

Tough Topics: What Does God Say About Co-Habitation?

I. Opening Scenario: The New Pastor and His “Family”

Let’s consider a hypothetical situation. Say your congregation receives a new pastor, calling him from the seminary. You are glad to hear that he has a family. When he arrives, you are introduced to his three children and “their mother”. You notice that she does not have the same last name as the pastor. You ask about this. “Oh,” she says, “We’re not married.”

Later, you ask the pastor about his decision to “not to get married”. He says, “Well...it just kind of worked out that way. We were dating, things happened...we have both been in bad relationships before...so, we thought it would be better to see how things work out. Three kids later, we are still very much in love! Besides, she’s divorced, and if she gets married, we lose her alimony. It doesn’t expire for another three years. We can’t afford to take the hit. The kids are happy! We don’t see the big deal—we love each other, we’ve been together for seven years now. We’re ‘life partners’.”

When pressed about whether or not it’s appropriate for a “man of the cloth” to be living with someone outside of wedlock, the pastor laughs. “What! Probably half of my home congregation had arrangements like we have. We don’t need a piece of paper to prove that we are committed to one another. That’s something for the courts and the government. Besides, there’s no verse in the bible that says that you can’t live with a woman outside of marriage. I dare you to find me one! Be careful...I went to seminary!”

So, what do you say to your pastor? Do you disagree with him? Do you agree? If not, what would your argument be?

II. Adam and Eve Were “Living in Sin”?

Uh...no. They actually were “married”. Says who? God. Genesis 2:18-25 (ESV):

*Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a **helper fit for him**.” ...The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a **helper fit for him**. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and **hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh**. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

This is the quintessential definition of human marriage. You don’t believe me. Listen to Jesus. Mark 10:1-12 (ESV):

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his

wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

You can’t “divorce” someone who’s not married. Besides, both the Lord and Jesus (One and the same!) calls Eve “his wife.” **This is marriage.**

But this is more than semantics. Incarnationally, divinely, God put a man and a woman together to be one...**fit them together to make a whole.**

“But there’s no justice of the peace!” You’re right. There’s God. **God is present in the marriage.** In fact, God created man for woman and woman for man. He put them together, two creatures made in the image of God, equal in value and dignity but different in roles and responsibilities, and in this, He gives them **interdependence.**

Listen to St. Paul. 1 Corinthians 11:8-12 (ESV):

For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Paul, in the midst of a discussion about women’s hairstyles/headwear in worship, appeals to the creational account of Genesis, and makes the point that both man and woman (in the context of marriage) **are different but interdependent.** The takeaway is that they go together, are made for each other. But this is in **the context of marriage.**

III. The Mystery Disordered and Perverted

So, what has happened? Marriage is, as God intended, a life-long union between a man and a woman. **Holy Matrimony** is marriage blessed by God through the words of the pastor. Can people “be married” outside of the Church? Of course! Whether people believe in God or not, **marriage is still His creation and ordination.** So, even marriage laws and civil institutions can reflect God’s design. But marriage is a reflection of something even greater. Marriage represents Christ and His Bride, the Church.

Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV):

*“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.***

However, ever since the fall, man and woman have subverted marriage, undermined it, devalued it, and made it a laughing stock. Men and women want the “fruits” of marriage without the binding commitment. They want blessings that go with marriage without God’s Word. And people will even use the Scriptural narrative as a rationale for their behavior. Just because **you find something described in the bible does not mean it is prescriptive!** There are many, many examples in the patriarchal period (and before) of marriage being disordered and abused. See Genesis 4:19-23!

What about today? Do we (those of us in the Church) “disorder and pervert” what was good and according to God’s design? **THE ANALOGY OF THE “TEST DRIVE”**

Co-habitation...is a man and woman, outside of marriage, living together as husband and wife, without the blessing of God and the Church. It is a perversion of what is good and

true and beautiful. To put it another way, co-habitation is mimicry and a mockery—it looks like marriage, might seem like it, but is not actually it, because it lacks God’s binding Word and blessing, which creates a new thing out of an old.

IV. God’s Standard Is the Law (and the Law Runs the Show)

Sometimes the reaction to God’s teaching, His Word, His LAW is repulsion, anger or resentment. God’s Law ALWAYS accuses us! But it doesn’t JUST accuse. **What is the Law of God?**

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV):

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern **what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

Consider this from the **Formula of Concord, Article VI (Solid Declaration)**:

*The law of God is used (1) to **maintain external discipline and respectability against dissolute, disobedient people** and (2) to **bring such people to a recognition of their sins.** (3) It is also used when **those who have been born anew through God’s Spirit, converted to the Lord, and had the veil of Moses removed for them live and walk in the law ...** Against this (that the reborn do not learn a new obedience to the Law), the other party taught that although those who believe in Christ are truly motivated by the Spirit of God and do the will of God according to their inward person from a free spirit, nevertheless the Holy Spirit uses the written law on them **to teach them**, so that through it believers in Christ learn to serve God not according to their own ideas but according to **his written law and Word, which is a certain rule and guiding principle for directing the godly life and behavior according to the eternal and unchanging will of God ...** For the law is a **mirror that accurately depicts the will of God and what pleases him.** It should always be held before the faithful and taught among them continuously and diligently.*

Why are we talking about the Law? Because the Law of God is not simply a set of rules arbitrarily written down. **The Law is God’s Will for His creation.** And it runs the show. The Creator creates with order, design and purpose. This means that everything has a place, function and role within the creation. Consider the so-called “law of gravity”. It is not arbitrary law; it operates consistently every time. *It is the way it is.* Who created the “law of gravity”? The Creator.

So, while we lack a *specific* command prohibiting “co-habitation”, it clearly goes against God’s will and desire...against His desire for sexual purity, for family structures and for the raising of children.

Although God’s Law always convicts us of our sins, and although it does not/cannot save us, to the regenerate Christian, **the Law functions as the rule and guide for life.** It’s not just what we’re supposed to do, but how we are to operate *best* because a) it is pleasing to God and b) it assures us of living the best life that we can (in a fallen creation).

We don’t do morality based on majority! That means, even if “most” people act, live, think a certain way, that does not run the show!

When we push against, transgress, break, ignore or flaunt God’s will against Him, bad things tend to happen. Because we are working against not just God’s pleasure but against the Creator’s design and purpose.

But what if we have been willingly, intentionally sinning against God and His will? What if we even know God's intent and design and still do otherwise?

V. Repentance Leading to a Changed Life

The fact is, we all find ourselves in this position. Every day, every person. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23).

But we return to the verse I cited earlier from Roman 12:1, and the "mercies of God". *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God...BY THE MERCIES OF GOD.*

Through God's mercies. What is that? Well...it's Romans 1-11! **It is the Gospel.** And it is free and it is for all. (Romans 3:24-5) "...and have been justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith."

So, we stand forgiven by the blood of Jesus and on account of Jesus. God grants us this gift (grace) that we might be free from sin and guilt and then, in that free forgiveness, "*present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your next step service* (my translation)." God cleanses and redeems us to be His holy people...a living sacrifice.

But what if we **refuse to repent of lifestyles, habitual sins, of doing things that we know totally go against God's will**...what if we refuse His gift and His mercy?

That is unrepentance—*obdurate and ongoing sin that we are aware of but keep engaging in without any contrition or sorrow in our heart.*

Folks, that is dangerous. That is playing with fire. God's promises are certain and sure, but if **we persist in unrepentance, then we are setting ourselves up for condemnation and judgment.** Let me be clear what this "looks like" in the form of a narration:

"God, I know what you want. I know what your will is. AND I DON'T CARE. I do what I want to do. In the end, You will forgive me because You are merciful, but on this point I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY, because it doesn't suit me or the world I live in. So, give me your grace...cause that's what You do, but I'll do WHAT I WANT."

How will that go, do you think?

This is why our lives are to be ones of repentance and faith. This is ongoing, not because Christ's sacrifice and atonement is lacking, but because we are total sinners, through and through. But God's mercies are new every morning. So, we start and end each day with a confession of sins and a reception of what God has to give (baptismal remembrance).

1 John 1:8-19 (ESV):

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But in this life of repentance and faith, God *does* change our hearts, our minds and our hands. He *does* renew and regenerate our wills to be more and more in line with Him. We seek not only forgiveness, but a stronger desire to live in accordance with His Law and bear the Spirit's fruit in our lives. This is where we leave this topic—a **call to acknowledge God's truth, a conviction that we fail to live up to it daily, but also a desire to do what God wills, because He is God and He runs the show.** Marriage is His gift and is not to be despoiled and desecrated by the practice of "living in sin".

Instead, we are to uphold marriage in every way possible.