

CBC POSITION PAPER REGARDING: COHABITATION

The following represents the official position of the Pastors & Deacons of Calvary Baptist Church

1. The Position of the Pastors & Deacons
2. Regarding Key Biblical Texts
3. Regarding Exceptions/Objections (if any)
4. Regarding Membership
5. Conclusion

1. The Position of the Pastors & Deacons

Calvary Baptist Church considers the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and therefore our guide in matters of sex and marriage. We believe that the Bible teaches that marriage is always an official, recognized, and lifelong covenant, between one man and one women. (*Gen 2:24; Mat 19:5-6*).

We believe the Bible teaches that the only proper place for sexual expression is within the boundaries of a marriage covenant (*Exo 20:14; Deu 22:21-22; Heb 13:4*). Any sexual relationship outside of marriage, whether it be premarital, extramarital, homosexual, or polygamous is then considered a sin. Therefore, Calvary Baptist Church does not approve of any church member living with someone to whom he or she is not married when such a relationship could result in sin, the temptation to sin, or the appearance to others that a sinful relationship exists.

Even when a cohabiting relationship is intended to be purely platonic in nature, The Pastors and Deacons of CBC we would caution against an unmarried, unrelated man and woman living together. Likewise those tempted toward homosexuality would be wise not to cohabit with those of the same sex and should instead elect to live alone or with close family members. A cohabiting relationship, even when celibacy is intended, creates several serious issues:

- **Consider Your Christian Witness.** Even if you believe your cohabiting situation is completely pure, what about your neighbor, co-workers? etc. Does your living situation avoid even the "appearance of evil" (*Eph 5:3*)
- **Consider Your Weaker Brother.** Perhaps you believe you are strong enough to avoid sexual temptation, but what about other Christians, especially younger Christians who could follow your example (*1 Cor 10:23-24*). Will weaker Christians be strengthened or weakened if they followed your example and do what you do? Do your actions show a proper love for those observing your life (*1 Cor 8:13, Mat 18:6*).
- **Consider Your Modesty.** If you live with someone long enough, at some point someone's modesty will be compromised.
- **Consider Your Holiness.** Living together simply invites too much temptation (*1 Cor. 6:18*). Living together produces an intimacy that is not produced any other way, which is why that intimacy should be reserved only for marriage.
- **Consider Friction With Others** It is important to consider your family, friends, and church family. Living together causes friction with others who desire what is best for you and want to urge you to reserve the intimacy or living together for marriage

2. Regarding Key Biblical Texts

Genesis 2:24

Marriage was instituted by God very early in biblical history. The order of this verse is important: “leave”, “be joined” (marriage), *then* “become one flesh” (physical and spiritual union, not *just* sex, but not less than that).

Song of Solomon

It is interesting to note that the one book of the Bible entirely devoted to marital intimacy, the Song of Solomon, follows the same outline as Genesis 2:24.

- The courtship (“leave”) SoS 1:2 - 3:5.
- The wedding (“be joined”) SoS 3:6 - 5:1.
- The marriage (“become one”) SoS 5:2 - 8:14.

Cohabitation & sexual union do not occur until after the wedding ceremony has taken place and the reader is warned not to “stir up love” until the “appropriate time” (SoS 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)

Deuteronomy 22:13-29

Several important truths emerge from this chapter. First, virginity at the time of marriage is expected. Second, sex before marriage is termed “a disgraceful act” in verse 21 and is taken very seriously. Third, premarital sex, even if it is between two consenting adults, is wrong (vs 23-24).

1 Corinthians 6-7

In 6:12-20, Paul shows that sex is definitely not a trivial thing like satisfying a physical hunger (vs 13). Because our bodies are important, God has bought them and He will raise them. In chapter 7, Paul addresses the situation of two unmarried Christians who are burning with passion (7:8-9). They should either exercise self-control or get married (vs 36-38).

John 4:17-18

When Jesus confronts the women at the well, it certainly appears that he is rebuking her cohabiting lifestyle.

Sexual immorality is condemned throughout the New Testament. The Greek word is “*porneia*”, a word which includes all forms of sexual intercourse outside of marriage and appears approximately 25 times (Mat 5:19; Mar 7:21-23; Act 15:20; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; 1 Ths 4:3; Rev 9:21).

3. Regarding Exceptions (if any)

It is difficult to imagine a situation where even non-sexual, temporary cohabitation would be permissible. However, if a member of CBC felt that such a situation was necessary, it is expected that the member will seek the biblical counsel of their Pastors and will defer to their judgment.

4. Regarding Membership

Cohabiting couples are welcome to attend services at Calvary Baptist Church. When someone in an inappropriate cohabiting relationship expresses a desire to follow Christ or become a member of the church, he or she will be expected to find a separate residence and refrain from the sexual relationship until marriage (*a minimum of 30 days is suggested*). When the candidate demonstrates a willingness to refrain from inappropriate cohabiting and commit to sexual purity, he or she can be baptized and accepted into membership.

If a member of CBC is found to be in an inappropriate cohabiting relationship, he or she will be approached by 2 members of either the Pastor or Deacon staff and asked to repent and separate himself or herself from the relationship by taking residence elsewhere until marriage. If the member fails to repent then the principles of Matthew 18:15-20 regarding church discipline will be applied. After the initial meeting with 2 church leaders, the member would then be approached by the Deacon board. If the member failed to repent the matter would then be brought before the entire church. If the member still failed to repent then he or she would be treated as an unbeliever and would be removed from church membership.

Any cohabiting couple desiring to be married at Calvary Baptist Church or by one of the Pastors of CBC will likewise be instructed to separate until the wedding ceremony. A separation must be initiated before marriage counseling and planning can proceed.

5. Conclusion

In closing, living together, sharing life, and family, and finances, and sexual intimacy are *benefits* of marriage, not things that *lead* to marriage. Cohabitation distorts God's plan for marriage and family, brings God's displeasure, harms the couple, potentially harms others who follow their sinful example, and brings disgrace on all involved (including the church and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself).

When a man and a woman live together it sends the crystal clear message to the world that having sex together without marriage is okay and no Christian should want to make that statement. The Christian should take deliberate steps to communicate truth, and the sanctity of sex in marriage is a glorious truth that Christians should want to cherish.

Studies of cohabiting couples have proven the wisdom of God's Word.

- People who lived together before marriage marry are between 33% and 50% more likely to divorce
- People who lived together before marriage have much lower levels of marital satisfaction
- People who lived together before marriage are much more likely to be unfaithful during their marriage
- Women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse
- References:
 - Andrew J. Cherlin. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (revised).
 - Edward Laumann, John Gagnon, Robert Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*.

- Julie Brines and Kara Joyner. 1999. "Principles of Cohesion in Cohabitation and Marriage."
- Johnson, C. A., et al. (2002). Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce
- Cohan, C., & Kleinbaum, S. (2002). Toward a greater understanding of the cohabitation effect: Premarital cohabitation and marital communication. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 180–192.
- DeMaris, A., & Rao, V. (1992). Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability in the United States: A reassessment. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 54(1), 178–190.
- Kline, G. H., Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Antonio Olmos-Gallo, P., St. Peters, M., Whitton, S. W., et al. (2004). Timing Is everything: Pre-engagement cohabitation and increased risk for poor marital outcomes. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(2), 311–318.
- Forste, R., & Tanfer, K. (1996). Sexual exclusivity among dating, cohabiting, and married women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 58, 33–47.
- Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Maybe I do: Interpersonal commitment and premarital or nonmarital cohabitation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(4), 496–519.
- Thomson, E., & Colella, U. (1992). Cohabitation and marital stability: Quality or commitment? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54(2), 259–267.