

Cohabitation: An Occasion of God's Unmerited Mercy.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the theological debate surrounding cohabitation as either a state of sin or an occasion for God's unmerited mercy. By analyzing scriptural references, historical perspectives, and contemporary attitudes, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue, ultimately suggesting that while cohabitation may be considered a sin from a traditional standpoint, it also offers an opportunity for God's mercy to be demonstrated through love, forgiveness, and understanding.

Keywords: Cohabitation, Sin, God's mercy, Christian theology, Marriage, love, forgiveness, grace.

INTRODUCTION

The family's institution is fundamental to society's life. The family is the first and the most important path that man walks along in life. A person usually comes into the world within a family and can be said to owe the family the very fact of his existence as an individual. When he has no family, the person coming into the world develops a tragic sense of pain and loss which can burden his whole life [1].

However, families are often faced with many challenges nowadays. Cohabitation has become a significant social phenomenon affecting the institution of marriage and family life [2]. It is also an extremely perplexing issue for the Catholic clergy and lay pastoral ministers who help couples prepare for marriage in the Church.

Cohabitation or de facto union means a man and a woman living together as though they were husband and wife [3]. In a commonly understood sense, it means living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Society sees this situation as a sin because it violates God's commandments and the law of the Church.

Catholic schools, which are on the frontiers of preaching the gospel values, opposed cohabitation among their students. In Bukidnon, once the school finds out that students are living in cohabitation, they will be automatically expelled. On the other hand, the pastoral practice in some parishes when it comes to the sacrament of Baptism, the first child of the cohabiting couples will be the only one to be baptized. The remaining children of the cohabiting couples will receive the sacrament of Baptism once they decide to receive the sacrament of Matrimony. Is it logical to indirectly condemn these persons as living in a state of sin through their expulsion from Catholic schools? Are cohabiting couples denied God's unmerited, unconditional, and gratuitous mercy once they enter cohabitation that's why only the first child shall receive the sacrament of Baptism? Do these practices in Catholic schools and parishes an image of a God who came for sinners?

This paper delves into the theological debate surrounding cohabitation as either a state of sin or an occasion for God's unmerited mercy. By examining scriptural references, historical perspectives, and contemporary attitudes, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue and its implications for

modern Christianity.

COHABITATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Early Christian Views on Cohabitation

In the early years of Christianity, cohabitation was largely frowned upon due to its deviation from Jewish and Greco-Roman marital norms. These norms stressed the importance of marriage as a legal and social institution, which facilitated the creation of familial bonds, the continuity of family lineage, and the maintenance of societal order. Early Christian teachings largely aligned with these norms, emphasizing the significance of marriage in fostering stability and providing a foundation for family life [4].

St. Paul, one of the most influential early Christian thinkers, addressed the issue of cohabitation in his letters to the Corinthians. He advised Christians to marry if they could not control their sexual desires, as it was better to marry than to “burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:9). This suggests that early Christians viewed cohabitation as problematic, particularly due to its association with premarital sexual relationships.

The Development of the Sacrament of Marriage

The concept of marriage within Christianity evolved over time, gradually becoming a sacrament that signified not only a legal and social bond but also a sacred union between a man and a woman. This evolution was rooted in scriptural references that linked the marriage relationship to the union between Christ and the Church. In Ephesians 5:22-33, for example, the apostle Paul draws a parallel between the love and commitment shared by a married couple and the love and commitment of Christ to the Church.

As the sacrament of marriage developed, so too did the Christian understanding of its sanctity and the importance of preserving the marital bond. Consequently, cohabitation, which deviated from the ideal of a sacred marital union, became increasingly regarded as a sinful practice that undermined the sanctity of marriage [5].

Changes in Societal Attitudes

As societal norms and values evolved over time, so did attitudes toward cohabitation. The rise of individualism, secularism, and the sexual revolution in the 20th century contributed to a shift in societal attitudes, with cohabitation becoming more accepted and widespread [6]. This change was fueled by various factors, such as the declining influence of religious institutions, increased focus on personal autonomy, and the growing prevalence of divorce, which led some individuals to view cohabitation as a more flexible alternative to marriage [3].

Despite the changing societal attitudes, many Christian denominations continue to view cohabitation as a state of sin due to its deviation from the sanctity of marriage [7]. However, some Christians have embraced a more progressive perspective, considering cohabitation as an opportunity for God’s unmerited mercy to manifest, as it offers a chance for love, forgiveness, and understanding in the face of a complex and changing world [8].

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Old Testament Perspectives on Cohabitation

The Old Testament contains several references to marriage and sexual relationships, which often serve as a foundation for Christian perspectives on cohabitation. In Genesis 2:24, the creation story establishes

the ideal of marriage as a union between a man and a woman: “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This passage suggests that marriage was designed by God to be the appropriate context for a committed, intimate relationship.

Sexual relationships outside of marriage are generally condemned in the Old Testament. For example, in Exodus 22:16-17 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29, there are specific penalties for men who have sexual relations with unmarried women. These passages indicate that premarital sexual relationships, including those that might occur in a cohabiting context, were considered sinful and required restitution or punishment.

New Testament Perspectives on Cohabitation

The New Testament continues to emphasize the importance of marriage and the sanctity of the marital bond. In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus reinforces the Genesis account of marriage, stating, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” This passage underscores the significance of marriage as a sacred, lifelong commitment.

As mentioned earlier, St. Paul addresses the issue of cohabitation indirectly in his letters to the Corinthians. He advocates for marriage as a means of avoiding sexual immorality, asserting, “It is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:9). While Paul does not explicitly condemn cohabitation, his emphasis on the importance of marriage as a means of channeling sexual desire suggests that cohabitation may be seen as contrary to God’s intentions for human relationships.

The Role of Grace and Forgiveness

Christianity is rooted in the principles of grace and forgiveness, which are central to understanding God’s relationship with humanity. In the New Testament, Jesus often demonstrates mercy and compassion towards those who are considered sinful, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness and redemption. For example, in the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), Jesus does not condemn her but instead offers forgiveness and encourages her to “go and sin no more.”

This emphasis on grace and forgiveness can be applied to the issue of cohabitation, as it suggests that God’s mercy and love can transform even sinful situations. While cohabitation may be considered a deviation from the ideal of marriage, it also offers an opportunity for God’s unmerited mercy to be demonstrated through love, understanding, and forgiveness. This perspective encourages Christians to approach cohabiting couples with compassion and support, rather than judgment and condemnation, in the hope that they may ultimately come to embrace the sanctity of marriage.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION ON MARRIAGE

Marriage in the Old Testament

Marriage means God ordained the union of man and woman from the beginning. God instituted marriage as the pinnacle of creation. The scriptural account of marriage begins with God creating man and woman and bringing them together. In the second creation story, God says that “it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.” (Genesis 2:18). God did not plan for man to be alone, and therefore he created from him a “helpmate,” and one who was “flesh of his flesh” [9]. Because man and woman were created for one another, “a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh” (Genesis 2: 24). Genesis 2:24 contains the very words of the marriage ceremony.

This verse speaks of the divine institution of marriage and sets forth marriage as a Divine ordinance

[10]. Scripture teaches that marriage is not a mere human institution but something God established from the foundation of the world. God is thus the real author of marriage [11].

In the Old Covenant, marriage was a natural and legal institution. As a natural institution, the union between the husband and wife is one in which they freely agree to give themselves to one another to foster mutual love. In this marital union, they can also perform the act of generation. From the beginning, marriage was a monogamous union of one male and one female. Their common bond, along with the generation of offspring, was to be a foundation for society's good ordering and stability [9].

Marriage is governed under the administration of the law, the Torah, and protected by it. The Law of Moses codifies laws against the infidelity of married spouses, even for couples who were betrothed but did not yet live together as husband and wife. The betrothed was subject to specific laws enumerated in Deuteronomy 22:23–24 which says, “If within the city a man comes upon a maiden who is betrothed, and has relations with her, you shall bring them out of the city and there stone them both to death...if, however, it is in the open fields that a man comes upon such a betrothed maiden, seizes her and has relations with her, the man alone shall die”. These laws presupposed that a betrothed couple was already married in a legal sense, so any sexual involvement between a betrothed woman and another man was equivalent to adultery and rendered both parties subject to stoning to death. By extension of this notion, sexual relations between the betrothed couple, discouraged before cohabitation, were not condemned as fornication as the two were already pledged to one another by mutual consent [10].

But if the woman is not betrothed, Deuteronomy 22:28 says, “If a man comes upon a maiden that is not betrothed, takes her and has relations with her, and their deed is discovered, the man who had relations with her shall pay the girl's father fifty silver shekels and take her as his wife, because he has deflowered her. Moreover, he may not divorce her as long as he lives”. There was no mention that this verse speaks of cohabitation, but still the law of Moses has pointed out the necessary punishment once the couple has relations even though they are not betrothed [10]. Adultery is forbidden by the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18) and later laws of the Pentateuch (Lev 18:20). God endowed marriage with laws proper to its nature, but it was not a sacrament.

There are few details about the marriage ceremony in ancient Israel. Therefore, details concerning the marriage ceremony are limited. A dowry or “bride-price” was a fundamental part of the arrangement. If a man intends to marry a woman, the man shall place an item of his clothing upon the woman to signify his intent [10]. In the Talmudic Period, the ceremony was in two parts, the first called the betrothal and the second the marriage proper. The betrothal, the first element, was a legally binding contract between both sets of parents, owning the legal status of marriage. The second element of the ceremony typically took place one year after the betrothal [9]. After a formal marriage proposal and usually after a period of betrothal, there was a marriage procession in which the bridegroom set out to claim his bride, who waited for him in her finest clothes and wearing a veil. The following feasting might last for an entire week or even as long as two weeks. Marriage proper was when the couple began to live together and share all the privileges and responsibilities of a full partnership. In this era, “marriage was a purely civil contract, not sanctioned by any religious rite.” The only specific reference to a written contract is found in Tobit 7:13 which states, “He then called her mother to bring a scroll, so that he might draw up a marriage contract stating that he gave Sarah to Tobiah as his wife according to the Mosaic Law...to which they affixed their seals” [12]. There was no direct description of the ceremony since it had yet to receive a fixed form [9].

Marriage in the New Testament

Christ elevated marriage to a sacrament of the Church through which the spouses signify and partake in the

mystery of the life-giving love between Christ and his Church [13]. There was no systematic presentation of marriage, nor was it possible to discover elements of a marriage ceremony in the first century. At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary requested Jesus to perform his first public miracle (John 2:1–11). The presence of Jesus at the wedding feast implied his approval of the institution of marriage. It also established the basis for his subsequent teaching. Traditional exegesis often states that Christ sanctified marriage by his presence at the Cana feast and contributing to the festivities (i.e., the good wine) [12]. Jesus restored the original meaning of marriage as willed by the Creator in Gen 2:18–25.

COHABITATION AS A STATE OF SIN

Cohabitation in the Bible

The Bible does not explicitly state cohabitation as living in sin. Not stating that it is a sin does not mean that the Bible is completely silent on the issue of cohabitation. Rather, we must put several Scriptures together and gather the belief that any sexuality outside of the marriage of one man and one woman is a sin. Numerous Scriptures declare God's prohibition of sexual immorality. These scriptures passages can be found in Acts 15:20 which speaks of "unlawful marriage"; 2 Corinthians 12:21 states "impurity, immorality and licentious they practiced"; and Galatians 5:19 which says "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness".

The Greek word translated as "sexual immorality" or "fornication" in these verses is "porneia," and it means "unlawful lust." The word translated refers to "sexual misconduct" in a general way [14]. The Greek word "porneia" includes all forms of illicit sexual intercourse. The only form of lawful sexuality is the marriage of one man and one woman, as stated in Genesis 2:24, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body". Anything outside of marriage, whether it is "adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, or anything else," is unlawful, in other words, sin. Living together before marriage or cohabitation falls into the category of fornication—sexual immorality [10]. Sexual immorality is condemned in about 25 passages in the New Testament. The honorable state of marriage is described in Hebrews 13:4, which says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." As living together outside of marriage falls into this category, it is a sin. Anyone living together outside of lawful marriage invites the displeasure and judgment of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus in the gospels and St. Paul do not provide information concerning cohabitation. However, both exalt the partnership of man and woman, viewing it as God-ordained and reflective of the relationship between Christ and the Church [9]. Jesus declared the indissolubility of the marital union: "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). In Matthew 19:9, Jesus tells the Pharisees, "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery".

The Sanctity of Marriage

From a traditional Christian perspective, cohabitation is often viewed as a state of sin due to the sanctity of marriage. As discussed earlier, both the Old and New Testaments emphasize the importance of marriage as a sacred union between a man and a woman, reflecting the relationship between Christ and the Church. When couples choose to cohabit rather than marry, they are seen as deviating from God's intended design for human relationships and undermining the sanctity of the marital bond.

The Implications of Premarital Sexual Relationships

Cohabitation often involves premarital sexual relationships, which are generally considered sinful in Christian theology. The Bible consistently teaches that sexual intimacy should be reserved for the context of marriage, as exemplified by passages such as Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” By engaging in premarital sexual relationships, cohabiting couples are seen as violating God’s commandments and engaging in sinful behavior.

Consequences of Living in Sin

Living in a state of sin, as cohabiting couples are often perceived to be doing, can have several consequences from a Christian perspective. First, it may hinder the couple’s spiritual growth and relationship with God, as unrepentant sin can create a barrier between the individual and the divine. Second, living in sin may have negative effects on the couple’s emotional and psychological well-being, as it may cause feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety, particularly if they continue to identify with Christian beliefs and values. Finally, living in sin may also impact the couple’s standing within their faith community, as they may experience judgment, exclusion, or strained relationships with fellow believers.

Despite these consequences, it is important to recognize that the concept of cohabitation as a state of sin is not universally accepted among all Christians. Some believers argue that God’s grace and mercy can extend even to those in cohabiting relationships, offering opportunities for love, forgiveness, and understanding. This more progressive perspective emphasizes the transformative power of God’s grace in the lives of believers, regardless of their relationship status or past decisions.

COHABITATION AS AN OCCASION FOR GOD’S UNMERITED MERCY

Biblical Term of Grace

The main terms used in Scripture for grace were the Hebrew noun “*chen*,” meaning “favor,” the Hebrew verb “*hādnan*” which means “to show favor,” and the Greek noun “*charis*,” for “grace.” In the Old Testament, the words “favor,” “grace,” and “gracious” are all closely related. “Gracious” (the same word as “favor” in Hebrew) may characterize physical appearance: “A gracious woman gets honor” (Prov 11:16). It may also refer to politeness or polish in speech: “He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend” (Prov 22:11). The first Hebrew noun “*chen*” means “favor” and it appears most commonly in the phrase “find favor in the eyes of,” meaning that the one showing the favor is disposed positively toward the one finding the favor. Often the proof of the favor is the yielding of a request to somebody inferior in position [9]. This is especially important when “favor” is used to express the favorable disposition of God. The word “gracious” is often used in petitions, as in Ps 27:7: “Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!” The favor being requested is a superior’s willingness to accept a supplication and to answer positively [15].

The verb “*hānan*” has a similar range of meanings. The verb appears seventy-eight times in the OT; it can mean “to be gracious” or “to show favor to,” but it can also mean “to seek favor” when understood automatically. It can mean the behavior shown to those in dire need or circumstances. When the word is applied to God, it might be understood broadly, as in Gen 43:29: “God be gracious to you.” It might also denote a blessing. Above all, the verb expresses God’s powerful favor or concern in bringing liberation and help in times of trouble and danger, as can be seen mostly in the Book of Psalms. God shows great favor to

Israel by delivering it from enemies [14].

In the New Testament, “grace,” which means “charis,” is understood in the light of salvation brought by Jesus Christ. The word “grace” often appears in Acts and the Epistles. In the Synoptic Gospels, it appears only in Luke (translated as “favor”: Luke 1:30; 2:20, 52); it is also used in John 1:14, 16, and 17. Grace was a general blessing of God toward his people. Such favor is given to those who ask, and God comes to assist those in need. God’s grace is itself enough. “Grace” is part of many greetings and closings. Thus, grace is God’s giving of himself in Christ to bring salvation, so much so that it became a central word for the whole of the Gospel [14].

There is a passage in Paul’s letter to Ephesians that offers a useful teaching on grace, expressing the two categories of meaning attached to “charis.” It says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace, you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:4–6, 8). First, there is the adverbial sense, which explains the way or conditions under which salvation has been achieved, that is, by God’s gratuitous and entirely unmerited favor. God undertook the initiative. Second, there is the grace that speaks of the content of salvation, the supernatural life offered by God that first comes to us in Baptism [14]. Salvation is a gift from God that is given freely so that we might partake in the divine nature, attain eternal life, and receive divine adoption [13]. We have no strict right to salvation on our own merits, for salvation comes from God’s initiative and demands man’s free response. As Paul notes in Ephesians 2:9, salvation “is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

St. Paul positions himself against those who claim they can achieve salvation through their work on their merits. Once grace is established in a person, good works proceed in Christ—from the predispositions provided by the Holy Spirit—and man’s merit “before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace.” In this way, the life of the Christian becomes perfected, and the same love for God becomes the impetus for the performance of works of mercy. Merit is thus to be attributed first to the grace of God and then to the willing collaboration on the part of man [13].

Biblical Terms of Mercy

Closely connected to the concept of grace as gratuitous favor is mercy. In the Bible, mercy is a quality of showing compassion. This quality enables God to show compassion toward the guilty and the distressed (Deut. 4:31). In the Old Testament, “mercy” is used as the translation of three Hebrew words, the most common one being “hesed” [16]. The next word is “Rahamim,” the plural form of “womb,” and this is also translated as “mercy.” This dimension of mercy requires action on man and God. Also translated as “mercy” is the Hebrew word “hen” or “henan,” meaning “grace” or “favor.” Unlike the terms already mentioned above, this is a gift with no implied or expected mutuality. This quality depends solely on the giver and usually occurs between unequal beings [17]. Mercy also signifies God’s steadfast love and commitment to the covenant. This mercy is a gift and not a right, but it requires a relationship between God and the one who receives it—a connection in which God is the superior party. Both terms “mercy” and “grace” imply that God’s actions are gratuitous. He is under no compulsion to show mercy and favor [14].

God’s “mercy” and “love” are closely related in the Old Testament. Two Hebrew terms, “hesed” and “rahāmim,” are both translated as either “mercy” or “love.” About mercy, God’s “hesed” is a gift and not a right, but it entails a relationship between God and the one who receives it, who is expected to reciprocate by

loving God. The Hebrew word “rahāmîm” denotes the love and compassion expressed by a mother for her child. It has the same root as the Hebrew word for "womb" (rehem). It is a love that is not merited but is freely given. This is the love God has for his people: "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely" (Hos 14:4). Israel's whole history shows that God's mercy was unmerited. God's mercy was limitless and unfailing even in the face of repeated apostasy of the people [14].

In the New Testament, the mercy of God pours forth to its fullest extent through the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught the nature of God's mercy, especially through parables: the Lost Sheep, the Good Samaritan, and above all, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. At the heart of this teaching is the mercy of the Father toward a son who had abandoned the Father's house and returned home to a generous and forgiving welcome after experiencing an authentic conversion [14]. Jesus' teaching and his paschal mystery are done to restore the broken relationship of the people to the grace of the Father, who is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4) and who “consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all” (Rom 11:32). God reaches out to save us “not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his mercy” (Titus 3:5)[13]. We read in the Gospels that Christ came “not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). Jesus also said, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Matt 9:13). This call to sinners is entirely consistent with the idea of God's unmerited mercy in the Old Testament. Even though the Lord executes justice, he is gracious and merciful [15].

Pope Francis on Mercy

Pope Francis emphasizes that “mercy is real; it is the first attribute of God”. “Mercy is doctrine”. “Mercy is true” [18]. Since the face of God is mercy, “the way of the Church is not to condemn anyone forever; it is to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart...for true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous.” We could not condemn these cohabiting couples as living in sin. No one can be condemned forever because that is not the logic of the Gospel [19]!

In addition, Pope Francis calls forth a compassionate pastoral approach toward people who are simply living together [18]. The Church is responsible for helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and assisting them so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them. It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find their proper way of participating in the ecclesial community so they will experience being touched by an “unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous” mercy. It means trying to reach everyone by sharing the experience of mercy, which we have experienced, without ever caving into the temptation of feeling that we are just or perfect [18]. The Church can no longer say that all those, in any rare case, live in mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace [19].

The Role of Love and Forgiveness in Christian Relationships

While traditional Christian theology may view cohabitation as a state of sin, it is essential to consider the role of love and forgiveness in Christian relationships. Jesus consistently demonstrated love and compassion for those considered sinners and emphasized the importance of forgiveness in human interactions. This perspective encourages Christians to approach cohabiting couples with understanding, empathy, and support, rather than judgment and condemnation [20].

By embracing love and forgiveness, Christians can embody God's grace and mercy, offering cohabiting couples a chance to experience spiritual growth and transformation. This approach can create a more inclusive and compassionate environment within faith communities, promoting healing and reconciliation for those who may feel alienated or unworthy due to their relationship choices.

God's Grace in Transforming Sinful Situations

God's unmerited mercy can be demonstrated through the transformation of seemingly sinful situations, such as cohabitation, into opportunities for redemption and growth. By extending grace and forgiveness to cohabiting couples, Christians can help create an atmosphere where these individuals can reevaluate their choices and come to appreciate the sanctity of marriage.

Through the experience of God's love and mercy, cohabiting couples may be moved to make changes in their lives that align more closely with Christian teachings on marriage and relationships [5]. This transformative power of God's grace can ultimately lead to stronger, more committed unions that reflect the sacred nature of the marital bond.

The Power of Redemption

The Christian faith is built upon the concept of redemption, which is the belief that God, through Jesus Christ, can restore humanity to a state of grace despite human sinfulness. This redemptive power is not limited to specific situations or actions but extends to all aspects of human life, including relationships and choices such as cohabitation.

By viewing cohabitation as an occasion for God's unmerited mercy, Christians can emphasize the power of redemption in the lives of believers. This perspective offers hope and encouragement to cohabiting couples, reminding them that their relationship status does not define their worth or their capacity for spiritual growth. With God's grace and mercy, even those who may have strayed from the ideal of marriage can find redemption and healing, ultimately drawing closer to God and experiencing the fullness of His love.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This research paper has explored the topic of cohabitation as a state of sin or an occasion for God's unmerited mercy within the context of Christianity. I have examined the historical and scriptural perspectives on cohabitation, as well as the consequences of living in sin and the transformative power of God's grace in seemingly sinful situations. By examining historical developments, scriptural perspectives, and the core concepts of the theology of mercy, the study highlighted the transformative power of God's love and grace in redeeming and restoring broken relationships. Finally, ethical considerations were outlined, focusing on balancing traditional Christian teachings with compassionate pastoral care, respecting autonomy and individual choice, and promoting inclusivity and non-judgmental support.

Implications for Contemporary Christianity

The findings of this study have several implications for contemporary Christianity. First, they highlight the importance of engaging with the issue of cohabitation in a thoughtful and nuanced manner, recognizing the complexity of human relationships and the diverse perspectives within the Christian community. This approach can help to facilitate open and respectful dialogue, fostering unity and mutual understanding among believers.

Second, the study underscores the need for the Church to provide compassionate and personalized support for cohabiting couples, focusing on their unique circumstances and spiritual needs. By offering pastoral guidance and promoting the sanctity of marriage, the Church can play a crucial role in helping couples to

navigate their relationship choices and grow in their faith.

Finally, the findings of this study emphasize the transformative power of God's grace and mercy, even in situations that may be perceived as sinful. This perspective offers hope and encouragement to all believers, regardless of their past decisions or relationship status, and serves as a reminder of the redemptive power of God's love.

Areas for Further Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between cohabitation and the theology of mercy, there are several areas that warrant further research. These may include exploring the experiences and perspectives of cohabitating couples within various Christian traditions and cultural contexts, examining the effectiveness of different pastoral interventions and support programs, and investigating the potential long-term outcomes of cohabitating couples who choose to pursue a more Christ-centered commitment through marriage or other means. Additionally, future research could focus on the role of Christian education and discipleship in shaping attitudes and beliefs about cohabitation and the theology of mercy.

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