they possibly can without stepping over it. 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 true that there is not a single passage of Scripture 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 abstain from any hint of sexual immorality and live a life worthy of the Gospel.

In those instances, in which cohabitation seems to be a necessity for financial or other reasons, we highly encourage you to think through other options that 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 rob you of your mission to reach your *oikos*.

