

CHAPTER 7



The first issue addressed concerns whether a married couple should engage in sexual relations. St. Paul's answer, to summarize, is that it is good for married couples to engage in sexual relations, but it is even better if they can remain unmarried virgins and dedicate their entire selves to God (7:1-5).

St. Paul moves on from the subject of whether people should marry to whether they are allowed to divorce. St. Paul gives a simple answer, but one that he also notes is the commandment of God (rather than his own opinion): a married couple is not to divorce (7:10, 11). If they do divorce, however, they are to either remain unmarried or reconcile with their former spouse (7:11). He then goes on to give his own opinion on a related matter that would have been of great importance to the Corinthian Christians: a person who has converted to Christianity is not to divorce his or her non-Christian spouse, because the faith of the Christian partner sanctifies the non-Christian, and perhaps most importantly, can lead to children who are Christians (7:12-14). At the same time, if a non-Christian wants to leave his or her spouse wants to divorce after the spouse converts to Christianity, then the Christian should do whatever will result in a peaceful situation regarding the relationship (7:15).

This leads the apostle into two of the dividing issues of his day: circumcision and slavery. In both cases - as with marriage - St. Paul's teaching is clear: the new convert to Christianity is to remain in the general social situation (assuming that it is not a sinful lifestyle, of course) in which he or she existed before conversion (7:17-24). Whether circumcised or uncircumcised, the new Christian should follow the commandments and calling of God (1 Corinthians 7:19, 20). Similarly, St. Paul advises slaves to not become distraught over their situation in life (while also advising them to take advantage of legal means to free themselves) (7:21),

because both Christian freedmen and Christian slaves are viewed in the same way by God (7:21-23).

Because a married person must dedicate time and attention to his or her spouse (and, usually, children), this person cannot dedicate full attention to God (7:32-34). Therefore, St. Paul says that it is preferable for a single person to remain unmarried so that he or she can give complete time and attention to God.

St. Paul concludes by looking at two additional family situations. In the first situation, if an older daughter wishes to marry, the father should not forbid her from doing so (7:36). If, however, the daughter does not wish to marry, and certainly if there are no financial reasons why marriage would be highly preferable, then the father should conversely not force his daughter to marry (7:37). In the second situation, St. Paul says a should be allowed to remarry if she wishes - provided that the groom is a Christian - but that it would be preferable if she remained single (7:39-40).



TODAY'S SPECIAL: PRESERVE INNER PEACE

St. Theophan the Recluse presents a solid method for preserving inner peace:

1) *First of all keep your outer senses in order and flee all licentiousness in your external conduct, -namely, neither look, speak gesticulate, walk nor do anything else with agitation, but always quietly and decorously. Accustomed to behave with decorous quietness in your external movements and actions you will easily and without labor acquire peace within yourself, in the heart; for, according to the testimony of the fathers, the inner man takes his tone from the outer man.*

2) *Be disposed to love all men and to live in accord with everyone, as St. Paul instructs: If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18).*

3) *Keep your conscience unstained, so that it does not gnaw at you or reproach you, in anything, but is at peace in relation to God to yourself, to your neighbors, and to all external things...*

4) *Accustom yourself to bear all unpleasantness and insults without perturbation, It is true that before you acquire this habit you will have to grieve and suffer much in your heart. But once this habit is acquired, your soul will find great comfort in the very troubles you meet with. If you are resolute, you will day by day learn to manage yourself better and better and will soon reach a state where you will know how to preserve the peace of your spirit in all storms, both inner and outer.*

