

A Christian View of Sex, Marriage and Living Together *Genesis 2:20-25; Ephesians 5:31-33; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20*

In a cover story on premarital sex, *U.S. News & World Report* raised the question: Have you ever heard a sermon on living together? The article goes on to say:

Condemnation of adult premarital sex has virtually vanished from religious preaching, even in the homilies of Catholic priests. “In the pulpit there has been a backing away from moralizing about sex before marriage,” says Bishop James McHugh, the bishop of Camden, New Jersey.

Why such reticence: The answer may seem obvious. Americans, at least tacitly, have all but given up on the notion that the appropriate premarital state is one of chastity.

Now, if some researcher from a news magazine calls you and asks, “Have you ever heard a sermon on living together?” you can say, “Yeah, sure, I heard one last weekend!” and you will make the national news.

Couples living together and engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage is not new. It was frequent in the first century Roman world. For the past generation Scandinavian couples have been more likely to live together before marriage than get married and then live together. What once was unusual in America has become common, although not as common as television shows present. American TV is ten times more likely to portray sex outside of marriage than within marriage although in real life sexual activity is ten times more likely to occur inside of marriage than outside of marriage.

Our purpose today is to develop a Christian view of sex, marriage and living together. There is no need to spend much time explaining a non-Christian view of these matters. It is readily available on television and through other media. What we want to do is get a Christian perspective. So let’s start with the divine design of human sexuality.

The God of the Bible is a God of diversity. There is one God, but there are three persons that are distinct as Father, Son and Spirit. This is a marvelous mystery that is impossible for us to fully understand and explain.

When God created humans he created us to be like him. God thinks so we think. God has emotions so we have emotions. God makes choices; we make choices. We’re not God, but we are a lot like God. That family resemblance is clearly there.

When God created us in his image he created us to have our own diversity within our human unity. We are all people but we are all different. The main difference is gender. We learn in Genesis 1:27, “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*”

There is an interesting use of words here. We are all “man” in the sense of humanity. In other words, in most ways we are the same. We can have

blood transfusions or organ transplants one to another regardless of race, gender or age. We all have amazing similarity in appearance.

But we also have significant distinctions and the number one distinction gender. If you meet a person or witness a crime, the most likely characteristic you will remember is gender. Even if you don’t

remember race, age, height, weight or other aspects of appearance, you are still likely to remember whether the person was a male or a female. Gender and sexuality are very important parts of each person’s created identity.

Sexuality is a gift from God that connects the souls and bodies of men and women. The order is important: 1) souls; 2) bodies. God created us not to be alone. When we are alone we are not all we are meant to be. We feel incomplete, disconnected and dissatisfied. That is why we spend much of our lives trying to make a connection with someone else.

Adam was not complete, satisfied or fulfilled alone, even though he was in paradise and God was his best friend. So God gave him a woman to connect to spiritually and physically.

At creation, God placed within us a strong desire for sexual union. It is true that part of that is for populating the world, but is far more than that. It is to be an expression of the connection of the souls of two different people. That strong sexual desire is normal, healthy and God-given. Some may think it is mostly physical, but that is a tragic mistake. Those who seek physical sex through promiscuity will never be satisfied because they haven't connected their soul to anyone. They may try more and more and become more aggressive and exotic, but they will never be satisfied. Sexual union is all about fulfilling our created need to connect our soul to another person. Genesis 2:20-25 deals with this:

So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 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.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

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

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

This story from the Garden of Eden is filled with truth, spirituality and sensuality. Adam was not complete, satisfied or fulfilled alone, even though he was in paradise and God was his best friend. So God gave him a woman to connect to spiritually and physically. She became the primary human relationship of his life. He immediately realized the unity they shared when he said that she "*is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*" While these words are not very romantic, I think in essence what he was saying was, "She's like me. We are one, but we are separate, distinct." In that combination of unity and diversity their relationship was forged. The natural and normal expression of connection of their souls was in sex. There they stood separate

but united. Naked but not embarrassed. The fulfillment of the way God designed them to be.

The divine design was to preserve and protect this intimate and mysterious relationship between a man and a woman in the relationship of marriage. God knew that gifts as powerful as soul-connection and sex need protection so they can become strong and last long.

We understand this concept of protection because we do it all the time. If we have a penny we leave it out or loose in our pocket, but if we have a \$100 bill we put it in a wallet or purse. If we have a weed we don't care what happens to it; if we have a garden we build a fence to keep out the rabbits and deer. If we have a stuffed animal we leave it home alone when we go to the mall, but if we have a baby we take her with us and never leave her alone. If we have a stick we leave it unguarded in the backyard; if we have a nuclear bomb we surround it with an army of armed guards. The more valuable something is the more we protect it.

God puts huge value on the connection of human souls and on the sexual connection between a man and a woman. God wants the spiritual connection to grow strong. He wants sex to be fun and fulfilling. He wants to keep the dangers out of the soul and the sex. His fence is high—no other people get to participate or to watch; no diseases are to come from outside sources. God knows that the best soul connection and the best sex connection happen when a man and woman know without a doubt that they are completely and permanently safe within the protection of a permanent and exclusive relationship of commitment called marriage. It's described in Ephesians 5:31-33:

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

God knows that sin is a problem to his ideal. People chronically abuse his gifts. They take this wonderful, powerful gift of sex and use it to abuse children, sell their bodies for money, attack others in rape and seek unfulfilling fun without the satisfaction of soul-connection. God is never surprised

but always saddened by human destruction of divine design. That’s why God tells Christians to watch out for messing up his design. It’s in numerous places in the Bible, but from I Corinthians 6:18-20 we read:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

God designed our bodies and souls to work together and to enhance each other. When we use sex in ways that God did not design we are sinning against God. It is bad rather than good. And it is ultimately bad for both God and us.

God sees the body of a Christian as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are like cathedrals where the Holy Spirit of God lives. What we do with our bodies directly impacts the Holy Spirit inside each of us and his reputation on the outside of us. That’s why we Christians should always use our bodies to make the Spirit of God look good.

If you are not a Christian, none of this may matter to you. It may not even make much sense because God is not all that important in your life. But for those of us who are Christians, this divine design shapes our Christian view of couples living together without marriage.

Here is where 21st century Americans are in adult relationships: 51% married; 7% living together; 8% widowed; 11% divorced; 3% separated; 18% never married. Between 1960 and the end of the last century the number of people living together in the United States grew by 1000%. Today five million American couples are living together without being married. That is a significant social change. As many as half of all the couples getting married in the United States today are living together when they get married.

Explanations for this include birth control, the sexual revolution and a later marrying age. Fifty

years ago it was far more likely for people to be married in their late teens or around 20. Today the average marrying age in America is 25 for women and 27 for men. But perhaps the best explanation is the fear of divorce. We have a generation of adults whose parents divorced and left them hurting for life. One of the most significant and traumatic events in a person’s life is the divorce of parents, the effects often not showing up until years later. Many who marry today do not want to repeat the divorces of their parents or the friends of their parents. They conclude that the best way to guarantee a permanent, successful and committed marriage is to live together first. In other words, the reason for living together may often be well motivated.

However, social researchers tell us that the outcome of living together before marriage is exactly the opposite of what is intended. Partners are four times more likely to sexually cheat on one another if they are living together than if

they are married. Secular researchers without any Christian agenda are now saying that couples who live together before marriage are less committed to each other and to marriage. In fact, couples who live together before marriage increase the likelihood of a divorce if and when they do marry. The risks are so high that marriage researcher Scott Stanley is quoted in USA TODAY as saying, “If you want someone to marry, choose someone who won’t live with you.”

Of course, the assumption of many couples is that they will marry and that living together will simply end up being a “prequel” to that marriage. For some, that is the way it turns out. However, researchers tell us that among many couples who live together there is an increased likelihood of infidelity, there is an increase in abuse and there is an increase in the likelihood that they will break up before they ever get married. That is because the essence of marriage is commitment and the essence of living together is not making that commitment.

Dr. Nancy Moore Clagworthy spent ten years researching people who lived together without

...marriage researcher Scott Stanley is quoted in USA TODAY as saying, “If you want someone to marry, choose someone who won’t live with you.”

marriage. She began with a hypothesis that living together is a good thing and sought scientific documentation for her conviction. She concluded that living together without marriage “is one of the worst things that can happen to anybody.”

The alternative to living together is to do sex God’s way, and that is marriage. That takes conviction, courage, discipline and self-control. However, it is those very ingredients that make for a good marriage, soul-connection and good sex. Interestingly, married couples report higher sexual satisfaction than do couples who are living together!

This message is increasingly being heard and understood by teenagers in America. We are already seeing a significant shift in attitude among America’s teenagers toward premarital sex. *TIME* and MTV funded a survey of people 13-18 and the result was that 56% of American teenagers said they want to abstain from sex until they marry.

Remember, sex is more spiritual than it is physical. Sex is more than the connecting of two bodies; it is the connecting of two souls. That is why it is so very important that Christians marry other Christians. It is impossible to fully connect the soul of a believer and an unbeliever.

A high school girl wrote this interesting letter to author Tim Stafford:

I am a Christian. I don’t believe in premarital sex and I also do not believe that oral sex and “petting” are harmless. My problem is that I could not answer a question that a guy asked me. He simply wanted to know why I couldn’t let him touch me in those certain places. Of course, it sounds like a simple question, but I’ve thought and thought and I can’t come up with any more reason than “I don’t want you to.” I have very strong morals in this area but now that the question of “why” confronts me, I’m really confused.

Here is how Tim Stafford answered her question:

Because when he touches you in those places, he touches more than skin. He touches a very private part of your soul. When you do, at last, give that part to someone, you don’t want fingerprints all over it.

He got it. He understood it. The divine design connects the body and the soul. Just as you don’t want to drink out of a glass coated with lipstick

imprints and fingerprints, you don’t want your soul covered with the fingerprints of many sexual encounters. The divine design is to have our souls embraced by God and the person to whom we are married. Let our bodies and our souls be touched only with clean hands and pure hearts.

The highest goal for the Christian is to glorify God—to make God look good. That is more important to a Christian than money, job, success, power, title, sex, happiness or anything else. Making God look good is what the Christian life is all about. I Corinthians 10:31 says, “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*”

In 21st century America we have a wonderful opportunity to make God look good in the way we live out this divine design. What we do with our bodies and relationships is a primary expression of our love of God and our commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. The Christian view of living together is that it does not make God look good. What does make God look good is the Christian view that sex and marriage are divinely designed gifts that are for our spiritual and physical satisfaction and pleasure.

For those who are now living together, talk together about changing your relationship to follow the design of God. For those who have lived together and have regrets, tell God about it and let him give you a fresh start. He is the God of second chances and new beginnings. He is the one who cleans up the soul. For those who have followed the divine design so far, good for you! Continue well. And for those who have influence on others (your parents, your children, your brothers and sisters, your friends, your co-workers and neighbors) be the agent of God in kindly and positively communicating God’s divine design for sex and marriage.

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.faithmatters.fm
©Leith Anderson