

THE PIECE OF PAPER THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE - How Living Together Before Marriage Diminishes Life After the Vows

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THE MARRIAGE COVENANT - GOD'S DEFENSE AGAINST SEXISM

There are certain thought-patterns that have to be assembled in proper order to make spiritual life a fruit-producing flow rather than a reluctant grind. Here is how this principle of *the sequence of spiritual truth perception* plays out in a very important example.

Take the very basic demand for the disciple's *obedience* throughout the New Testament. The importance of obedience could hardly be overstated. In spite of the modern attempt to separate the grace of *forgiveness* received at the *beginning* of the Christian life from the ongoing *grace-empowered obedience* in the *rest* of the Christian life there is simply no such thing as a *non-obedient* Christian in Biblical revelation.

But the life of obedience will be hard-won and grudgingly performed until another truth takes hold of the disciple's mind *first*. Before I lean my will into obedience I should first ask another more important question. *Why does God command my life?* What is in Father God's heart when He issues commands?

And if I have never seriously considered that issue - if I have never asked that question and allowed the answer to echo and resonate deeply and persistently in my mind - I will, sooner or later, *resent* obedience even as I may *offer* it. My heart will have a resentful, obligatory bowing posture rather than a praise-filled, loving obedience.

Here is what I must constantly re-tell myself about God's commanding approach to my life. Everything Father God commands is ultimately for my good. This is true even though many of the things He commands go against what I think is best for me.

In other words I am saying we all, to varying degrees, share in a common problem that will not be totally erased until Jesus comes again. We do not *hear* Father God's commands the way He *speaks* them. This spiritual hearing problem is part of the residue - a hangover - from the Fall. The commands of Divine love feel *restrictive* and *unreasonable* the way a curfew feels restrictive to a dating fifteen year-old.

For this reason I should never waddle into a raw-willed, mindless obedience. Until Jesus comes again I must constantly remind myself *why* Father God commands. Expressing His commanding is what our holy Creator God *does*. He will never stop doing this. And that divine will can quickly be questioned and evasions to obedience rationalized - unless I constantly hear Father God's *motives* - not just His *commands*.

Now this is a very long introduction to say this: The sexual blindness of our culture regarding the growing preference to *co-habitation* over *marriage* is manifested in many ways and many culturally snappy Christians buy into it. But they are walking away from the protective commanding love of God.

And their primary point of error is this: *sexual intercourse is not the covenant sign of love in the Scriptures. Sexual intercourse is the covenant sign of marriage.* In God's design sexual intercourse doesn't prove *love*. It proves *covenant in marriage*. And that divine law - that decree - that *boundary defining command* - is, like every other divine law, given as a manifestation of God's *care and protection and love*.

My main point of concern now is to show the mountain of evidence that Father God's divine marriage command, like *all* of Father God's commands, is rooted in *love* rather than mere *restriction*. And one of the marriage covenant's most loving rewards is it is the greatest protection against *sexism*. Particularly, it is a protection and blessing for women.

Let me explain. People don't cohabit with the *intent* of becoming sexist. And most certainly would deny they were. But there is something that happens with sin - *all* sin. Sin always comes in *bunches*. You end up darkened in more than *one* area of your mind. Sin always spreads beyond the initial point of rebellion. It's like deadly chemicals being poured into a stream.

Here is how this works - Ephesians 4:17-19 - "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are *darkened in their understanding*, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have *given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*

The key phrases are ***“darkened in their understanding”*** (18), and, ***“...have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity”*** (19). But surely not each one of these ***“darkened”*** individuals committed ***every single sin imaginable - “...greedy to practice every kind of impurity”*** (19).

What can that mean? It means that with a ***“darkened understanding”*** there is nothing to ***prevent*** or ***protect*** the life from sins they might still regard as morally offensive but will soon be trapped in anyway. Like we said earlier, sin always comes in ***bunches***.

Now, coming back to tonight’s subject. I said cohabitation feeds sexism. Then I said couples who cohabit probably don’t mentally embrace sexism. They are probably offended by it. But it cohabitation tends toward sexism nonetheless.

Take another example. You can see a clear example of this with the sin of abortion. It is getting to be an awkward fight for consistent feminists. The bare facts are solidly undeniable. The vast majority of babies killed in the womb in our hemisphere are black. And I mean a ***vast*** majority. And the vast majority of babies killed globally are girls. And again, I mean the ***vast*** majority.

So the feminist must choose her argument very carefully because to be in favor of a ***woman’s right to choose*** is also to be in favor of ***racism*** and ***sexism***. And that’s because there is no stopping off place for a ***“darkened understanding.”*** When you snub God’s creative authority in ***one*** area you reap the results of that disobedience in ***many*** areas. You end up living with moral darkness you don’t even agree with.

On the positive side, honoring God with obedience brings protection into more areas of life than just that one area of obedience. And, to the point of this teaching, honoring the covenant of marriage is also God’s protection against sexism. Very quickly, here’s how it works.

1) **STATISTICALLY, MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT EQUAL IN THE EXPECTATIONS THEY BRING TO A COHABITING RELATIONSHIP**

Imagine the following scenario. Take thousands of cohabiting couples and bring them into an interview setting. You divide couples up, putting all the women in one area and the men in another. Tell each one you want to talk to them about the future of their relationship. Ask each man and each woman to write down where they see their relationship going in the next three years. Then bring the couples back into the same room, match the partners up and compare their answers. How similar do you think the answers they gave in private would be regarding their relational futures?

We don’t have to guess. This has been done scores of times with many sample cohabiting couples. Now, which of these three conclusions do you think researchers found to be true:

- a) ***Cohabiting men and women - at largely the same percentages - both hoped to move their relationship into marriage as soon as possible.***
- b) ***Cohabiting men and women felt they were just having fun with their relationship and felt no need to rush into marriage.***
- c) ***Cohabiting men and women had very different views on where they thought their relationship was going.***

Which option would you pick? Over and over again, across all racial, ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds the third answer is statistically overwhelmingly true. And if you are a woman, you need to know which was correct because, in the vast majority of cases, it was the woman who saw the relationship as preparation for marriage and the man who did not.

Now here is the conclusion of researchers as they study this data. ***Galena K. Rhoades*** and ***Scott M. Stanley*** and ***Howard J. Markman*** in ***“A Longitudinal Investigation of Commitment Dynamics in Cohabiting Relationships,”*** say the following: ***“In these relationships women may be at a disadvantage in terms of relational power because they are the ones that are more committed....Particularly if they are unaware of the difference in commitment, women may wind up making more sacrifices for their relationships than their partners, and these unrequited sacrifices could be detrimental if the relationship ends.”***

Remember, this is not just ***“Christian”*** research. Cohabitation is a sexist set-up right from the start.

2) **STATISTICALLY, MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT EQUAL IN SAFETY IN THE COHABITING RELATIONSHIP**

The ***Family Violence Research Program*** at the ***University of New Hampshire*** - the leading American institution studying domestic violence - finds that all other factors being equal, ***“cohabitators are much more violent than marrieds.”*** Specifically, the overall rate of violence for cohabiting couples is twice as high as for married couples, and the rate for ***“severe”*** violence is five times higher.

Consider their other staggering findings. Instances of violence and abuse rated highest in cohabiting relationships at ***48%***. While the national average for acts of violence in marriage was ***19%***. And the important point to note is these rates hold true even when taking into account education, age, occupation and income. In other words, ***cohabitation itself*** accounts for the domestic violence, not some other factor like poverty, education, status, etc.

Something else. These numbers don't show that men are more violent than women in cohabiting relationships. The ratio of violence splits evenly among both men and women. However, women ***suffer*** more in these violent encounters due to lack of size and physical strength. They come out on the short end of the deal the vast majority of occasions and, to make matters worse, frequently feel fearful and more threatened to ***leave*** the relationship.

3) **STATISTICALLY, MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT EQUAL IN THE FAITHFUL LOVE COMMITTED IN THE COHABITING RELATIONSHIP**

The highly touted ***National Sex Survey*** reveals live-in boyfriends are ***four times*** more likely to have cheated on their partner in the past twelve months than a married man. And, even more important for this teaching, this non-Christian survey concluded that ***“...cohabitation before marriage is still associated with reduced sexual exclusivity after marriage.”***

In other words, cohabitation isn't like taking that new car out for a test drive before you buy it. A marriage partner isn't a consumer product. You can't learn ***commitment*** in a ***non-committed*** relationship.

A study published in ***The Journal of Marriage and Family*** reveals, not surprisingly, that cohabitators ***“...more closely resemble singles than married people in extra-relational sexual liaisons.”*** Also, they concluded, ***“...the relational clarity and commitment of marriage....served to protect against infidelity.”***

All of these statistics should only serve to prove what we should have known all along. God always knows what He's talking about. He is and has always been way ahead of the sociology departments and psychology departments and philosophy departments. He reveals out of deep wisdom and commands out of deep love. ***And “no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”***