



## **Celibacy, Marriage or "free love" - Which way to choose?**

### **The problem of gender.**

People are nowadays more than ever exposed to unhealthy sexual pressure. Sexual problems have always tormented the human race. And now they are tormenting it with an even more indomitable power. That is why it is important to help Christians understand this sphere so as to avoid a spiritual catastrophe. There is only one way to master the play of our subconscious powers — that is, to illumine them in calmness and sobriety, in order to understand their hidden dynamics in the light of Christianity. First of all it is necessary to establish the fact that not everything in a human being is natural, for all kinds of perversion also arise “naturally”, becoming the cause of severe and agonizing illnesses.

In our blindness we can not make out right away as to what can be acknowledged as “natural,” and what is, though being experienced as “natural,” in fact, a display of unhealthy deviation and spiritual dislocation. Many sufferings torment human beings because they did not master that fight of light and darkness, of virtue and vice, at the right time, which starts at a very early age...

### **The enigmatic side of sexual attractions.**

Why does the problem of gender contain so much difficulty and suffering? Our other functions usually develop normally without causing any complications; but in sexuality our body and soul are bound so tight together and affect each other so imperceptibly that sexual desires can cause extreme pressure. It is exactly within the sphere of sexuality that everything in human life is brought together, — things dark and terrifying, as well as bright and creative. Thus the right arrangement of sexual life is a most important task in our life.

A major obstacle in the elucidation of the gender problem is that this sphere is closed for us in many aspects, as though being hidden in psychological twilight. Under the conditions of modern life, filled with vulgarity and moral decadence, a person must learn how to guard his spiritual health and develop an “antidote” against all kinds of fornication. It is especially important for the young whose sexual attractions are developed too early. Indeed, young men mostly suffer from the intensified work of imagination in the area of gender, from that secret curiosity and inner tension, that so much weakens any self-control. It is the premature development of sexual imagination, neither bridled by spiritual sobriety nor restrained by Christian morals, that becomes the source of all sorts of mental illnesses.

The purpose of this work is to demonstrate the advantages of a morally pure way of life. This way has not only been pointed out by God, but is also dictated by all modern scientific knowledge about man. The way of chastity and abstinence does not mean running away from life, but, quite the opposite, a way of providing a healthy direction for the creative power within us.

### **A healthy direction for sexual draw...**

Some people hold that a human being has been designed harmoniously, which means that the gratification of all his needs produces a natural mental equilibrium and sets an inner harmony of the human functions. This conviction must be acknowledged to be erroneous, first of all because man is organized not



harmoniously, but hierarchically. It means that the development of some functions depends on the development of others, and that a delay or, on the contrary, an overdevelopment of one function inevitably affects the others. There are primary or main functions, as well as there are secondary, or derivative ones. In one's growth we do not see a simultaneous and rhythmic development of all the aspects, but, the other way round, a sporadic discontinuity.

### **The energy of gender.**

Of course, if there is a certain organ, and certain functions are present in it — it is assumed that the latter should be gratified. It must be born in mind, though, that the more important this organ or function is, the more complicated its expression and development can be. This is most evident in the sphere of gender, which is one of our central spheres.

A large amount and, maybe, the most considerable part of gender energy, not passing into sexual desirability and as if escaping the physical fulfillment, goes away into other more noble spheres of our being. Abstinence is totally based on this concept. It frees the energy of gender for creative use in the higher manifestations of psychic life. What they call sublimation (passing from one state into another) in modern psychology rests on the concept that sexual draw may be turned into creative energy and thus weaken the demands of sexual organs. The paradox of the sphere of gender lies in the fact that absolute abstinence (dissatisfaction of sexual needs), does not devastate man's life at all, but, quite on the contrary, becomes a pre-condition for a real blossoming of spiritual and creative life.

### **The meaning of abstinence.**

Everything that has been said is based not only upon Christian teaching, but also on modern knowledge about man and on the facts of psychopathology. Christianity has not only established the principle of monogamy, resolutely condemning polygamy. It has not just made the man-woman relationship more human and ennobled it. It has also highly elevated the idea of voluntary celibacy. Jesus Christ said the following about it: "For there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake"; and added: "He who is able to accept it, let him accept it!" that is, whoever can raise himself to the idea of celibacy for the sake of virtue, let him follow this path (Matt. 19:12). In the same time, from its very beginning Christianity condemned any disrespect towards marriage and sanctified matrimony (the miracle in Cana of Galilee, John 2:1-11) in the sacrament of marriage. Therefore the principle of celibacy in Christianity is not opposed to marriage, but is a parallel way of ascending towards God. Through married life as well as through celibacy man can come to God. Physical purity — whether in a healthy Christian marriage or in celibacy — is a necessary condition for moral growth as well as a source of spiritual strength.

### **The main stages in sexual development.**

The first manifestations of sexual motions may be noticed very early. Before sexual maturity is achieved (at the age of 11-13 with girls and at 12- 14 with boys), the gender life is presented in what may be called the indifferent disposition. Though the physical organs are not developed yet, the body already has a certain "erogenous" character and may experience sexual excitement. The genital zone plays the most important part in the process of sexual ripening. It is the zone where the sexual organs are located. There



may also be a danger of a premature development of sexual psychology. It happens sometimes that children 9 years old look for pornographic pictures and watch adults' behavior with an unhealthy curiosity.

In the following years the sexual development of boys is more intensive, capturing body and soul. The development of the sexual sphere advances with such a speed that the spiritual outlook of a teenager can change entirely. Here we see a split of consciousness into two poles.

On the one side there is sexuality that embraces the bodily side of sex, and the psychic changes connected with it. On the other pole is the Eros, that is, looking for love that brings the teen's psychology in motion. At this period the entire soul lights up with poetic dreams about a loved one. Eros and sexuality present themselves equally as the expression of sex in a human being, but their splitting, and sometimes their reciprocal repulsion, clearly reveals the notion of sex as a spiritual-bodily energy. Sexuality in man is like fire that is burning deep inside — in sexual motion as well as in the most minute manifestations of Eros. It is important to consider that these two different expressions of gender are of the one and the same source. Here we see an example of the wholeness of our nature: the need for sexual union and a communion of love inevitably co-exist in man. That is why even the most perverted people, even those that have entirely sunk into fornication, every now and then experience a tormenting longing for love. Thus, the single notion of sex during the time when young men are maturing is polarized, and there emerges a split between sexuality and Eros. We are going to consider this matter more thoroughly now.

### **The development of sexual awareness.**

Sexual maturity localizes the sexual energy in the bodily organs, and from this time forth the bodily part comes out to the forefront. Through this sexual awareness is created. What we have called sexuality before now embraces the physical development of sexual organs, as well as the awareness of one's sexual motions. The two sides of sexuality are intimately connected, but sexual awareness may be dim and unclear. Due to certain physiological and anatomical peculiarities of a man's body boys usually have a more vivid and distinct sexual awareness. That is why the work of imagination in boys is much more active and vivid in the sphere of sex. If we also consider the talks they might often have, then the danger of "soiling" their imagination becomes most explicable. But no matter how vague or more definite the work of sexual imagination may be, sexual ripening in itself causes deep changes in young organisms.

The spiritual side of this change lies in the fact that young boys who have just lately been greatly devoted to different social activities (imitating older people, leaving the family for the company of boy and girl friends, a disposition to be engaged in adventures, being in love with "heroes" etc.), now retire into themselves, beginning to stand aloof from society. The sphere of the subconscious that captivates a young soul now becomes the central point of its mental activities. Consciousness is not able to cope with the play of the subconscious power that grows strong in a young person. This becomes a source of constant contradictions: pretentiousness, dreaming, irritability, becoming keen on science fiction. Very often teens even do not know what they want...

### **Observation:**

Boys at a transitional age are often upset, relaxed, as though "scattered." It is not so with girls. They instinctively know that they will have to create a family and bear children. They are not allowed to relax.



Boys are “scattered.” Girls are “self-disciplined.”

How do we know that the transitional age has started with a girl? – We can judge about this even by looking at her coming home. Let us assume that a school-friend has called her. She grabs her coat and runs away — she is still a child. And here we have another young girl who has been called to go out into “society”... The real “society” is not there, but she would like to go out (to a dancing party or to a movie). Do you think that she will just stand up and go ahead? – No, she has to prepare, making a serious work on herself. First of all, she sits down, studies herself thoroughly and... puts on a “militant” make up. As any symbolic coloring, this make up has a meaning that may be expressed in the following words. Girls, do not get offended please, but I will say these words that are written on your faces when you make up for such an occasion. Somebody must tell you this anyway. The meaning of such a make up is this: “I’m looking... Looking for a partner...”

While a girl is making up like that, a certain change happens within her soul. The soul has a point of attention (a point of concentration), which can move within the body... We may move it willingly, but most of the time it just wanders. While the girl is getting ready for the “exit”, this point of concentration slowly moves from the head (if it had been there) down... lower... lower... even more lower... The expression of the eyes changes, a special light is coming out of them (as from the eyes of a beast at night). The point of concentration is going down and down, below the diaphragm. From down there, from the deep, comes a cloud, which is called “female charm.” The girl has fixed this cloud... And only now she will stand up and leave.

She goes on like a bulldozer. She meets him — relaxed, scattered, on half-bent legs. What will happen? Yes, she is going to “knock him off.” Boys, bear in mind, that girls often “knock you off” not because they like you: they are just interested in how it is done.

You see, the outward picture of psychological change in the transitional age in boys and girls is different. But their essence is the same: lust captures the mind and makes it a servant to itself.

For example, a man has fallen in love. Not to say that he really loves, because a man loves with all his soul. No, he is infatuated; only the passionate part of his soul is excited, the part that creates in his mind the image of a loved one. But this image is deceptive. If an infatuated man comes into an intimate contact with his loved one and the passion is satisfied, his mind starts to imagine another image of a lately loved one. Will this second image be a true or deceptive one? True? – No, it is deceptive again: the pendulum has swung to another side, from one illusion to another.

## **The need for love.**

The development of sexuality goes on in the above described fashion during the first three-four years. Then it takes on a more calm character and is no longer the source of contradictory motions. But during those three to four years of sexual development the need for love grows, and the Eros becomes mature. Sometimes those two spheres (sexuality and Eros) are not very different from one another (although their ways are diverse). But sometimes they are considerably different and even appear to be disturbing to each other. Along with purely sexual imagination, in the realm of Eros, nourished with music, movies, arts, or novels, imagination becomes a powerful force. Eros reveals itself then through youthful pensiveness or a melancholy dreaminess.



Girls want to be “liked,” start to care about their appearance, look for being in boys’ companies, generally speaking, they become “little women,” falling in love, getting jealous, etc. Boys intensely try to look older, imitating different “heroes” and also falling in love. In general, the Eros’ motions at this initial period are fearful, shy, seemingly looking for obstacles in order to hide behind their back, to conceal their innermost feelings from strangers; they may seem to be comic, but at the same time touching in their freshness and idealism.

These romantic feelings possess a great creative power. They are the source of the powerful wings that lift the soul into the ideal world. Vladimir Solovyov wrote an excellent essay on this subject named “The meaning of love.” After Plato’s “Feast” it is one of the most genial works in world literature dedicated to the philosophy of Eros.

The value of gender mainly consists in a longing for love that becomes the source of the “fire” that fills one’s heart. Sexuality is just the expression those internal movements produce in the bodily sphere. Since the body is the soul’s tool, sexuality only conveys and expresses the love that is burning in the soul; the body is like an instrument that through its sounds conveys the melody played by the musician.

### **The law of double expression.**

In order to get a better understanding of the correlation between sexuality and Eros — their divergence in time and their profound inner unity — we should get acquainted with the law of “the double expression of feelings.” This law consists in the fact that all movements, feelings and all the deep agitation that comes out of the very depths of the human being look for a double expression — bodily and psychic. Any feeling, say fear, may serve as an example of this double expression. Fear is expressed in a number of bodily changes (heartbeat, syncope, paleness, trembling of the limbs, weakness of voice etc.). At the same time there arises a psychic wave, which brings about certain feelings of fear (tension, terror, depression that causes weakness of memory and will, state of emotionlessness). This psychic “wave” seeks for expression in the work of imagination (which is well noticed by the proverb that “fear has big eyes”), and, through imagination, it influences all the spiritual structure.

The essence of the abovementioned law is not just to ascertain the double expression of feelings. It also shows that one expression (for example, the bodily one) does not replace the other (the mental-spiritual), and cannot be replaced with the latter as well. The law comes forward with full power when an expression (for example, a physical feeling) is constrained or suppressed. In this case its energy does not go out in another expression (for example, the mental-spiritual one); and the suppression of one expression determines the suppression of the other. Freud has the honor of having discovered that our subconscious is hiding within itself a number of similar complexes — desires and feelings that had once been moved into the depths of our being.

Looking upon the sphere of gender in the light of the law of double expression we can easily understand that under normal conditions sexuality and Eros must develop simultaneously, enriching each other, rather than forcing each other out. A “splitting” or division of sexuality and Eros, of which we have spoken above, and which can be ascribed to a sickly period of maturing, is rooted in their mutual indispensability and the impossibility to remove either of the expressions from the life of gender. Nevertheless, the divergence of sexuality and Eros, while so natural for youth, is in itself a drawback, since only in family and marital life the wholeness in this sphere can be restored.



## **The ennobling power of love.**

When a human heart is set on fire with love, the entire human being is enlightened by its radiance. All extraneous things step back to the background, and a soul can completely, sometimes even ecstatically, plunge into contemplation of the beloved one. Even the most dry and boring people change when they fall in love, their soul softening and becoming bright, as if having wings. For other people a person who is loved by someone does not seem to be any better or more handsome than others, but for the lover he or she is the only one, the incomparable and the irreplaceable. This is the idealization that is so often described in literature. It means that through an external cover, we, in light of love, see the ideal side of the loved one which is hidden from others. It is present in every human being, as an image of God, not noticeable, and very often suppressed by the external shell, by appearance or “character,” which is always something secondary, and not representing the “essence.”

All the power of love consists in the fact that through love we are as though touching upon the internal beauty of a human being. We cannot leave the person – we would like to be joined with the loved one forever. A soul that has experienced those feelings even once will preserve memories about their transforming and creative power for the rest of its life.

It is exactly in the rushes of love that a soul experiences a deep need to come out of the boundaries of its own personality in order to be united with a loved one. The need for love witnesses that it is impossible to retire into oneself — all the natural limits of individuality are overcome in love, and its shell is torn apart. That is why in the rushes of love a human being starts to be burdened by himself: to retire into oneself, in the light of love, means to condemn oneself to loneliness, to find oneself in a metaphysical emptiness. That is why our soul is tirelessly looking for somebody to love in order to find a point of rest and a purpose for existence.

The power of poetic imagination that is so characteristic for young love, through which we idealize a loved one, is not some play of fantasy. On the contrary, it reveals a deep thirst for a spiritual and absolute life.

Love for one’s mother, sister, and wife — however different these kinds of love might be — presents an aspect of spiritual life anyway. The human being is designed according to the law of “sexual dimorphism,” that is, one belongs either to the masculine or to the feminine gender. This dimorphism borrows the natural need for love from the depths of the spirit. It is exactly in this sphere of gender-dependent love that Eros has the most important meaning, sexuality only being the latter’s bodily transcription.

## **The meaning of family.**

The division between sexuality and Eros, which is so characteristic for the period of maturing, is but a transitional state. Gender in a human being is lying deeper than just his/her physical cover; it is an inalienable quality of his/her nature. Sexual maturing only temporarily polarizes physical and mental desires. This polarization and divergence of sexuality and Eros belongs to a transitional stage and requests the restoration of an initial wholeness. Therefore gender can only find its real expression in marital life. Outside of marriage a normal expression of gender is impossible.

Satisfaction of sexual desires outside of the inspiration that is given in love and completed in marriage is a



violation of the law of wholeness, which is inherent to our nature. Naturally, marriage can lead to new difficulties. But if we are looking for a solution for the problems that arise out of the depths of gender, we have to admit that it is not to be found outside of marriage.

## **Marriage or celibacy?**

Marital life, which begins after marriage, provides a normal solution for the needs and strivings connected with gender. The truth is that in our times marital life has become complicated and subject to many temptations, — partly due to economic problems, as well as to the hectic pace of life in modern society, but most of all due to moral degradation. But only in marriage the gender life finds a healthy outcome. If for some reason marriage is impossible or complicated, there cannot be a healthy sexual life outside of it — everything will be a deviation from the norm, a contamination of the soul and a perversion, undermining the foundations of human personality.

Life in marriage has three sides: biological, social and spiritual, and each of these sides does not just develop along with the others, but under normal conditions, they create a unity. The division between sexuality and Eros that signifies a disorder in youth does not just disappear here, but, rather, becomes a source of new energy and releases a new way of life.

The apostle Paul spoke beautiful words on marriage; let us just look at their initial part. “This mystery (that is, the mystery of marriage),” says the apostle, “is great!”

This “great mystery” of marriage only appears where the division between sexuality and Eros has been completely overcome. Where for some reason this division is still active or where only one side prevails, for example, the sexual one, “the great mystery” does not only reveal itself, but its meaning is also perverted, and that which is most holy and deep in people is dragged out into the mire. By the way, it is not correct to identify pure sexuality with the “animal” side in a human being: animals do not have a division between sexuality and Eros. Their nature is much more simple and primitive.

## **Marriage as the fulfillment of unity.**

Those who enter into marriage having been clear and chaste before it learn the mystery of bodily union for the first time in marriage. Because of that a new and careful attitude to the body of the other is born in their soul. Life experience shows that it is exactly due to bodily intimacy in marriage that a deep, bright and joyous feeling of love to one another, a tender feeling of unity flourishes within the two souls. It is here, in this union blessed by God, that one can learn through experience the truth of monogamy (being married to one person at a time) and all the falsehood of “free love.”

Sexual intimacy cannot only be separated from other ways of unity, but it also creates a complete wholeness of all mutual relations. When love flourishes between a husband and wife it is reflected in all their life and takes possession of everything. The smallest disharmony at this time is experienced very painfully; carelessness, indifference, rudeness, accusations can all bring grievance and anxiety. Christianity helps a married couple find a way to do away with disharmony in their relationship. Through practicing Christian life under the new conditions of marriage the two mature spiritually and perfect themselves. Family is a great school of piety.



When the first symptoms of pregnancy appear the relations of husband and wife become strengthened through their love for the awaited child — flesh from their flesh. The purity of their mutual love does not only increase due to bodily intimacy, but is also feeding on the latter, and there is nothing more warm than that deep tenderness that blossoms in marriage; its inner meaning is in the acute feeling of being filled with each other. The feeling of one's own "I" as a separate individual disappears. A husband and wife experience themselves as part of something whole — one does not want to experience anything without the other, there is a desire to see everything together, do everything together, be together in everything. It is an ideal to which a married couple should aspire to.

There should be neither differentiated "spheres of activities" in a family nor any kind of physical or spiritual disconnection: here one thing echoes in another, everything is connected internally and intimately. According to the Creator's plan family is the only way for the mystery of gender to be actualized in us. There must not be a sexual life outside a marriage; such a life will not be right, it will only pervert our nature and break life's harmony. For this reason the way of purity before marriage is not just a demand of morality, but it is also dictated by the very nature of the human being. Premarital sexual life is always one-sided. It is therefore a perverted expression of gender that threatens to devastate of the soul and distort its inner structure.

### **The meaning of voluntary celibacy.**

To give the question of gender a thorough consideration, it is necessary to mention voluntary celibacy. Christianity teaches that voluntary celibacy means a conscious abstinence from sexual life for the sake of moral purity and spiritual perfection. Does it mean that family is a lower form of life? Should those who seek spiritual perfection remain virginal for the rest of their lives?

The chastity of virgins and monks does not debase their gender, but, rather, shows the latter's potential holiness that remains closed due to the moral corruption of human nature. The meaning of voluntary celibacy is not a fight against gender, but a fight against sin that is present in our flesh. Chastity and abstinence from sexual life is not the purpose, but a means in this battle. In voluntary celibacy people look for the best way to overcome their passions. This task, which is valid for all people, is solved here by rejecting everything which is of this world, not because of spite for it, but because sin finds its easiest way into us through our flesh and the world. He who strives for spiritual perfection must, in his ascetic struggle, wage a severe battle against the world inside himself. He will perceive disorderly lusts of the flesh as obstacles on the way to God.

Let us also notice that remaining in marriage also sets the task of struggling with sin, only here different means are applied. The meaning of voluntary celibacy consists in the feat of crucifying one's flesh — not because of despising marriage, but for the sake of attaining a victory of the human spirit over the flesh. The same task remains in marriage, but in a different way. Marriage is not just sexual life; it is a long and complicated spiritual way, in which there is place for chastity and abstinence. If sexual activity occupies the major place, that family is at risk of falling into excessive sexuality. The same division which tears apart the youth is intruding, dimming the image of the family as a shared life.

Thus, the family way leads to a restoration of wholesome life, given by God to man at the time of creation. As for the way of voluntary celibacy, it leads to victory over sin through the suppression of fleshly passions. That is why the monastic way is not open for all, but only for those who do not have an attraction





for family life with its cares and problems or those who, having tried a family life, after its loss, seek for more spirituality in their lives.

### **The danger of sexual lust.**

The sinfulness of human nature as the reason of deviation from the norm. There should be no sexual life outside marriage. It must die out outside family — whether in voluntary celibacy or in solitary life forced by circumstances. The requirements of health here coincide with those of Christianity. Any sexual life outside of marriage, giving only temporary satisfaction, invariably pushes a human being if not onto the way of falsehood, then always onto the way of sin; for this kind of sexual life is the triumph of pure sexuality at the expense of the spiritual side.

Here it is necessary to touch upon the dark sides of sex, which are an infringement against the natural norm. It has already been said earlier, that among the different instincts or inclinations the sexual one is the strongest and the most difficult to control. If it is not restrained, it may degenerate into a fierce lascivious lust, which can cripple a person both spiritually and physically. The reason for this abnormal change is the sinfulness of our nature. Animals are free from this kind of damage. With the fall of the first man the balance between his physical and spiritual powers was lost. Therefore quite natural needs sometimes begin to degenerate into pernicious passions, for example: the need to eat and drink — into gluttony and drunkenness, and an instinct of reproduction — into unguided lust. This is our tragedy, that being put by the Creator as overseers of fauna and as “kings” of it, we often appear to be much worse than unreasonable creatures (Psalm 49:13).

### **The sources of temptations.**

The source of different deviations from due order is not only our sinfulness, but also the demons — these invisible fallen spirits which play a most active role in our sins. Both the Scriptures and the patristic literature (see our book “At the threshold of the fiery gehenna”) speak in detail about their fatal activity in people’s life. Demons influence people through thoughts and feelings. During the thousands of years spent in destructive activity they have perfected themselves in the “art” of tempting. Their influence on people is akin to hypnosis, intoxication or doping, when a person sees things not as they really are, but in a warped way: what is harmful and pernicious is accepted as the height of happiness, and what can really give him happiness, he sees as boring and unnecessary. Because of the diligence of the “demon of lust,” as the fathers of Church call the demon who kindles lust in people, this lascivious passion at times takes the most monstrous and disgusting forms. The Holy Fathers affirm that the “demon of fornication” is one of the strongest spirits. It is obvious that his power comes from our sexual energy, which lies at the very foundation of our nature. Who is not familiar with the situation when it seems that each of our cells demands sexual satisfaction?

In accordance with the predictions of the Holy Fathers, one of the characteristic signs of the approaching end of the world will be a universal and awful dominance of debauchery, an abominable carnal dissoluteness and unrestrained voluptuousness. Realizing that their end is near the demons throw all their energy in arousing lust in people, because through this passion it is easier to alienate a person from God, because it is precisely through carnal passions that we lose our godlike image.



## **The cult of fornication.**

The predictions of the Holy Fathers about the last days begin to come true before our eyes. It seems that never in the history of mankind has there been such a universal pressure of sexuality in all the areas of life as there is today. All the achievements of culture and engineering are used to this end: literature, art, magazines, newspapers, TV, films, music, advertising, fashion, the Internet, computer games, sexual education in schools... At the same time the wild opinion that abstinence is harmful and satisfaction of lust is good is being imposed more and more persistently. The modern conditions of a wide-spread “sex cult,” which calls to get rid of the yoke of the Middle Ages and worships “free love”, is especially difficult for the poor young people. The monogamous marriage appears as a “vestige of the past”; usual family life and family obligations — as “prejudices”; the necessity to restrain carnal lusts — as a “dangerous thing” which injures one’s mentality; modesty and bashfulness — as an “inferiority complex.” “We have entered a new era of free mankind,” therefore: “No prejudices!”, “Closer to the nature!”, “Away with shame!”

A huge industry of pornography and semi-pornography has grown around sexuality. It keeps growing, flooding the hearts of young people and teenagers with dirt and forcing them to frantic behavior.

One is constantly exposed to a flood of sexual stimuli. Let’s assume that a Christian man has woken up in the morning, prayed and read the Bible. He is in a light mood, his soul is longing towards God. But then he turns on the music or the TV and in an instance his eyes and ears are flooded with sexual melodies and images. He is leaving his home and from all directions advertisements with half-naked women are looking at him, or he sees girls who are dressed defiantly... In a word, wherever you look everywhere are stimuli which kindle carnal lust. Through the windows of the soul — the ears and the eyes — an uncontrollable flood of temptations is breaking in. It puts him before a dilemma: whether to surrender to his low desires, or to struggle against them in a most wearisome and long war.

Opposing this corruption of flesh and spirit, the Scriptures call us to struggle with carnal lust and to keep ourselves clean from lascivious deeds.

“I have written you in my letter — the Apostle Paul addresses the Christians — not to associate with sexually immoral people... do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the Kingdom of God... The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord... Do not you know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said: The two will become one flesh. But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 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 5:9-11; 6:9-20).

## **The sins of the flesh and their consequences.**

It is impossible to ignore such a secret sin as self-satisfaction (masturbation), from which some people suffer from an early age. With all its unnaturalness it would not have been too dangerous, if it were not for



the fact that there are no external borders to control it. Because of that, after it has become a habit, it draws to itself even when there is no physical need for it. When this habit has become strong, the most difficult side to it is that a person feels himself in the power of some fatal force, which he cannot confront. It produces a sense of uncertainty, a predilection for melancholy and apathy, a decline of energy, with a negative effect upon one's health.

Why do the Scriptures call so persistently to struggle with carnal lust? — Because, on the one hand, the sin of fornication exhausts the physical strength and health of a person. “..The fornicator sins against his own body,” the apostle Paul writes. In sexual life outside marriage the body wears out faster because sexual life not connected with love requires much more power than a normal matrimonial relation within in marriage.

We should add to this the chance to contract any of the awful venereal illnesses or — which is even more pernicious — AIDS, which cannot be cured.

But the main thing is that people who have given themselves to lascivious passion have a decreased ideal of life. Dreams about self-denying work for the benefit of the society and a happy life with the loved one gradually fade; the ideals of youth evaporate. The person becomes cynical and ambitious. His consciousness is more and more filled with dirty pictures of voluptuousness. He looks at each woman as a female plaything. Dirty thoughts invade his dimmed brain, and there is only one desire in his heart — to satisfy his lust.

God's grace recedes from the person who has given himself to voluptuousness, and because of this his faith in God grows weak and his spiritual inclinations go down. He stops hearing the voice of his conscience through which God is calling him to the path of repentance. Cold, gloom and rage establish in his soul. This is called a spiritual death, after which there is nowhere else to fall.

Because of the inability of inveterate sinners to turn over to the path of amendment, God punishes them with His holy judgement. “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal,” — said God over the ancient mankind and exterminated it with the waters of the Flood (Genesis 6:1-5). Later a similar awful thing happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sins of debauchery which prevailed among their inhabitants: “Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the Lord out of the Heavens. Thus He overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities – and also the vegetation in the land” (Genesis 19:24-25). The apostle Paul has expressed the immutable vital law: “God will judge all the adulterers and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4). How many great empires and civilizations have perished; how many peoples indulging in voluptuousness have disappeared without leaving a trace!

So, in the context of creating correct sexual relations between spouses, it is necessary to say that the sins of having sexual relations before or outside marriage affect those relations very heavily. Promiscuity devastates people, if not physically, then always spiritually. It brings us to the question of redirecting our forces, in order to avoid sinning and to be perfected morally.

### **Advice on the struggle with sexual lust.**

The most important factor in the struggle against any passion is spiritual concentration directed to God. When our heart burns with love to God then carnal pleasures seem insignificant and boring to us.



Therefore it is necessary to warm up our soul with love to God in every way. This can be done through the reading of spiritual literature, sincere prayer, reflecting about God, attending service in the church, frequent confession and communion, good deeds... If we are spiritually strong, all the burning arrows sent by demons will bounce away from us like from a rock. But as soon as we relax the enemy attacks us right away. That's why: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

### **Here are some pieces of advice on fighting sexual lust:**

1. It is always necessary to keep the mind occupied with pious and useful thoughts: about God, prayer, brainwork, good deeds to be done. Any temptation is rooted in the mind. Temptations seize the person in the following way: first there comes a dirty idea (sometimes caused through sight or hearing), then comes the enchantment (the capturing) which overcomes the will, and at last comes a fall. It is easier to stop a temptation at the first stage when a seductive idea has not yet become a lascivious desire. An idly wandering idea can easily transform into a sinful one. Therefore: "Think about the good so as not to think about the bad," — Saint Ephraim the Syrian advises.
2. Protecting oneself from temptations. The eyes and the ears are the doors of the soul. Therefore it is necessary to control them so that something seductive cannot penetrate the soul through them. Do not watch seductive photos or films, do not listen to voluptuous and violent music, do not contemplate beauty of the opposite sex... be very aware of what you read.
3. Sin is contagious. People with whom we communicate have a great influence on us. "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Therefore, avoid spoiled society where you may be led away by a bad example; do not listen to cynical jokes; bravely stop a story-teller asking him to be decent, or leave the company without hesitation if someone starts telling such things, and it is best to avoid going to places where you think you may hear them.
4. A healthy body contributes to the health of the soul. Therefore it is necessary to lead an abstinent and active life. One should observe the fasts — especially Wednesdays and Fridays; eat simple and moderate food, nothing alcoholic or stimulating; wear simple and modest clothes; sleep on a firm bed; sleep moderately and wake up early; bathe or wash with cool water; walk and toil physically. These rules of elementary hygiene and leading a purposeful way of life help pacify chaotic carnal passions.
5. Never play with temptations, because this already means falling half-way. Seductive dances, games with kisses, secret meetings, flirtation "for the sake of the sport" are dangerous games through which it is easy to slip and experience a real fall.
6. Do not allow any compromises or concessions when struggling against temptations. Be strict and ruthless towards yourself. When the person fails to banish a seductive idea in time, he begins to cherish it in his imagination and then it quickly seizes his heart and enslaves his will. After that a fall is almost inevitable.
7. However do not surrender even if you feel that your power is betraying you and sin is beginning to win. There is still a great instrument to your assistance — prayer with all of your heart. When there is not enough human power then God's Grace comes to help. God is strong enough to rescue you even at the edge of an abyss. Call out to God from the depth of your heart: "God, have mercy on me!" or "My God, rescue



me, the guilty one and do not let me sin!”

## **The meaning of repentance and confession.**

Christian faith gives a person powerful means to struggle against sin and to recover from lust. They are repentance and confession before the one's spiritual father. (Revealing one's spiritual problems to an experienced therapist or even a close person is acknowledged to be useful even by modern psychology). This is an extremely important fact from the point of view of spiritual hygiene and the moral development of a person. It is not right to think that the loss of purity is irreparable. Sins, no matter how heavy, must not become an evil fate, through which we are doomed to slide further and further down. There are many young people who despair and cease to struggle with the bad inclinations because they have lost hope of improving. The Holy Fathers note the following law: before a fall the demons convince a person that God is very kind and He will forgive him this “small” sin, and after the sin is committed the demons convince him that his sin is awful and it is useless to confront his lust or passion. However, it is necessary to remember that Christ's grace can heal even the most inveterate sinful habits. It is only necessary to open up to God the secret places of your sick soul and to ask for forgiveness and help.

The following sins are connected with lust: accepting dirty ideas, enjoyment of voluptuous dreams, looking at another person with lust, shameless exposure of the body, seductive and defiant behavior, immodest conversations, nasty jokes and stories, voluptuous kisses, embracing and immodest dancing, enjoyment of provocative music, watching seductive shows, photos, or pornography, self-satisfaction, fornication, adultery, debauchery, different sexual distortions and homosexuality. This last sin is the heaviest and most disgusting of all.

We must remind here those who tempt sin even more than those who are submitting to temptation. Therefore girls and women should behave modestly and with a due sense of shame. They should avoid the exposure of their body as well as all kinds of immodest behavior. “Woe to the man through whom they (the temptations) come” —says our God (Matthew 18:7).

## **The cross of abstinence.**

Each person has his cross and by carrying it he achieves heaven. The cross includes different sufferings, which are created by the imbalances of our nature caused by original sin. Nobody can avoid the sufferings caused by gender, but everyone can and must redirect them into kindness and mutual benefit. Even in the most stable family it is necessary to adjust and restrain chaotic sexual desires.

Sufferings caused by an inability to satisfy sexual desires are most acute in forced celibacy, i.e. when it is not possible to create a family no matter how strongly one might be wishing it. Due to social conditions a man has an advantage: if a girl rejects his proposal, he may try to find another one to marry. A girl is deprived of this right of first initiative (she cannot very well propose to a man!). Therefore a girl is more likely to remain single, either because she doesn't love those who propose to her or because the man in whom she is interested is not interested in her, or for some other reason.

Celibacy caused by the desire for moral perfection is like a ladder by which one ascends to the highest rank. The sublimation of sexual energy which is inevitably accumulated in the body, although it is not at all



an easy thing to do, can only be achieved through this way leading directly upwards. Then a real “transfiguration of Eros” takes place, when the cross of opposing sexual desires becomes a struggle with the “old person” in oneself. All the stress here is put into a free direction of one’s will towards Heaven, which attracts God’s spiritual energy to the person.

But unwilful virginity in which the soul does not readily participate will only lead to new suffering. It does not weaken the pressure of sex, on the contrary, it strengthens it, because the soul thirsts for intimate closeness and suffers from lack of it. Does not this kind of celibacy force one to look upon illegitimate cohabitation in a new way, or does it not justify casual relations?

But it is necessary to remember that only in marriage the satisfaction of sexual desires does not bring in any kind of lie or disharmony. On the contrary, illegitimate relations are immutably laden with lie and ruin the spiritual health of a person.

## **Conclusion.**

Sex is a creative force in a person. As a bodily and spiritual function it is not identical with sexuality. Sexual abstinence does not at all kill the energy of sex, but transforms it into higher spiritual forms. But abstinence (free or compelled) assumes that spiritual efforts are taken, which in their turn become a source of new power, laying the foundation for a blossoming of creative qualities in a person. That is why the way to spiritual perfection opens up in virginity.

A split within the sexual instinct, which leads to a separation between sexuality and the emotional experiencing of Eros (thirst for love) is absolutely natural during puberty. However owing to the sinfulness of our nature it frequently becomes a source of an internal conflict, which is often very difficult to solve without correct spiritual guidance.

In the young age sex rages and disturbs the soul, sometimes bringing sexual impulses to the forefront with burning force, sometimes turning into “aloof” Eros and romanticism. This young “instability” of sex, which creates unbalance and contradictions in the searching soul, can be tormenting. However it is important to know that the “mistakes of youth” are reparable, if they are washed away with tears of repentance.

Sex may cause emotional and bodily sicknesses or become a source of tragedy in one’s life. However within voluntary virginity it can be a source of higher pleasures, opening up a great development opportunity for the soul. It can become the beginning of salvation and a transfiguration of one’s creative powers.

At present the sexual problem is put forward, so that much of what used to be “secret” is shamelessly exposed. The most intimate is discussed openly even with children, without being embarrassed with such words as sex, condom, orgasm, etc. The popular term “free love” does not mean love at all, but just fornication. Mankind, having begun to resolve the problem of sex and love outside of Christian teaching, is making fatal mistakes. Together with the vulgarization of intimate relations evil and debauchery are multiplied, families collapse, which in turn leads to the disintegration of society.

The Church teaches that virginity and celibacy on the one hand, and marriage on the other both serve our salvation, both open up space for our creative powers. We only need to hold the rudder firmly and direct



the boat of our life to God. We only need to understand the truth and inevitability of carrying the cross for each person.

By carrying the cross patiently, whether on the way of celibacy or on the way of marriage, the person grows morally, and this is the main task of this temporal life.

### **Additional reflections on marriage and celibacy.**

**Marriage.** The beginning of Christian marriage goes back to the first days of human life, as we read about its beginning on the first pages of the Bible. After having created the first man – Adam, God then created a helper for him — the wife. He Himself brought her to Adam, blessed them and said: “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis.1:28). This is how marriage started.

The high worthiness of marriage follows directly from this biblical passage. First, the establishment of marriage by God Himself directly specifies its deep moral basis, because God could not have given a commandment to man which would serve any other purposes except for the most exalted and highly moral. It also emphasizes that, as St. Cesarios said, “copulation and birth of children in accordance with the law is free from any sin and condemnation.” Secondly, the establishment of marriage right after the creation of the first people clearly shows its direct connection with the purpose of their creation. Having such origin, the purpose of marriage could not have been to restrict any abnormal processes within human nature. In his primitive state before the fall man’s nature contained nothing what could demand correction. Therefore the initial purpose of marriage was to assist and help the person to realize the tasks given to him by his Creator.

The sense of giving Eve to Adam was not to improve any imperfections in his nature: “God did not initially approve of a single existence for the first man not because he contained something imperfect in his nature but because he was the only one in his kind. “It is not good for the man to be alone,” said God. Obviously it was not good in the respect that many of his powers and abilities did not find conformity and application, that being kept within himself his abilities might decay, or at least might not be perfected and developed. Therefore the first man needed an “appropriate” helper, i.e. the same human person as he was, someone who would have powers and abilities corresponding to those he had in order to achieve a harmonious integrity of human activity and life in general through an interaction of the husband and his helper — the wife.” Thus, the essence of marriage consists in an integral and full connection of two human beings. St. John Chrysostom also said that the wife is necessary as a consolation for the man: “Though the unspeaking ones are very useful to us with their services, the help given to Adam by his wife was of another kind and much more excellent ... The wife is a whole, perfect and complete being who can converse and who can give great consolation to him due to their unity of nature. Indeed this being (the wife) was created for his consolation”.

The question of giving birth to children. Marriage is understood as a complete and close connection of two people, and marriage should certainly include its physical part. By divine definition reproduction of people is directly connected to marriage. But even in this respect the task of marriage is high. As defined directly by God, the reproduction of people has a moral purpose — that is, the dominion of people over the earth and all its creatures, i.e. the triumph of the reasonable and moral source over the earth. The person is the crown of creation, he is the bearer of God’s image and God’s glory is revealed in him since he is a conscious and free being, that is why the multiplication of people is the multiplication of God’s glory. God



transfers the creative function to man through marriage: “God completed the creation; but man is appointed to continue it.” Marriage gives life to new beings, who are intended for eternal blessedness. Through this unbounded kindness and love of God is revealed. Thus, the mystery of marriage is also a mystery of spreading God’s kingdom on earth.

This is how we see the initial worthiness of marriage from its very beginning. It is seen at once as most tight and inseparable. That is why it does not admit polygamy and demands faithfulness in the union of two people, because “as a whole there may be only two halves and consequently absolute monogamy is not only a Christian ideal, but even the overall standard of marriage.” Through realizing and implementing this unity people are called to find a superpersonal perfect life in love, thus resembling the Holy Trinity. Through the means of marriage people are to fulfil the purposes which the Lord has given them. Taking into account these purposes and remembering the moral basis of marital relations, it is necessary to point out that love between spouses should not just have an intimate closeness to it. It should be a highly moral love, in which a person grows and comes to perfection. In the conditions of a sinful world the high standards of this love include self-renunciation and self-sacrifice. A husband and wife should maintain “love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14)

We see from the Scriptures that under the cover of marriage something mysterious, heavenly and eternal is placed. We see that marriage is an image of something divine and superhuman, that the beginning of it is here on earth and its end and completion is in Heaven, in eternity. Therefore the apostle says: “and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:31-32). This parallel is based not on external similarity but on internal unity. The close connection between husband and wife is similar to the unity of Christ and the Church. “Christian matrimonial love is understood first of all as a complete and inseparable moral communication of life, having a deep natural basis for mutual complementation and aid. By mutually complementing each other in marriage the spouses eventually become more and more close to each other. The thoughts and feelings of the one are becoming clear for the other without saying them, the one sees in the other a part of himself or herself.” Under such circumstances, “The Christian idea of merging two lives into an inseparable single whole, expressed by the words of the apostle — “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman,” (1 Corinthians 11:11), — becomes reality. Each of spouses loves the other as himself (herself) or even more, being ready to sacrifice everything for him (her) at any moment. Thus matrimonial love becomes a real reflection of the boundless love of Christ to the Church, due to which love He even sacrificed Himself for her.” The man leaves his father and mother to be one flesh with his wife, and the Son of God “left” His Father in Heaven, came onto earth and through embodiment became one flesh with the Church. The spiritual union of Christ and the Church is a continuation and realization of the mystery of marriage. And this union has a character of sacrifice, because for Christ “it was necessary” to sacrifice Himself (otherwise the freedom of choice would not be kept) in order to sanctify us, to present us to Him without a stain or defect. And that is why marital relations also bear a character of sacrifice. Through their sacrificing love, through overcoming their sins and defects, by sanctifying each other they repeat the salvific feat of Christ. It appears that the mystery of marriage is directly connected and realized inside the mystery of redemption, the mystery of redemption is realized inside the mystery of the Church, for this reason the apostle compares the mystery of marriage with the Church of Christ. “This mystery is and will be really great and more than great, because the communication and unity, the affinity and relationship that the wife and the husband have between themselves ... are the same relations that the Lord and the Creator of all has towards the whole Church, as with one bride.”





Tertullian: “How are we to represent the happiness of marriage, which concludes the Church itself, which is strengthened by prayer, which is fixed by blessing, which is declared by the Angels and is finally approved by the Father? How pleasant is the yoke of two hearts connected by one hope, one teaching, and one law. They are like the children of one Father, like the slaves of one Lord; there is no contention between them neither in the soul nor in the body. They are two in one flesh. Where there is one flesh, there is one spirit. They pray together, they bend their knees together, they fast together, they mutually admonish and exhort each other. They together attend church and God’s meal, suffer persecutions together, enjoy peacefulness together. They hide nothing from each other, they are never a burden for each other. They freely visit the ill ones, they give alms without shyness, they stay at church meetings not for entertainment; they sing psalms and hymns together and mutually motivate each other to glorify God.”

Saint Gregory the Theologian: “Being connected by the ties of marriage we substitute for each other both hands and ears and legs. Marriage makes a weak one twice stronger, gives great joy to well-wishers and grief to ill-wishers. The common cares of the spouses make their griefs easier; common joys are more delightful for both of them. For the unanimous spouses riches are more pleasant, and in scarcity unanimity itself is more pleasant for them than riches. The ties of marriage serve them as the key to chastity and desire, as the seal of necessary affection. They drink from one source of their home, from which strangers do not drink and which flows nowhere and from nowhere. Being one flesh they have also one soul and with mutual love they equally motivate each other to be diligent to please God. Because marriage does not remove from God, but on the contrary it ties more to Him, because it has more motivations for it.”

Marriage and virginity – the two ways.

Saint Athanasius the Great: “There are two ways in life. One is ordinary and worldly, that is marriage; the other one is angelic and a higher one, that is celibacy. If someone chooses the worldly way — marriage — he will not be censured, but he will not receive the same gifts. However, he will receive some of them, because he brings the thirty-fold fruit. But if one chooses a glorious way which is high above the world he will receive more wonderful gifts, though this way is more mournful and difficult than the first one: because he has brought a perfect and hundred-fold fruit.”

Saint Gregory the Theologian: “There are two possible ways in life — marriage and celibacy, and the latter is higher and more godlike, but it is more difficult and dangerous, and the former is lower, but more safe...” “Neither celibacy, nor marriage connect or disconnect us with God or with the world entirely, so that one could be worthy of abhorrence, and the other of unconditional praise. On the contrary, the mind must be a good governor both in marriage and in celibacy, and to create virtue in them like an artist in a certain material...” “Though marriage has an earthly origin and celibacy makes us brides to Christ the King, it happens, however, that celibacy throws us down to earth, and marriage brings us to Heaven. That is why, if one began to blame marriage and another one celibacy, both would be wrong...” “Virginal life is better, really better; but if it serves the world and the earth it is worse than marriage.”

Monasticism.

Saint Dorotheus says: “Other virtues, being done as a duty, have the meaning of only a tribute, which everyone has to pay, like the citizens of a country to the king; monasticism, non-possession of money and celibacy, as virtues taken up of one’s own will, have the meaning of precious gifts brought to God because of love, just like in a country famous people, beside their tributes, bring gifts to the king and in return they



receive rich awards, great honor and ranks.”

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Source: <http://www.fatheralexander.org/>

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