

“Is a Marriage Ceremony Necessary?”

I have been embroiled in a recent debate over the evils of cohabitation and sex before marriage. Another Christian agrees that fornication is a sin, but he doesn't believe that two “committed” people living together should be considered fornication. In his mind, fornication is wanton sexual promiscuity with no commitment or sincerity. You know—Spring Break sex. ☺ ☺

He believes that if two people intend to spend the rest of their lives together and have pledged themselves to one another, God sees their hearts and doesn't require legality or ceremony.

I explained that this would be true if two people were stranded on a desert island with no opportunity to participate in the process. However, in America, it is our custom and law to have a ceremony, even if it is only between us and a justice-of-the-peace, and we have maximum opportunity to engage in this custom. If we choose not to then we are not recognized as husband and wife by the state. Since we, as Christians, are bound to obey the authority that God has placed over us, such a non-recognition by our culture and authorities would amount to a non-recognition by our God.

Unfortunately, though, he doesn't want to listen to what I consider sound reason. He demands scriptural proof that a ceremony is necessary for a marriage blessed by God. Do we have any other argument that may satisfy him?

God says in Genesis 2:24, “A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his WIFE and the two shall be one flesh.” What changes a man into a husband and a woman into a wife? Only a wedding ceremony.

God says in Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” What defines a marriage bed? A place where a husband and a wife sleep.

So what makes for marriage? A social ceremony in the presence of witnesses who are there to support and ratify (in a social sense) the public commitment of two coming together to become one. The role of witnesses in the formation of social contracts is a biblical principle. (Just do a word search for “witness” in any Bible software program.) No matter where you go in the world, wedding ceremonies occur in the context of community (witnesses) because a marriage creates a new social unit that becomes part of the community.

Two unmarried people who are “committed” to each other in their hearts are still unmarried people, and their sex is fornication. It’s God’s definition that matters, not ours. Fornication, by His definition, is sex outside of marriage.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Do We Explain the Spirit to Children?”

Recently I attended the viewing and funeral of a dear Christian sister. One of her sons has two little children, a boy four years old and a girl two. They explained to them that Grandmother is asleep but her spirit went to be with our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. They seem quite comfortable with this.

At the viewing celebration the mother asked me a question. She said, "My son asked me what is the spirit. How do I answer him?" This really made me think about how we can explain this type of Christian understanding to little children in a way they might be able to understand, yet will not seem frightening, confusing, or spooky to them.

Thank you for your help and your web site.

Probably the best way to explain the spirit to children is by saying that it's the part of us that thinks and loves and talks and chooses. That part is invisible and on the inside, just like our body is visible and on the outside.

I would also use an analogy with a visual aid by picking up a glove and showing them how lifeless it is when just lying on the table. But when you put your hand in it and start to move your hand, the glove "comes to life," even though you can't see the hand. Our spirit is like the hand—it's what makes our outsides move and talk and love. So the children's grandmother went to heaven, leaving her body on earth, the same way that you can take your hand out of the glove and leave it behind on the table.

Does this help?

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"How Does the Bible Show Abortion is Murder?"

In my "Introduction to Ethics" class, the topic for the night was abortion. As the discussion progressed, people all around

me were saying that an abortion is good to do under any situation (rape, too young, the woman's choice) and I argued my point on that abortion is murder. I stated that the Bible had claimed to that statement also. The teacher then told me that I have to prove to him and the class that the Bible says abortion is murder. Can you help me with verses, or anything I could possibly use to make my point valid?

Glad you asked!

The perspective that abortion is murder depends on two points: 1) The Bible condemns murder (taking the life of another human being), and 2) The unborn baby is a person—a human being.

Point #1: What is murder?

Exodus 20:13, usually translated “Thou shalt not kill,” one of the Ten Commandments, actually means “Thou shalt not murder.” (There is a difference. Taking the life of another person in war, for example, is not the same thing as murder.)

Point #2: The humanity of the unborn

1. Both Hebrew and Greek (the languages of the Bible) do not make a distinction between pre-born and born babies. Whether they live inside or outside the womb is not important as to their value or personhood.

2. *For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be. (Ps. 139:13-16)*

This portion of scripture is written about the unborn baby.

3. *The Lord called me from the womb; from the body of my mother He named me. (Is. 49:1)*

The prophet Isaiah says he received God's calling and naming while still in the womb.

4. *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)*

The psalmist states that he was a spiritual being from the point of conception. This isn't saying that he sinned while in the womb, but that he recognizes that from the earliest part of life, he was a sinner.

5. *Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:4-5)*

Jeremiah declares that God knew him, consecrated him (set him apart), and appointed him a prophet before he was even conceived! From God's perspective, Jeremiah's humanity began even before conception.

6. *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among*

women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. (Luke 1:39-44)

The unborn John the Baptist had a physical reaction to the presence of Mary and ESPECIALLY her unborn Child. At this point, Jesus was probably only a week- or two-old embryo. (Scripture tells us that as soon as the angel Gabriel spoke

to Mary about God's plan for the Holy Spirit to overshadow her and conceive the Messiah in her and she consented, she hurried to see Elizabeth, who lived about 70 or so miles from Nazareth.)

I believe that these verses indicate that abortion is murder, but all you can do is offer the light they provide. Some people who don't want to believe that abortion is murder or that an unborn baby is anything more than a "potential human being" can and will refuse to accept it. (Remember what the Word says in Jeremiah 17:9—"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?") Your job is to pray for God to open the eyes of the hearts of the others in your class, humbly offer the truth, and leave the results to God.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"My Husband Wants to Put Our Daughter on Birth Control!"

Help! During a casual child raising discussion, I found out that my husband insists on putting our (unborn) daughter on birth control when she enters high school. He claims that it is the best thing "just in case" she gets caught up in temptation – he does not want her to "ruin" her life by having a baby so young nor does he want to raise the child for her. I tried to express my disagreement with the idea, indicating that I believe that placing her on birth control is a form of condoning the behavior and I do not want to give that

impression to her. I even tried to use an analogy of telling her not to use drugs, but giving her a clean pipe to carry around "just in case" she is at a party one night and is tempted to smoke crack! Of course he saw the drugs as completely different, and he insists that birth control is the way to go. Your personal input backed by theological soundness is greatly appreciated.

I answer your question both as a mom and as someone who ministered to high school girls for several years.

First of all, you can relax. Making policy about unborn children is something lots of parents do and it completely changes when reality sets in.

Secondly, the cross-gender relationship between your husband and his little girl is going to be very different from what he expects. If he's like most fathers he's going to be extremely protective of her, and that means looking at the young men she hangs around with a very wary eye. Instead of putting her on birth control, there's an even better chance he'll have an eyeball-to-eyeball little "chat" with her male friends and let them know how he expects them to take extremely good care of her and that means not touching her sexually in ANY way. (With some dads, that "chat" happens without words by giving them the evil eye. . .<smile>)

Your drug analogy was really very good even if he blew you off about it. Here's another one: what if he bought a Lambourghini that he kept in the garage, washed and waxed every week, was absolutely obsessive-compulsive about keeping it maintained to perfection. . . and then, when you daughter got her license at 16, said, "Here are the keys, honey, and of course, I got you insurance because you might get in a wreck but hey—no big deal. I expect you to wreck a car the first year of driving." Uh....I'm thinkin', NOT!!! <grin>

When parents get their teenagers birth control, they are

making a statement about having low expectations of their kids. It's amazing that we can expect that kids will exercise tremendous self-discipline for sports or academics, but when it comes to sexual activity we assume they are incapable of it! It's entirely possible to start talking about the treasure of virginity and the importance of maintaining modesty as soon as kids are old enough to know what they are, and build a protective wall of positive expectations that help the kids maintain their purity. It has been a joy to see both our teenage sons accept a chastity ring and the challenge to stay virgins until they get married, and to fight the temptations of the flesh out of their own convictions. In other words, it CAN be done.

When my husband and I were growing up, we were told "Just say no" to sex, but not given any reasons why. When it was our turn to parent, we explained how God's word tells us to keep the marriage bed pure and condemns fornication (sexual immorality), which is any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage. As Josh McDowell communicates in his "Right From Wrong" conferences and book, God's commands are given to both *protect* us from harm and *provide* us with good. We talked to our kids about sexually transmitted diseases (and showed them really gross photos of diseased sexual organs from the [Medical Institute for Sexual Health](http://www.medinstiute.org/) [<http://www.medinstiute.org/>], where Ray got training for giving lectures on STDs). We also told them that sex in marriage is worth waiting for.

We understand that our kids will make their own decisions about these things, but we gave them all the ammunition to fight temptation (and a culture that is absolutely saturated in sex) that we could.

The great news is that parents today have more help [for example, [Aim for Success](http://www.aimforsuccess.org) at <http://www.aimforsuccess.org>] in assisting their kids to value purity and chastity than ever before, especially in the church. I hope that by the time your daughter is old enough to handle this issue, there will be

even more!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Do I Recover From My Husband’s Adultery with Prostitutes?”

I have only been married four short years this December. I just learned my husband committed adultery on at least 2 occasions with a prostitute. He says he is sorry and wants to salvage the marriage. I have conflicting emotions from moment to moment. If we as Christians are supposed to forgive others for their sins, why does God allow for divorce when a spouse is unfaithful? I find it hard to believe that a marriage can survive infidelity and I am wondering how one ever trusts their spouse again after this type of betrayal? We are both Christians. He was saved three years ago, no religious upbringing. We do not have a Church home and share no Christian friends. We sought counsel from a Christian and that counselor told me that I had approximately 30 days from discovery to either remain, forgive and never speak of the adultery again or divorce. He says that the 30 days is biblical. I have never heard of this nor have I read it in the Bible. I think if I choose to stay within the marriage it should be based on my spouses behavior. I appreciate any information you may have and I thank you for your time.

I am so very, very sorry for the pain you are experiencing. Your conflicting emotions are totally normal and to be expected.

The biggest thing you need to know is that there is a difference between forgiving someone and trusting him again. They are not the same. When we forgive, we release the other person from our desire to exact revenge on them for hurting us. We let go of their sin against us into God's hands so that He can deal with them. But broken trust is another matter; it needs to be earned back, and that takes time. A good amount of time, consisting of one faithful, responsible, caring choice after another.

In order to understand God's allowance for divorce, consider what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 19:8—"Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." The Lord allows for divorce as a matter of love and grace for the one being hurt by a hard-hearted spouse. In the case of infidelity, when a spouse is repentant and truly wants to mend the marriage, God's desire is that He glorify Himself in the marriage by demonstrating His power and grace in the relationship.

There are many spouses who will attest to the fact that there is indeed trust after betrayal if the unfaithful one truly repents and commits to faithfulness. But it takes time, like I said. Probably close to a year minimum.

I disagree with the 30-day ultimatum. I see nothing in the Bible that says that. I do agree that if you choose to stay in the marriage it would depend on whether your husband shows remorse, demonstrates repentance, seeks accountability and is willing for his whereabouts to be checked on at all times. People who are hiding nothing have nothing to fear from accountability.

Here is a link to the Midlife Dimensions website, which offers

help and resources for dealing with an affair: www.midlife.com/html/resources/articles/category_affairs.htm. I am concerned that you two are not plugged into a church home and therefore do not have any support system. This is going to make recovery unnecessarily difficult. I would hope that one way your husband could show you he's serious about mending your marriage is to find a church home and get connected to other people who will help support your marriage. God never intended for us to be "Lone Ranger Christians." His intent is for us to be knitted into the body of Christ for support and as a way to receive His various kinds of grace. You are cheating yourself and yourselves to not be connected to an important source of life and strength. I want to strongly suggest that you make this a priority.

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

P.S. You might also poke around the New Life website (www.newlife.com) and educate yourself on sex addiction. If it were me, I would want to know what drove my husband to a prostitute. I would also want to know if my actions played any part in it. (For example, this is one reason the apostle Paul tells married people not to deprive each other sexually.) It sounds like you have an opportunity to each look at your own "stuff" and see what you can both do to build the marriage, as long as he's serious about it.

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“What If You Disagree with the Catholic Church About Birth Control?”

I have a friend who is a devout Catholic. She is torn about birth control in her marriage. Her priest has told her it is a mortal sin to use birth control. The few scripture references she was given, I had a rebuttal to, but I am looking for a way to help her through this crisis. This is really beginning to affect her marriage, since she and her husband do not want any more children. I would appreciate any guidance you could give us.

Dear _____,

Well, your friend has a choice to make. The position of the Catholic Church is that birth control is sin. There are many other people who are completely committed to the Bible and to a biblical world view who see freedom to use birth control in the context of submitting to Christ and actively seeking to know His personal will for them. (We mean here contraception, preventing an egg from being fertilized so no new human being comes into existence.)

Your friend will have to choose either the church's position or her own conscience after spending time in prayer (and, may I suggest, fasting) about this issue. I say this very gently and respectfully: there are lots of people (my husband and I included) who no longer accept the Catholic Church's authority, understanding that we can go directly to Christ for instruction and direction (1 Tim. 2:5). Your friend needs to ask herself if she can live with that. I suggest that's it's not enough to reject the church's authority simply to pursue

whatever we want and think will make us happy (been there, done that—it doesn't work!); the only wise course of action is to pursue what will bring glory to God through our obedience to His word and Spirit.

I send this with a prayer for heavenly wisdom (James 3) for your friend, and for you as you help her walk this out.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“I Liked the Article About Modern-Day Knights”

I read the article “[Raising a Modern-Day Knight](#)” by Louis D. Whitworth. I would like to thank him and the others involved with the article. I am going to be turning 20 April 16 of this year. I know that I am not a teenager anymore but that did not make me a man. At least I do not feel like one. I do have Jesus in my heart. I was raised at a FBC understanding. Also I did not get a Father till 12. I would like to thank him again and the site. I will be looking at your site in the future. I pray that Mr. Whitworth will get this message of thanks.

Hi _____,

Happy Upcoming Birthday!

I will certainly make sure that Lou gets your message. He is no longer with Probe, but I will forward your note to him. Do yourself a favor and get a hold of the book he reviewed (*Raising a Modern-Day Knight* by Robert Lewis), or another truly exceptional book that we enthusiastically recommend to all our high school and college age guys who come to our

conferences: *Tender Warrior* by Stu Weber. If you want to know how to grow into being a godly man, that's the best book there is. Lots of men in their 30s and 40s have been greatly impacted by this book, and if you read it as you turn 20 you will be SET!

God bless you.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You Are Judging Gays”

I was browsing the web for so information on a term paper and was disappointed in your site. I wish you all would choose to follow Paul in his thinking by following Romans 2:1-2. Please do not judge me because I would like to meet you in Heaven one day! I just hope that a young person that is experiencing mixed feelings about their sexuality does not view your site and feel that they are undeserving of God's love because that is the message that you all seem to be giving. Love me as I love you, unconditionally!

Thank you for your note.

Please define “judging.” The verses you mention in Romans immediately follow a strong indictment of homosexual behavior. Why do you ask us to follow Paul’s example when Romans 1 is full of strong language about how sinful homosexual behavior is? Is *that* judging? I don’t think so; there is a difference between comparing someone’s behavior to God’s laws, which are

rooted in God's character—and making assumptions about someone's heart issues and motives, which is judging.

If you have found anything on our website that is judgmental of a person's heart—as opposed to agreeing with the scripture about sinful *behavior*—I would appreciate you pointing it out to me. It's interesting, I've had feedback from homosexual strugglers and those who *used* to be strugglers, and they didn't find anything judgmental in our articles. Some of these people are my friends, because I work with a ministry that helps those who want to stop identifying as gay and receive inner healing for their same gender attraction.

Yet you are concerned that someone reading our articles would feel that we are saying they are undeserving of God's love because they struggle with their sexuality? Please show me how you arrived at that conclusion!

These are not empty words. I really, really want to know what you saw. My concern is that you may have been shaped by the culture's “new tolerance” that says that to disagree with the concept that all sexual expression is equal, and equally fine, especially if you ground your position in scripture, is being judgmental. If that's the case, then I respectfully suggest that you do not understand what judging someone really means. If I am speeding and get pulled over by a police officer who says, “You were going 70 in a 45 zone, ma'am,” it would be inappropriate and untrue for me to complain, “You're judging me!” He's not saying anything about my heart or my character; he is comparing my behavior to the law.

Having same-gender attraction is not a sin; acting on it is. People in both categories are unconditionally loved by God, but the consequences for one's chosen behavior do not negate His love. God is love, but God is also holy, and that's why He offers cleansing and forgiveness and healing to those who seek Him for it.

I appreciate your time in reading this.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You Are Close-Minded and Prejudiced Against Homosexuals”

What is wrong with homosexuals? Are you against Jewish people also? Do you think the Holocaust was wrong?? If you do then you should understand that you are supported modern-Hitler ideas by being prejudiced against homosexuals. When did you decide that you were heterosexual? At what age? If you don't know, it's because you never had to decide. You just are the way you are. Homosexual people never decided they wanted to be gay. I have a hard time understanding why people are racist also. If you think racism is wrong, maybe you should think about your opinions against gays. I still cannot believe that there are people in this world still close-minded. I cannot wait until people like you get off of this earth, and make it a happier place. Thank you for your time.

I'm not sure what you read on our website that would make you conclude we are prejudiced against homosexuals. Perhaps you are confusing our position against homosexual practice, with bigotry against those who discover they have homosexual feelings. We condemn homosexual practice because God, who created sex in the first place, condemns it as abnormal and a perversion of His plan. We also believe in the dignity of human beings, made in the image of God, who are given the gift of choice of our actions, and that includes the choice over

whether to act on homosexual desires or not. We do not condemn those who experience homosexual feelings, recognizing that those are not chosen; but we agree with the Bible when it says that acting on those feelings is sinful and wrong. Please understand, this is a difference between actions and feelings. One is wrong, the other is not.

We are not prejudiced against homosexuals, but we will proclaim the truth that people don't have to be gay and lesbian. Offering a way out of a destructive, difficult lifestyle is loving, not prejudiced. But many people believe the lie that being gay is as unchangeable as being a person of color, when that is not true. It's not easy to change, and many don't succeed, but that doesn't mean it's not possible. Ask people in Alcoholics Anonymous; they'll tell you the same thing about achieving freedom from the bondage of alcohol.

I think it is unwise to equate a belief that "homosexual behavior is wrong" with the belief that it's okay to judge people as inferior because of the color of their skin. There is a huge difference between a person's chosen behavior and the unchosen manifestation of genetics.

You ask, "What is wrong with homosexuals?" Our answer is, they are relationally and sexually broken people for whom there is hope in Jesus Christ. Those who recognize their brokenness and seek help can find it. But this answer comes with a humble awareness that we are all broken people in one area or another—or several.

Thank you for writing.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Please Consider the Christian Position”

Consider the Vegetarian

Greetings Mr. Williams,

I enjoyed your well-written and thoughtfully-considered article [“Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Eating Animals.”](#)

I urge you, therefore, to consider the Christian vegetarian position, developed in scholarly literature and now, finally, summarized on the Internet (www.ChristianVeg.com).

Like your own perspective, vegetarian Christians do not typically equate human and animal life and shun exploitation in order to be the best stewards we can be of the Creation God has made. Take a look for yourself and tell me what you think!

Some “food” for thought: you stated, “God provided a food chain involving plants and animals for man.” But much modern research in nutrition is showing animal protein to be hardly necessary for the proper development of humans. In fact, an animal-free (vegan) diet is shown to be optimum (for human performance, growth, etc.). It certainly avoids many risks related to cancer and especially heart disease (which it virtually eliminates)—the two biggest killers of North Americans!!!

Consider the facts for your self—I am genuinely interested in your perspective in light of this knowledge. As a starting point from this perspective, from an “outside” (i.e. nonvegetarian) source, see the American Dietetic Association at <http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/index.html>

Thanks for your time and consideration. I am looking forward to your response!

P.S. Relevant titles are listed on the bibliography on the website. See especially *Is God a Vegetarian?* by Richard Alan Young (student of Luke Timothy Johnson). And works by Stephen H. Webb, such as *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* another title forthcoming from Oxford University Press this October.

Thank you for your recent E Mail concerning my article on "Eating Animals."

I appreciate very much your contacting me, and I will make a note of your resources at ChristianVeg.com. I will be happy to refer your efforts to people who struggle with this issue, and I will explore your information myself as my dialogue with users continues.

I think there are many unanswered questions about this. For example, the human digestive system which parallels the herbivores (long) and not the carnivores (short) is an argument for your position. I have often pondered this.

On the other hand, if we take the Bible at its word, and recognizing the nutrition, disease, and environmental factors, etc., which you mentioned, I still do not think we can develop an exclusive doctrine of vegetarianism based on the Scriptures. The fact that God gives explicit instructions about which animals could and could not be eaten in the Hebrew community would indicate some meat eating is allowed.

I also turn to the New Testament and discover that Jesus celebrated Passover and ate portions of the slain lamb.

Further, there are passages in the New Testament (Peter's vision in Acts 10, or Romans 14, for example) which indicate that this is a matter of conscience, indicating that some may choose to eat meat, and others who do not. But one is not supposed to judge the other, because God has sanctified both.

I will look forward to reviewing your material.

Warm Regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Dear Probe,

I find your correspondence with the Christian vegetarian to be so interesting. . . It's got to be the best dialogue I've seen on this topic in almost all of my 30+ years. I just wanted to add that I don't think the choice to eat or not eat meat is one of just conscience. See, I quit meat (long before becoming a Christian) and had several problems physically/medically. I'm anemic, and not eating meat seemed to complicate the matter. I tried vitamins, eating more beans, nuts, fruits and vegetables (especially spinach) and still couldn't raise my iron level to where it needed to be. . . The only thing that worked (and had I been honest with myself I would have heeded the strong cravings) was a 6-8 ounce piece of beef liver prior to my monthly cycle. I've since taken to eating meat again (although I'm still more a veggie eater) and I've been a lot healthier for it. I say all of this to say, that I and many others are not wired for life without flesh. The Lord's intricate work will never be fully figured out as it regards the body (although we've seen some of the best medical advances known to man and that's a good thing). . . Nothing could take the place of meat in my life. I'm not sure why this happened or why it's still a necessity, but I would love to be meatless, I just wouldn't be as healthy. I hope this all makes sense. I'm looking forward to the next installment regarding vegetarianism. Thanks and keep up the good work.

Well, your comment IS the next installment! <smile> As a lover of chicken and cheeseburgers, I freely admit to a pro-meat-eating bias. . . but even with my personal preferences aside, I think your experience adds an important element to the discussion. Vegetarianism can cause problems for women of childbearing age that men do not face, and this needs to be

considered as we seek to be wise stewards of the bodies God gave us to use for His glory.

Thanks for writing!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries