



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians

Chapter 7

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Introduction

- St. Paul begins to address those things about which the Corinthians had written to him (7:1)
- The first half deals with issues involving those married (1-24)
- The last half covers those who are single (25-40)
- So this chapter can be divided into:
 - ❖ Principles of Marriage (1–9)
 - ❖ Keep Your Marriage Vows (10–16)
 - ❖ Live as You Are Called (17–24)
 - ❖ To the Unmarried and Widows (25–40)



Principles of Marriage (7:1-9)

- Now St. Paul begins to answer various questions asked in a letter from the church
- He does not mean that marriage is wrong, but that on account of the present distress it was a good thing not to be bound by family ties
- To avoid fornication and the temptations to it, it is best for each sex that they be married
- Marriage is a state of mutual obligations; each must yield to the other those obligations



Principles of Marriage (7:1-9)

- Each sex here is put on exactly the same rule
- The body of each belongs to the other, and cannot be yielded to other parties
- The spirit of the passage not only forbids adultery, but polygamy and premarital sex
- The married couple should not live apart, except by mutual agreement, and that only for a season, while devoting themselves to a period of prayer and fasting



Principles of Marriage (7:1-9)

- Self control is important in marriage
- What is just stated is permissible in the married state, not commanded
- I would that all men were as I myself i.e. have absolute self-control, as I have
- St. Paul had the gift of celibacy; others might have other gifts which he did not have



Principles of Marriage (7:1-9)

- To the unmarried: if they have his self-control, it is well for them to remain unmarried, even as he
- This is on account of the present distress (1 Cor 7:26), the critical times
- But if they cannot, let them marr
- If the unmarried and widowed cannot control their desires, it is best to marry
- Burn: with the secret flame of lust

Keep Your Marriage Vows (7:10–16)



- Some might say, If the unmarried state is best now, it will be better to leave our married partner
- He replies, the Lord commands otherwise
- Provided, despite the prohibition, there is such disagreement that she leaves her husband, she must remain unmarried, or be reconciled
- The husband is not allowed to put away his wife, by sending her off
- Both are equally prohibited

Keep Your Marriage Vows (7:10–16)



- On the circumstances that follow, the Lord has not directly spoken, as he did on divorce; hence, St. Paul speaks by inspiration
- If either husband or wife is converted, and the other is not, they must not on this account forsake the unbelieving spouse, provided he or she is pleased to remain
- The unbelieving spouse is not made personally holy by this marriage

Keep Your Marriage Vows (7:10–16)



- Sanctification, then, means something besides personal holiness
- To sanctify is to separate to a sacred use, or relation (Exo 20:8; 28:38)
- Food is sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Tim 4:4,5)
- Here St. Paul uses the term to denote that one Christian member of a household brings a sanctifying influence to it

Keep Your Marriage Vows (7:10–16)



- So that all the members are to be regarded as separated in part from the great, ungodly, unclean world
- The godliness of the wife is of more force to cause their marriage to be considered holy, than the unbelieving husband is to profane the marriage
- The unbeliever is not sanctified or made holy in his own person, but in respect of his wife, he is sanctified to her

Keep Your Marriage Vows (7:10–16)



- The children are holy in the same sense that their parents are; that is they are lawfully espoused together, so the children born of them were in a civil and legal sense holy, that is, legitimate
- If the unbelieving spouse insists upon making the Christian profession a ground of separation, let them have their way

Keep Your Marriage Vows (7:10–16)



- If conflict must occur to prevent separation, let the other go
- Let the Christian be gentle, forbearing, unselfish, though true to Christ
- Perhaps the result will be that they will be God's means to save their partner
- This happened in many examples

Live as You Are Called (7:17–24)



- This I would add, says St. Paul in effect, whatever may be the lot and special circumstances of each man, single, married, let him walk in it without seeking a change
- He now applies the principle just stated, of walking as God called every one (1 Cor 7:17)
- The circumcised Jews were to be content that they were circumcised; the uncircumcised Gentiles were to remain so when they became Christians

Live as You Are Called (7:17–24)



- Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing i.e. Has no bearing on final salvation
- The one essential condition is keeping the commandments of God
- Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called: in that secular condition of life in which he was when called
- Half the population of the Roman Empire at this time were slaves

Live as You Are Called (7:17–24)



- Thousands early Christians were in this condition
- Care not for it: if a servant was converted, let him not be troubled over his state
- But if he had the means of becoming free, let him rather choose freedom
- The eternal equality of the servant and freeman in Christ is shown
- The servant is Christ's freedman, since Christ has freed him from sin

Live as You Are Called (7:17–24)



- The freeman, when converted, is Christ's servant
- Christ has bought each alike, ransomed them from the bondage of sin with His blood, and bound them to His service as His own. See 1 Cor 6:20
- As Christ's servants, do not become the followers of any other men
- Let each one remain in the domestic and social condition in which the call of God found him

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- No doubt in the letter from Corinth it was asked whether a father should place his virgin daughters in marriage
- In the East to this day the marriage arrangements are made by the parents
- I have no commandment: he had no revelation upon the subject, but gives his Christian judgment
- It is good for a man so to be: to remain in the state he already is

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- Present distress: The critical condition in which Christians were placed by the spirit of persecution which then prevailed
- If married, he is to remain true to the bond; if unmarried, at present it seemed best to remain so
- While it seemed prudent, with persecution, not to marry, it was not wrong to do so
- Nevertheless, those who did, should have trouble in the flesh

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- Anxiety and distress on account of their domestic ties
- The time is short: Life is short in general and thus the time of preparation is short
- Everyone should look on all earthly ties as soon to be broken
- All earthly arrangements must be regarded as transitory

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- And they that weep, as if they wept not: though sorrowful, yet always rejoicing
- They that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not: tempering their joy with godly fear
- They that buy, as if they possessed not: knowing themselves to be only stewards, not owners
- And they that use this world, as not abusing it - Not seeking happiness in it, but in God

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- Using everything therein only in such a manner and degree to lead them to the knowledge and love of God
- Because this marrying, weeping, rejoicing, and all the rest, not only will pass, but now passes away; this moment is flying off like a shadow
- Without care: without distracting cares
- The unmarried man, if he understand and use the advantage he enjoys, Cares only for the Lord

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- Those that are married have their minds drawn here and there, and therefore if any man has the gift of celibacy, it is more advantageous for him to live alone
- But those who are married may care for the things of the Lord also (Clement, Strom. 3)
- The unmarried woman cares only for the things of the Lord: All her time, care, and thoughts centre in this, how she may be holy both in body and spirit

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- This is the standing advantage of a single life, in all ages and nations
- This I speak for your own profit, not to interfere with your freedom to marry
- A leash: thrown over the head made the victim helpless
- Now he turns himself to the parents, in whose power and authority their children are, warning them to consider what is proper for their children

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- If any parent think he is not treating his daughter well in leaving her unmarried beyond the flower of her age
- Thus excluding her from the lawful gratification of her natural feeling as a marriageable woman
- Thus it must be: regarding to the feelings and welfare of his daughter
- Let them marry: the daughter and her suitable groom

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- If no need makes marriage necessary, and the purpose that she remain unmarried continues steadfast, he does well to let her remain so
- Power over his will: which would incline him to desire the increase of his family, and the strengthening it by new relations
- To choose either course is well, but the last is the better, where circumstances permit (1 Cor 7:36)

To the Unmarried and Widows (7:25–40)



- In case of husband's death, the widow is free from the marriage bond, and can marry whom she will, with one limitation: she must marry only in the Lord (Christian and mystical marriage)
- In his judgment, she will be happier by remaining a widow
- It is not only his judgment, but the Spirit seems to point the same lesson for all the reasons that he explained before



Conclusion

- According to our teacher St. Paul, it is better not to marry than to marry... Explain why
- St. John Chrysostom teaches that neither husband nor wife is master of himself.. but they are both servants to each other. Which verse is St. John Chrysostom referring to?
- In verse 14 St. Paul says, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband". Does this mean that it is OK to marry an unbeliever?
- In verse 39...what is meant by "to be married only in the Lord"?