

Living Together & Open Marriage

by David Lee Burris



The New York Times Magazine

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IS AN OPEN MARRIAGE A HAPPIER MARRIAGE?



UNMARRIED COHABITATION

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Cohabitation Before Marriage

We live in an age of "free love," an open acceptance of adulterous relationships and the sin of fornication accepted as just a fact of life that "everybody" participates in and should not question. The vast majority of movies, television shows and reading material published in great numbers today depict what the Bible calls "sin" as being the socially accepted way of life. Parents are encouraged by humanistic influenced counselors to let their children "explore" their friends' bodies. Many counselors have been known to advise clients to have an "affair" as an answer to marital problems. With such thinking and advice glorified on a daily basis, no wonder marriage is seldom considered an "until death" commitment, but rather just a "temporary" relationship that one can discard when there are problems. Is it any wonder authorities tell us that the majority of marriages end in divorce?

Because of the lack of respect for the marriage bond, many begin to reason, why marry? If most people do not think it is wrong to commit fornication, then we see why many live co-habiting together rather than marry. God's plan for sexual relations has always been approved only in the marriage relationship of husband and wife. Whenever sexual relations are engaged in from outside of marriage, God's law has been violated. His plan has always been one of total commitment to him and each other, of purity, love and trust. Such passages as Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:3-9; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 5:22 clearly teach this.

When faced with the facts, even those in the world agree that a commitment to God and his word can help keep one pure until marriage, thus laying solid foundation for successful marriage. If the world's thinking is followed, failure is more often the result.

"Cohabitation" is a word the world likes to use to describe sexual relations. Though it can be rightfully used to refer to relations in the marriage relationship, much of the time when the media uses this word, it is used instead of either of the words "fornication" or "adultery." This is done so as to not sound judgmental toward one's sexual actions outside the marriage relationship, but God's word does not hide the terribleness of such action.

In trying to find things that bring about divorce in marriages, sociologists have made an interesting find in their research of cohabiting before marriage. In a recent project conducted two years ago, The National Institute For Healthcare Research in Washington, D.C. and Austin, Texas, released the following observations:

Making a lasting marriage commitment and avoiding the pitfalls of cohabitation is strongly associated with the degree of personal religious commitment Since cohabiting couples have a greater tendency to divorce if they eventually marry, researchers at the University of Michigan, University of Chicago, and the University of Toledo investigated what factors help predict who is more likely to cohabit.

They found the cohabitation rate is seven times higher among persons who seldom or never attend religious services compared to persons who frequently attend.

Religious commitment reduces cohabitation among both young men and young women, but the effect was found to be stronger among young women. The level of religious commitment was also a key. Women who attended religious services regularly were only one-third as likely to cohabit as those who attended church services less than once a month.

The religious commitment of parents was also found to be significant in determining whether an adult child will cohabit. If the mother frequently attended any religious services, both sons and daughters were only fifty percent as likely to cohabit as adult children whose mothers were not actively religious.

The researchers noted the tendency to co-habit increased in the early seventies, just about the time that religious commitment in young people began to decline. The higher divorce rate of about the last twenty years also tracks consistent with the increased tendency of married couples who initially cohabited to seek divorce (Arland Thornton, William G. Axinn, Daniel H. Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation and Marriage," *The American Journal of Sociology* 98, 1992).

If we call and teach that fornication and adultery is sin, as God does in his word, then we will want to please him by abstaining from that which he condemns. We will strive to keep ourselves pure before marriage and committed to one another in marriage. If we want our children to avoid fornication then we must do every-thing we can to instill in their lives a desire to love and obey God. Remember we teach both by our words and our actions. Do not be afraid to tell them that cohabiting outside of marriage is sin and that it can destroy that which God designed to be beautiful in our lives. - Guardian of Truth XXVJJJ: 15, p. 14

LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT MARRIAGE!

Most of the unbelieving world does not have a problem with couples living together outside of marriage. To them, it is not sin. It is normal. But, others living together without marriage does not mean Christians can also partake in similar lifestyles. Christians represent Christ and they are also entrusted with the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:4). So, as a Christian goes through this world, they represent the kingdom of the Lord (John 18:36) and it's a Christian's responsibility to reflect their King and kingdom and what it stands for. A Christian's influence is very important!

In the Bible, Christians are called to be holy as God is holy (1st Peter 1:16) and so they should never do anything to bring shame (reproach) upon the Church. Christians are also called the salt of the earth because the world is morally corrupt and it requires of Christians to be a light to the world of darkness and to show them who Christians are so that the world will glorify God (Matthew 5: 13-16). This is why Paul wrote, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31). This is also why the early Christians are told by Peter to keep their conduct honorable before all so that when evildoers speak against them, they may see your good deeds and glorify God (1 Pet. 2:12).

Now, many who are not Christians know that unrelated adult males and females should not live together unless they are married. Even non-Christian parents don't want their children living together with others of the opposite sex. So, why are there Christians, of opposite sex, who think they can live together and still not bring the Church under community reproach where its effectiveness is put in doubt?

Also, most neighbors assume that since two people of the opposite sex are living together, then they are having sex with one another. And, what's worse here is that the neighbors know that they are Christians. How are they influencing others for good? Furthermore, by living together as man and woman, it allows everyone the right to live together as man and woman, for whatever reason. But, is this living Godly (1 Peter 1:7)?

Consider that “the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him . . . Therefore, a man shall leave father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:18,24). God’s first institution was marriage, not cohabitation. Thus, God has only one plan for a man and a woman living together and that’s marriage. God gives no indication that a man and woman, who are not related, to live together under any circumstances.

In the Bible, the Jews throughout history understood this as well as Jesus and his apostles. So, “Does the Bible say it is wrong for unmarried, unrelated men and women to live together?” Well, this is not the right question. The right question to ask is “What is God’s will concerning a male and female living together?” It is between husbands and wives (Genesis 2:24). So, why does God say this? The answer’s because living together is an intimate and bonding experience. Living together in the same quarters where men and women share the same kitchen, bathroom, etc., where they see each other early in the morning and again late at night - intimacy and bonding naturally develops.

We learn from these verses that living together as a man and woman does not reflect the commitment that God instituted and ordained via marriage. It is something else.

Now, Christians are commanded to abstain from every appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). So, how can a man and woman live together and not have people thinking that nothing is happening? They cannot. So, the result is that these individuals bring shame on the Church and on Christ. Christians need to remember that they're to live holy lives and this includes being above reproach. And, just because some do not see living together as a problem, Christians should know better than to promote anything that would appear evil or sinful. And, as Paul warned Christians, they should not give the adversary occasion to slander the name of Christ (1 Tim. 5:14).

You know, as we consider appearances, Christians know that God designed us to desire companionship. Living together puts natural temptations in front of us. But still, men and women may attempt to rationalize or justify living together. They think that God would not care and He would understand. Surely, some may co-habitate un-married because of financial challenges. But, where some may attempt to excuse themselves from making a legal commitment to one another for budgetary reasons, others will excuse themselves for other reasons. And so, Christians become a stumbling block to others, which is sin (Romans 14:13; Matthew 16:23; 1st Corinthians 8:9). And, it is also worrisome that Christians living together like this say they believe in God. The same God who created the entire universe and everything in it from nothing and who raised Christ from the dead yet, they do not trust Him enough to take care of their financial needs if they got married on a fixed income.

Does this display seeking first their own agenda or seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)? I mean, why are Christians more worried about making it financially than obeying God and trusting in Him to provide? God promised to meet our needs and even Paul penned, “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Isn’t trusting the Lord and following His will what we are all about as Christians? We should never allow financial problems to determine our morality.

All in all, God is angered when we attempt to justify our sins by rationalizing them. And, Christians must remember that circumstance never ever determines what is right and what is wrong. God does. And so as Christians, we should follow whatever glorifies God. Thus, The Bible seems to be clear that for a man and a woman to live together outside the bounds of marriage is a sin...even if there is no sex. And, a Christian should know better. Living together outside of marriage causes all sorts of problems and it’s against God’s pattern for living together, *it gives off the appearance of evil, which is sin, it causes others to stumble, which is also sin and will cause some people to lose their souls* because they think that it is now okay for Christians to live together without a marriage covenant. As a Christian, be careful of your influence because we are not to live like the world! (Romans 12:2).

- Church of Christ Articles

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Palm Beach Lakes CHURCH OF CHRIST

Is Having an “Open Marriage” a Good Thing?

What does it mean to have an “open marriage”? At one time, it indicated that a person was open to marry whomever they would choose and wasn't restricted by any social or parental regulations. It later came to denote married couples who had open communication or flexibility of their family roles. No longer does it refer to what could be characterized as such “innocent” connotations. It is much different today.

In a passing comment recently about a Hollywood celebrity couple, a television reporter mentioned that “they have an open marriage.” What does that mean? Unfortunately, even if you are not certain what it means, your suspicions are accurate!

“Open marriage” (also known as sexually non-monogamous marriage) typically refers to a marriage in which the partners agree that each may engage in sexual relationships outside the marriage, without either being regarded as unfaithful. So, if you were in an “open marriage,” you would have permission (maybe even encouragement) from your spouse to have sex with others. It sounds so modern, so understanding, so non-judgmental, so open-minded and so tolerant. If I have my spouse's permission or blessing, what could be wrong with giving this a try? Some say that as long as you lay down the ground rules and both agree to them, that this kind of relationship is worth the try. But - not everyone agrees!

Some say that such relationships should be avoided because they lack social acceptance and create social awkwardness. Others add that these kinds of relationships are a recipe for disaster, as they create all kinds of jealousy issues.

Some therapists point to serious emotional distress that many open marriages generate, as well as the increased risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease.

No matter what experts say and no matter what permission one spouse might give to another, **God clearly condemns all adulterous behavior.** “You shall not commit adultery” ([Ex. 20:14](#)). “Whoever commits adultery...destroys his own soul” ([Prov. 6:32](#)). “Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers will inherit the kingdom of God” ([1 Corinthians. 6:9-10](#)). “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” ([Heb. 13:4](#)). It matters not what rules of “freedom” a couple might make for their relationship, when **God's rules clearly and eternally condemn!**

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“People cheat because they’re not fully invested, and having an open marriage is a way of not having to be fully invested.”

**- relationship expert
Dr. Carmen McGuinness
on open marriage**

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Sacredness of the Marriage Covenant

BY DAVE MILLER, Ph.D.

AMERICA'S CULTURE WAR DOCTRINAL MATTERS IN THE NEWS DIVORCE HOMOSEXUALITY MARRIAGE & FAMILY

Since its inception, the United States of America has been a country whose Founding Fathers recognized the need for God in public life, and the need for Bible principles of morality to govern and structure American society. Our Founding Fathers recognized that if our country strayed significantly away from these basic moral, spiritual, and ethical principles, we would be doomed as a nation. For 150 years, our society recognized the importance of what some are calling the “traditional family,” i.e., a husband and a wife who marry for life and raise children together. Divorce was almost unheard of in this country. When it did occur, it was regarded as deviant behavior. Family disruption in the form of separation, divorce, and out-of-wedlock birth were kept to a minimum by strong religious, social, and even legal sanctions. Immediately after World War II, most American children grew up in a family with both biological parents who were married to each other.

This state of affairs held sway up through the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, disruption of the traditional American family reached a historic low in the 1950s and early 1960s. But then something happened. Beginning in about 1965, the divorce rate suddenly skyrocketed, more than doubling over the next fifteen years. By 1974, divorce passed death as the leading cause of family breakup. By 1980, only fifty percent of children could expect to spend their entire childhood with both their parents. **Now half of all marriages end in divorce. Every year about a million children go through divorce or separation, and almost as many more are born out of wedlock. People who remarry after divorce are more likely to break up than couples in first marriages. The same is true for couples who just live together.**

Overall child well-being has declined, despite a decrease in the number of children per family, an increase in the educational level of parents, and historically high levels of public spending. The teen suicide has more than tripled. Juvenile crime has increased and become more violent. School performance has continued to decline. Some sociologists now recognize the incredibly harmful effect these circumstances are having on our country.

They are beginning to realize the relationship between family structure and declining child well-being. Some experts are even admitting that the social arrangement that has proved most successful in ensuring physical survival and promoting the social development of the child is the family unit of the biological mother and father.

But our society as a whole has been slow to see family disruption as a severe national problem. Why? A fundamental shift has occurred in our culture with reference to religious and moral value. Much of our society has jettisoned the Bible as the absolute standard of behavior. The Bible is no longer considered to be the authoritative regulator of daily living. Many, maybe most, Americans no longer feel divorce is wrong. “Irreconcilable differences” & “incompatibility” are seen as perfectly legitimate reasons for divorce—flying directly in the face of Bible teaching. Many Americans no longer feel that a couple simply living together without marriage is morally wrong. By the mid-1970s, **three-fourths of Americans said that it is not morally wrong for a woman to have a child outside marriage.**

We could debate the causes of this basic cultural shifting. I would argue that the influence of evolution and of humanism in our educational system, the impact of feminism, the increased participation of women in the work force to the neglect of their children, the widespread prosperity that we enjoy as a nation (causing us to forget God and to indulge ourselves)—these and other factors have contributed to our moral decline. Hollywood, television, and the cinema have unquestionably glamorized, defended, and promoted divorce, premarital sex, unwed motherhood, abortion, and the use of alcohol, profane language, and many other immoral behaviors.

Ironically—and tragically—the media have been working overtime to discredit the married, two-parent family by playing up instances of violence, and abuse. If a family has religious inclinations, its members are depicted on programs as weirdoes and deviants. In fact, it is surely disgusting to the sensibilities of the morally upright that what was once mainstream and normal (religious, church-going, two-parent family) is being ridiculed, while behavior once considered deviant, reprehensible, and immoral is paraded before society—on television, in the news, and in the courts—as the social norm. Anyone who lifts a finger to speak against such immorality is berated as “homophobic,” “prejudiced,” “judgmental,” “mean-spirited,” and guilty of a “hate crime.”

Illustration of the undermining of the marriage relationship as God intended is the recent decision regarding homosexuality by the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that sodomy laws are unconstitutional—even though sodomy was treated as a criminal offense in all of the original thirteen colonies and eventually every one of the fifty states (see Robinson, 2003; “Sodomy Laws,” 2003). Sadly, a generation has arisen who simply does not share the family values of its parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Sexual fidelity, lifelong marriage, and parenthood are simply no longer held up as worthwhile personal goals.

All of this self-centeredness has taken its greatest toll on the children. The erosion of basic moral values in exchange for pluralism, the growing moral and ethical diversity, the shifting of emphasis to choice, freedom, and self-expression, have all inflicted great damage on marriage and family—especially the children. The fuller body of empirical research documents a number of startling conclusions:

1. Divorce almost always brings a decline in the standard of living for the mother and children, plus a dependence on welfare; children in single-parent homes are far more likely to propagate the same behavior.
2. Children never fully recover from divorce. Five, ten, fifteen years after a divorce, the children suffer from depression, under-achievement, and ultimately, their own troubled relationships.
3. Young adults from disrupted families are nearly twice as likely as those from intact families to receive psychological help.
4. Children in disrupted families are nearly twice as likely as those in intact families to be high school drop outs. Those staying in school show significant differences in educational attainment from those children who grow up in intact families.
5. **Remarriage does not reproduce nor restore the intact family structure. The latest research confirms that stepparents cannot replace the original home.**
6. For children whose parents divorced, the risk of divorce is two to three times greater than it is for children from married parent families.

These findings—and many others—underscore the importance of both mother and a father in fostering the emotional well-being of children. But even more far-reaching effects have been documented—effects that impact society at large beyond the confines of the family. Authorities now are beginning to admit that a central cause of our most pressing social problems like poverty, crime, and school performance is breakup of the traditional American family.

Even more startling is the fact that as an institution, marriage has lost much of its legal, religious, and social meaning and authority.

For most of American history, marriage was one of the most important rites of passage in life. But now, marriage has lost much of its role and significance as a rite of passage. Sex is increasingly detached from the promised expectation of marriage. Co-habitation is emerging as a significant experience for young adults. It is now replacing marriage as the first living together union.

It is estimated that a quarter of unmarried women between the ages of 25 and 39 are currently living with a partner, and about half of all women at some time having lived with a male partner outside of marriage. Referring to this state of affairs as “the deinstitutionalization of marriage,” researchers at the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University concluded: “Taken together, marriage indicators do not argue for optimism about a quick widespread comeback of traditional marriage. Persistent long-term trends suggest steady weakening of marriage as a lasting union, a major stage in the adult life course, and as the primary institution governing childbearing and parenting” (Popenoe/Whitehead).

Make no mistake: the social science evidence clearly documents the fact that the breakdown of the traditional two-parent, biological husband-wife family is a major factor contributing to the overall moral, religious, and ethical decline of our country. The social fabric of American civilization is literally tearing apart.

The social arrangement that has proved most successful in ensuring the physical survival, and promoting the social development, of the child is the family unit of the biological mother and father.

The clear-cut restraints and distinctions between right and wrong so typical of American culture in the past have been systematically dismantled. Relativism has taken the place of objective, absolute truth. Glorification of the individual has encouraged people to determine for themselves right and wrong—rather than looking outside themselves to the Transcendent Creator of the Universe.

Consequently, whatever the individual **feels** is right is sanctioned as right — at least for that individual. Subjectivity reigns supreme, and God has been effectively severed from the human culture. “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:12).

GOD'S VIEW OF THE MATTER

The fact remains that there is a God in heaven (Daniel 2:28). God has spoken to the human race through His written Word, the Bible. In that inspired communication, He has designated the structure of society. He created male and female with the intention for one man to marry one woman for life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Here is the basic foundational building block of humanity. That is His simple will on the matter. He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). The only way He permits divorce is if one marriage partner divorces the other marriage partner for the one reason that the marriage partner has committed adultery. Upon that basis alone, God allows the innocent partner to put away that unfaithful mate and form a second marriage (Matthew 19:3-9).

God intended for the husband and wife to produce children who, in turn, are to receive nurturing and care from their parents in a stable, loving home (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21). In this divinely ordained institution of the home, God intended that children receive the necessary instruction and training in order to prepare them to be productive, honest, God-fearing, hard-working citizens of their nation. The home was God designed to impart to each succeeding generation proper religious, moral, and social principles that would in turn make their society strong and virtuous. The Bible is filled with references to the essential ingredients for healthy families (Deuteronomy 4:7; 6:1-9; 11:18-21; 32:46-47; Psalm 127; Proverbs 5:15-20; 6:20-35; 11:29; 12:4; 14:1; 15:25,27; 17:1,13; 31:10-31), including the proper parenting skills (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Ephesians 6:1-4).

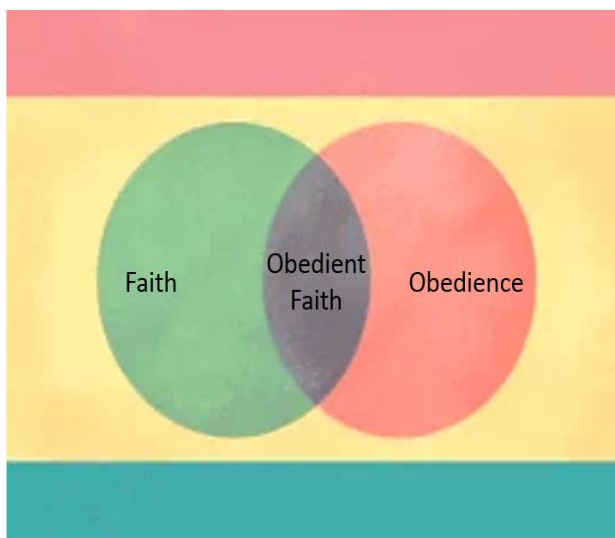
CONCLUSION

How simple! The solution to the confusion and corruption that has gripped American civilization is simple — if hearts are humbly yielded to the will of God. If we could just get our families back on track according to God's will, we could get our country back on track. It starts with you and me. We must believe in, affirm to others, and conform ourselves to the sacredness of marriage.

AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- **BELIEVING:**
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- **REPENTING:**
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- **CONFESSING:**
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- **BAPTISM:**
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



O That Will Be Glory

2. *Wh* O that will be glory for me, e grace,

I an Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

When by His grace I shall look on His face, e

That will be glory, be glory for me. me.

