

***Question: A recent TV report stated that the number of people choosing to live together without marriage has increased in recent years. Why is this so wrong?***

In February, 2010, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published a statistical report on “Marriage and Cohabitation in the United States.” When we compare that report with statistics from a 2002 national survey on family growth, we do see a discernable increase in the number of couples who cohabit before or without marriage. However, the report also shows that most couples still prefer marriage over cohabitation.

For those who trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, it is enough to know that the Bible views sexual relationships outside of marriage as immoral. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Also read 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:2-5). I do understand that cohabitating does not necessarily imply a sexual relationship, but I believe it is safe to say that most couples who live together are sexually active in their relationship.

Those who prefer to trust their own wisdom instead of what Jesus would say should consider that the above statistical report also points to some negative effects of premarital cohabitation. The report states: “Persons who cohabit before marriage are more likely to have their marriages dissolve than those who did not cohabit premaritally.” In addition, the report says: “Studies comparing child academic outcomes and behaviors in cohabiting and married parent households conclude that children living in families where the mother is cohabiting do not fare as well as those where the mother is married.”

Apparently cohabiting couples have failed to understand how the covenant commitment in marriage affects the relationship. It may not prevent divorce, but it can both enhance the marriage and prevent problems. Compatibility is not necessarily something two people already have. It is something created when a man and a woman commit to each other. When committed for life, a married couple will make a greater and more deliberate effort to accommodate each other. Living together before marriage creates habits and thinking that hinder growth in the relationship after marriage. For example, the “this is yours and that is mine” attitude which may prevail in an uncommitted relationship is difficult to change into an unselfish “this is ours” thinking after

marriage. The previous relationship too often continues, and the possibility for the creation of compatibility has been short-circuited. The insecurity of this uncommitted relationship can cause deep-seated emotional anxieties and psychological damage. If children become involved in these transient and non-committed relationships, the problems are even more devastating. Even some secular psychologists and sociologists have confirmed the harmful effects of co-habitation before marriage.

I pray that my readers will think about what they are doing to their own future and happiness before deciding to live together as a test for marriage. Marriage was created by God in the Garden of Eden in order to bless humanity. The principles that Jesus taught for living can help achieve the success and happiness that God intended in marriage. Let's look at the evidence gathered from experience in our world today and give the Lord's way a try.

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