

"Is Marriage Obsolete?"

A recent report reveals that four-in-ten Americans say that marriage is obsolete. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study, In Search of the Lord's Way. Is marriage obsolete? What's God's will for couples who wish to live with each other? Does marriage matter? Well stay with us, and we'll explore God's Holy Word.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word for God's Way. The Bible provides us the best way and the right way to live. And that's why we go to it again and again. Thanks for spending this time with us. We love to hear that you're watching or listening whether you're in any of the fifty states or in other of the many other countries that hear this broadcast. We want to be a part of your life each week.

A Pew Forum survey released in November said 39 percent of Americans say marriage is obsolete. This change in thinking profoundly impacts our country and especially children. In 1960, 72 percent of the adults in America were married, but today only about half are married. Many are waiting till later in life to marry, and the number of single people who are divorced has tripled since 1960. More than that, the number of couples living together without marriage has grown dramatically.

God gave Eve to Adam in the beginning, because it was not good for him to be alone. Marriage, that is, one man and one woman for life, was and is today God's design. The home made up of a married father and mother still provides the very best foundation for the happiness and the prosperity of the whole family.

God has blessed my wife Jackie and me with 42 years of happy marriage and four wonderful daughters. We now have twelve grandchildren. I consider my wife Jackie as God's precious gift and a treasure. I'm so thankful for her. I've often wondered, though, how she's put up with me. When we married, we made a promise to God and to each other that we would live together as husband and wife until death do us part. And after all these years, we still love each other deeply and are even more determined to keep that promise.

Now we offer copies of this program free. And if you want a printed copy or a CD of our study, simply ask. Mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or e-mail us. The address is searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number, that's 1-800-321-8633. We also have this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in song, we'll read from Ephesians 5:25 to 30, and then we'll explore the values of marriage.

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 25 to 30. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body." That's a reading from God's Holy Word, encouraging us to love our wives and for wives to respect their husbands. Let's pray together. Oh Father may we love You, and may we love one another as You would have us to do. We pray that our marriages and our homes will be the kind of homes that You wish, and that You want. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

When I was a teenager growing up in Shawnee, Oklahoma in the 1960s, we used a word that I don't hear much these days. It described a sexual behavior that was considered sinful and shameful. We used the term "fornication" to describe all kinds of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Today nearly 60 percent of American adults believe that "fornication" or sex between an unmarried man and woman is morally acceptable. Only forty percent think it's wrong to have sex outside of marriage.

Now this change in thinking reminds me of what happened at Corinth. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 5 verses 1 and 2, "It's actually reported that there is immorality (that is, sexual immorality) among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. (And then he says) you have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst." You know, rather than be ashamed of sin, people have become arrogant! We've assumed that we have moral freedom to do as we please without the spiritual or physical consequences.

And I think that explains in part why we're seeing some significant social changes in America. The number of couples who are living together has risen dramatically! Cohabiting has nearly doubled since 1990. More than half of adults between the ages of 30 and 49 say that they've lived with someone at some point in their lives. Even many people who call themselves Christian have turned a blind eye to the common practice of cohabiting.

As in the days of Jeremiah, many Americans today have no shame about anything. Jeremiah 6 verse 15 says, "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they've done? They were not even ashamed at all; they didn't even know how to blush." From our movies, to our television sets, to the internet, there's a constant message that sexual immorality is now morally acceptable. But is it? When did God change His mind? Has God ceased to be holy? Habakkuk 1 verse 13 says about God, "That Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor." My friends, God hasn't changed.

The National Center for Health Statistics reports that nearly 44 percent of births in 2014 were to unmarried mothers aged 15-44. In 1960 that number was only five percent. Today one in four children is growing up in the home of a single parent. Children who grow up in single-parent families often face greater social, financial, and moral challenges than other children. People who value marriage less are more likely to value other family relationships less as well. Those who don't want a spouse often don't want a relationship with his cohabiting partner's family either.

I'll never forget a man coming to my office for help a number of years ago. He was in his late twenties and he needed to talk. He had hit bottom in life, feeling so alone and needing so much. He lacked food, but he had a greater need than a meal. He needed a family. With tears streaming down his eyes, he said to me, "You know, if my father walked through that door, I wouldn't even know it. I don't know who my father is. I wished I had a father." I saw an empty man with a hole in his heart, impoverished by a father that he never knew.

Two-thirds of the children entering step-families do so in the setting where adults are cohabiting rather than married. Studies show that children who live in cohabiting homes show poorer emotional development than children from married, two-parent families. Cohabiting means people can leave their partner rather than face the challenging responsibilities of a home and family. Cohabiting families, unfortunately, rarely think of their spiritual lives or giving their children a spiritual education.

Now even when two people have lived together a long time in cohabitation, they don't feel obligated to remain with this partner forever. Couples who live together often define their relationship as "open" and do not feel the need to remain exclusively loyal to their partner. Cohabiting couples,

frankly, are less willing to support or be financially responsible for their partners. Such couples usually take steps to keep their money separate from their partners. A woman who lives with a man without marriage may be his girlfriend, but a girlfriend is not a wife. She is not yet family; she is only a live-in lover.

Many couples say they want to live together for a while before marriage to see if they're compatible. And they assume that if they can get along before marriage, they can get along after they say "I do." And they figure they need to see if they can handle the down times as well as the good; and breaking up before marriage is better than going through a messy divorce. Well all of this sounds good, but there is a substantial difference between "trial" marriages and real commitment for life.

You see, a trial is just that...a trial. Somebody slips up and the other person leaves. Marriage is much deeper and richer than that. It has levels of love the couple who is cohabiting will never know. Marriage is for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, and until death do us part. Cohabiting means I'll put up with you as long as you keep me happy. And in the meantime we're on a month-to-month agreement. No assurance, no security, and no long-term commitment.

And if you get sick, lose your job, or become unable to take care of yourself, your live-in partner will feel less responsible for your welfare. They may even abandon you when you most need them. One live-in partner said to the other, "If you ever need me, we're going to be in trouble." Couples who cohabit want the sexual benefits but not the responsibility. Now this selfish, self-absorbed attitude means it'll be harder for them should they marry to have a lasting and happy marriage.

Studies show that two people who deeply love each other and are willing to commit their lives to each other in marriage will live longer, healthier, happier, and more prosperous lives than those who are not married. For instance, sociologists Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher cite a study that showed ninety percent of married men at the age of forty-eight would live to be sixty-five; but only sixty percent of never-married men at forty-eight would live to see retirement at sixty-five. Now among married women, nine in ten at 48 reached 65, but among those never-married or divorced, only 80 percent reached the age of 65. Married people, generally speaking, live longer than those who do not marry.

Some cohabiting couples end up marrying, but they divorce far more frequently than do couples who wait until marriage to live together. Now in their book, *The Case for Marriage*, Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, show substantial evidence that married people are happier, healthier and better off financially than those who choose other lifestyles. They cite hundreds of studies showing marriage is indeed a blessing of God. Marriage has not failed us, we have failed it.

Waite and Gallagher conclude their book with these words: "Decades of social-science research have confirmed the deepest intuitions of the human heart: As frightening, exhilarating, and improbably as this wild vow of constancy may seem, there is no substitute. When love seeks permanence, a safe home for children who long for both parents, when men and women look for someone they can count on, there are no substitutes, for the word that we call marriage."

In reality, what some people have tried to substitute for marriage is simply living in sexual immorality with the same person. The Bible says in Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

God's will is that people marry rather than live in sexual immorality. 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 2 says, "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Paul advises widows and the unmarried to live as celibate singles as

he did. And then he said, "But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it's better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Corinthians 7 verse 9). The Bible never approves of cohabiting outside of marriage.

Some today repeat what the Corinthians said long ago, "Well all things are lawful for me." Well the apostle Paul quotes this saying, because the people thought they were free to commit acts of fornication. But the inspired apostle Paul answers them in 1 Corinthians 6:12 to 13, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body."

In verses 18 to 20 in 1 Corinthians 6, the Bible says, "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

The Lord expects those who follow Him to live a pure and holy life, not like the people of the world. The Bible says in Ephesians 5 verses 3 to 6, "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

Now when people marry, they publicly promise before God and witnesses that they will care about and care for each other. Married couples work together, they take care of each other, they provide for each other, they share common goals and dreams. The money they earn they budget and spend together. They share their lives and raise their children together. They worship together, pray together, and work together. They share their joys, their sorrows, their faith, and their love. They become one flesh and one in heart. My friend, this is the Lord's way for people, both men and women to live together.

God realized that it was not good for Adam to live alone, and so He made a helper suitable for him. "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept, He 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" (Genesis 2:21 to 22). When husbands and wives highly value their mates as gifts from God, they will find greater satisfaction in marriage.

But when couples live together without marriage, and they snub their nose at the will of God. Many couples who cohabit stop going to church and push God out of their lives. It's hard to draw close to God while you continue living in sin. Why not give up the sin and come back to God's way? Why not turn your heart and your life around and live as God teaches? You'll never regret doing the right thing, but you will always regret your sins. Let's pray together. Oh Father, we're grateful that You and Your love, and in Your mercy have granted to us the privilege of marrying. And Father may this country come to value marriage, even as You have taught about it in Your word. May they come to love each other, each husband and each wife. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen!

When Jackie and I married, we inscribed some words of a Scripture in our wedding rings: "Two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4 verse 9). Now verses 9 through 12 say, "That two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep

warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” We believed this verse forty-two years ago. And today we know them to be true. The Lord’s way is the right way to live.

The Word of God proves itself over time. The Lord Jesus said in John 7 and verse 17, “that if anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.” The Lord’s teaching is from God and has proven itself again and again. And that’s why we must follow God’s teaching on marriage, on salvation, and on the Christian life.

Now if you love the Lord, come out of sin and live righteously, confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and do it before others, and then be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 3 verse 7, “you must be born again.” That new birth of water and the Spirit comes through the grace of God when one is baptized into Christ. God washes away our sins in baptism (Acts 22 and verse 16) and causes us to walk in newness of life free from sin (Romans 6 and verse 4). Now perhaps you’ve given in to the lust of the flesh and you need forgiveness. There’s never a better time than today to get things right with God. Won’t you do that please?

We hope you’ve been blessed by today’s study of God’s Word. If you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, “Is Marriage Obsolete?” mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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We want to attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in your area served by this station or network. Now those churches love guests, and you’ll be glad you visited with them, and you worshipped with them. And you know what, they’ll be glad that you walked through the door, and especially if you tell them that the Search program invited you. Well we’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about this program, let them know. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.