

# Cohabitation.

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we looked at marriage in the Old Testament, marriage in the New Testament, divorce in the Old Testament, divorce in the New Testament.! We looked at marriage in the Old Testament, marriage in the Old Testament, marriage in the Old Testament.

We're initiating it from a casual sexual relationship. This is an ongoing heterosexual relationship, so I'm not confusing the issue by going beyond that heterosexual relationship.

I'm saying that for this definition there is a genuine option for them to be, quote, married, but they have not or have not yet taken that option.

They know this. Their family and friends know this. So I'm just repeating myself now. There is a further option to express to each other and to the world a permanent union, but they haven't done it for whatever reason.

And therefore, although in many ways it looks like marriage, there is something lacking in way of a clarity of commitment to each other, a clarity of what their relationships actually is.

[ 2 : 02 ] And there is also a lack of clarity regarding the world around them, how our family and friends to regard this couple. Okay, does that make sense?

So it's sort of like being married, but it isn't quite. So are we happy? That's what I'm going to try and talk about.

Does that make sense as a definition? Yeah. Yeah, okay. Now we have got the... There's a microphone there, so there is opportunity to say things and they will get recorded and people will be able to profit from that.

So why are we bothered doing this? Because since... Now, what do you think? I think the 1960s, this has become a normal thing.

1960s, John, is that about right, do you think? It wasn't like that. The swinging 60s. Yes, that's right. Yeah. So if you watch the sort of nostalgia programs like Heartbeat, which are set in the 60s, it would still be a rather radical thing for people to be living together without being married.

[ 3 : 13 ] And if you watch Foil's War, so we're going back into the 1939-45, it would be a very strange thing to be living together without being married.

And if you watch Call the Midwife, the assumption was that all the women who had children were married. So I think this is a recent phenomenon. So it's become a normal thing.

And Christian couples might think this is normal for Christians too, unless it's actually spelled out, like we're doing this evening. Another reason is that there might be a cohabiting couple, one of whom becomes a Christian.

So that's well within the bounds of possibility. And indeed, if we're praying for people to be converted, it's something in a sense we ought to be praying for.

Because a cohabiting couple might become Christians. So here's so and so and so and so and so who are actually living together, not married, they become Christians.

[ 4 : 20 ] What do you say to them? I can actually remember Les Hill back in the day when so and so and so and so were going to be married.

And I think he was completely shocked at the idea that they might previously have been living together, although everybody else knew that that was exactly what had been the case. So a cohabiting couple might become Christians.

And also because people who are now in such and such a position might want to be able to come to terms with their own past.

Because people have come from all sorts of different mixed up, muddled up situations. And they might like to think, you know, what am I to make of that?

How does that affect me? How am I to think of myself and my walk with the Lord? How does the Bible address this?

[ 5 : 20 ] And I'm linking in with this. How is cohabitation different from marriage? So what does the Bible say to this situation?

I don't think the Bible particularly addresses this situation, simply because it's a relatively modern phenomenon. In the Hebrew culture, you would have had single people, married people. You would have people who were adulterous. You would have people, you would have the actuality of rape. You would have prostitution.

You would have concubinage. But you wouldn't have cohabitation. So the Bible doesn't particularly address that.

We do know that the Old Testament fiercely guards the boundaries of marriage. So it says there's the boundaries of marriage. And sexual intimacy is within those boundaries and not to cross those boundaries.

[ 6 : 26 ] So that's a very definite thing. And in the New Testament, So when I say New Testament, I'm meaning the kingdom ethics for Christians.

It follows that fierce boundary, plus it draws its categories, its way of thinking and its inspiration from the union of Christ with his church.

So that's the additional sort of genius point of the New Testament, that we have Christ and his church, which refocuses everything. And if you think of Christ and his church, the realm that we are in is of total permanent commitment.

That's the realm that we're in, isn't it? So that reading that we had from Ephesians of the husband gives himself up.

No, Christ gives himself up for the church in the same way husbands are to, what does it say? Give themselves up. Does it say that? What does it say?

[ 7 : 39 ] He gave himself up for her. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

So you get those sorts of very strong, well, it's a command, isn't it? We know in the New Testament that human marriage is terminated only by death with exceptions, and we might differ over quite what the exceptions are.

So I'm going to say that the exception, well, Jesus spells it out for porneia, and I would say that he makes an exception to, that he says there is such a thing as divorce and there is such a thing as remarriage for porneia, although you might say there's only the possibility of divorce but not of remarriage.

And then you go on in the New Testament and Paul says there are situations that didn't occur in the time when Jesus was giving particular teaching, so of a couple in which one becomes a Christian and the other remains a pagan and the pagan person won't stay and there is a desertion and that also it would be the termination of the marriage in my understanding of it.

So those are the things that we looked at before. So I can say the Bible does not give permission for cohabitation and the Bible does not give permission for sex outside marriage.

[ 9 : 23 ] So those are the things that we can be clear about. Does that make sense so far? So I'm not going to try and rewind into the exceptions, but those are the parameters that we're working, those are the principles we're working with.

Let's visit the idea of one flesh. So it says, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

So I have a reference in 1 Corinthians 6.16, so please could we look at that? And here in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is dealing with Christian people who haven't got the hang of the idea that what you do with your body matters.

Presumably they're thinking that spirituality is so spiritual that where your body happens to be and who it happens to be with is totally irrelevant. And he says that's not the case.

The body was not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. He says in chapter 6, verse 13, verse 14, by his power, Christ raised the Lord from the dead and will raise us also.

[ 10 : 52 ] Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Don't you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

For it is said, the two will become one flesh. So his argument there is that this idea of a sexual union producing or being at least part of one flesh, he says, well, that's the case.

So union with a prostitute is somehow producing a one flesh union to some extent in a very abnormal way.

But he doesn't say that that produces marriage because simply to have a sexual union with somebody does not mean you're married to them.

Does it? Think about it. It doesn't mean you're married to them. So I would suggest that the cohabitation, sorry, that one flesh refers to sexual union and it refers to more than sexual union.

[12:03] So the sexual union takes you, you know, is part of it, but that's not the whole thing. And if you think of, no, let me look at my notes because this is one of the bits that I didn't write down.

Okay. So sexual union doesn't make you married, but the one flesh is more than sexual union.

So the cohabiting option contains many of the ingredients of the marriage, but not all of them. So I think one flesh, so here's some thoughts about this, see what you think.

I think one flesh is also to do with your social identity. So if you invite a one flesh couple to dinner, you invite Kenny and Katie because they're a married couple.

They're one flesh in property and legality. So some people on the ministry training course know Nick and Sarah.

[13:18] And if you went to Nick and Sarah's house, you would go to Nick and Sarah's house because the one flesh involves holding property together.

Children. The family is part of the one flesh. So Mark and Rachel have lovely children. Mark and Rachel bracketed together.

You wouldn't say Mark has lovely children and incidentally Rachel has lovely children as well. You'd say Mark and Rachel as one unit. And for the future, so you wouldn't say Steve's retirement plans and Brenda's retirement plans.

You'd say Steve and Brenda's retirement plans because you think of them as one entity. Do you see what I'm trying to say here? So I think, Maureen, you said, I always think of Phil and Maria.

I think you said that the other day, didn't you? Don't think of Phil and Maria. I always think of Phil and Maria. So the oneness is more than the sexual aspect.

[14:29] It's more than that. And cohabitation has some of that, but I don't think it has all of it.

There are some legal realities, in fact, that if a cohabiting couple, and this was written, what I got for this might be out of date in terms of the law, I'm not quite sure, but certainly at the time this was written, cohabiting does not confer joint ownership of property.

So if you move in with somebody, and let's suppose a terrible thing to think that the somebody died, the next day you'd be homeless because you don't own that property because the oneness hasn't extended to you owning the property.

The death of one partner, the other may be left with nothing, not even a home. And children, cohabiting does not confer legal parenthood.

So if there's a child, the child belongs to the mother, and the father is only part of that if there are special legal things that are said and done to make that the case.

And again, should there be a splitting up, it may well be, and I'm not an expert on this, but it may well be that the father has no rights at all because there wasn't a complete one flesh.

[16:13] It was a sort of incomplete union. And of course, another thing about a cohabiting relationship is that no divorce is necessary to end it.

So if you're married, if it's been settled in the sense that we join ourselves together, which is true in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well, isn't it?

It is of such a nature that ending it is a big deal. But if with cohabitation, you're living together, and to end it, presumably, somebody moves out.

There's no formal procedure. There's no promises to unpromise. There's no binding to unbind. There's no legal connection to disconnect.

No share out of property. No commitment to extricate from. So it is different from being married, isn't it? The law looks at it that way. I'm not saying that our thinking should be governed by the law, but I think the law isn't being stupid about this.

[17:29] It is reflecting something about the way that relationship is. Okay, so far? Could anybody update me on the legal situation?

Is that correct? I mean, maybe nobody's. Okay, we've got two contributions from the floor. One says, I don't think it is correct, and one says, pretty well.

I... There you are. It's a difficult position compared with being married, and I think that sort of sums it up, really.

It's a difficult position compared with being married. What can you say, Phil, is that the cohabiting father has no right to the children, and the other people could be the responsibility.

Does the cohabiting father have any responsibilities for the children he's fathered within that relationship? I thought he did. Yeah, I'm not an expert on this. I'm not an expert.

[18:35] Rights, no, but responsibilities, yes, perhaps. It might be the case. I think there would be... Child maintenance would be payable, I would imagine. But the question of whether you can...

Let's put it another way. It's much more difficult than if the couple were married, and then there would be something more... Obviously, it would be difficult if there's a divorce separation, but there's...

You know where you are much more with a marriage situation than a cohabiting situation. Wasn't there recently the case of a couple that were cohabiting and the mother died and the children of the mother wasn't automatically allowed to stay with the partner of the mother because the father was around somewhere else?

Oh, right. Okay. Well, that makes it even more complicated, doesn't it? And I don't know the incident that you're referring to, but I could well believe that there would be complexities of that sort. It's a very complicated thing. Yeah. But I believe, and I'm not 100% sure, that if you cohabit with someone, and as far as property's concerned, I think they have a right when the one dies now.

[19:56] I think the law's been changed recently. Well, when I got this off the internet, it says the law is going, is in process of being changed. Right. Now, where it is now, I'm not a legal expert and I don't know exactly, but I think we could be quite clear that it is much more complicated and much less clear for a cohabitation situation than a marriage situation.

Ray? Yeah, as I said, there is some case law, but it obviously means taking the situation to court for a judge's opinion and decision. Yeah.

But it is a very difficult situation and it can be expensive from lawyers' fees and so on. Yeah. Yeah, there is talk of changing the law, but I'm not sure that's processed as yet. Yes.

And I sort of wonder if the law were changed so that if you were to move in with somebody, you automatically take on these responsibilities and automatically take on these promises where the people would say, well, I don't really want to do that because that's the very thing I'm trying to avoid. So here's some thoughts. I see what you think about this. Why do couples enter this? Now, I'm just sort of speculating here on what I think and you might think I've got it completely up the spout.

[21:27] I think that people might say, well, we've moved in together because we or I, we are or I am not ready for marriage.

So I say, well, I'm ready to move in, but I'm not ready for marriage because I know that marriage is bigger and more complicated or something, more demanding perhaps, and I'm not ready for that, but I'm ready to move in.

And I'm reinterpreting that as not ready to make a commitment. Well, actually, if you read it in terms of Ephesians 5, it'd be, I'm not ready to make the sacrifice. And I've put some comments and see what you think about this.

I think that the Christian, whether the Christian would be in a position to say this outright or whether you just think it, I think the response is, then according to God's wisdom, if you are not ready for marriage, you're not ready for this sexual relationship.

Because entering to, and entering into a cohabiting relationship will in fact not help, but will just hinder. And I'm saying that from a Christian point of view because of my faith that God's way of doing things is the best way of doing things.

[22:51] And this is not the best way of doing things. Does anybody want to comment on that? Do you think that that's a reasonable suggestion that people might say that?

Have you ever heard anybody say that? I don't know. Yeah, Arsema could do. I know a few couples that have lived together for a long time.

And when I've asked them why they didn't get married, they looked at me and said, we are. You know?

Yeah. We're living together. We've committed. I said, and I said the same thing, you know, there's a commitment in marriage that there isn't in just living together.

And they said, no, but we're committed. You can tell that we're committed. We've got children. We, you know. Yeah. Yes. Well, that's right. And I think, so, I, the commitment may be, the commitment may be actually very real, but it is not expressed in the available vocabulary, because there is a way of saying we're committed to each other.

[ 24 : 13 ] In our culture, there is a way of saying we're committed to each other, which is to get married. And the law recognizes that. So, this is why it's almost like being married, but it just lacks in some areas.

And I think there's a lack of clarity, because although the couple might know where they stand with each other, it isn't really expressed comprehensively to the outside world, is it?

You'd have to know them fairly well to know, oh, they are committed to each other. So, that's the sort of area in which cohabitation is not quite the same as marriage.

That's what I think. Let's go on and see whether you agree with me. So, here's a second thought. People say, well, we would like to see whether we can live together before we make a commitment. So, it's a sort of trial marriage. So, we'll see whether we can live together before we make a commitment. We'll see whether we're compatible. It's a sort of experiment.

[ 25 : 25 ] Well, it is, isn't it? It's a sort of experiment. We'll see what the results are. So, I've got two thoughts on this. One, compatibility is really not a biblical idea.

The Bible doesn't say in the book of Proverbs, my son, make sure you are compatible with your wife. It says, you know, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

It doesn't say anything about compatibility. Now, clearly, hmm, yeah, actually, it's not clear at all. I'll go back to what I was going to say, and I should say, in our Western system, where the couples choose each other, it's a very wise thing to get to know who it is you're going to marry, to spend a time of courtship, or, and, and, and a time of engagement, while one gets to know one another.

But, the idea of compatibility is not really a very biblical idea. I mean, the reality of it is, that whoever you marry, they're going to, they're going to be a sinner, and sinners are difficult people to get on with, and whoever you marry, they're going to find that you're a sinner, and you're going to have to find ways of forgiving one another, working things out together, whoever you marry, really.

That's just, just the way it is. And, the idea of experimenting, I really doubt whether this is wise.

[ 27 : 07 ] Man, woman relationships, this sort of relationship, like Christ and his church, these relationships are in need of the, glue called commitment. And, if you don't have the commitment, it's not going to work.

So, I tried to think of the example. So, imagine you're building a house of bricks and mortar. Shall we try building the house with bricks, but forget the mortar first? We'll just try building it, just with bricks, and no cement in between them, just to see whether it will work, see whether the bricks are compatible.

See what I'm trying to say? You can't do it that way, because it's going to fall down. And, to try and build a relationship together, without the commitment, that's part of it.

The, the, the saying, I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, or whatever words I said, that's part of the glue that makes it work.

It's, it's a silly experiment to try without that. Did you see what I'm trying to say? Did that, that make sense? Yes. And here's a, a, a third one, that, which is almost like what, what, what, um, our Semer said, formal marriage is simply unnecessary.

[ 28 : 24 ] so Joni Mitchell, bless her heart sang we don't need no piece of paper from the city hall keeping us tied and true, we don't need no piece of paper from the city hall keeping, I can't do the rest of it, beautiful song, terrible idea and in fact when she wrote that she'd already been married, she'd abandoned her husband and her child for the sake of her singing career and I think that haunted her for many, many years afterwards so even though she said that it isn't even true in her own life and what I would say is, well you don't need a piece of paper the paper achieves nothing really, I mean it achieves a record in the Old Testament, people were married and there's no hint of paper it's the promises on the paper that are the thing the promises on the paper that hold people together, the paper itself achieves nothing, it's the promises that the paper captures that mean everything and God designed marriage to include explicit faithfulness and when I say explicit what I mean is, it is spelled out understood clearly what is being promised does that make sense?

hmm what about this fourth one? so I managed to get this spilling over two sheets by accident so here's fourth one we just drifted into it so occasional sexual encounters evolved into staying over permanently and moving in together although interestingly you might well find that one partner keeps their own flat on as a sort of fail safe do you know people like that?

where they've moved in together but they still have two properties and here's my comment for what it's worth that drifting into something seems to imply that drifting out is equally possible and this falls short of the type of love that God has in mind for such relationship so the God of the Bible is a total enthusiast for chesed which is covenant love it's committed love it's count on me through thick and thin love it isn't love that they accidentally drifted into and one day might accidentally drift out of it is a definite you can count on me forever and ever amen love and this fails to to encapsulate that or it fails to express it let's put it that way that makes sense and a fifth reason why people might be in cohabitation is that they're put off by the formality or the cost or the fuss of a wedding and I do tend to my blood does tend to boil at the thought that you can only be married if you spend a king's ransom on getting married 10,000 20,000 pounds a year's pay and I think if people are put off by that or if people set themselves up for that and then say well we can't get married because we can't afford it

I think that's a huge huge pity because wouldn't I be right in saying that just a few weeks ago with Zach and Darlene's wedding we proved you can have a wonderful day and a wonderful wedding and you don't have to spend hardly anything would that be right and so I wouldn't want this is my comment to that you can have a wonderful wedding it doesn't have to cost the earth you don't have to put yourself into a mortgage for it and also to say a registry office wedding is just as much a wedding in the eyes of God a registry office wedding is just as much a wedding you're just as much married a wedding ought to be special but it doesn't need to cost the earth right let me stop there and see whether anybody's got any other comments on that so that that section was why do people enter into this situation anybody got any other comments so

Catherine Samuel and I had to read this book we recommended to get this book on marriage for our premarital counselling and it wasn't a Christian book it was written by these sort of sociologists who had studied marriage lots of marriages and looked at what worked and what didn't work so they were taking a purely pragmatic view and not a moral one but one of their big things was sort of on point two they said the key to having a healthy relationship was decide don't slide and they were saying how people tend to just sort of drift into living together and then they can finally have children together and then they feel they're sort of committed but they didn't really choose that because there wasn't a point at which they decided that can be quite unhealthy which I thought was really interesting because as a Christian I was like well yeah but it was interesting to see that all this sort of you know research was just bearing out what we knew all along so decide don't slide and that's a piece of wisdom about the health of a relationship don't just slide into things but decide and I think that's helpful

[ 34 : 46 ] I think that's helpful I mean to be I suppose maybe your friends asked Sam and they said well we have decided to live together we've decided to have children and it is a commitment and it's not something we've slid into it's something we've decided and you might say well that's very very like marriage except you haven't actually told the rest of us by using the vocabulary that's available of standing up in front of everybody and saying your promises to each other so other people could hear I think that would be how I'd think about it yeah another thing that this book said was that cohabitation prior to divorce cohabitation prior to marriage was statistically speaking you were more likely to get divorced after marriage so this whole oh it helps you to prepare and get to know them doesn't hold up no okay so statistically it just seems to be the case that it doesn't help it doesn't mean that you have a stronger marriage afterwards so I remember one of my dear colleagues at school she lived with her whatever partner all the time

I was employed there and ever since and only when she retired did she and her partner get married and I think that's an interesting thing isn't it because they they did recognize that there was something that they weren't and in the end they said well whatever it is we want to be it we want to get married right so let's look at what is the biblical way so first let's think of different scenarios let's think of Christian couples so here are boyfriend and girlfriend if we're allowed to use that term couple and they say to the young adults group we'd like to tell you we're moving in together and we hope you'll pray for us and to them then

I think the only thing to say is cohabitation is simply not an option for Christians who wish to follow the Lord so if you're already a Christian and you're in a relationship with the opposite sex the way forward is to emulate Christ and his church and to enter a sexual committed public relationship which is what marriage is so I think that one I have to say I think it's fairly clear cut for Christians who want to get together you don't say to them cohabitation that's fine you say that's not the way forward don't slide decide think about it pray about it and you're going to take a step a public committed step and we'll all pray for you in that and the reason for it is that's the way Christ is with his church it's an explicit promise entailing total committed relationship and that so the one flesh every way that we can be combined not only sexually but legally financially in terms of where we live in terms of how people relate to us we want the whole thing and that's marriage so I pause for a moment to see if anybody wants to disagree but I think that one's fairly clear cut now let's work for non-Christian couples so so now we think about people in the workplace we think about perhaps members of the family think of might even think of your parents in a non-Christian state so these are people who are not

Christians and to be frank cohabitation may well be the reality that's that's where they're at Christian insight says it's not what the maker intended and therefore it would be it would not be surprising that it doesn't work as well because the way the maker intended it is surely the best way now people may have actually very durable and as far as we could say sort of healthy cohabiting relationships but I don't know whether you say that's the exception rather than the rule or it's by God's grace rather than anything else or whatever you say but marriage is

[ 40 : 16 ] God's way and that's what we would pray for wouldn't it we'd pray for and if we had the opportunity we'd try and say that marriage is a creation thing and even though the people concerned are not Christians Christianity still has an insight to offer and it may well be rejected and you just have to work with the fact that it is rejected what might be slightly what might be deficient well there's possibly a lack of security because neither of them have actually made promises to one another in front of other people certainly a lack of legal recognition so unless they take special measures which perhaps may be possible one if the male partner died would the female partner have tenure of the family home things like that and a lack of clarity for the rest of the family do we treat these as husband and wife what do we treat them as things like that and this would be the case for many of us in terms of family members and friends so how do we treat them we treat them as people that we love and honour made in

God's image people for whom we continue to pray and we want the best so if they come from a distance and want to stay do we say here's the room that we would give to our married friends to stay in and we're going to treat you as if you're more or less married we know that you're not quite married but for the sake of argument we'll treat you as if you are married it's a difficult one isn't it and so that's the thing about people who are not Christians who are cohabiting and that's about as far as I could get with that does anybody want to offer any comments any thoughts that people have picking up on previous stuff here it's a bit perverse in a way that the law is definitely changing into a direction that creates cohabiting as enjoying equal rights with marriage that's the drift of the law isn't it apparently that's where it seems to be going in Britain in 2014 we're not talking about the rest of the world here but it's a strange thing so the distinctiveness which was true of marriage is being eroded from a different starting point so in the end the issues to do with security are possibly probably going to be dealt with and there'll be certain judgments put on it like well if you've been together for six years and if you've got two stable children who've passed a psychological test at school then presumably your relationship is strong enough therefore we'll put a tick in the box and you can be in a place where the property would definitely go to your wife you wouldn't have a wife it would be cohabited whatever so it's kind of all heading in that direction so those distinctions between marriage and cohabiting are being eroded in practice starting from a different standpoint so the ground shifts the ground shifts and it would be different in different cultures that's why I said right at the beginning that the definition I was using was to say that there is still available to the couple an option to say we are married which option they are not taking and as things move it might be more like ancient Rome where the state wasn't apparently I'm not an expert on this wasn't that bothered in saying well they're married they're not married it was just the sort of thing that you drifted into and drifted out of and of course there's a cost to that isn't there because you say the law gives those rights to the cohabitee as if they were married I'm just trying to think this through on my feet surely one of the tendencies of that is to remove security from the whole idea of marriage so if

we make it fit with cohabiting what do we say if you've spent more than a week together you can have such and such amount of the property or if you've spent six years together and if it isn't the way that that would come to match with marriage to reduce the security that you can have within marriage

I don't know I'm just talking off the top of my head but it's not helpful is it it's not it's not helpful to people to feel secure to know they've taken a step into security and deliberately done so I mean to say it's not helpful because it removes from people's thinking the thought here is a commitment I am deciding to make here is a step I am publicly taking that becomes less and less of an option because you can drift and end up in the same legal situation I suppose this becomes quite complex for us because we all think of individual situations and by the same token that we can have people who are in the categories of I've just drifted into it is clearly not going to be working on the other hand we can all think of situations where people are just completely happy to be in that and they've got very strong stable relationships equally on the marriage side there are people who get married for the dream and they make statements which are done in public and are legal but if you were to measure the heart and measure of commitment and say well how much did you really mean that equally there are undoubtedly people who make their vows in a registry office with a complete clarity and maturity so there's this enormous spectrum that sort of overlaps yeah yeah it does it does

I think what as Christians we want to try and move to is enhancing clarity and moving towards like Christ and his church so but as you say there's all sorts of mixed up situations on either side of that boundary that's the sort of world that we live in and it's not the way things are moving is not helping yeah it's very clear and very easy to say to a Christian this is the way you know this is the right way to before God and the Christian will want to do the right thing but can you honestly say to non-believers you have to live by these rules no

[ 48 : 34 ] I don't think we can say you have to live by these rules but what we can say is you can say right begin quote I'm a Christian I believe Christianity has a particular insight into the real meaning of marriage if I may be permitted to share this with you I believe on that basis that your relationship will be much stronger much better much more like the way God made it to be if rather than cohabiting you take serious thought as to whether you want to make the commitment of marriage because it works better and the statistics bear it out actually full stop so you brought God into that conversation because it's a Christian insight yes it's a Christian insight but it's a Christian I'm not arguing the case I'm just saying as a

Christian to another Christian you can make it very clear this is wrong this is right to a non-believer how can we expect them to live by you know well I suppose it's because what we're saying is we've got an insight into a creation ordinance so bottom line is that God has hardwired marriage into humanity and if you look through all the different cultures and all the different history everybody has a grasp of what marriage is what cheating is what unfaithfulness is and so on the one hand you've got what's inside people's consciences they all the no so that's one angle of it and what we're saying is that we as Christians have got an insight and we can speak into that and tell people this is this is what's going on inside your heart and mind on this matter of marriage this is how it's meant to work this is the best way for it to work but

I don't think we've got any more leverage than that I don't think we have to say you must live by Christian standards I don't think we can say that John what do you think I was going to to a non Christian couple is what about coming along to hear about Jesus and then expect this to follow rather than be the I mean I think it would be taken as with some resentment if I I think of a particular family situation and I think that would be received with resentment if I said that but if I took the opportunity to say there's an American gospel choir on Monday week why don't you come along and they listen to the gospel I think that would just be my first priority I don't want you to get me wrong I actually don't believe that a Christian can and should say to a non-believer this is the way you should live you need to get married but

I also believe that just saying to them marriage is a good thing for the children for all the other legal reasons and things yes marriage is a good thing and it is a commitment whether people acknowledge it or not it does make a difference to whether you're living together or whether you're actually married I think it does there is a difference I think you could say to people that to a couple who say cohabiting and I mean if they were to ask the question what do you think about cohabiting you might say something like well Christians think that marriage is the best way to go in these areas

because marriage is like is it's like a picture of

Christ and the church and then you could explain what Christ and the church means and the relationship between Christ and the church and marriage is like that and it involves commitment Christ's commitment to the church like the husband's commitment to the wife so you don't have to make it personal you want to say it in a winsome way if you have the opportunity and of course one could also say that although this is a particular Christian insight it isn't only Christianity that would take a strong view of marriage so Islam according to Amar our students this is one of the pillars of Islam fidelity within marriage this is what was the let's not go there!

[ 54 : 12 ] I've got a couple of other things to look at as well before we all turn into pumpkins right so here's one one member of a cohabiting couple becoming a Christian one member of a cohabiting couple becoming a Christian what do we say if we're asked for advice what advice do we give and here's a question how much undoing is wise and good so that's a question which I think is reasonably helpful the bible is realistic in that it doesn't expect us to go back 20 or 30 years and undo things that have been well in the past shall we say so just have that thought in mind so for example if this couple have lived like our

Semmer's friends as a couple for 20 years and they've got seven children what would be the wisest Christian counsel to this convert should you say let's suppose it's the mother do you say if you're going to be a Christian you've got to break this off you've got to leave your partner you've got to leave your children because that's the Christian way forward is it wise and good that's trying to undo 20 years of something which was almost marriage but I think we've agreed it wasn't marriage but it was almost marriage would it wouldn't it be better to say what you should be looking for is not trying to undo 20 years but move forward to fulfilling and completing this and prayerfully saying to your partner I'd really love to be married now I'm a Christian would you like to think

I think I've probably got myself out of order on this if they had been married a believer and an unbeliever Paul would not say undo that he would say okay you're married to an unbeliever I wouldn't advise you to enter that but you're in it now and unless the unbeliever walks out your job is to witness to your partner and seek to bring them to Christ and I wonder whether the wisdom of that situation is to say to the person it's not exactly the same but it's very much like it and rather than to say to you your act of Christian discipleship is to leave your partner of many years and leave your children of many years or whatever to say think of yourself as married really and see whether in prayer your partner might not join and see whether you can play the part of a Christian wife to win your partner and your children that's my thought on that if they had been living together for two weeks and you just had two weeks to undo you might well say to somebody now you're a Christian I really think that you should try and put an end to this relationship because it's quite feasible to undo weeks in the way that you can't undo 20 years and we can think of people can't we so there might be somebody who is living cohabiting!

get this relationship right because it isn't and that might well be a crucial point the believer might request marriage of the unconverted partner but would not be in a position I think to demand it it really does so that's why the question of how much you have to undo is important so I could envisage cases where you would really say the way ahead is to encourage the completion of the process by formalizing the marriage rather than undoing what really can't be undone so you can't un-have seven children can you whatever and no I think I'm repeating myself here so you'd say yes well what this normalizing would do would be marrying an unbeliever to a believer which is in my reading of it unequally yoked which is not a situation that you're supposed to enter into if you've got the option but

[ 59 : 41 ] I'm saying that this hypothetical situation would be more like the situation of an unbeliever already married to a believer not required to divorce but rather to win over via witness so that was the situation of one partner of a cohabiting couple becoming a Christian could I ask a question yes if you have two people who are cohabiting and one becomes a Christian but the partner doesn't agree to marriage the unbelieving partner doesn't agree to marriage how would that where would that leave that Christian partner that's exactly the question isn't it so it

I think it depends on the situation so if they're like our Semmer's friends and they've been married they haven't been married they've been together for 20 years and they've got children and it's a stable relationship so I'll put my colours down I think the sensible godly thing would be to say let's assume it's to the mother to say you stick with these people because you're married in a sense it's not complete it's not ideal but it's more like you do more damage by upping and leaving than you

would by staying and praying and trying to win so that would be you see that's one end of the spectrum but if as I'm saying if this is a situation that doesn't have all that history to it it might well be that the person would the Lord would say to that person this is the one thing I need to extricate myself from this relationship and that's the thing that I need to do so yeah so

Catherine was going to say yes she was going to say something sorry oh right I just finished I just wanted to say then that that person who is now a Christian would they have to see themselves as living in sin well this is it isn't it it's a very difficult situation so which is there are some situations where it's very difficult not to sin whatever you do and it's a question of which will be would it be a greater sin to abandon the children and this partner who although not a Christian has been faithful and you know I think in God's eyes you could say he has played the part of a husband would that which would be the greater sin and so I

I'm putting down my mark and say I can envisage situations where it would be a greater sin to get up and leave than it would to continue in the relationship yeah I was just going to say in a situation where people have been married I mean surely you don't even need to say if people sorry if people have been living together and have children together but aren't married surely you don't even need to say well you're almost married you could just say you are yoked I mean if you have a child you're jolly well yoked to somebody like it or not but then that was making me think like because in your first example the couple have been together for 20 years and have seven children the second they've been together for two weeks so I mean in the case of a childless cohabiting couple because I think I think I personally feel like a child constitutes a yoke but living together even for a very long time is that the same as having a child?

well I don't think the child I think the child just is an additional factor in terms of responsibilities I don't think a child makes a marriage I don't think you're not really married until you have children I don't think we would go that way and if think of people who are beyond childbearing age who might be in a cohabiting relationship and you say that's more like a marriage than not so I think there's room for some judgment here Steffi?

[ 64 : 37 ] I was just thinking about when it talks to masters and slaves and it talks to the masters and it doesn't say took out your slaves because it's wrong to take part in slavery which it is and the bible is clear on that but it says to the masters be kind to your slaves and then I think it does say in so many years free them does it?

The Old Testament parameters had a year of jubilee but in the New Testament I don't think in Rome society there would have been a provision to free the slaves necessarily although a slave might have the opportunity to buy their freedom.

I was thinking it's a bit like being in an unmarried relationship it's not because I mean obviously it's wrong to have a slave but in that society or if you're stuck in that situation it says to be a witness rather than yeah thank you yes yes that's helpful yes so it's a situation which is not ideal and in a sense is wrong but you're supposed to stay in it and make the best of it yes I agree this is a complex situation I haven't fully made my mind up about it but I'm still a bit uncomfortable with the idea that you can stay with somebody despite not being married to them Jesus says doesn't he if anyone comes to me does not hate his father and mother his wife and children his brothers and sisters even his own life he cannot be my disciple now I know we need to understand that in context but Jesus also talks about leaving doesn't he children and wives for his sake and reward that will come from that now obviously

I know we need to take this in context but there is a case that you say well I love the Lord so much that I'm willing to sacrifice this relationship to show it could be a great testimony to your partner by moving out and saying I'm so devoted to the Lord Jesus so devoted to this new life that I'm willing to move out and sacrifice the comfort and security of this relationship and what a testament that could be to the partner hang on my partner is really serious about this rather than willing to compromise so I'm still debating the matter but thank you Ben that's an interesting thought isn't it where do our responsibilities lie before the Lord so I think the quote that you gave really does need to be put into context because it doesn't say if you're a married person that it really is super spiritual to say to your wife and your children I am so much following the Lord I'm going to leave you lot and I'm going to be a missionary

Buddha did that and I don't think it's to his credit that he left his wife to go off and be spiritual and Augustine did that because he had a non-married relationship with a woman he had a child called a Deodatus when he became a Christian he left her and left his child and I'm not sure that it was to

his credit to do so and I think it is a difficult one but personally I would I think in a sense there is the individual conscience before the Lord and I would personally not find it in my heart to say to somebody who'd been in a cohabiting relationship stable loving responsible relationship to say to them it is clear that your Christian discipleship obliges you to leave this relationship

[ 68 : 56 ] I don't think I could find it in my heart to say that I'm still not convinced that however long you've been with that person that constitutes a marriage in any kind of sense well yeah I think that's what we've been saying it is different from marriage but cohabitation can be very like marriage so are the situations in which it would be the sort of the next question of what my responsibility is would be better informed by saying you're pretty much in a marriage to an unbeliever rather than to say you are living in a sinful relationship which you must leave you know which is the way to look at it and we do know that if it was a marriage to an unbeliever the believer is not charged with saying because

I want to live the spiritual life I'm going to leave you in fact the other way around so the responsibility on the believer is to stay and try and make that marriage work so that's my thoughts on that but it is tricky and you know we pray Lord lead us not into temptation please don't give us situations that are so difficult that we we don't know which way to turn on them do you want to do time's getting on but here's here's another one a cohabiting couple together become Christians a cohabiting couple together become Christians what would you say to them now I would say to them the way forward for you is not to try and undo what's in the past but to complete it and to say if you're real with the Lord you need to be married you need to get married to formalize that and then the question would be during the process of completing this would it be required that the couple live perhaps for a while as if they were two single individuals well in terms of the length of the relationship so you could do this thing where you say well if they've been together for 20 years would you say no you say you're pretty much okay that's 10 years and that was five years and you see how difficult it would be and I think judgment would have to really pray for good judgment on that

I think Maria the cohabiting relationship would come under the banner of the umbrella of sin maybe within the Christian context but then there's sin all around us isn't there so in a sense it's another sin but we are supposed to forgive sin aren't we in other people well we are supposed to forgive sin I think Steffi's point is helpful because the slave and master is in some sense a sinful system but the slave doesn't isn't blamed by the Lord for being a slave and the master isn't blamed for being a master what they're told is to make to live within that system in a Christianized way so sorry I've lost my train of thought on that so I've stopped talking

I'm just thinking of this cohabiting situation I wonder whether it's if one of them became a Christian then it could be rather helpful to explore the degree to which they have a commitment to one another so the things which characterize marriage have to do with a commitment that says we put it in our words till death has two part that's one of those commitments to have and to hold they stay forward for better for worse for richer for poorer to what extent are all those things true in this particular relationship if those things happen to be true in that relationship they haven't actually gone through the process of saying that out loud in public and I think that would be great if they were to do so but it might be quite encouraging to them to be able to understand the extent to which that is actually the case for them already yeah I think it's a bit more just measuring the years like John was saying depends how long they've been together would be one thing exploring the quality of what they understood by those years might be actually a very helpful thing to do so I think there's judgment and work and patience to be put in difficult situation isn't it let's pray together