

Scriptural Principles as They Pertain to “Live-In” Arrangements

By John D. Schuetze

[September 1998, Fox River Valley Pastoral Conference]

The pastoral ministry has changed. Today we face problems that pastors of a generation or two ago rarely faced. We have to deal with life issues such as abortion, in vitro fertilization, and surrogate motherhood. We have to deal with end of life issues such as physician-assisted suicide and medical directive statements. We have to deal with family life issues such as single parenting and blended families. We have to deal with sex life issues such as homosexuality and sexual abuse. Another way the ministry has changed is that we also have to deal with “live-in” arrangements. While our forefathers could have counted the number of “live-ins” they dealt with on one hand, we would quickly run out of fingers and toes if we attempted to count the many “live-in” couples we have dealt with “in our ministry, at least those whose ministry has spanned more than a few years. Even though the details may vary from case to case, we could define the “live-in” arrangement as “one in which a man and woman live together as though they were husband and wife prior to or apart from legal marriage.” It is estimated that more than 2 million couples in our country fall into this category. “Live-in” couples are common today and dealing with them is one way that the pastoral ministry has changed.

And yet we could also say the pastoral ministry has not changed. We are still called to proclaim God’s Word to a sinful world. We are still called to apply the law, and the gospel to each situation we face in our ministry. We are still called to care for souls—those sheep that are presently a part of the flock as well as those other sheep that the Lord has yet to bring into his flock. We are still called to administer Word and Sacrament. These tools of the trade have not changed over the past generation or two. They have not changed since God first gave them to his church. Because the Word is the same yesterday, today, and forever, so our ministry is also the same. Let’s now look to that Word for some SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES AS THEY PERTAIN TO “LIVE-IN” ARRANGEMENTS.

PRINCIPLE #1: God instituted marriage and the family at the beginning of time as the basic social unit for his world.

- **Genesis 2:18-24**

Over the years, unbelieving man has come up with many alternatives to the marriage relationship. These include communal marriages, polygamy, and homosexuality. In recent years the “live-in” arrangement, though not new, has become increasingly common. However, marriage does not have a human origin but a divine origin. When God created man and woman at the beginning of time he also instituted marriage as the basic social unit for his world. Because God established the marriage relationship, we human beings do not have the right to change it or to provide or practice alternatives to it.

God blessed us with marriage for our good. He wanted husband and wife to enjoy the security of each other’s love. He wanted children to enjoy the security of a two-parent family. He wanted society to benefit from the stability that the family brings. Marriage provides us with blessings that the alternatives to marriage cannot. Our Creator is deeply interested in our temporal happiness. For this reason he instituted marriage and the family.

Even more did God want a healthy environment in which parents could “bring up their children in the training and “instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). In establishing marriage God was seeking “godly offspring” (Malachi 2:15). As pastors, we know how marriage and family problems can be detrimental to the spiritual life of parents and children alike. Following a divorce, one or both parents may fall away from the faith and take the children with them. Confirmation work or Sunday school lessons are rarely done and done well in a dysfunctional home. God instituted marriage and the family so that the seed planted in Baptism and watered

through the Word might fall on fertile soil and be nurtured in a positive family environment. Thus we see that even this earthly arrangement also involves heavenly blessings. God’s ultimate goal is that we be members of his family of believers through faith in Christ. Our earthly family often plays a part in how God accomplishes that goal.

The “Live-in” arrangement violates this principle because it substitutes a manmade arrangement for a divine institution.

PRINCIPLE #2: God regulates marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman.

- **Matthew 19:3-6**

God not only establishes marriage. He also regulates it. It is God’s will that marriage be a monogamous, heterosexual relationship—one man and one woman. It is also God’s will that marriage be a lifelong relationship. While man can dissolve this arrangement through divorce, such an action always involves sin on the part of the husband or wife or both. God alone reserves the right to dissolve a marriage through the death of the husband or wife.

Even though a person who divorces his or her marriage partner for marital unfaithfulness is not sinning by breaking the marriage, the partner who was unfaithful did sin. God in his Word indicates that the sin of marital unfaithful and the sin of malicious desertion breaks the marriage bond which is something only the Lord has the right to dissolve.

One problem with the “live-in” arrangement is that it establishes a union that isn’t necessarily lifelong. The couple has no legal or social obligation to each other. They are free to break off the relationship at any time with few if any legal repercussions. However, God designed marriage to be a lifelong union.

The “live-in” arrangement violates this principle because it is not designed to be a lifelong union.

PRINCIPLE #3: God blesses marriage with companionship, sexual happiness, and children.

- **Genesis 2:18**
- **Genesis 2:24**
- **Genesis 1:27**

Sometimes we speak about the three “C’s” of marriage—companionship, chastity, and children. However, it might be more accurate to use the phrase “sexual happiness” rather than the term “chastity.” Chastity points to a purpose for marriage after the fall into sin (1 Corinthians 7:2). Sexual happiness points to the blessing God gave husband and wife at the beginning of time (Genesis 2:24). God doesn’t just allow sexual intimacy in marriage. He gives it his blessing. Within marriage sexual happiness falls under the benediction, “And God saw all that he had made and it was very good (Genesis 1:31). Through sexual intimacy a husband and wife glorify God.

Song of Songs gives us a beautiful picture of sexual love. This book has been interpreted in various ways over the ages, yet I feel it is best understood to portray the love between a man and a woman. Certainly it does speak about a love (אֶהְבֶּתְּךָ) which “is as strong as death” and which “burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (Song of Songs 8:6). One can hardly read the book without being reminded of the love God has for us and showed us in his Son.

Yet much of the book deals with a sexual love between a lover and his beloved, a sexual love between a husband and his wife, a sexual love which causes the woman to exclaim, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love (אֶהְבֶּתְּךָ) is more delightful than wine” (Song of Songs 1:2). This book not only presents us with beautiful poetry but also with a beautiful message. In his wisdom the Lord chose to inspire a book that celebrates the gift of sexual intimacy that he gives to husband and wife in marriage. This is the very relationship that the Lord says should reflect the love between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5).

Men and women who practice sexual intimacy outside of marriage are not just failing to live chaste and moral lives. They are also depriving themselves of true sexual happiness that can be found only within marriage. They may experience a temporary pleasure. They won't experience the depth of love that can be experienced only by husband and wife.

The "live-in" arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it partakes of the blessings of marriage without assuming its responsibilities.

PRINCIPLE #4: God establishes a marriage when a man and woman freely, sincerely, and publicly give an unconditional consent (commitment) to live together as husband and wife.

- **Genesis 2:18-24**
- **Matthew 19:6**

"*Consensus facit matrimoniam*" is how the dogmatists put it. While this principle is not explicitly stated in Scripture, it is inherent in the Genesis 2 account. That this consent is to be a mutual consent, sincerely and freely given, is clear. However, what isn't always understood by "live-in" couples is that this consent is also to be publicly given. More will be said on this point later.

Contrary to what some people think, marriage is not established by love but by consent. And exactly what are the two consenting to do? They are promising to live together as husband and wife until God ends the relationship through death. This commitment is unconditional—an element that is usually lacking in the "live-in" arrangement. The marriage commitment is to reflect the unconditional love Christ has for his church. He did not set down any conditions we had to meet before he would go to the cross. As far as this relationship was concerned, Christ got the "worse." He was the "poorer" because of it. He was subjected to the devil's temptations. He endured the pain of rejection to the point of being crucified like a criminal. But as a result we got the "better." We are now the "richer" because of what Christ did (2 Corinthians 8:9). Through faith in his redemptive act we are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. The love between a husband and wife is to imitate the unconditional commitment Christ had for us. And because this is a serious commitment, it is to be stated and established publicly.

The "live-in" arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it does not involve a public commitment to live together as husband and wife.

PRINCIPLE #5: God wants husbands and wives to act in a loving manner toward each other and show loving concern for each other as they live together in marriage.

- **Ephesians 5:21-33**

Early in my ministry I counseled a young couple with marriage problems. In an individual session with the wife, she said with a serious look on her face, "I don't love him anymore." I soon realized what she meant by this statement. She was saying that at the moment she didn't have deep feelings of love for her husband. As we discussed what the marriage promise is all about, she began to understand that it is not based on the feelings of love but rather the commitment to love. Contrary to what she thought, her marriage was not hopeless. Even though she had no warm emotions for her husband at the moment, she was committed to the relationship and was willing to show loving concern for him.

This concept is at the heart of Ephesians 5. While Genesis 2 speaks about the institution of marriage, Ephesians 5 speaks about the marriage relationship. God didn't just state his commitment to our salvation. He put it into action and showed loving concern by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins. This is what the marriage commitment is all about. It does not mean that the couple will always have deep emotions of love for each other. It does mean they will do loving things and act in a loving way toward each other. This is what husband and wife promise in their marriage vows.

This isn't to say that emotions do not play a role in the marriage relationship. God created us emotional beings. He appeals to our emotions in his Word. But while emotions do play a role in the marriage relationship, they are not to play the lead role. And when the Lord tells husbands and wives to love each other, he is speaking more about their actions than their emotions, as 1 Corinthians 13 demonstrates. That chapter speaks more about what love does rather than how love feels. Applied to marriage, it points out how a husband and wife will apply their commitment to love—by acting in a loving manner toward each other. They will act in a patient manner even when they might feel impatient. They will act in a kind manner even when they might feel rude, even when feelings of anger fill their hearts.

This commitment to love is not a one-time statement, but a promise that husband and wife are to apply to the marriage relationship on a daily basis. Their relationship is to be a loving one. This love is reflected in the roles God established for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5. In View of Ephesians 5:2 1, we can describe these roles as follows: The husband is to be the servant-leader; the wife is to be the servant-helper. Both are to serve God even as they serve each other. Both are equal before God yet each is different according to the roles God gave them in marriage. The Christian husband and wife will see these roles not as a burden but as a blessing that God gave to marriage.

The “live-in” arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it fails to reflect the perfect love Christ has for his church and replaces it with a self-centered love.

PRINCIPLE #6: The many problems associated with marriage (divorce, marital conflict, abuse) are not caused by a weakness in the marriage arrangement as God instituted it. The sins, weaknesses, and shortcomings of those who are joined together in the marital union cause such problems.

- Genesis 1:31
- Genesis 3:16

We have all encountered them—those who are gun-shy about marriage. Maybe they had a bad experience with a previous relationship. Perhaps these problems have soured them on marriage. They are afraid to make a commitment for fear that the results will be the same.

Unfortunately these people blame the marriage arrangement for their problems. They feel that something must be wrong with the arrangement, otherwise they wouldn't have had so much trouble. Yet the problem isn't with marriage per se. As with the rest of his creation, God declared marriage to be “very good.”

This didn't change after the fall into sin. What did change is that marriage now consists of two sinful people who fail to live up to God's perfect standard for husband and wife. So while the institution of marriage is perfect, each individual marriage is a less than perfect union because it consists of two less than perfect partners. Because of sin, the harmony of marriage will sometimes give way to strife, the loving concern that husband and wife are to show for each other will give way to apathy and anger, the joy that radiates on the day of the wedding will give way to bitterness and hurt. No earthly marriage is perfect. The idea that they will live happily ever after is a myth we need to dispel as marriage counselors. Christian couples need to have a realistic view of the marriage relationship. Yet Christian couples also need to realize that marriage still receives the blessing of God. And when the arrangement ends up crumbling or breaking up entirely, they need to accept responsibility for their failures in the marriage relationship, remembering that marriage is something that the Lord declared to be “very good.”

The “live-in” arrangement violates this principle of Scripture when it sees the institution of marriage rather than sinful human beings as the root cause of marital strife.

PRINCIPLE #7: In current American society engagement is not tantamount to marriage. The engagement period is not a time to enjoy the privileges of marriage, but a time to prepare for the wedding when the marriage consent is publicly established.

- Hebrews 13:4

- **Matthew 1:18,19**

In our circles people have sometimes made the statement, “Engagement is tantamount to marriage.” In saying this they were trying to stress the seriousness of the engagement promise. Promising to marry someone is not something that should be made in haste. A person should give it serious thought and make every effort to keep such a promise once it is made. Before God’s law the sin of breaking an engagement promise is just as serious as the sin of breaking a marriage promise.

Yet to say that engagement is tantamount to marriage overstates the case. For one thing, it is not true in our present American society. Today engagement can mean many different things. Usually it means that in the future the two people will be making a public promise to be husband and wife.

Another problem cause by the “engagement is tantamount to marriage” approach is that it inevitably results in the “breaking of an engagement is tantamount to divorce” conclusion. It also leads to a false dichotomy where a couple may think they are now married “in the eyes of God even though they are not yet married in the eyes of the state or the society in which they live. This, in turn, can be used to justify sexual intimacy before marriage. So let us not overstate the matter when it comes to engagement. Let us point out that it is a serious promise that should not be taken lightly. It is a promise that should not be broken. Yet let us also guard against saying it is tantamount to marriage which tends to confuse the matter.

The “live-in” arrangement violates this principle of Scripture when couples seek to justify their actions—especially their sexual sins—on the grounds that they are really married “in the eyes of God.”

PRINCIPLE #8: Sexual union does not establish marriage. Rather the sexual union is to be an expression of the marital union.

- **1 Corinthians 6:16**
- **Genesis 2:24**

The young woman was pregnant. For this reason the Christian couple agreed to move up the date of the wedding and also keep the ceremony simple. But when I indicated that the fruits of repentance also meant that they should abstain from sexual intimacy until they were married, they were surprised. “Since we have slept together, aren’t we already married in the eyes of God?” was the young man’s question.

This young couple was confused about what establishes a marriage. They thought it was established through sexual intercourse. They thought that because the two of them had become one sexually that they were also one in marriage—at least in the eyes of God. Yet they had things turned around. Sexual intercourse doesn’t establish marriage. It is possible for two to become one sexually outside of marriage. The prostitute that the apostle Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 6:16 is an example of this. He indicates that “he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body.” He even quotes Genesis 2:24, “The two will become one flesh.” Yet Paul doesn’t mean that by virtue of the sexual union the two are now married to each other. As Principle # 4 indicates, marriage is established through consent. Through the mutual and public promise the two become united in marriage a unity that is expressed by the sexual union.

The “live-in” arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it expressed a union that does not exist.

PRINCIPLE #9: The government regulates marriage as a legal entity. As Christians we are to obey both God and his representative—the government. Those who have not met the requirements of the government or society have not yet fulfilled all divine requirements for marriage. Those who are not married in the sight of man are not married in the sight of God.

- **Romans 13:1-8**
- **Matthew 22:21**

We Christians do not live in a vacuum. We live in a society over which God has placed his representative in government. In Romans 13 God requires us to obey the government. This includes the laws it has established to protect and regulate marriage. A Christian will seek to obey not only God's laws but also human laws regarding sex and marriage, even when the government may not enforce them consistently. If the government requires us to have a marriage certificate, then we are required by God to do so. We have no right rejecting this law of the land on the grounds that "it is only a piece of paper" or that "everyone else is doing it."

Some may argue that the government no longer requires a marriage certificate in that it recognizes common law marriages. Yet at present these laws are very vague and apply only if two people have been living together for a set period of time (see attachment). A Christian can hardly justify violating God's law and governmental law on the grounds that the obligations of both will eventually be fulfilled.

Not only should a Christian fulfill all legal requirements but also all social requirements. The Christian couple has to ask, "Does the society in which we live regard us as husband and wife?" Take for example a place like Africa. In Zambia the government does not require a marriage certificate and only about half of the married couples there have one. The government recognizes that there are many different tribal customs that regulate marriage. In such a setting the Christian will want to fulfill the social requirements of marriage so that those in society recognize that a marriage exists between the two parties involved. What presently exists in Africa may become more relevant in American society as the government loosens its requirements for marriage.

The "live-in" arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it fails to fulfill both the legal and social requirements for marriage.

PRINCIPLE #10: Even though our society and government may allow considerable freedom in marriage and family relationships, including the "freedom" to sin, we Christians are not to conform our thoughts and actions to those of the unbelieving world. Just because something is legal doesn't mean it is moral.

- **Romans 12:2**

"Welcome to the 90's, Mr. Banks!" We may recognize this line from the movie, *Father of the Bride*. It was the comment the father received when he reacted to the sticker-shock of a 90's wedding. Sometimes people will use a similar comment in support of the "live-in" arrangement. "This is the 90's, pastor!" "Everyone's doing it!" Even parents may use this argument in support of their children or their lack of concern in the matter. And there is some truth to their arguments. Many couples are living together outside of marriage several million in our country alone. The attitude that our unbelieving society has toward this arrangement has also changed. Few "live-in" couples try to hide the fact that they are not married. Few people raise their eyebrows at this all too common practice. This is the 90's and to a point things are different.

Yet even in the 90's one thing remains the same. The "live-in" arrangement is still a sinful lifestyle. It still earns the eternal wrath of a righteous God. Regardless of how our government or society views this arrangement, it is still a sin against God. As Christians we are not to be the "conformed" but the "transformed." We are to live as the new creation that we are through Christ. We are to live as future residents of heaven and not as though we were in training for hell.

The "live-in" arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it conforms to the attitudes of an unbelieving society instead of conforming to God's will.

PRINCIPLE #11: As Christians we are to avoid not only sin but also the appearance of sin as well as those things that might lead others into sin.

- **Corinthians 6:12-20**
- **1 Corinthians 8:9-13**
- **2 Corinthians 8:21**
- **Ephesians 5:3**

Children often live on the edge. In their attempt to test limits and boundaries they may try to get as close to the line as they can without stepping over. As God's children, we are not to take such an approach to God's Word. We are not to see how close to the line we can get without crossing it. We are not to see how far we can bend the rule without breaking it.

The same applies to the "live-in" arrangement. Even if our government would give marital status to all "live-in" couples, even if our society would accept this lifestyle as a form of marriage, this doesn't give us Christians the right to do as we please. We always have to ask, "How will my behavior affect the spiritual lives of others?" "How will it affect those inside the church as well as those on the outside?" As Christians we want to avoid not only sin but also the appearance of sin. We want to let our light shine 'in every way possible so that others may be led to glorify the Father in heaven and drawn to the Savior he has sent.

The "live-in" arrangement violates this principle of Scripture because it not only seeks to get as close to the line as possible, but clearly steps over the line and breaks the laws God established for marriage. It is a lifestyle that misleads those inside and outside of God's church.

PRINCIPLE #12: All sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sinful regardless of how committed the unmarried couple may be to the relationship, even if they plan to acknowledge this commitment publicly in the future.

- **1 Corinthians 6:9,10**
- **Hebrews 13:4**
- **John 4:17**

When it comes to sexual sins, our sinful nature makes every effort to justify our sinful actions. "We are going to be married anyway." "We are already married in the eyes of God so it must be okay." "We have already committed ourselves to each other so why shouldn't we sleep together?" Yet all of these arguments overlook one clear truth: God limits sexual intimacy to marriage. Only those who are married have the right to partake of the blessings of marriage, including the blessing of sexual intimacy.

Some may try to downplay the seriousness of their sexual sin by using the "married in the eyes of God" argument. They may feel that since they are committed to each other that they are married in God's sight and therefore didn't commit a sexual sin when they slept together. They may argue that their sin consisted in that they were not being totally honest with family and friends and failed to fulfill all the legal and social requirements of marriage. Yet they didn't commit a sexual sin since before God they were actually married.

Yet Scripture nowhere makes this distinction. It is true that the Bible does speak about how we Christians are citizens of two kingdoms—the church and the state. While these kingdoms have distinct goals and tools, there are some areas where they overlap. One such area is marriage. The church has an interest in marriage because it is instituted and regulated by God for the physical and spiritual welfare of the family. The state also has an interest in marriage and family arrangements in order to maintain peace and stability in society. Yet to say that we can be married in one kingdom and not the other is a false distinction. Both kingdoms have been established by God and a Christian couple is required to fulfill the obligations of both kingdoms when it comes to marriage. Until the requirements of both kingdoms have been satisfied, a Christian couple is not married in the eyes of God.

Therefore if two people who are not yet married have sexual relations, they are guilty of a sexual sin. It is true that we might not label such a couple "promiscuous" since they were committed to each other. Yet they are still guilty of fornication, which is clearly condemned in God's Word. They have failed to keep the marriage bed pure since they slept in it before it was made.

The "live-in" arrangement violates this principle of Scripture when it tries to say that a committed couple may engage in sexual relations before marriage.

PRINCIPLE #13: Sexual immorality is not a lifestyle to embrace, but a sin to abhor. Christian concern will lead us to call a sinning brother or sister to repentance.

- **John 4:16,17**
- **2 Samuel 12**
- **Matthew 18:15-18**

When faced with a “live-in” arrangement, a pastor may have to deal not only with the sinning couple, but also with the extended family. This may bring an added challenge, especially if family members and friends support the sin rather than aid in calling the sinner to repentance. Some may overlook the sin on the grounds that things are different today and we have to accept people for what they are. “Judge not and you will not be judged,” is a line from Scripture that may be misquoted to support this approach. Others may be afraid of being unpopular. They are concerned that they will offend the family member and make a bad situation worse. They are worried that if they push the issue too hard they may drive the person away from the family and church entirely.

This is where we can learn something from the apostle John. He is often called the apostle of love since he uses the word “love” quite often in his letters. Yet John could also be called the apostle of truth, for that too is a word he uses frequently. The reason why he does this is because love and truth go hand in hand. Ephesians 4 tells us to “speak the truth in love.” The opposite is also true. We are not really showing love to people unless we speak the truth. We cannot hold back the truth for fear of offending people. A sleeping person may be “offended” if we wake him up. Initially he may not be happy with us. But if we tell him that his house is on fire and he must get out or that a tornado is coming and he must take cover, we see that sharing the truth is the loving thing to do. The truth may not be convenient at the moment. But in the long run it will save such a person from certain disaster.

As pastors let us always remember that the bottom line is souls. And let us help parents, friends, and other family members realize that eternity is at stake. Sin separates us from God and this includes the sin of the “live-in” arrangement. The only solution to sin is repentance. The only solution to sin is the Savior who died for our sins and rose as proof of our resurrection. Let us not let pressure from family members keep us from showing proper concern for souls, a concern which shows love by speaking the truth.

We violate this Principle of Scripture when we claim to show love but fail to speak the truth to those who are involved in a “live-in” arrangement.

PRINCIPLE #14: The Bible not only calls sinners to repentance but also calls upon them to produce fruits of repentance. What those fruits are may vary from one situation to the next.

- **Luke 3:7-14**
- **John 8: 11**
- **Luke 19:8**

Fruits of repentance are just that—fruits. They are not wages the sinner must earn by doing the right thing and making up for sin. They are not penalties that are handed out for a violation. They represent a response. They flow out of a love for the Savior, Jesus Christ, and an appreciation for his free gift of forgiveness.

Yet the fact remains that the fruits of repentance do involve a certain course of action. But what that course should be isn’t always clear. The paper, “Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage” (*The Counseling Shepherd*, p 238), outlines four principles regarding the fruits of repentance:

- 1) Fruit of repentance is to desist from the sin for which one repented.
- 2) Fruit of repentance is to restore, if possible, what sin has ruined.
- 3) Fruit of repentance is to amend one’s sinful life, to replace evil with good.

4) Fruit of repentance is to do all to the glory of God, whether we eat or drink, or work or play.

Notice that these principles do not prescribe a specific course of action that sinners should follow in a particular case. Having a legal handbook which lists the “acts of penance” one must perform as fruits of repentance would make our job easier as pastors. There would be no arguing over the prescribed course of action. Couples would be told, “This is what needs to be done and that’s that.” Yet it would not help us carry out an evangelical ministry, one that properly applies law and gospel.

Since the circumstances may vary from case to case, the fruits of repentance may also vary. We think of how John the Baptist applied this principle. Many different backgrounds were represented in his congregation. There were Jews and Gentiles, soldiers and tax collectors. There were society’s “sinners” and Caesar’s servants. John didn’t take a “one size fits all” approach to the fruits of repentance. He gave specific applications in each case. To the common people he said, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” To the tax collectors he said, “Don’t collect any more than you are required to.” To the soldiers he added, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

As we lead “live-in” couples to repentance, we also need to lead them to appropriate fruits of repentance, based on the above principles. As the final principle listed above states, our ultimate goal is that they now glorify God with their lives, something that their sinful lifestyle did not do.

We violate this principle of Scripture when we do not help couples who have repented of the “live-in” arrangement to apply appropriate fruits of repentance.

PRINCIPLE #15: “Live-in” couples are not problems to be ignored but a mission field to be harvested. They are souls to lead to repentance. They are souls for whom the Savior suffered.

- **Mark 2:16,17**
- **John 4**

Dealing with “live-in” couples is not a glamorous part of our ministry. I doubt that any of us would list it as one of the joys of the ministry. We may look forward to preaching a sermon; we don’t look forward to dealing with the “live-in.” We may keep a personal record of our confirmations and baptisms; we don’t keep a list of “live-ins” that we have encountered. But just as the Savior saw the “live-in” at Jacob’s well as a prime mission prospect, so let us also view our “live-in” couples in that light. This woman seemed like an unlikely person for Jesus to contact. She was a Samaritan, he was a Jew. She was a woman, he was a man. She was a sinful human being, he was the all-perfect God. However, Jesus saw her through the eyes of the cross. He knew that her eternal future depended on her relationship with him as Savior. He knew that while she was a “tough case” she was still a soul for whom he would suffer and die.

May we never violate this principle of Scripture. Our work deals with the public administration of the ministry of the keys. And confronting “live-in” couples with their sin is a part of that ministry. Brothers, support each other in this all-important work. Support your people who are deeply concerned about the sins of their wayward sons and daughters. Support your church leaders who have been called to assist you in this task. And most of all know that the Savior supports you in this gospel ministry of calling sinners—even “live-in” sinners—to repentance.

Common Law Marriage

This article was adapted from *The Living Together Kit*, by Ralph Warner and Toni Ihara (Nolo Press).

1. If my partner and I live together long enough, won't we have a common law marriage?

Not necessarily. A common law marriage can occur only when:

- a straight couple (common law marriages don't apply to same-sex couples) lives together in a state that recognizes common law marriages
- for a significant period of time (not defined in any state)
- holding themselves out as a married couple—typically this means using the same last name, referring to the other as “my husband” or “my wife” and filing a joint tax return, and
- intending to be married.

Unless all four are true, there is no common law marriage. When one exists, the couple must go through a formal divorce to end the relationship.

States That Currently Recognize Common Law Marriage:

Alabama	Oklahoma
Colorado	Pennsylvania
District of Columbia	Rhode Island
Iowa	South Carolina
Kansas	Texas
Montana	Utah
New Hampshire (for inheritance purposes only)	

This page was printed and distributed with permission from: <http://www.nolo.com/ChunkSP/SP8.HTML> on 8/27/98.