“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

“My Boyfriend and I Are Committed to Each Other, So Why is Sex Sinful?”

My boyfriend and I have both have been faithfully committed to each other for 4 years. He is now questioning the issue of fornication and is having a hard time in dealing with this

issue. He believes that it is a sin to have sex out of marriage.

I agree, but I believe that we are committed to each other, and in God's eyes I am committed 100%. The only difference is that we are not legally married. We do plan to marry, maybe in a few more years. We do not live together. Please help me understand why do I see it OK??

Dear _____,

I would gently take issue with your choice of words. If you and your boyfriend are not married, you may like each other and even love each other, but you are not in a committed relationship. A committed relationship is marriage. Right now all you have is strong feelings and good intentions. God's standard for what makes sex holy and right and not sinful is a marriage relationship, which means you have gone through a wedding, a public declaration of commitment that makes you a new social unit in the eyes of the community.

I'm glad you care about this issue. But how can you say you are committed in God's eyes when He has already told us what He thinks? In God's eyes you are committing fornication, because you are not married. It really is that black and white.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries