

ON COHABITATION

From the Elders of The Garden Church

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Many dating couples and opposite-sex friends have been faced with this question: *Should I stay the night? Should he stay with me while he's in town visiting? or Should we move in together?* While this memo has heterosexual couples in mind, Christians who struggle with same-sex-attraction may also apply this to their own lives as they consider their pursuit of purity.

What does the Bible say about cohabitation, or “staying together?” At first glance, nothing directly. However, where the Bible doesn’t directly speak about it, the Bible certainly speaks to it. The Bible provides us with a framework through which to make wise decisions on whether or not to cohabit:

Three Wise Questions to Ask:

#1 - “Could the decision cause me to be unnecessarily tempted?”

I Corinthians 6:18 is clear that we must “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.” Sexual attraction may be the most obvious temptation, but others may have to do with lust, drunkenness, dishonest behavior, etc. Passages such as I Thessalonians 4:3-6 and Galatians 5:19-21 define the consequences of giving into these temptations and the importance of abstaining from them.

#2 - “Does the decision honor God’s intent for marriage?”

I Corinthians 7:2 goes on to say that, “But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.” Essentially the remedy to temptation is not giving in to it but entering into a committed, life-long relationship with another human being. Genesis 2:24 notes, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” Even in situations where cohabitation does not involve a sexual relationship, it is likely to generate intimacy or “joining” of lives – an effect ultimately intended for marriage.

#3 - “Could the decision cause others to doubt your character or relationship with Christ?”

I Thessalonians 5:22 tells us to avoid every kind of evil, while Ephesians 5:3 tells us that there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality or impurity among believers. In situations where some might argue that there is little to no temptation involved (e.g. cohabitation for financial convenience), the decision to cohabit may still cause others to doubt our intentions. Rather than have others hint at what may be happening behind closed doors, it is best to avoid the situation altogether.

It is important to note that the questions above are filters that should also guide our relationships with the opposite sex in many other circumstances (e.g. staying late at a date’s house; working late with someone of the opposite sex; etc.) The general principle underlying this discussion is also found in 2 Timothy 2:22, “Flee from youthful lusts.”

Conclusions:

1. Cohabitation will more likely introduce temptations rather than opportunities for edification and close fellowship with Christ. Our primary goal is to love God with all of our heart, mind, body, and soul, and to love our neighbor. Even if we believe we won't be tempted to sin, to place our significant other in a position of temptation is not an act of love for them.

2. Additionally, as we remember that sin is cosmic treason against a Holy God, and we are called to love him, fleeing any possibility of temptation is far better than the convenience of cohabitation.

3. Thirdly, Cohabitation necessarily forces a relational closeness that God intended for marriage. For example, when we justify cohabitation through saying, *We're not having sex*, we should remember that there are often periods of time when married couples *don't* have sex. Being married is the joining of two lives together, which includes, but is not limited to, sex. Just because an unmarried couple is not having sex doesn't mean they aren't *playing marriage* in other ways.

4. Lastly, Cohabitation may cause others to doubt our intentions and/or the testimony of Christ, even when we may argue that temptation is extremely unlikely. The reality is, whatever happens behind closed doors is unknown to our neighbors. Most neighbors would never ask, only assume. If we are to be a people above reproach, we should realize that, even if we were "good" last night, to the watching world, we still "spent the night together."

As a summary, while the Bible does not speak directly to the issue of cohabitation, God has certainly provided the framework, through His Word, which helps us make wise decisions. On cohabitation, wisdom says *No, run from it!*