

Does living together make you married?

Does "living together" make you married? We live in a world where many people, perhaps even a majority, choose to live together rather than making the commitment of getting married. Some couples think that if the man and woman live together long enough, it eventually makes them married. What constitutes a marriage in God's eyes?

In John 4, Jesus talked to a woman at Jacob's well. Jesus told her, "Go call your husband" (v.16). She answered, "I have no husband." Jesus replied, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." (John 4:17-18).

If living together made her married, Jesus would have said, "The man you are now living with is your sixth husband." Jesus knew her entire past history and explained that the relationship she was in was not considered a marriage as the other five relationships had been. He did not recognize them as being married even though they were living together.

If you are not a Christian, you can choose to live any way you want (hopefully you won't commit any crimes). God loves you and wants the best for you, but He doesn't force anyone follow Him. The Lord has a volunteer army—composed only of those who *want* to obey Him. What we are about to say is directed at Christians who have made a commitment to follow Jesus.

What constitutes a marriage?

- Marriage is a covenant made before God.
God says that He witnesses the covenant that a couple makes when they get married. Malachi 2:14 says, "The Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth...(who) is your companion and your wife by covenant."
- Marriage is a vow a man and woman make that they will forsake all others and commit themselves to each other for life.
- Marriage is public declaration before society.
- Marriage is a legal agreement made according to the laws of the land with a document proving it.

Why do people live together without getting married? For a number of reasons. Most people want the benefits of marriage, such as sex and companionship, without having the commitment. Some people do it for financial reasons—they will lose government benefits or will pay more taxes if they get married. They live together to combine income and share expenses. Some are afraid if they get married it will end up in a divorce so it's easier part ways if they aren't married, and they won't have to pay a lawyer. Some think that living together is a trial marriage to see if they are compatible and if it works out they will get married.

However, if you are a Christian, here are some reasons why you should follow God's way:

- Since your highest commitment is to Jesus, you will live according to what He says. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)
- God wants you to make the covenant (commitment) of marriage first, and the benefits of marriage are enjoyed after that. Sex is reserved for a man and woman after they have made the covenant of marriage. If you have sex one hour before you get married, it would be forbidden by God. But if you have sex one hour after you get married, it would be blessed by God. What's the difference? You first made the covenant before God, and then the benefits of the covenant comes after it.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Fornication is when a single person has sex without being married, while adultery is a married person having sex with someone who is not the spouse. If living together and having sex makes people married, then there would be no sin of fornication.

- It's dishonest to live together instead of getting married so you can receive government benefits or save on taxes. You have compromised your integrity to save a few dollars and cheat the government. You want the government to think you are single so you can keep getting benefits.

God tells us we should pay our taxes (Rom. 13:6-7). The Lord wants us to live with integrity (Psalm 26:1,11, 41:12). We need to obey God, even if we have to pay more taxes for being married.

- Experimenting with a "trial marriage" has been proven not to work. Statistics show that people who live together before getting married have a much higher divorce rate than those who don't live together before marriage. The couple's commitment to God and each other makes the marriage stronger. If someone doesn't honor the commitment to the loved one before he/she gets married, why would he/she honor the commitment to the loved one after marriage?
- Your children need the stability of parents with a healthy marriage. Like it or not, you are a role model for your children. You are showing them how God wants you to live. If you want them to have a good marriage in the future, you need to prove yourselves to be an example of a healthy Christian marriage now.

God wants to bless your life but it must be on His terms. First, He wants you to know Him through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Second, He wants you to stop having sex with someone who is not your spouse. No matter what immorality you have done, God can forgive you through the blood of Jesus and will lead you from where you are right now. And then, just as Jesus told the woman caught committing adultery, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11).