

21st Century Challenges to God's Design of Marriage

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Martin Luther once penned, "How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage! I am reluctant to do it because I am afraid if I once get really involved in the subject it will make a lot of work for me and for others."¹ Since this author shares much in common with Luther, with but a few exceptions such as intellect, wisdom, ability in general, discernment, biblical knowledge, biblical understanding, etc., it should not be surprising to hear that he feels similarly about undertaking this essay. So much is so wrong with marriage today, that one wonders where to begin. Couple that with the understanding that in marriage matters, souls are at stake. On the one hand, in dealing with this topic among our people, we do not want to mimic the permissiveness that pervades society so that any conceivable relationship arrangement is viewed as acceptable. This will not do for the one who presents God's will and God's Word to God's people. Yet on the other hand, we want to guard against unleashing the suffocating load of the law on our people as if they were godless heathens instead of struggling saints. Souls are at stake, so we must treat matters delicately when the situation calls for it. Given the state of marriage today, the situation calls for it more than it has in previous generations.

Traditional norms and forms of marriage and the family are in trouble today. Statistics tell the bald American story, which has parallels in other Western cultures. Since 1975, roughly one-quarter of all pregnancies were aborted. One-third of all children were born to single mothers. One-half of all marriages ended in divorce. Two-thirds of all African American children were raised without a father present. Children from broken homes proved two to three times more likely to have behavioral and learning problems than children from two-parent homes. Single mothers faced four times the rates of bankruptcy and eviction. More than two-thirds of juveniles and young adults convicted of major felonies came from single- or no-parent homes. So much is well known. Though these numbers have improved over the past decade, they bring little cheer.²

The numbers speak to monumental problems that result as God's design for marriage breaks down in any society. Statistics and data have been collected and analyzed and can be framed in such a way as to paint a dismal picture of the state of marriage today. But more than likely, you don't need numbers, statistics, or data to tell you that; you have had your own personal experiences, just as I did one Sunday morning after worship.

She was disappointed and frustrated. I was glad. While I try not to make it a habit of delighting in the disappointment and frustration of others, in this case I was happy to make an exception. I caught her after church and was curious to hear what she

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works (AE)*, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 45, "The Estate of Marriage." (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 17.

² John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). p. x.

thought of her brother's living situation. I had recently discovered that he had been living with his girlfriend, which certainly came as a surprise to me. While his girlfriend was not a Christian, he was. He had gone through our elementary school. Before being away for college, he had been quite regular in worship. He was involved in our teen Bible studies and did not shy away from answering any questions he could. In short, he knew better. Now I wanted to see if his sister did, and to see if I had an ally in planning to confront the issue.

I was relieved to see that I did have an ally. It was refreshing to see that she acknowledged that her brother's living situation was not appropriate. My intent in speaking with her about her brother was not to rail on him in his absence, but rather to gather as much information about his situation as possible before dealing with him. I also encouraged her to be unafraid to point out to him that living together outside of marriage was not an acceptable option in God's eyes.

When I had the chance to speak with her brother, it was clear that he knew they shouldn't be living together. I encouraged him to correct the situation in one of two ways: 1) make different living arrangements that didn't involve both he and his girlfriend living under the same roof, or 2) go "downtown," get legally married, and we could talk about any wedding details at some point in the future.

I hope that you have at one time or another had the benefit of experiencing the same good news I did, that he did in fact end up filling out the necessary paperwork and making it official with a courthouse marriage. I was relieved. I had feared the worst, that certainly when faced with an ultimatum from God's Word, they wouldn't want to hear it and would simply ask to be released from the congregation. I was glad. Glad that I was wrong.

Sometime later, still relieved that that particular fire had been put out, another came to my attention. The situation was similar, only this time *she* was a member of our congregation, and he was not. Also similarly, he was not a Christian. They were about the same age as the two in the previous example, and the living situation was virtually identical. And to all of the reasons she should have known better, we can add this one: she was the sister of the young man in the previous case; yes, the very same sister I had approached after church some time ago who had been disappointed and frustrated by her brother's living situation at that time. I was not glad.

Ugh.

I wish it would be relatively safe to assume that the scenarios above are unique and very isolated incidents. I know better. You know better. We could spend the rest of this conference exchanging shocking stories about live-ins, divorce, and marriage in general. But, as a testimony to the sorry state of marriage in our society, I don't think many of us would any longer find such stories all that shocking. Regarding marriage today, what once would have made jaws drop has become commonplace, sometimes even a source of pride.

Perhaps the younger brothers among us could attest to the challenges a pastor today faces in this area of ministry. It would not be surprising to hear that a number of us have had more live-in counseling sessions than we have premarital classes. If this author hasn't, he is awfully close. A pastor today might not know what to do if he is approached by a young couple who has recently become engaged, is not cohabiting, and requests pre-marriage classes. Wait?! Do people still do that today? What a welcome scenario that would be!

What's the Problem?!?

The institution of marriage is crumbling. But let's not presume this to be a recent happening in our day and age. The institution of marriage began to crumble just after it had been established! The first husband failed miserably in serving as the head of his home by refusing to put his foot down as his wife entertained the possibility of challenging the one call to obedience that God had given her. The first wife put her own desire above God's will and so introduced a tsunami of selfishness into the world. That selfishness would essentially serve as the basest instinct responsible for drowning marriage after marriage throughout history. Recall God's assessment of prediluvian man: "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time."³ Unfortunately though, postdiluvian man would not fare any better in providing a more reliable pool from which to gather husbands and wives: "The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood."⁴ Nothing had changed! After the flood the world was still occupied by selfish sinners, just as it had been prior to the flood. Things weren't looking any more promising for the institution of marriage.

Truly, it has been a testament to God's grace that any marriage throughout history has survived. As a result of the fall into sin, the best marriage could offer was the joining of one sinner to another. No other type of arrangement is possible but for two imperfect, selfish spouses to externally exchange verbal "I do's" while internally hiding away "you better's" in their hearts. Instead of the joining of a perfect, loving husband to a holy, supportive wife, marriage unites two people who are inescapably selfish, and provides the perfect arrangement for demonstrating it. According to Andrew J. Cherlin,

The problem is that most people see marriage in a different light these days. They view it as a private relationship centered on the needs of adults for love

³ Genesis 6:5 (NIV 1984)

⁴ Genesis 8:21 (NIV 1984)

and companionship. The postmodern, relationship-based view of marriage has carried the day.⁵

John Witte, Jr. echoes those thoughts,

Today a private contractual view of marriage has come to dominate Anglo-American law, lore, and life - largely unbuffered by complementary spiritual, social, or natural perspectives and largely unreceptive to much of a role for the church, state, or broader community. Marriage is viewed increasingly at law and at large today as a private bilateral contract to be formed, maintained, and dissolved as the couple sees fit.⁶

The selfish heart views marriage primarily as a means to fill its needs. It is not about what is beneficial for children or society, but about what is best for me, since it is my relationship.

With both an awareness of that selfishness and the patience necessary to deal with it, let us consider some of the more pressing challenges facing marriage in our world today as a result of that selfishness. Some of them are not entirely new, but have nonetheless become increasingly difficult (and all-too common!) to deal with for reasons which we will consider later. Others, while charting new or unfamiliar territory in marital waters, nevertheless have in common with most marital problems the same root issue: selfishness. As we identify these 21st Century challenges to marriage, we will try to focus on what makes them unique in our modern era.

Symptoms of the Problem

Divorce

Divorce itself is not a new phenomenon in our day and age. Rather than pointing to statistics to support how commonplace it is, it may be just as practical to take a quick mental run-through of the couples in your congregation, making note of how many of them are or have been divorced. Divorce is not new, nor is it uncommon. It is precisely those realities that have done some pretty devastating damage to the institution of marriage today.

A young person in one of our congregations will undoubtedly hear about the blessings of marriage in church and, if one is present, in school. She will be instructed about marriage in Catechism. Her mother and father may even speak about marriage in favorable terms. However, when she spends weeks with mom and her step-father and weekends with dad and her step-mother, what is the lesson she is really being taught?

⁵ Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p. 193.

⁶ Witte, p. 288.

Divorce is OK, because mom and dad did it. Actions speak louder than words. Say it with me: actions speak louder than words.

Young people today more than ever are a part of a society in which role models have lost a lot of credibility in the arena of marriage. At the end of the day, the teen Bible classes, the youth rallies, the regular instruction - as far as lasting impact is concerned, these don't hold a candle to the examples set in the home. One might conclude that the negative impact of divorce in the home is even a bigger influencer than being religious or not, based on divorce rates. "Born-again Christians are as likely to divorce as Christians who are not born again, and the divorce rate of both is only 2 percentage points below the divorce rate of atheists and agnostics."⁷ Christians are just as likely to be divorced or to have divorced friends and family as the rest of society. While Christians are held to a higher standard, should it surprise us to discover Satan sabotaging marriage within the church? Luther wrote,

For the estate of marriage does not set well with the devil, because it is God's good will and work. This is why the devil has contrived to have so much shouted and written in the world against the institution of marriage, to frighten men away from this godly life and entangle them in a web of fornication and secret sins.⁸

Cohabitation

Kathleen Kiernan suggests that "in Europe and North America, a four-stage process has made cohabitation almost equal in status to marriage:

- In the first stage, most people marry without having lived together first.
- In the second stage, more people from more walks of life live together for a time but usually move on to marriage and almost invariably marry if they become parents.
- The third stage is achieved when cohabitation becomes a socially acceptable alternative to marriage.
- In the fourth state, however, cohabitation and marriage become virtually indistinguishable legally and socially. Couples may have several children without ever marrying. The number of married couples and cohabiting couples is about the same, and children living with both parents are almost equally distributed between the two categories."⁹

As with divorce, living together has become so commonplace in society that it would be naïve for us to pretend it hasn't been influencing each successive generation ever since it has been deemed socially acceptable. Is it possible that the custom of

⁷ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005), p. 287.

⁸ Luther, p. 37.

⁹ Coontz, p. 272.

cohabitation has had such an impact on society today that we may be overlooking something fairly significant? Might it be merely an assumption that modern-day challenges to marriage are even of concern to people, and the reality may very well be that marriage isn't on their radar as it used to be for people in the past? To put it another way, perhaps the problem isn't so much trying to fix what's broken with marriage, but rather acknowledging that we're trying to sell marriage to a society that isn't even shopping for it! Therein lies the truly troubling difference cohabitation has made. Marriage is no longer the only option people are looking at when their relationship is ready to take the next step.

Nevertheless, society's trends don't trump Scripture's truths. The writer to the Hebrews rules out cohabitation in speaking of the respect we are to have for the institution of marriage. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."¹⁰ Cohabitation is a misguided attempt at securing the blessings God reserves only for the married. Luther didn't mince words when addressing the topic at hand:

Because marriage is a public estate ordained by God and not a shady business to be carried on in dark corners, he who seeks it in corners and dark places or enters into it secretly is a marriage-thief, for he has stolen it and not obtained it honestly from God and through obedience to his word, as is fitting so honorable an estate.¹¹

Cohabitation seeks to steal that which God intended only for the husband and wife in the marriage relationship as he designed it. Cohabitation isn't the only way by which people attempt to take hold of the blessings God reserved for marriage.

Same-sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage is the hot-button issue of our day. The current status of same-sex marriage advanced to the point it has reached today in a relatively short period of time.

When President Nixon remarked in 1970 that the issue of gay marriage would have to wait until 2000, he picked that year to symbolize the inconceivable future. In fact, though, his prediction turned out to be remarkably accurate. In July 2000, Vermont made same-sex civil unions legally equivalent to marriage. In 2003, Canada legalized gay and lesbian marriage in two of its most populous provinces. On November 18, 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that its state constitution guaranteed equal marriage rights for same-sex couples."¹²

¹⁰ Hebrews 13:4

¹¹ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works (AE)*, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 46, "On Marriage Matters." (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 283.

¹² Coontz, p. 273.

To better understand why our society has witnessed such a huge push for same-sex marriage, we need to see that the issue runs deeper than just marriage. It really begins with the shifting view toward homosexuality in general that has taken place in our society. An email I received not too long ago after the start of a new Bible Information Class illustrates this view.

Hi Aaron,

I thought a lot about this yesterday after Church. I am no longer going to be able to attend this class nor will I be coming back to Church. Yesterday's service was the deal breaker for me. My son is gay and I can't go along with the idea that he is a sinner because of this. He is not a deviant and I can assure you he was born this way. He did not "Decide" to be gay. He did not choose a path where he would be called "faggot," beat up and have to look at protesters that say "God hates Fags." He thinks those people are all representatives of God and that makes me so sad that I can't even truly explain my sorrow. I agree that all of the other sins listed are sins of choice. The adulterer, the thief, the drunkard all made choices. My son can't just be straight anymore than a straight person can just decide to be gay. There is no choice. If the bible is all true or none of it is, then I can't agree with the teachings. I will continue my personal relationship with God and I will continue to love my son more than life itself. I know you said if the bible teaches it then you believe it. I don't feel that way about this subject. I can't go along with the hate and attitude of organized religions and the hateful opinions that are spewed against my son and others like him. I am not blaming you nor suggesting that you have an affront to gay people. You are still and will always be one of the most amazing people I have ever met. One of the reasons that I stopped attending the Catholic Church was a hateful sermon by a priest about this subject. I am not suggesting you are hateful because I know you are not. I just can't sit in Church and be true to my heart. I guess I always knew it would eventually be a deal breaker for me. I can't be a hypocrite. I truly believe that God made my son the way he is. I will always love God and if this is truly his word, then I will have to pay whatever penalty there is for not accepting or understanding this part of the bible. This is not a rash decision for me. I don't need you to respond or try to convince me otherwise. One of the reasons I have stuck around as long as I have, is that I have never felt any pressure from the Church or you. I wish you well and hope you have nothing but Joy and Peace in your life. I didn't want to just disappear like I did from the Catholic Church, I wanted to let you know why I was leaving. Thanks Aaron.¹³

It was easily one of the heaviest emails I had received. It also happened to be one of the first that I read through on a Monday morning. Not a great start to the week. If you knew the email's author, you'd know why this particular email was so hard to read. It had been more than two and a half years since he first came into the picture at

¹³ A 6/17/13 email to the author.

Shepherd of the Hills. He had enrolled through one of our Financial Peace University classes, and we got along right from the start. Over time I regularly invited him to church and to our Bible Information Classes as they were offered. He would come to church somewhat sporadically, claiming he took me for a good speaker and simply appreciated good public speaking. Obviously he didn't have very high standards.

In the months prior to his sending me this email, he had become almost a weekly attendee at worship, and even enrolled in our Bible Information Class. Needless to say, I was thrilled. Then I received the above email. In worship the day before, I had preached on 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - an absolutely stunningly beautiful picture of the transforming work of Jesus' atonement! Yet, tucked in that laundry list of sins was the undeniable reality that those whose lives are characterized by engaging in homosexual activity will not inherit the kingdom of God. Honestly, I barely even touched on it in the sermon, aside from asking if perhaps we are at times quick to grab our pitchforks and torches to rally and riot against the sin of homosexuality, while slow to face up to the equally kingdom-disqualifying sins that fill out the rest of Paul's list. At any rate, as is clear from the email above, the Bible's take on homosexuality didn't sit well with my friend.

Because the Bible's take on homosexuality doesn't sit well with a lot of people, pastors today can expect that if they haven't had to yet, they will more than likely have to face similar situations. Don't expect the issue of same-sex marriage to fade away anytime soon. Just under a decade ago, American family historian Stephanie Coontz predicted that "In the short run the United States is unlikely to join Belgium the Netherlands, and Canada in legalizing same-sex marriage."¹⁴ Given the successful rate at which the push toward legalizing same-sex marriage has advanced in our nation, it appears that such a prediction may have been a bit premature.

Polyamory

A decade ago, Stanley Kurtz predicted what would naturally follow the battle for same-sex marriage:

Among the likeliest effects of gay marriage is to take us down a slippery slope to legalized polygamy and "polyamory" (group marriage). Marriage will be transformed into a variety of relationship contracts, linking two, three, or more individuals (however weakly and temporarily) in every conceivable combination of male and female.¹⁵

¹⁴ Coontz, p. 274.

¹⁵ Stanley Kurtz, *Weekly Standard*, Aug. 4-11, 2003, "The Road to Polyamory." <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/002/938xpsxy.asp?page=1> (accessed 10/18/13).

More than likely, you haven't had to deal with this in your congregation. It may be that you never have to, as this custom may prove to be like so much other chaff in our day and end up blowing away and being replaced by a newer trend. Polyamory is defined as "the philosophy or state of being in love or romantically involved with more than one person at a time."¹⁶ In its strictest sense, a polyamorous relationship might consist of a husband and wife, both of whom also share feelings with a third partner, with the desire that the three of them share a committed relationship. Taken more liberally, the term appears to be akin to an open marriage, in which each spouse agrees to having multiple partners. In an online article posted by "Anonymous Mom," the author explains her view of polyamory or "ethical non-monogamy" as

The idea that the human heart is capable of love and devotion to more than one partner. There is not one soulmate who fulfills you so completely that your emotional, physical and all other relationship needs are met, but that meeting all these needs could take more than one person — and that's OK. In fact, it's down right beautiful.¹⁷

In a different online post, another "Anonymous Mom," addressing the struggle of managing different schedules with both a boyfriend and husband, almost sounds as if she's trying to justify her adulterous relationship in her own mind. "I want to be able to enjoy my time with him because I love him — otherwise I wouldn't be trying polyamory. I'd either get a divorce or do what many disgruntled married folks do out of cowardice: cheat."¹⁸

We might think it quite obvious that the practice of polyamory would not be something the Christian would entertain. But suppose your member who has recently heard of this practice and has been looking into it with innocent curiosity, comes across this comment from an ABC News article posted online:

Life is fluid and so is love- it's a constant changing motion. Nothing stays the same forever. If you believe that your love for the person you are with could never change then you've already failed at it. If you are doing love right then it will change too- for the better! Your journey will take many turns and take on different forms from the time you meet, throughout your courtship, marriage and family life, and you have to be willing to flow with it. Love is compromised when one or both of you become rigid and interrupt the flow. Polyamory works no differently. For people that don't understand this concept compare it to the love you have for your parents or children. To say that you can't love them equally

¹⁶ New Oxford American Dictionary

¹⁷ Anonymous mom. "I'm Polyamorous And My Marriage Is In The Best Place It Has Ever Been," <http://www.mommyish.com/2013/08/01/im-polyamorous-and-my-marriage-is-in-the-best-place-it-has-ever-been/#ixzz2hz795gDp> (accessed 9/11/13).

¹⁸ Anonymous mom. "I'm Attempting A Polyamorous Relationship," <http://www.mommyish.com/2013/07/18/i-have-a-polyamorous-marriage/2/#ixzz2hzCA1K8v> (accessed 9/11/13).

would be nonsense. Love is beautiful in any form and the entire world needs so much more of it! Who has the right to say when, where, and with whom I am allowed to share or express it?! Thankfully, until I'm drawing my last breath I'll never have to explain myself to anyone other than my Creator and I'm very certain that hate mongering is far more a grievous sin than loving too many people!¹⁹

Imagine your member's response! "Wait, did she just refer to her Creator? She's a Christian? Well, if a Christian is defending such a practice, then it must not be wrong." Nevertheless to be fair, we should be able to expect that the majority of our people are well-enough equipped in and familiar with the Word that something still so "out there" as polyamory presents the least amount of concern to the pastor shepherding God's flock. Divorce, cohabitation, and increasingly, same-sex marriage will continue to have a more negative impact on marriage in our congregations than polyamory. Yet we do well to at least include it in the discussion, so that it is on our radar for the future.

Each of four issues just addressed are really symptoms of the underlying problem of selfishness in marriage. Unfortunately, the self-centered view of society toward marriage today isn't the only challenge the pastor faces.

Dwindling Allies in Society, the Home, and the Church

While selfishness in some form or another has always been the source of marital problems, the pastor used to be able to rely upon a relatively solid support system to aid him in marriage counseling. He had allies - allies in society, allies in the home, and allies in the church. The days of being able to depend on those allies appear to be numbered. Witte states,

The roles of the church, state, and broader community in marriage formation, maintenance, and dissolution have been gradually truncated in deference to the constitutional principles of sexual autonomy, domestic privacy, and separation of church and state. Traditional criminal prohibitions against most sexual offenses have become dead letters in most states. Tradition prohibitions against contraception and abortion have been held to violate the constitutional right of privacy.²⁰

Divorce, children out of wedlock, and things like cohabitation used to be social taboos. Society - not just churchgoers - frowned upon such things and saw them as socially unacceptable. So long as the population in general had a negative perception of such things, it made the pastor's work that much easier (though he may not have recognized it at the time, given that he likely wouldn't have imagined how far and how quickly things could digress). To make matters worse, not only is society a dwindling ally to

¹⁹ "Polyamory: When One Spouse Isn't Enough." June 18, 2009. Comment posted June 30, 2009 <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/US/story?id=7870884&page=1> (accessed 9/11/13).

²⁰ Witte, p. 289.

the pastor, but in some cases we have seen it turn on him and the work he is called to do. Consider the following example, a recent online post from an organization called *Unmarried Equality* (formerly known as the *Alternatives to Marriage Project*):

We try to keep on top of activities that work against our goals, and wanted to share something that recently came through our media alerts.

Here at Unmarried Equality we advocate for unmarried, cohabiting and polyamorous relationships. Within the “unmarried” category we recognize single people, those in committed relationships, those in legal domestic partnerships, and common law marriages. Because our base is so large and diverse, we sometimes feel that our constituents require separate advocacy efforts. That is, until we read something like this:

From “UnMarried: The Rise of Singleness,” comes an appeal to support the production of a Christian-produced movie. The call to action states, “If we don’t address this issue (the decline of heterosexual marriage), we’re done. There is no future for the family. There is no future for the church. There is no future for our nation.

It is not the similarity of their name to ours that offends us the most (though it is pretty creepy.) The mission of this organization is to use the Bible to investigate why their cherished institution of heterosexual marriage is on the decline, and to instill fear in the hearts of those who suffer from “prolonged singleness.”

We could see why Christian fundamentalists might be concerned about the future of marriage: same sex couples are gaining marriage rights; young adults, especially women, are investing more time in their own educations and careers before considering partners; more individuals are becoming parents outside of marriage; and polyamory has begun to emerge as an accepted lifestyle. Their project documents rising fears of the demise of the “traditional” way of married life.

Ours celebrates it.²¹

Not only do we witness such organizations openly attacking marriage, but a case could also be made that the government doesn’t appear to be doing much to support or build up marriage as God designed it. A little research into the Affordable Care Act reveals that married couples can expect to be paying substantially more than single

²¹ Antonio Skilton, “Celebrating Progress in the Face of Those Who Fear It.” Posted on August 14, 2013. <http://www.unmarried.org/featured/celebrating-progress-in-the-face-of-those-who-fear-it/> (accessed 10/7/13).

couples cohabiting.²² While there is room for debate over whether or not this ought to be perceived as a direct attack against marriage, the fact remains that couples living together will be much better off than those who are married under Obamacare.

The age-old chicken or the egg question may come into play when trying to determine if it was the family which changed society's perception of marriage issues, or if it was society's influence which changed the family perception of marriage issues. It usually is a both/and matter. The home can't shelter itself from the changes in the world around it, but those very changes have their roots in the home. Accepted practice is first challenged, others follow suit, and then society takes up the cause to present it as an acceptable way of life. That pressure then turns back in against those families who try to cling to what inevitably becomes the "old-fashioned" way of doing things.

Yesterday's pastor could in most cases depend on parents, grandparents, or other family members to support him in dealing with marriage issues. An excerpt from a conference paper written nearly thirty years ago bears this out.

It is impossible for me to imagine that parents, even parents of children who have left home, will put their stamp of approval on the "life style" which their cohabiting children has chosen, especially when they realize the hurt, conflict and injury to which their children expose themselves. It is impossible for me to imagine that Christian parents will condone the cohabitation of their child or children. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." Colossians 3:20. (Emphasis added.) Cohabitation is a violation of the Fourth Commandment.²³

Today's pastor, however, may find that not only does he lack that same support, but that family may be every bit as inclined to side with the child or family member who is in the wrong.

"The first sort of marriage penalties affects low- and middle-income couples who would get their insurance without employer assistance but with government subsidies. The penalties accrue through the "caps" on premiums. In the House plan, an unmarried couple living together with each earning \$25,000 would pay no more than \$3,076 in combined premiums each year. If the same couple got married, their annual cap would skyrocket to \$5,160 - a 68 percent punishment just for saying "I do." (The penalty in the Senate bill is slightly lower, at 48 percent.)

What is even worse is that the subsidies are suddenly and completely cut off once somebody reaches 400 percent of the official poverty-level income (\$63,360 in 2016). The arithmetic is complicated, but what it means is that two unmarried persons earning \$32,000 each (\$64,000 total) would pay a maximum combined \$5,684 in premiums, but if they got married, they would pay about \$15,000. That is an astonishing penalty of 164 percent. It is almost impossible to imagine a policy that could be any more anti-family than that."

EDITORIAL: "Obamacare's Marriage Penalty."

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jan/14/obamacares-marriage-penalty/#ixzz2i6ADczJ9> (accessed 10/18/13).

²³ Marvin E. Otterstatter, *Counseling Couples Living Outside of Marriage*. p.4. Presented at the Joint Conference, Metro-North and Metro-South Pastoral Conference, November 19, 1984.

This may be one of the results of a child-first parenting approach that is popular today. Should it surprise us that when junior's parents haven't put their foot down, haven't refused him anything, and are convinced that he can do no wrong, that they would also side with him unequivocally once he finds that special someone? Inevitably these situations end up replaying the blame game from Eden all over again and refusing to accept that maybe, just maybe, junior's behavior is sin that needs correction.

John Schuetze points out the family challenges that the pastor may face specifically in the area of cohabitation:

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.²⁴

In other cases the home may not prove to be much of an ally simply as the result of ignorance or spiritual immaturity. Chances are, those cases in which the pastor cannot depend on the family as an ally likely involve families whose use of the means of grace probably leaves a little to be desired. If the Word is not at work in their hearts and lives regularly, it should not surprise us to find spoiled fruit on an unhealthy tree. We should not expect Christians who are babes in the faith to exhibit anything but spiritually childish behavior.

So that we don't paint an entirely lop-sided picture of the home as a dwindling ally, we are grateful to God that there are still many parents and family members who do stand with their pastor in addressing what for them is often a deeply troubling situation. They know their child or family member is in the wrong. They have pointed it out from the Scriptures. They have prayed and they have pleaded. They welcome the pastor's counsel and will diligently and faithfully support him in every way possible in hopes that the situation might come to a God-pleasing resolution. Do take time to thank God for these families and their support of our work, especially in this day and age in which the home in general is a dwindling ally.

Sadly, we must acknowledge that today even the church is becoming a dwindling ally. Of course we are not referring to the Holy Christian Church, but the visible church as represented by the vast and varying beliefs and practices that one finds across the

²⁴ John D. Schuetze, "Scriptural Principles as They Pertain to 'Live-In' Arrangements." p. 8. Essay presented to the Fox River Valley Pastoral Conference, September 1998.

landscape of Christianity. Anyone today is surely likely to be able to find some “Christian” church (there is great need define what “Christian” means today, as it has become entirely too well-worn and watered down) at which pastor and congregation will embrace any number of the abominations to marriage addressed previously. So the pastor who is faithful to the Word, when pointing out that such-and-such a practice is not in line with God’s Word and is certainly not permitted in any Christian church, must be ready for his ears to bleed when in response he hears, “Well I have a friend who loves her church because they focus on Jesus and the Bible, but they’re also accepting of anyone who is in a committed relationship, regardless of what nature that relationship may take.”

Andrew Cherlin makes the point that a part of the problem is due to the fact that some well-known religious leaders, such as Rick Warren and Joel Osteen, have tailored Christianity to fit our culture’s self-serving needs. He writes, “Warren lets the genie of self-development out of the bottle in order to get people to serve others by serving themselves. But in an individualistic culture, there is no guarantee that people will make only selfless choices.”²⁵ Cherlin then quotes Robert Wuthnow, who provides a spot-on summary of how many today apply religion to their lives and relationships:

The meaning of [divine] guidance shifted subtly away from behavioral norms and focused instead on reassurance. People talked about receiving divine guidance, but what they meant, when pressed to explain, was that they felt better about what they already were doing.”²⁶

Don’t underestimate how confused our people are by what they see and hear passing for Christianity today (recall the previous online comment under the topic of “polyamory”). They witness headlines about homosexual pastors being in committed relationships. They read comments online from people openly embracing sin, but when such comments are prefaced with, “I’m a Christian, and I don’t have any problem with...” our people are confused about what the proper Christian teaching on a matter truly is. They have friends who are “Christian, but just prefer to practice their spirituality on a personal level rather than be tied down to an institution or a building.” The vast variance of views from Christians on every topic under the sun make it a confusing time to be a Christian. The result has often been that the individual Christian ends up making his own personal definition of what being a Christian even means.

If the church is a dwindling ally, it should not surprise us to find that the Bible doesn’t seem to be recognized as carrying the same authority it once did. In the past, it went something like this: “If this is what the Bible teaches, then that is what I believe. Therefore I will find a church that is faithful to the Bible.” Today however, assuming a person is even looking to belong to a local congregation, which fewer and fewer are, the attitude is “Here’s what I believe. Therefore, I will find a church that preaches and teaches what is in line with what I believe.” The old days, when people flocked to

²⁵ Cherlin, p. 133.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 134.

WELS churches in droves, simply because of their solid doctrine, are long gone. OK, maybe those days never existed, but you get the point. While the Word of God absolutely stands on its own and is and always will be authoritative, nevertheless, society today does not share that same perception to the degree that it once did.

Today's pastor is conducting his ministry with fewer allies in society, in the home, and in the church. He has his work cut out for him. While Satan's attacks on marriage are on the increase, the pastor glances around to see that fewer are willing to stand along side him and do battle. Society is thinking about joining the other side. The home is untrained and ill-equipped. The church wants to make peace, not war, and will compromise to avoid losing its footing. That pastor may be tempted to feel like he is waging an unwinnable war. But there is still hope.

An Unwavering Ally in the Word

Given the direction we have seen the institution of marriage head over the course of our lifetime, it would be easy for us to write it off as a lost cause. It seems as if even the tiniest rays of hope we catch in the headlines, which are few and far between to begin with, are quickly overshadowed by depressing storm clouds of "advancement" and "progress" from the organizations whose agenda undermines the institution of marriage as God established it. We might be inclined to collapse in cowardice as Elijah did when he lamented that he was the only one of God's people left. "No one else cares about God's design for marriage," we tell ourselves. "It's an uphill battle that simply cannot be won against the vast number of forces opposing it," we moan. The situation appears hopeless.

Might we benefit from giving pause for a moment and asking ourselves a question: has God tasked you and me with the tall order of keeping marriage between one man and one woman for life? Is the success of your ministry based on your ability to persuade as many people as possible to see that God's design for marriage is clearly the way to go? Were you ordained into the "ministry of seeing that the institution of marriage stands the test of time?"

No, brothers. You were ordained into the ministry of the gospel, no more and no less. You have been called by God's Spirit to serve God's people with God's Word. Wouldn't it be rather naïve of us to presume that the God who graciously instituted the blessing of marriage would somehow be unable to defend it? Does he need us to do that for him? Have we finally discovered the one area that God has been longing for us to figure out that he needs our help to uphold? Can God finally breathe a sigh of relief now, knowing that the institution of marriage is, like Allstate, in good hands - ours? Can he rest easy knowing that pastors of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have determined that theirs is the responsibility of keeping the institution of marriage intact?

Of course, first he would have to overlook a few things. He would have to overlook the marriages in our own congregations that have fallen apart, some because we didn't

give them the attention they needed; others, which still fell apart in spite of having received our undivided attention. He would have to overlook the times we've turned a blind eye toward cases of cohabitation, hoping to wait them out until things change and different arrangements are necessitated because of a breakup or a move. Perhaps most humbling of all, he would have to overlook our own marriages, which are many times a far cry from the high standards we have for our own people. Yes, if God were to entrust the responsibility of retaining his institution of marriage solely to you and me, he would have to overlook much.

Brothers, he has done just that. "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sin no more."²⁷ Marriage and its place and role in society will change. Our handling of marriage in our parishes will fall short of God's expectations, as will our own marriages themselves. But take note of what does not and will not change:

¹ "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord:

Look to the rock from which you were cut
and to the quarry from which you were hewn;

² look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.

When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many.

³ The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins;
he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord.

Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

⁴ "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation:

Instruction will go out from me;
my justice will become a light to the nations.

⁵ My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way,
and my arm will bring justice to the nations.

The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.

⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath;
the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies.

But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

⁷ "Hear me, you who know what is right,
you people who have taken my instruction to heart:
Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.

⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment;
the worm will devour them like wool.

But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations."²⁸

God's salvation will not change. It will not run out. His reservoir of forgiveness will never be tapped out. We need that assurance and that reminder first and foremost if

²⁷ Isaiah 43:25 (NIV 1984)

²⁸ Isaiah 51:1-8 (NIV 1984)

ever we are to serve God's people and bless their marriages. Then, once we apply it to ourselves, we apply it to our people and to their marriages. While marriage will continue to be faced with a wide variety of challenges, let us not forget that we have exactly what is necessary to deal with those challenges: the gospel of forgiveness. Many a marriage has been and will continue to be rescued through the gospel. Remember that the gospel will always be an effective tool with which to serve our members and their marriages, for we aren't called to address the legal issues of marriage, but the spiritual, as Luther reminds us:

"Here I want to close and leave this matter for now, and, as I did above, advise my dear brothers, the pastors and clergy to refuse to deal with marriage matters as worldly affairs covered by temporal laws and to divest themselves of them as much as they can. Let the authorities and officials deal with them, except where their pastoral advice is needed in matters of conscience, as for example when some marriage matters should come up in which the officials and jurists had entangled and confused the consciences, or else perhaps a marriage had been consummated contrary to law, so that the clergy should exercise their office in such a case and comfort consciences and not leave them stuck fast in doubt and error."²⁹

Celebrate Marriage

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks paints a sobering summary of the nature of relationships today:

Sex has become, for the first time since the conversion to Christianity of the Roman Emperor Constantine, an almost value-free zone. Whatever happens between two consenting adults in private is, most people now believe, entirely a matter for them. The law may not intervene; neither may social sanction. It is simply not other people's business. Together with a whole series of other changes, the result has been that what marriage brought together has now split apart. There has been a divorce between sex and love, love and marriage, marriage and reproduction, reproduction and education and nurture. Sex is for pleasure. Love is a feeling, not a commitment. Marriage is now deeply unfashionable. Nurture has been outsourced to specialized child carers. Education is now the responsibility of the state. And the consequences of failure are now delegated to social workers."³⁰

The institution of marriage is not enjoying its proudest moments in our era. That is clear. How will we choose to respond? Will we curse the darkness, or light a candle instead? Note how Luther managed to put a positive spin on the many attacks on marriage:

²⁹ Luther, "On Marriage Matters." p. 317-318

³⁰ Witte, p. 322-23.

If there were nothing else to suggest that the estate of marriage is a godly estate this fact alone should be enough to convince you, namely, that the prince of this world - the devil - sets himself against it in so many ways to resist it with hand and foot and all his strength; indeed, that fornication is not diminishing but on the increase.³¹

How do we follow Luther's lead and celebrate marriage when society appears just as happy to stifle it?

First off, there needs to be a recognition that marriage just isn't perceived by many - yes, even those within our congregations - to be the lofty goal it once was. Stephanie Coontz refers to European demographer Anton Kuijsten, who describes it this way: "rather than ordering from 'the standard life course menu, as people used to do,' an individual now 'composes his or her history *à la carte*.' And marriage, 'the obligatory entrée' during the 1950s, 'has become the optional desert.'"³² Those that do opt for the "desert" of marriage increasingly have different reasons for choosing it, one of them being the focus on the ceremony itself over and above the marriage. Cherlin describes it,

Through wedding ceremonies, individuals hoped to display their attainment of a prestigious, comfortable, stable style of life. The continuing enthusiasm for wedding celebrations suggests that people marry now as much for the symbolism it represents as for the social benefits it provides.

Marriage, in sum, has not faded away; rather, it has been redefined. It has become the ultimate merit badge - the marriage badge.³³

If such a low regard for marriage exists today, then we must counter it with whatever efforts are necessary to put marriage back on people's radar. We cannot continue to assume that the possibility of marriage is even in the plans for many today, even if they do find an ideal mate. We may need to focus more of our attention on teaching and reteaching the basic blessings of marriage. We do well to increase our efforts at training and equipping parents and families to solidify their marriages and strengthen their homes.

Let us see then how important it is for us to speak of marriage in such glowing terms as Luther does, so that "we may learn how honorable a thing it is to live in that estate which God has ordained. In it we find God's word and good pleasure, by which all the

³¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works (AE)*, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 45, "That Parents Should Neither Compel nor Hinder the Marriage of Their Children, and That Children Should Not Become Engaged Without Their Parents' Consent." (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 385.

³² Coontz, p. 276.

³³ Cherlin, p. 142.

works, conduct, and sufferings of that estate become holy, godly, and precious...”³⁴ Luther even commends the stay at home mom who raises children and lovingly helps and serves her husband by describing such efforts as “truly golden and noble works.”³⁵ Just as he was quick to speak favorably about marriage, let us do the same, and avoid the habit of marriage bashing that we see enough of in the world around us.

Let us encourage marriage also from the standpoint of civic responsibility, recognizing that marriage is good for society. Remember that from a legal standpoint, our government wants to recognize and protect the rights of married people.

The government has a God-given right to regulate marriage. God gave man and woman the “right”³⁶ to marry when he ordained marriage at creation, but he also gave the government the authority to regulate it. As Christians who are not only members of the church but also of the state, we will seek to obey God and man, provided civil laws do not mandate disobedience to God's laws. Civil marriage laws are designed to protect the institution of marriage as well as the citizens of a country from fraud and abuse.³⁷

Perhaps the greatest way to celebrate marriage is to speak clearly about it from God's Word. That means we don't shy away from applying the law when necessary, and we don't hesitate to smother marriages with the gospel (think Ephesians 5!). Just as Scripture speaks clearly about marriage and divorce, so we must. Simply because we live in a culture that accepts divorce as a perfectly normal and legitimate way of life, does not mean that we can permit a watered-down message. “At Willow Creek Community Church, one of the most famous megachurches, the message about divorce is nonjudgmental. At one service, the preacher said,

‘Mistakes are going to be made in [some] relationships that will lead to divorce. God knows that and He understands it.’

At another service, the head pastor said that

‘there is not an ounce of judgment in my spirit for those of you who are going through or who are recovering from a divorce in your family.... You matter to God more than you realize you do.’”³⁸

³⁴ Luther, “The Estate of Marriage.” p. 41.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 40.

³⁶ Author's original footnote: “In biblical terms we would call marriage a "blessing" or "privilege" rather than a "right." The author chose to use the term "right" since it reflects the fact that the ability and authority to marry comes from God and not the state.”

³⁷ John D. Schuetze, “Common Law Marriage - Fact and Fiction.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, V.106/2, Spring 2009.

³⁸ Cherlin, p. 152.

While we don't have the whole context from the above excerpts, one would hope that if we did, we might see a little less "divorce is just a normal way of life and we shouldn't sweat it," and a little more "divorce is an affront to God because it sinfully stains the beauty of his design for marriage."

Particularly frustrating may be the challenge of celebrating marriage by applying God's Word to cases of cohabitation. One might easily point to the passage in Hezekiah 4:32, "Living together outside of marriage is sin. Yes, it really is that simple," but alas, such a passage does not exist. Due to the nature of the challenge, the pastor will certainly need to give some thought to how he will lay out his scriptural approach in addressing cohabitation. Regardless, however he does it, he will be sure to clarify to the party involved that living in sin in 2013 is still living in sin. The good news is that he won't be lacking sufficient Scripture. The appendix is offered to highlight a number of passages and points that will serve the pastor well in dealing with cohabitation.

Finally, we celebrate marriage because God intended it to be a blessing to so many, in so many ways.

In Lutheran and Calvinist parlance, marriage has both civil and spiritual uses in this life. On the one hand, the family has general civil uses for all persons, regardless of their faith. Marriage deters vice by furnishing a healthy sexual option to overcome the temptations of prostitution, promiscuity, pornography, and other forms of sexual pathos. Marriage cultivates virtue by offering love, care, and nurture to its members, and holding out a model of charity, education, and sacrifice to the broader community. Ideally, marriage enhances the life of a man and a woman by providing them with a community of caring and sharing, of stability and support, of nurture and welfare. Ideally, marriage also enhances the life of the child by providing the child with a chrysalis of nurture and love, with a highly individualized form of socialization and education. It might take a village to raise a child properly, but it takes a marriage to make one.

On the other hand, the family has specific "spiritual uses" for believers, ways of sustaining and strengthening them in their faith. The love of wife and husband can be among the strongest symbols we can experience of Yahweh's love for his elect, of Christ's love for his church. The sacrifices we make for spouses and children can be among the best reflections we can offer of the perfect sacrifice of Golgatha.³⁹

Marriage as God designed it is and will always be a blessing, even to those who refuse to acknowledge it. "O what a truly noble, important, and blessed condition the estate of marriage is if it is properly regarded! O what a truly pitiable, horrible, and dangerous condition it is if it is not properly regarded!"⁴⁰ May we do all that is in our power to

³⁹ Witte, p. 330.

⁴⁰ Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works (AE)*, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 44, "A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage." (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 13,14.

properly regard God's gift of marriage, especially in the face of so many challenges in our day and age.

Appendix

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 difference 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 falls to fulfill both the legal and social requirements for marriage.

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 #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.⁴¹

⁴¹ John D. Schuetze, “Scriptural Principles as They Pertain to ‘Live-In’ Arrangements.” Essay presented to the Fox River Valley Pastoral Conference, September 1998.