

April 18, 2001

RE: *Is it OK for a couple to live together before getting married?*

Dear Tony and Karen<sup>1</sup>,

Thank you for your carefully worded response to my e-mail. It is obvious that the two of you care for each other and feel very committed as a couple. I am so encouraged by your enthusiasm for the Lord as you have begun to grow in your faith. There is no greater life than one wholly lived for the Lord in the light of His grace and forgiveness. As you have discovered, He loves you both very much and has demonstrated this by sending His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to be your substitute on the cross, taking the punishment for your sins that you might be wonderfully forgiven and restored to Him. Being a Christian does not mean we are perfect—rather we are simply repentant sinners who have found forgiveness with our wonderful Lord who created us and gives us purpose in life.

As you made reference in you e-mail, we do care about both of you. While your relationship in the past is not the “Christian norm,” as you say, this is understandable because you were not Christians. Non-Christians don’t act like Christians, because they don’t have the same standard, motivation or power to live like Christians.

As for your present situation, (living together as Christians without being married) that is what I would like to discuss with you a bit further. You have asked me to perform your wedding, a privilege I do not take lightly. Therefore, I am taking the time to write my answer out carefully and fully, because you deserve a good understanding of these matters.

If I understand you correctly, you have lived together for three years. You are very “committed” to each other and have shared many significant life experiences together. Therefore, it must seem unreasonable in your eyes for me to suggest you separate until the wedding.

You mentioned in your letter that you do not feel Scripture speaks against your situation of living together. I believe God *does* have something to say about your situation and that you, and I believe your reference to Scripture, has lacked a clear understanding of what is really taught there. I know you are meaning well in your thinking, but good intention does not by itself safeguard from error, and ultimately harm. Let me be quick to say that nothing in what I am about to say should be taken in any way as my “judging” you. I have spent years studying and teaching the Scriptures and these are understandings I have had long before I met you two. I must be true to God and His word as I offer counsel to you. It is precisely because I am deeply committed to God’s truth and committed to helping you find the freedom of living under God’s truth, that I want to help you see God’s way.

You brought up the fact of your *present* living together arrangement. My comments are based on the situation as you have described it to me. But my concerns would still exist based on only a reasonable assumption of the intimacies that a man and women in love would share when living together. Although, your present situation is not the “Christian norm,” you are not the first to find yourself in this dilemma—others have faced this as well, and found God’s way through it all. Our Lord is an expert at guiding us through our moral quagmires.

### General Comments

Let me state up front what I believe God teaches in His word and then I will seek to show you these things from Scripture. Though there are many liberal preachers who would water down or minimize Biblical teaching in the area of sexuality, I cannot do that. I cannot make myself judge over God’s word, determining which aspects I “buy into” and which I can discard or distort. As Christians we take God’s word as He wrote it. Most credible teachers of the God’s word would agree with what I am about to say.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The non-Christian world view is that sexuality is a private matter between two consenting adults. The prevailing opinion is that, “Love makes it right.” In the world’s sense, “love” is an emotional, romantic type of thing between a man and woman. But, that is not the Biblical viewpoint. Romantic “love” is not the ultimate “justifier” of life. Often, the world’s view of love is captured in the old United Way slogan, “Give—you will feel good about yourself.” I believe that that saying betrays a fundamentally wrong view of life.

*Self-sacrificing* love, on the other hand, is the ultimately right motivation in life. Christ defined love as this, “*No greater love is this than a man lay down his life for his friend.*” John 15:13. And “*God commended his love for us in this, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” Romans 5:8.

All this is to say that the love of a man and woman for each other is not the ultimate determination of the rightness or wrongness of a matter. After all, the Scriptures clearly state that “*men loved darkness, rather than light*” John 3:19. Even when it comes to the word “commitment” as used by the world, it can be embraced with somewhat less meaning than is intended in a Christian marriage. Note how many couples have pledged their commitment to each other only to find themselves bailing out five, ten or more years down the road, when their feelings about each other change. In fact, many “wedding” ceremonies delete the words, “till death do us part” or if they include those words, they are held in somewhat of a perfunctory sort of way, like Gothic printing on the invitation cards. It looks nice, but really doesn’t mean anything. My point is that the

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed.

Christian viewpoint of relationships, sex and marriage is drastically different than the non-Christian viewpoint.

Proverbs 14:26 says, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*” So, it is important to not live in the way that “seems” best, but to live in the way that God says is best. Especially is this true in relationships between the sexes. Only then is there true freedom to become all that God wants us to be. Often a person will say, “I will do what I like,” when he really means he is intent on indulging a habit which has him its grip. It is when a man has the strength of Christ in him that he can say, “I will *not* do what I like.”

### **So what does the Scripture say about marriage and sex?**

1. Marriage is between one man and one woman for life.
2. Sex is God’s beautiful gift to a couple that cements their relationship in the context of a lifelong commitment defined by marriage.
3. Sex (specifically sexual intercourse) outside of marriage is wrong.
4. Sexual activity outside of marriage that leads to intercourse is very dangerous.
5. Sex in a loving, non-marital relationship is never condoned in Scripture.

It follows then, that adultery is immoral, premarital sex is immoral, living together is immoral. Our society has “softened” it’s descriptions of what once was recognized as sin: pornography is called “adult entertainment”, promiscuity is called “casual sex”, adultery is “extra-marital sex,” and “living together” is another euphemism for what the Bible clearly says is wrong.

Now, let’s look at the Scripture to see if these things are true.

### **General teaching about marriage & relationships**

If you are looking for a verse that says these specific words: “Living together in such a way that involves sexual intimacy without being married is a sin”—you won’t find it. But, then neither does the Bible specifically say, “Drinking and driving is a sin” or “Killing your mother in law is a sin.” However, God does give us clear principles that address these issues.

First, of all, Scripture teaches that marriage is what unites a couple. The first teaching on this subject is found way back in the beginning with the first man and woman.

*Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.* Genesis 2:22-24

Notice, when God made the human race as represented by Adam and Eve, the pattern was laid down: one man, one woman, united into one flesh. The obvious understanding of this “one flesh” is sexual intercourse but, of course, it encompasses much more as well. Notice, the forming of a completely new social

unit: leaving father and mother and beginning a life apart from parents as a separate family. Interestingly, parents are mentioned, yet Adam and Eve had no parents, being created directly by God. Therefore, the statement is a universal truth and not one that just applies to the first couple. God is laying a foundation for all time. Notice also, that Eve is called his “wife”. Finally, it is obvious that their coming together is not only designed by God, it is also recognized and sanctioned by Him. In other words, they were married “before God.”

The Lord Jesus Himself even endorsed the wedding in Cana of Galilee where He turned the water into wine (John 2). In fact, He refers to this foundational concept of marriage when some self-righteous religious leaders tried to embroil Him in a hot topic of that day, namely for what reasons could a man rightfully divorce his wife (note: it is not just the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has these kind of morality debates):

*And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made [them] at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*  
Matthew 19:4-6

Jesus stressed the permanency of marriage in this lifetime, embracing Genesis 2:24 as the foundation for such an understanding. The union of a man and woman is not to be broken. In other words, marriage is to be life long, with only God having the prerogative of breaking the marriage bond, which He does at the death of one spouse. “*What God has joined together, let not man separate.*” Marriage then is something that has been recognized in the Bible from the earliest times and sanctioned by the Lord Jesus Christ as a life long commitment.

Consider also Proverbs 2:17 that refers to an adulterer “*who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.*” Marriage is a covenant, or an agreement. Today, we might use the term “contract,” in which two people commit to living together for the rest of their lives as husband and wife. One man, one woman, united by God for life.

True, there were many marriages in Scripture that failed this and there was much immorality (sex outside of marriage), but this is God’s standard. Sometimes, people do break the unity that God has designed. This is due to sin and hardness of heart (Matt 19:8). Adultery, polygamy, incest, pre-marital sex – they are all in the Bible.

You might object at this point, saying “We have committed ourselves to each other, we have proved this already. A wedding ceremony won’t really change anything.” Before we address this subject, let’s look further about the topic of sex itself.

## Specific teaching about sex in Scripture

Now, our subject is not the enjoyment of sex inside marriage. For this there are many wonderful portions of Scriptures (see for example Proverbs 5:15-19 and the Song of Solomon) and books written on the subject.<sup>2</sup> We want rather to look at those verses which are pertinent to our subject, namely “Is living together with sexual intimacy without or before being married sanctioned in the Scripture?”

Let’s begin with the Old Testament:

*If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife.* Exodus 22:16

In Israel, if two single people engaged in sex, they were to be immediately married. Sexual activity carries great responsibilities. The reason for this seems obvious when considering Gen 2. The nature of sexual intimacy is so profound that when it happened outside of marriage, the only reasonable thing was to get married. If you have sex, then you are committing yourself. Notice this has nothing to do with whether or not the woman became pregnant.

You might say, that this verse deals only when the couple is not engaged, that is, not committed to each other to be married. Therefore, if they are engaged, the male was to assume full responsibility as a consequence of the act.<sup>3</sup> It would follow that sex is OK, if you are planning to “tie the knot.” But, this is faulty reasoning. The concept here “pledged to be married” is the concept called “betrothal” (as translated in the NKJV). For Jews this was tantamount to being married but without the sexual intimacy. It constituted a legal marital relationship.<sup>4</sup> There was to be no sexual intimacy until the actual marriage took place, the consummation of which followed. To do otherwise would mean to cut short the betrothal period and go immediately to the wedding and marriage. This, also, would be accompanied with public disgrace as well as forfeiture of the benefits of the betrothal period.

An example of this “betrothal” concept involves Joseph and Mary who were pledged to be married, and traveled together to Bethlehem for the census. They had not had sexual intercourse, yet they were legally bound (Matthew 1:18). This was the normal pattern in those times, and it was honored by God.

In our times, engagement is not a legally binding arrangement. Nothing is final until the public proclamation of vows. You might ask, why does making something legal affect things? We will address this latter.

Clearly, casual sex is wrong. But it is also clear that for a couple to have sex before marriage would mean to immediately go to the wedding; the betrothal

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<sup>2</sup> See *Intended for Pleasure*, by Dr. Ed Wheat, also books by Clifford & Joyce Penner

<sup>3</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, (Westminster Press: Philadelphia), 1974. p. 477.

<sup>4</sup> *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, (Abingdon Press: Nashville), 1962. 3:284.

period and all its benefits (of testing of the relationship) would be cut short. It was considered scandalous in Bible times.

The seriousness of sex outside of marriage is seen in another, similar situation. If the woman had been engaged to be married, and a man had intercourse with her, this would have been considered adultery and required the death penalty for both (Deuteronomy 22:23). Though that penalty doesn’t apply today, it does tell us something of God’s attitude toward violation of His standards in the area of sexuality. He takes it very seriously!

Scripture has much to say about the subject of sex outside of marriage. Consider the foundational truth found in Exodus 20:14 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5:18: “*You shall not commit adultery.*” Clearly, this pertains to a person having sexual intimacy with a married person, but it also lays a foundation for the rest of Scriptural teaching on the subject of sex. Prostitution was forbidden (Leviticus 19:29). Incest was condemned (Leviticus 20:12). Godly men sought to discipline their eyes in relationship to lust (Job 31:1; 2 see Peter 2:14), hence Jesus’ caution in the New Testament about sinning sexually with the mind (Matt 5:28 “*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*”).<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, there is more on the subject of immoral sexuality in the Old Testament, but let’s move on to the New Testament.

*But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’... Matthew 15:18-20 (emphasis mine).*

The Greek word for “sexual immorality” is “porneia” and is translated in some versions as “fornications.” This where we get the word “pornography” from. The word has a wide range of meanings, including “prostitution, unchastity, every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”<sup>6</sup> The related term “ pornos ” means “one who practices sexual immorality”

God speaks strongly against *porneia*. In Acts 15:20, 29, new converts are to abstain from *porneia*. Christians are not to associate with sexually immoral Christians (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). Christians are to avoid *porneia* altogether:

*It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God... 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

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<sup>5</sup> *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, (Moody Press: Chicago), 1980. 2:542.

<sup>6</sup> A Greek-English of the New Testament, Bauer, Andt and Gingrich, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago), 1958, s.v. *porneia*, p. 693.

The writer to Hebrews treats adultery and sexual immorality as separate things, both of which come under God's judgment:

*“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral (Grk: pornos) Hebrews 13:4*

The idea here is that sexual activity outside of marriage dishonors marriage and violated the marriage bed. This includes a sexually active person who gets married, thereby bringing defilement with him to the marriage bed.

God tells us through the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians,

*Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 (NKJV)*

The word translated “to touch” carries the sense of “igniting” or “lighting”. The touching Paul has in mind is a sexual activity which ignites the passion. In the context, he is addressing the virtues of singleness in the midst of “distressful times” (see vs. 26). The important thing to note, however, is that the sanctioned alternatives for a person sexual immorality (*porneia*) are either singleness or marriage. Sexual expression in a “committed” non-marital relationship is **not** an option here. Clearly, that would be included in *porneia*.

Any sexual sin outside of marriage is considered by the Bible to be immoral, and therefore a sin. Someone may say, “We are living together. We are not immoral perverts.” Society has brainwashed this generation into dumbing down the concept of sin. Living together before marriage used to be called “shacking up”. The Bible calls it “porneia”, that is, sexual immorality or fornication. Sex outside of marriage is sin—even in a so-called “committed relationship”. By analogy, shoplifting is wrong even though it is not as bad socially as grand larceny. Likewise, even though living together is not as “bad” as prostitution, living together is none-the-less wrong.

In our society, sex has become so common place in the public discourse, that to question the free enjoyment of it is considered prudish, old-fashioned. Sex, today, is viewed as recreational and a right to be enjoyed without outside interference. It is considered a personal issue between a couple and no one else. It is as though sex is a right, a basic thing just like eating and drinking. But, the Word of God says,

*Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 1 Corinthians 6:13*

Paul addresses the immoral Corinthian mindset that was reflected in a contemporary proverb among them. The proverb captured the mindset that in the same way that food and the stomach go together, so do the body and any form of

sexual expression. Paul contradicts this by saying that the body is meant for more than just sex. It was created for God. The connection between you and God supercedes your fleshly connection to sexual expression. In other words, sex is not the ultimate purpose of the body. Sexual expression must find its created purpose and enjoyment when, and only when, it is experienced under the Lordship of Christ.

Why the fuss, and what impact does this really have on life. You see, sexual sin affects the human being far more deeply and profoundly than any other sin:

*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” 1 Corinthians 6:18.*

As one author says, “It is a spot in the consciousness that cannot be removed.” It works against the “one flesh” that God purposes for us with one other person for life. No, sexual intercourse is not just a casual enjoyment of another person. It is a “wedding” of two souls together, a uniting them into one flesh. For the Christian this takes on even more significance:

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.*

As Christians, we dare not take these things lightly. God is directly involved by virtue of his taking up residence in our lives.

I would like to conclude this discussion on sex outside of marriage with one final thought. If, contrary to what I have said so far, living together and enjoying the full benefits of marital relationships without being married was sanctioned by God, it is inconceivable to me that He would have spoken so strongly about sex outside of marriage but not specifically mention that living together is OK. In fact, we see absolutely nothing in scripture that leads us to believe that such an arrangement is permissible.

Now let's turn our attention the crucial question of what constitutes a “marriage.”

### **What Constitutes A “Marriage”?**

I would like to address this by answering two questions. The first could be stated like this: “But we are committed to each other and have been for a number of years. What difference does a wedding ceremony make?”

The second question is a bit different: “Since we have been living in a committed relationship until now and are planning to be married soon, why should we separate (i.e. abstain) until then. In other words, why stop?”

Concerning the first question, “commitment” as defined by God is this: one man, one woman, for life, in a covenant relationship. Marriage involves a covenant, a promise, publicly made that you are committing to spend the rest of

your lives together. Even if you have made that commitment in your hearts to each other, did you have that commitment when you first engaged in sexual intercourse? If not, then clearly, by your own reasoning, you were in sin. And was that commitment for life?

But, you may say, “We are *now* committed to each other. What is in the past, is in the past.” I cannot urge you enough to realize that sin must be confessed or you will not enjoy the forgiveness of God. And I believe this unconfessed sin will affect your future relationship.

As for your relationship now, the Bible does not say anything about the custom of how people become married—this is different in different cultures. But, the Bible is clear about certain principles pertaining to marriage. It is a covenant that is recognized and entered into publicly. In the Scripture, it was a matter of public record who was married and who was not. Weddings varied from time to time, but they were always openly recognized by the society at the time. Weddings separate out those who are married and those who are not. You see, *easing* into a relationship, poses no accountability on the couple. Evidence the fact that you two have not gotten married prior to this. Why not? Clearly, you knew there was a difference. Even in our non-Christian culture, there is enough collective memory of this truth that a couple is very aware of the significance of being married or just living together. Even our laws recognized the difference. Anyone who knows human nature understands that real commitment is seen when a person makes themselves accountable for their actions. And accountability, to be valid, must have an objective outside source. That is why public vows are necessary. There is a responsibility before God as well as our society—which keeps a couple true to their commitment to each other. A person may well say, “I don’t want all the baggage on my commitment. I will stand by my word and that is it.” Try using that logic when procuring a mortgage or buying a car. In every important social commitment in life, there is a societal accountability.

You see, a wedding is not just “tying the knot”, a formality. It is a way for a couple to commit publicly in such a way that says, “Society can hold me responsible if I do not keep my promise to my spouse.” Before the wedding, either one of you can walk away from the relationship with no liabilities or obligations, other than what puts your personal integrity at stake. In every society, biblical societies as well as our modern society, commitments are “notarized” so to speak. Public vows at a wedding say, “I am willing to really commit to you for the rest of my life.” Not incidentally, a wedding in our culture calls for witnesses, by law.

It is this sense of the word “commitment” that is in mind when the Bible allows sexual expression. You may say, if it takes a legal contract to make a marriage stay together, then there must not be much love there. That may be true in some cases. People often turn their love elsewhere and marriages die, regardless of the burden of their decision. But, there is a penalty—just ask anyone who has been

through a divorce. But, the converse is the important thing. Where there is genuine love of a man and woman for each other, they would be more than willing to prove their love by entering into a covenant relationship with all its built-in accountability. Today, many people think nothing of tattooing their bodies with an image for life. Marriage is the uniting of two individuals for life, bringing to bear the strongest accountability to help make that happen.

At what point did you become committed to each other for your life? What is the evidence? Marriage settles it for sure. Like signing on the dotted line, when you put your signature to a deal, the proof is there for anyone to check. And it holds up in a court of law. When we want to make sure someone keeps their word, we ask them to sign their name to the agreement. Why would we do any less when it comes to something more important, like relationships. Now, *that* is commitment.

Now for the second question, why should you stop what you have been doing for a number of years? First, and foremost, it is wrong to continue in sin. Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11 “...*neither do I condemn you... God now and leave you life of sin.*” Rather than continuing in sin, the appropriate response would be to confess to God that it is wrong and turn away from it. That is what “repentance” means, to turn from your wrong behavior and turn to right behavior. You are not married, so it is right to stop living like it until you are married.

Perhaps some might rejoin: “After we are married, then we will repent. And there will be no more problem.” Unfortunately, this is superficial repentance and playing games with God. During the time of John the Baptist, the self-righteous religious leaders tried to get around the righteous requirements of the law by “going through the motions.” Their hearts were not in it, but they tried to put on a good show. Along with everyone else, they came to John to be baptized. But John, seeing through their duplicity, commanded, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” When a couple continues in sin until they get married and then asks for forgiveness, they have no more opportunity to demonstrate to God and to themselves genuine repentance. That opportunity will be lost to them forever.

There are other ramifications to continuing the way you are living. One of the most significant is the impact it will have on your child(ren). You will find it hard to convince them that pre-marital sex is wrong. As teenagers, they will quickly pick up that it is OK with you to just repent after you are married. I have dealt with many teenagers over the years including two of my own. Teens are quick to pick up on a double standard and they can easily see through our self-protecting justifications. But, if they know you separated before you became married in an effort to establish a “new” purity in Christ, this can have a profound positive affect on them.

Living together without sex until you get married will communicate to others that you think pre-marital sex is OK. You won’t have opportunity to explain your specific case to anyone. But, by living separately until your wedding, this

will be a powerful testimony that you are seeking what is right. You won't have to say anything.

On a related note, you may feel uncomfortable at church when we speak on these subjects in our preaching. We see clearly that living together without being married is sin—and we do not hesitate to teach this in our meetings. We are not trying to make you feel uncomfortable or to make you feel singled out. We are committed to preaching the whole word of God.

Finally, to continue in your physical relationship will give a hollowness to your wedding ceremony, in which as Christians you are “being united in marriage.” This will be hollow because you are continuing to assert by your behavior that you are already united. I don't mean to be harsh, but when I officiate a wedding, the symbolism and the truth of it are things I take seriously. Even a white wedding gown becomes merely a decorative choice, rather than the symbol of purity it was designed to be.

The only purpose I see in a ceremony, if you continue to live together, would be to make the public vows that would formalize your commitment. This could be adequately done by the justice of the peace. This would certainly be better than remaining unmarried and living together.

On the other hand, should you see the wisdom of Scriptures and the command of the Lord, and keep yourselves pure until your wedding day, then I believe God will honor this “secondary” purity.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.*

I believe, then, a Christian wedding ceremony has tremendous meaning and will become a significant marker in your relationship and your lives together. You will be united before God and witnesses, publicly declaring your commitment to each other. White becomes a symbol of redeemed purity. God will be glorified.

God is a great God. He can do wonderful things for those who recognize the truth of scripture:

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9*

As difficult as it may seem, in the long run, living by God's directions is far better than the way that seems best to us.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God and he will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6.*

## **Practical issues**

Where do we go from here? I would like to present you two options.

The first option, which I believe is the best one. Confess your sin of sex outside of marriage and receive God's abundant forgiveness. Then commit to living apart until you are married. We are not trying to tell you how you live your lives—that is only for God to do. You need to search the scriptures to see if what I have said in my letter is true (see Acts 17:11).

We stand ready to help you in this matter. Either of you would be more than welcome to live at our house with my wife and me. I know others would be open to having you as well. Then you could have the wedding day as planned with our church helping you celebrate your being united together before the Lord. I would be more than happy to officiate at the ceremony.

The second option is this: If you decide that you do not want to separate for the short period of time, I would recommend you go before the justice of the peace as soon as possible to make your vows to each other. What you are looking for, in this case, is someone to simply legitimize your already being united. I am committed to bringing couples together in marriage, not simply “tying the knot.” Therefore, I would recommend you go to a justice of the peace as soon as possible. Once you are married, we will accept you as a married couple and will be as much of an encouragement to you as we can.

Clearly, my recommendation would be the first option. In the long scheme of things, a time of separation is a small amount of time. But, you will have the rest of your life together finding the joy of knowing you have sought after God's best. You will have the rest of your lives to reflect and build on a solid foundation.

Once you have read this, I would very much like to discuss with you this matter further—you will undoubtedly have questions. I wanted to write it all down so that you would understand clearly and have time to reflect, pray and discuss these recommendations together.

I pray the Lord will guide you and bless you as you seek to follow His will. My desire is that you both would enjoy your wedding day and every day thereafter as a lifelong commitment. You both are worth the wait!

In the Master's Name,

Chuck Gianotti