

Common Questions About Sex and Marriage

As a pastor for many years, I have received many questions from Christians about marriage, as well as matters that pertain to sexual behavior. The following are summarized answers to five of the most commonly asked questions on these matters, based from scripture and my pastoral experience.

1. Is Premarital Sex Acceptable to God?

Despite our permissive society that suggests that everyone should be sexually active, God considers premarital sex to be sin. In the Bible, the word "fornication" (Greek, PORNIEA) is used to describe premarital sex and other acts of sexual impurity. According to the Bible, God created sex to be a blessing of the union between a husband and wife, but He clearly and absolutely disapproves of all other sexual activity, including premarital sex. *"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).*

In this age of worry about sexually transmitted diseases, there is something better than a condom that can be worn to prevent AIDS: *It's called a wedding ring! The Bible says, "...because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2).*

The Bible warns that those who continue a life-style of fornication and adultery will not inherit God's Kingdom. *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revellies, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).*

2. Is it Acceptable for Couples to Live Together Without Marriage?

As we know, in our present society this is a common practice by many couples. However, this is not considered acceptable to a Christian life-style for the following reasons:

(1) SEXUAL IMPURITY -- Unmarried couples who live together usually have a sexual relationship. As already mentioned, premarital sex is sin condemned by God's Word. If a believer wishes to be obedient to God and His will, they will refrain from sexual impurity. *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4:3).*

(2) THE APPEARANCE OF SIN -- Not only does the Bible teach that believers are not to live a life-style of sin, but they are even to avoid the "appearance" of sin (1 Thess. 5:22). Even if a couple does not have sexual relations while living together, sleeping in the same dwelling gives every impression that they do.

Regardless of whatever innocent intentions that some couples might have, the appearance of living together tends to endorse sexual impurity and sets a bad example to other Christians. We all have an obligation to our brethren, not to provide a stumbling block to their faith. *"But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak... when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ" (1 Cor. 8:9, 12).*

(3) EXPOSURE TO TEMPTATION -- Even if an unmarried couple plan to refrain from premarital sex, living together could allow temptation to compromise those standards. The Bible teaches us to flee lusts and other temptations which could cause us to sin (2 Tim. 2:22). When we give our desires over to lust and temptation, it leads to sin, and the Bible says that sin leads to death. *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).*

We are taught to avoid temptation for our own sake, but should also comply as a good example for others. Even if a couple living together were strong enough to abstain from sexual relations, would those who follow their example also be able to be strong enough to overcome temptation? Set a good example for other couples in the body of Christ.

3. Is it Permissible to Entertain Sexual Fantasies?

The Bible says that through Christ we should bring

discipline and control to our thought-life. Our thoughts should not control us, but we should rule over our thoughts. *"Cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).*

Sexual fantasizing is a symptom of lust and is not pleasing to God. It stimulates and promotes sexual anxiety, which can lead to impure behavior and fornication. Get your mind out of the gutter and discipline your thoughts on good, and holy things. *"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). (Read Mark 7:21-23, Eph. 4:8.)*

4. Should a Christian Marry an Unbeliever?

The Bible teaches that Christian believers should not enter into any type of permanent partnership with unbelievers. *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14-15).*

The yoke that is referred to means the "wooden yoke" that was used to place on the necks of a team of oxen, to bind them together. Since marriage is a type of yoke which bonds two people together as one team, a marriage between a believer and unbeliever would place them in an "unequal yoke."

The Bible teaches that a house divided cannot stand. The success of any marriage depends on the unity and harmony of the two people. If one spouse is committed to the Lord Jesus, but the other isn't, it will create division. *"...Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand" (Matt. 12:25).*

5. Is Same-Sex Marriage Acceptable to God?

God created marriage for the purpose of joining a man and woman. Jesus said "But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:6-9).

Regardless of whatever legal and secular attempts to redefine marriage, there is no other Biblical definition for marriage other than between male and female. Homosexuality is clearly viewed as an abomination to God, as scripture says, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22).

The Apostle Paul wrote that homosexuality is an immoral expression of lust and perversion (Romans 1:26-27), and stated that those who practice a lifestyle of sexual sin, such as adultery, fornication or homosexuality, would not inherit the kingdom of God. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites" (1 Corinthians 6:9).

God will love and forgive anyone who repents and turns away from a sinful lifestyle (Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:9), but He will not bless or embrace a lifestyle of continued sin or defiance against His moral code. Regardless whether same-sex marriages become legalized by the government, or even administered by some select church groups or clergy, such unions have no basis in God's Word.

6. How Should a Marriage Companion be Selected?

Next to your salvation, your choice of a wife or husband is the most important decision you will ever make in your life. Marriage can be one of life's most wonderful blessings, but it can be an endless nightmare to those who have chosen carelessly.

(1) As in all other areas of our life, God will guide us to the right mate as we trust Him and submit to His will (Prov. 3:5). A believer should seek to marry another believer, not merely one who professes to be a Christian, but whose life also demonstrates long-term stable, Christian behavior.

(2) Do not be led by your emotions. Infatuation is often mistaken for love. Real love is not something you "fall" into. It's something you commit yourself to, and sacrifice yourself for.

(3) Never marry anyone on the mere basis of their appearance, sexual appeal, or material things. Only shallow, foolish people do that. Choose a marriage companion on the basis of what's inside their heart, not what's on the outside.

(4) The Bible teaches us to count the cost of all our decisions before we make them. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?" (Luke 14:28). Since marriage is supposed to last a lifetime (1 Cor. 7:39), we should carefully weigh the cost. Marriage is a sacred covenant between you, your spouse and with God. It will be a lifetime of give-and-take, sharing, and compromising. Are you willing to make these sacrifices for your mate? Remember, marriage is intended to endure, whether better or worse, "til death do you part."

(5) A good marriage requires that Christ be the center. If He is not the center of your relationship with your companion prior to marriage, He'll not likely be the center of your marriage later.

(6) Short-term engagements are not a good idea. Get to know a person over a period of time. A year of friendship should be a minimum before anyone even considers marriage.

(7) Never marry anyone on the basis that they'll change after marriage. Bad habits often become worse, not better. People are usually "already" on their "best" behavior before marriage.

(8) Watch and observe how your prospective mate treats their parents. Generally, the way a son treats his mother, is how he'll treat his wife -- the way a daughter treats her father, is how she'll treat her husband.

(9) Do not enter into marriage without the preparation of premarital counseling from a pastor or qualified marriage counselor.

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*Unless otherwise stated, all scripture references were taken from
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